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FIELD-FARINGS

A Vagrant Chronicle of Earth and Sky

BY

MARTHA McCULLOCH WILLIAMS

"A picture-frame for you to fill"

R. L. STEVENSON

NEW YORK

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Orat Hist

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TO

ONE WHOSE HEART IS A GARDEN

ALL OF FRAGRANT THINGS

MRS. MARGARET E. SANGSTER

THIS LITTLE BOOK

Is Lovingly Inscribed

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
SNOW-FALL	I
NEW GROUND	15
AT FLOOD	24
WINDS O' MARCH	30
A LITTLE EARTH	38
WHERE THE BEE SUCKS	48
TREES ABLOSSOM	55
GREEN FIELDS	62
A MOON O' MAY.	68
IN A RIOTOUS GARDEN	74
SUMMER RAIN	83
IN THE OLD FIELD	91
WHEAT HARVEST	102
HIGH SUMMER	108
DOWN THE CREEK.	114
IN THE ROSE GARDEN.	122

	PAGE
GHOST-LAND	128
HORSE AND AWAY	134
AUGUST LILIES	142
THROUGH FIELDS AFLOWER	148
WHAT SAITH SEPTEMBER?.	153
IN "THE MOON OF FALLING LEAVES" .	160
ALL IN A MIST	166
TONGUES IN TREES	173
SUNDOWN	180
AFTER FROST	187
IN AT THE DEATH.	193
GATHERING CORN	201
A HUNTER'S MOON	212
IN MONOCHROME	224
FRESH FIELDS AND PASTURES NEW .	230
COME CHRISTMAS-DAY.	237

SNOW-FALL

N you love Nature, our mother, a winter world shall tempt you forth as strongly as summer sunshine. All the more if your lines are cast where snow is an event, not a commonplace of long, white monotony. All of yesterday it was falling, falling, sifting down in fine, needle-sharp lines. At nightfall the flakes grew big and feathery, as though the snow-cloud had a mind to come bodily to earth.

The weatherwise knew what it meant—a clear sunrise, a faint, keen blast sitting steady at northwest. East wind is the snow-bringer. His brother, whose home is in the far Rocky Mountains, breaks and banishes the low, protecting clouds. Truly, God giveth snow like wool. Without it, the earth loses in myriads her tender seedlings. It brings to her also strength, vital force. That electric condition, wherein you feel

"snow in the air," is marvellously fructifying. So light, so white, the thistle-down of winter, it comes bearing gifts that shall make all the world glad.

Promise of full harvest is in it. Full streams, too; also the early and the latter rains. Give thanks for all, and venture forth spite of this nipping air. All paths lie unbroken. To walk through this twelve-inch fall sets blood atingle to your finger-tips.

The game is worth the candle. Even if you saw no more than the white, fine curves of mounded drift and hillock. Low and soft are they—warm beds for Earth's tiny children, not cruel grave-mounds over her dead. The snow did its spiriting gently indeed. It fell almost without wind. Here, in the orchard, branch, bough, twig lie heaped with glistening white, and bent all to earth with the clouds' fair gift of pearls. Part the boughs over the pathway with gentlest touch, yet tiny avalanches shower upon you. All the grieving grave-yard cedars are tall, ghostly cones—even the brier-clumps turned to ivory-carvings, more exquisitely patterned than ever came from mortal hand.

Something rifts a cedar's southernmost side—something more than dazzling against this world of white. Ah ha! Master Red-

bird took refuge from the snow in this dark evergreen fastness—now he is minded to stir abroad for a breakfast more to his taste than the cedar's thick blue-berries. See! he perches on a tall apple-bough, so lightly as scarce to disturb its crown of snow. Listen to his low, insistent call. Madame, his mate, is most like a sleepy-head, dozing yet upon her perch within. How he sways in the wind—a flower of the air—ruffling his small throat till the laggard love comes to him. Hers is a querulous note. Perhaps she is reminding him that she knew last fall it was going to snow—and how very, very much better if they had flitted south, along with other fashionable folk in feather.

Poor little body! Her red-throated, ruffled coat does seem a pitiful protection against this cold. It strengthens hourly, spite of the sunshine. This barn here in the outlying field has one steep roof-side fair to the south. The snow upon it smokes and thaws faintly—the drippings thereof freeze in crystalline fringes all along the eaves.

It is one of those days,

“ When icicles hang on the wall.

* * * * *

And milk comes frozen home in pail.”

Tramp lustily forward, with head upheld, with mouth close-shut, and no harm of it shall befall you. Now we gain the wood's edge, and look back at the long fields criss-crossed with snow-capped fences, streaked faintly hither and yon with trails of venturesome foot-prints.

Woodsmen are all abroad. From every hand axe-strokes ring cheerily through the bitter air. Leave them behind, and plunge into the deep forest, whose big boles show in dim, dark colonnades against the white earth. There only does the winter most truly enthrall you. The sharp wind is shivered into a long, chill sighing. Especially here in lee of this low slope, clothed top to bottom with trees that, had they tongues understood of men, could tell you rare tales of vanished days, vanished races—of Creek and Choctaw and Cherokee—of Algonquin and Ojibwa—who by turns killed deer, or bear, or buffalo in their shadow, or turned tomahawk and arrow one against the other's breast.

All this wide, central region was dark and bloody ground, held of no tribe, hunted, wrestled over by all. It is sown thick with their weapons—every ploughman turns them up. Here, under these huge oaks, was once

a famous run-way for deer. So much tradition avouches. Three miles away, the Buffalo Ford, across a wide, swift stream, holds tangible memory of those giants of the plain.

Men yet living have seen them cross it by hundreds—by thousands. Now, lack-a-day! their heads are dust, their bones ableach on the lessening prairie. Yet these goodly saplings of their day stand stanch and tall, laughing rarely with the summer, daring the winter's stress. They are intolerant of neighbors less lordly. No low shrubs cumber them at root. Aspiring saplings fight hard for life in their shade, and win only by shooting up, miraculous tall and slim, to claim a share of sunshine.

All overhead is a tangle of locked boughs. You can see no sky clear of their lacy network. Wherefore, never look hence at the horned new moon. Seen first "through brush" she is sure presage of woe. Now she is invisible. Your eye may range safely up and up, a full hundred feet to the branchy tips. Let it fall slowly, slowly, marking all beneath. Here you may surprise a-many sylvan secrets. Something big and dark sits huddled against the great oak's midmost branch—so high that only a hunter

or master of wood-craft would know it for a wild turkey. There is another—two, in fact—in the white-oak just beyond. Hunted well-nigh to extinction, they find asylum here in this lingering stronghold of the forest primeval.

Aperch, with head beneath the wing, they look a temptingly easy prey. Wait! break but one twig—whisper even above your breath—they are away down wind, on wide, tireless pinions that only the fleetest horse can follow. Yet they are simple fellows—easily fooled, despite the caution born of danger. Gregarious, too, and curious as a monkey. The wily hunter knows it to the bird's cost. He builds a blind of brush and leaves, hangs twenty yards in front of it some bit of red stuff, hides himself, and calls upon a "yelping bone" till the woodland rings with his counterfeit note.

Woe to the birds that hear it. They set off at the run, to hunt this stranger evidently lost in the wood. Running they give out answering calls—the sharp yelping prut-t, that once heard is never forgotten. Nearer, nearer it sounds. The ambushed hunter clutches his gun, sights along the barrel towards his red flag. It is there his quarry will pause, curiously peering, checked by the

unfamiliar sight, in his search for the unseen yelpers. A minute of nervous fingering, "lining up" the flock—fiery death bursts out from the harmless bush—the remnant flutter away—the huntsman rushes out to find two, three, it may be even four, fine birds—enough to salve with the lust of possession his conscience against hurt for such unsportsmanlike methods.

For it is murder premeditate—with no law for the quarry, such as the gentle art of ventry allows all hunted things. Perhaps it is some floating tradition of that which makes the rabbit-hunting lads hold their dogs in leash till Mistress Molly Cottontail has a clear start. We have passed the wood now, and come out upon a neighboring plantation. The open is alive. Here be great dogs and small—yelping, snarling, straining on their collars, frantic to be tumbling, plunging through the snow.

A mighty various lot are they—

"Mongrel, puppy, whelp, and hound,
And curs of low degree."

By the way, did you know the cur's name had an historic tang? You thought it generic, and most useful as an epithet of scorn. In a way it is both, yet runs back to the

days when the chase was an affair of state. Then, by special enactment, dogs of the villainage, for the most part low-bred mongrels, were required to be curtailed of the feather, in order that they might be readily cognizable by huntsmen and whippers-in, who could thus separate them, in chase, from My Lord's racing, fine-bred, true-nosed deer-hounds, whom the plebeians might confuse and draw to a false scent. From cur-tail dog to cur-dog, or simply cur, the descent is easy, even without aid from Time's transforming whirligig.

Though his name is so foreshortened, his race abounds. Folk hereabout are evidently at one with the canny Scot, who "aye thocht a mon leukit sae naked wi'out a bit doggie at his heels." Every huntsman, even the smallest, holds three to four eager creatures, betwixt whose plunging and straining towards all quarters many falls are his portion.

When the snow began Mistress Molly perhaps thought it a small affair. She crouched comfortably in some tuft of dry grass to doze it away. By and by, as it grew deeper, she stirred a little, back and forth, scooping by pressure of her soft body a chamber, barely big enough for it, in the

white, growing wall. At last it was over her back, her long silken ears. Gently, gently, she surged against it, till it arched whitely over her—shut her in safe from wind and cold.

She has not yet left her snow-chamber. She supped full of buds before the fall began, and has so far 'scaped hunger. Her warm breath has melted a tiny window in the arched roof, and puffs out through it in fairy clouds. It is those which betray her hiding-place. Once it is sighted, your pot-hunter falls flat upon it, with intent to seize outright its furry occupant.

Sometimes he is successful, and scrambles up, holding high above his head the quaking, four-footed thing, quavering out a piteous cry. Oftener far, Mistress Molly slips safe through his fingers, shakes the snow from her hair, and goes away with great leaping bounds that mark and dent darkly the white, yielding surface.

Bedlam breaks loose then. Once she is thirty yards away, dogs are let slip and go after her full cry, a yelling, shouting chorus at their heels. The chase is not long. Fear lends Mistress Cottontail speed, but strips her of her cunning. Her line of flight is straight-away. If she would but turn aside,

bend, double on her track, even the lightest dog could not over-run her. She is making blindly for the far, thick brier-field—a thorny haven she may never reach. Now she drops, flat and breathless, on the snow—the nearest dog turns a summersault in the effort to check him and seize her. Before his fellows can come up human hands have swung her aloft—a loud halloo of victory tells other hunters her fate.

Poor little Mistress Molly! Eden's innocence seems to linger in your limpid, appealing eyes. You are full of pretty craft, of gentle guile. Seemingly you ask little of earth—space for your young to play, a dinner of herbs and buds. Surely man might grant so much ungrudgingly—leave you unmolested to frisk through woodland ways. And yet—and yet—if he spared you, it were his own destruction. You would crowd him from the face of earth, eat every green thing, and leave behind you a desert inside of a hundred years. Verily, the problem of necessary evil is one too complex for mere human solution.

Now the sun turns westering. Here, at the swamp's edge, is a dead tree—gaunt, white, barkless. Twenty feet from earth a hollow makes in. Once a great branch grew

there. The wild winds tore it away—the green wound grew at last to this yawning dry one. Sound wood rimmed it about—sound still, though life has so long left the parent trunk. Queer tenants house them in it. Woodpeckers have flown in and out since dawn. A blue-bird is a perch, too, in the hollow of one gnarled lip. He sits motionless in the sun, heedless that his mate calls shrilly to him from the near hedge-row.

A little higher you see a round tunnel-mouth in the wood. That is due to Sir Red-head—one of his choicest bits of engineering. There he kept house, and fed his clamorous younglings in the time of cherries. He would be there still, but that Master Screech-Owl fancied snug winter-quarters, and has entered in to possess them. See! the hunters have scraped away the snow, and built a fire of dead branches at the tree's root. It must be some flaw or cranny runs up to Master Owl's snug chamber—he dashes out of it, falls blind and panting on the snow.

Use him delicately. In Nature's economy he has his place. What a clown he looks, to be sure, flying blindly this way and that, as he is set atop of a near bush, falling prone

to earth, then snapping viciously at the rescuing wand that would raise him. Wisdom's bird though he be, he shines only in the dark. Sailing slow and noiseless through midnight forest aisles, his great eyes gleaming a green phosphorescence, he is a sight to thrill the stoutest heart. Here, in broad, honest daylight, like many another bogy, he is merely amusing.

Now we come to a runnel draining slow from out the wood. What a brown clearness the water wears between the white-heaped banks! Here, in the skirting thicket, is one of Nature's store-houses—a waste-place, irreclaimable, wherein she lays up for her wild creatures all manner of fruit and seed. What clumps of buck-berries grow here—all the slender, drooping twigs crowded with red-purple fruit to the bigness of your finger. What scarlet cones of sumach, too—what fruit of bramble and partridge vine—what seed of grass and weed! No wonder the place is awhir with wings—that fine, faint footmarks write on the snow the tale of other comers. Squirrels have crept down to drink. Brer Possum has dragged himself clumsily hither. There are deep footmarks, too, to say Reynard the Fox has gone padding past. He is a delicate drink-

er, though, and would scarce bring himself to lap this bitter water.

It begins to skim over. In spite of its gliding ripples, long, slender, jagged crystals shoot out from either bank. The sun is almost down. The wind has taken on an edge of steel. Darkness shall see these shooting lines of ice locked in one glassy whole, save and except at the "boiling holes," where waters of the upland dance out to meet the drainings of the swamp. They will save flock and feather from thirst through the little space of cold.

Three days is its utmost limit. For see, the moon rides in the west—a new crescent moon, barely able to silver this white world. She holds a star in her horns, hangs far to south—sure portents that the wind will follow her long ere she swells to quarter. Night falls without darkness. | From earth to sky there is ebb and flow of light. All the happy huntsmen are trooping home, hungry and full-handed, to hearth-fires glowing red. There is no sound abroad save the sough of wind through snow-clad boughs, undervoiced by the faint complex human hum. Presently a fine note breaks through—the bell in a town-steeple is ringing its call to prayer. So far, so faint, it is barely a

The sun is in the light the night

ghost of sound, fitting well with this spectral world, lying so low and still beneath crowding stars. *Winter Fireplace*

Shut you straitly away from it. • Draw curtains close; pile on logs till the red flame leaps up the chimney throat. Bid winter avaunt as you sun you in its warmth, and in its deep heart you shall see visions, dream dreams.

NEW GROUND

ALL the Dryads are awailing—
ruin has fallen heavy on their
immemorial haunts. Steel is
eating to the heart of oak and
beech, and walnut and hickory.
Giants primeval, they must all lie low that
corn may laugh in their stead, or wheat
wave yellow, or rank tobacco stand aglisten
in the sun. After all, axe and plough are
your real Vandals. They overrun, destroy,
the forest's royal savagery, turn all its seat
to tame fields ready for lowliest use.

The fatness of fresh ground delights all
growing things. Grain, flower, or weed gets
root, strength, substance, as by magic. What
wonder man, living in the sweat of his
brow, has scant reverence for green trees—
holds them but cumberers of the ground.
Useful, indeed, for shade and timber and
firewood, but not one to be set over against
the sweet, the fat, that may be wrought in
their stead.

He falls furiously upon them, intent to carve from among them a broad foundation for his fortune. Yearly his fields encroach, the remnant grows thinner, but none the less sturdy. The last of race and line waves defiance to conquering steel as stoutly as it has done to a century's storms. When needs must, it comes crashing to earth; cleft so bitterly from its brave root, it still holds up to heaven protesting branches, crying aloud against this sylvan sacrilege.

Trees give room only through steel and fire. The felling is not a tenth part of the battle. Have you ever thought what it means to wrest an empire from the wilderness? Do but look at those four sturdy fellows, racing, as for life, to the great yellow poplar's heart. Four feet through, if one—sap and heart ateem with new blood, just begun to stir in this February sun—it is a field as fair, as strenuous, as any whereon athletes ever won a triumph of mighty muscle.

You thought it sapless—dormant. The woodsmen knew better. The live pinky-gray of bark, the flexible fulness of twig, the faint loosening of scales, the bud—told them sap was running up before even the first chip parted so hard from the wounded trunk. Oak in the sap chips

freely. Poplar is tough and spongy—so soft that the axe buries sometimes half-way to the eye—so deep that the handle splinters in the effort of withdrawal.

The racers have a care for such mischance. See how they temper their stroke. Up, down, in, out, the keen blade flashes; alow, aloft. Two either side, they stand, bending, swaying, flashing steely arcs momentarily over and around them. Heroes of toil, they fight with this towering giant a battle to delight all Walhalla's warrior-gods.

Listen! What rhythm of stroke! If the forest must fall, could it wish a statelier death-knell? The pulsing sound throbs uphill, down dell—ringing, rolling, in long, reverberant swells. It is at once march of doom, anthem of promise, whose fulfilment Summer shall write large in Plenty's golden smile.

With a wild leap the great tree crashes downhill, quivering in all its length, vibrant to tiniest tip. Its conquerors barely breathe them ere they mount the prostrate trunk, measuring, lopping, tossing in piles the fine intricacy of small branches. Soon they stand arow, each in his allotted place; axes fall swift and swifter on the wood beneath their feet. Big chips and small go splut-

tering out over the leafy earth. A little space, and the monarch of the hill-side, last night so tall and goodly under the midnight moon, has sunk to forms of use—lies in mill-stocks, in firewood, in promiscuous brush-heaps that March winds soon shall fan to flame and scatter wide in ashes.

Twenty acres for new ground. Already the axe-men have swept over ten. Attila was not more ruthless. No standing thing has escaped. First they cut down the underbrush at root; laid it orderly away; left dusk-dim aisles all through this God's first temple. One by one the aisles have vanished. The clear, pale sunshine plays wanton-free over virgin soil long hidden from his beaming. The guardian trunks yet lie thick upon it—as though even in death they would shield the mother-breast.

Hither and yon they run. It is no feat to walk yards stepping from trunk to trunk. By and by the rail-maker will come, with wedge and maul, to rend their tough hearts, rive asunder their clear sap. Or maybe it is the stave-man—a mighty connoisseur in timber. It must be thus and so—of this size, of that grain, so wide betwixt heart and sap, neither brash nor warping, free of knot or windshake, and riving true.

Given those conditions, the white-oak that is his prey may end its usefulness in fair France—or even twice cross blue water, and bring back over sea wine o' Burgundy; thin, sour, light claret; or even the yellow, mellow Spanish liquor o' Xeres. If they have forests over there, those good vine-growers, they have need to conserve them. Since the days of flat-boat commerce the Mississippi has borne yearly to the Crescent City an inland tribute of pipe-staves, to be sent across the sea.

Most like, though, no stick of timber shall go over the plantation line. Fire and fence consume it ravenously; besides, there is building—log walls, clap-board roofs. It was necessary timber that, a hundred years ago, stayed the emigrant tide among these hills, beside these streams; left the wide prairie country, for all its largess of tillable land, to beckon in vain, and lie, seas of grassy solitude, into a later time.

Shelter, fire, and water this land assured. Stroll on down to the waterside. A fair spring bubbles there—fresh and warm—warm, that is, by contrast with this keen air. Each axe-man, half-spent and athirst, drops prone beside it, and drinks, all harmless, his fill of sweet water. Now they are

gone cheerly away, lie you down in their stead; let the gliding current lave hand and lip; pick a fine white pebble from its bubbling bed, a trail of green moss from the edge, and you shall hold a talisman.

Bear it far as you will—to the solitude of desert or city—you have but to lay it in your hollowed palm or close against your cheek, and with shut eyes you shall see again this brown, swelling hill, clear for half its breadth, this tangle of bough and trunk, this enlacement of vine; you shall hear again beat o' axe, rippling water, sighing sough of boughs overhead, wind aruffle in dry leaves, crows calling one to another across the open; above all, you shall smell bruised bark and bud, and rifted wood, and new earth, crisping at the touch of fire.

The dropping sun dips half below the skyline. The wind freshens. The plant-bed is afire. All day stout arms have been heaping it high with brushwood, with round sticks, with logs big as a man can carry. Twenty yards square, of rich slant earth, it stands, a red line to windward, creeping, flickering, sending before it licking tongues of watery flame. The last sun-ray has vanished—you would never see such burning in its light. Let the wind hold steady one hour—here

will be only coals and embers and burning brands.

Winds are fickle—even winds of sun-down. Dusk falls calm and stirless; the flame sinks—languishes, creeps snail-slow through the brush, barely blackening heavier fuel. The evening-star comes, big and white, into the west's pale glowing. And far away to southward a slow, faint haze lies low above the remaining trees. Wind is under it, rain in its breast. The men running hither and yon, tossing leaves and brush upon the dying fire, look up at the cloud-wall with hope and fear.

One tall fellow raises his hand; his mates stop still and lean, in shirt-sleeves, against their rakes, looking all away from the leader who has sprung upon a tall stump and whistles and whistles for wind.

It comes at dark—rushing, roaring, half a hurricane. The plant-bed is one huge flame; the glare of its burning shows red against the sky—now faintly murk, yet full of veiled stars. The wind plays tricks with the fire—hurls brands about till on every hand brush-piles flame twenty feet in air. Lines of fire run, too, all along the trampled leaves. If once they reach the untouched wood, havoc indeed will be wrought.

All the dark is veined with red light. A month hence there will be other burnings. All the big knots, the whorls, the forks—whatever, indeed, is too tough for axe and wedge—heaped together in huge piles, shall lie smouldering for days, with bluebirds chirping over them from nests safe-ambushed in high, hollow trees; blue-jays flashing, screaming athwart the waking fields.

Axe-men eye Master Blue-jay askance. He is well known to go o' Fridays and carry sticks to the devil. With that fuel you shall be burned if by any chance you stick blade into the tree whereon he is a perch and he flies away over your head. Indeed, he is a general bringer of ill-luck—hooted at, pelted away with stones. The tree that holds his nest is marked for destruction—but no well-informed woodsman will sit by a fire of it. He would nearly as soon tempt fate by burning upon his own hearth wood that the lightning has touched. "Thunder-struck," he calls it. Even upon the log-pile he scents danger—of frost, or hail, or wind-torn crops. He drags it carefully outside the clearing, there to thaw and resolve into its original elements unhelped by fire's red rage.

Steadily, patiently he toils, singing often

at his work. The sun climbs high and higher. From the rising to the going down thereof he rakes and grubs. The smoke of his burning — at night, at morning — hangs blue wreaths along all the hills. At last comes the coulter, as cruelly sharp as justice. Soberly, with low heads, with straining necks, the team drag it—cutting, rending all the tender roots. Each long, black furrow is a trail of woodland blood. Once and across the narrow plough goes. The harrow behind it fairly chokes with mangled roots. What fine earth it leaves!—so light, so soft, so fragrant. The smell of it out-matches even the swelling buds—those small, brown, scaly miracles that so cunningly enfold the mystery of growth, the glory of flower and leaf.

Now it lies ready for planting. Happy the seed, the root, whose lines fall in such place. If the Dryads must seek new groves, the fowls of the air new nests—rejoice and be glad that Nature's alchemy shall return toil so strenuous in corn and wine.

AT FLOOD

WET world this, my masters.
Not dank and dripping, but all
awash. Saith not the prov-
erb,

“Wind i’ the south,
It’s in the rain’s mouth”?

How dully it blows—reaching humid, languorous fingers in slow caress over all the wakening world. How gray and low the clouds lie, pouring, pelting, till racing runnels furrow all the hill-sides, till creek, mill-stream, river, dash down at foaming flood. All the level is sheeted water. The swales show each a glimmering pool. Far off you hear the boom of heavy waters; overhead, all day long, the deep tattoo of big drops on the roof.

Not a monotonous drip, drip. This rain never slackens, but ever and anon some surcharged cloud sweeps low through the sky, pouring out a thunderous deluge.

Through such downfalls the lightning faintly shimmers, far, low mutterings of the thunder undervoice the plashing rain. Its long, gray, slanting lines build a watery wall about us. The eye cannot pierce it fifty yards. Trees, almost tapping at the window-pane, stand ghostly-dim against it, with hardly a sighing sweep amid all their half-seen budded boughs.

The sky is moveless, moulded all of cloud, and changing only in depth of hue. Through the fine, steady fall it is palely dun. Heavy, washing rain comes out of one, darkly gray-purple—so black, indeed, that oftentimes darkness covers the face of earth.

Through nights, through days, it pelts the sodden mould. Still the wind sits at south, a giant at ease, the clouds all in his eye. Presently a short, sharp gust blows out of the west. Another, still another, fitful, snarling, furrowing the cloud into long leaden ridges, that break and tumble one over the other, as this new ill-wind doth visit them so roughly.

Now rain falls only in spurts and spits. The cloud parts—for a minute you see through the rift the laughing blue beyond. Now the gray ridgy pall falls over it. A sharp touch comes into the air—more than

a hint of frost, but not for this night. The wind blows half a gale—a conqueror insolent of victory. Upland he sets all the world aroar. Lowland levels, under the lee of sharp hills, hold the calm of a great peace.

How rarely the waters brawl! From every hand comes up a thread of singing. How clear they run, all awreath with foam-bells. Even ploughland and fallow are beaten hard by such floods. These waters shine whiter far than those from out the woodland, wherein still there lurks some taint of leaf and root. What haste they make all to the great swale, now all over a lake to swim man and horse. One side is the long, sloping water-shed spread over how many hundred acres. The other, a rim of steep, low, rounded hills, under which the waters must tunnel and burrow to level of valley streams. All the hill-foot is honey-combed with sink-holes—round, small pits, darkly deep—running down, down straight through loam and clay, then bending to channel under the rock-ribs of the hills.

Thence come caves. Such runnings underground abound in this limestone land. Before you leave the wide, gray, sullen water—here to-day, to-morrow vanished—stand a minute on the hither verge, to look over

the pallid earth. It lies weary, patient, sad-colored under this breaking sky. Nowhere a hue of hope. The woodland stands dim and cheerless for all its promise of buds, with such trees as have been lured into blossom but poor ghosts in rags and tatters. Young grass and wheat show drowned and sickly green. It seems worse than idle to dream of growth and blowth over such drenched, hopeless breadths. Fruitful summer, indeed, looks further away than when sleet-bespangled snow lay white.

The raw wind chills the marrow, but look overhead. See summer's true harbinger—wild fowl in flight. In the lazy south wind, the pouring rain, they heard a call invisible to your ears, and are winging to answer it. See the wisp of blue-wing pause in mid-heaven, hover and circle above the flooded swale, then drop to its rocking breast. There they will rest and feed—diving, splashing, calling aloud in sibilant, wheedling chatter—till some gunner creeps upon them and showers them with leaden hail.

Wild geese are more wary. Seldom, indeed, do they dare in broad daylight waters thus in the open. They make for the covert of wooded streams, feeding thence at night in some near wheat-field or corn-

stubble. And high above these honking companies—so high, so far, the eye barely notes them—you see by ones or twos, or at most threes, white-winged specks, sweeping ever to north upon powerful pinions, too tireless to need pause or stay. Those are the great wild swans—known to folk of the country-side as bog-eagles. All winter long they have plashed and preened in gulf-marshes, in lake and bayou inland. Now, the woodsmen tell you, they are bound for the North Pole, and will make no stop this side that resting-place.

Certainly, these puny pools must ill-tempt a bird so majestic—flying, too, so high that its harsh, ear-piercing note comes to you the faintest dissonance. But it might stop at the river-side. There miles upon miles of still, gray, waveless waters lie wide over the bottoms, either side the racing flood. For our river runs down to a greater, that is likewise at the flood-mark. All the hundred miles betwixt us and the mouth, back water spreads, smoothly lapping, faintly eddying, over all the level land.

There it lays up the tribute of its hundred racing streams. Each comes to it, bearing gift of rich earth and sand and silt, stolen from hill-side or hollow or its own

crumbling banks. The thrifty river takes all, but cannot store it within its own proper channel. That were hazardous, indeed. A little while, and its bed would be dry land. So the wild current sweeps it aside, flinging it out to the eddy waters that run back to the hills. Therein all the fine, small grains fall slowly, slowly, till when the waters go out they leave a new earth behind.

New earth, new life. After it, over it, what grass shall laugh to sunlight! What corn shall toss i' the wind! What bursting plenty in barn and byre! What grace of new, strange water-sown flowers! What strength and fulness of leaf and root. As stars keep their allotted courses, so, too, do wind and water and pelting cloud work together that this our earth may be fruitful, green, and good.

WINDS O' MARCH

OUR truest weather chameleon is the March wind. April breezes may be daintily fickle—awEEP, asmile in the self-same hour—but it is wind o' March that sits steady in the south, blowing high, blowing low, till spring laughs through all the land, then whirls him to the bitter north-west, piles cloud on cloud, pelts all the world with sleet.

He spares not even the

“Daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty.”

Captive he may be, yet thrice cruel to his love. See! he has bedecked her with such weight of diamonds her yellow head lies low, never to rise again, nor dance and ruffle it, when softer airs do blow. Perhaps his thought is to make the world so splendid, no eye would ever miss the fine glory of blossoms.

A true enchanter he! Yesterday the world

lay gray and sodden under a dripping sky. Then his laden legions came hurrying pell-mell out of the north, with store of pearl and silver and crystal. He commanded, it stood fast; he spake, it was done—a waking world outdazzles Fairyland.

It must be these are the borrowing-days. Saith the old rhyme :

“ March borrowed frae April
Three days, and they were ill.
The first o’ them was wind and weet ;
The next o’ them was snaw and sleet ;
The third o’ them was sic a freeze
That the birds’ legs stuck to the trees.”

If the birds are not fast it must be because they have all got to cover. Nowhere any bare twig invites their perch. You will find them all ahuddle—under eaves, in barns and hay-lofts—wherever they could safely bide through the pelting of this pitiless storm.

Do but look down the avenue. Long boughs either hand roof it over with crystal fret-work; the road winds through a floor of beaten silver, and fence and hedge drip silver fringe.

Grass-land and wheat show emerald, set under seas of glass. Orchard boughs bend low in grottoes such as Elfland never knew. Sunrise flings through and over it an in-

tolerable splendor. Especially here in the waste-land, where weed and brier and tall, feathery sedge are bent, tossed, writhen, curved—each and all aglisten in armor of ice. You have no heart to shatter aught so exquisite. The cunningest workman, even of the gnomes, could not shape such crystal plumes as overlie the yellow sedge. Truly it is gold bediamonded. Do not grudge the poor grass its brief splendor. Twelve o' the clock in sunshine will see this Cinderella of the fields once again in rags and tatters.

Leave the field-path unbroken, and skirt the forest's edge, climbing slow and painfully to the hill-top at cost of many falls. Thence the clear valley unrolls before you as a scroll. To eastward what glow, what splendor, what powdering of rainbows, as the sun swims slow above the sea of crystal boughs. Now and again one snaps, topples sharply for a breath's space, then crashes to its fall. Excess of splendor is perilous always. My word for it, the trees will be joyful at end of this gorgeous masking.

Turn your dazzled gaze to westward. There the pale, dipping verge throws up a crystalline forest-rim, with high-lights of gray lustre, with swimming space-shadows, to accent this world alight. Overhead is a

sky blue, brilliant, intense, hard. March winds have blown out of it all hint of softness. Not one lingering, trailing cirrus deepens the cold east's pallid rose. The wings of the morning have borne them all away. Far, far to southward, maybe, they distil in gentle showers upon orange and palm and pine—forgetting, amid such wealth of tropic bloom, this temperate earth, bediamonded as for a bridal—the bridal of flower and sun.

Through the intervening valley the creek roars at flood—a water-giant, turbid, yellow, too strong for the fettering of frost. Look well at its fringing trees. Elm, ash, maple, listened all to the traitor, wind, while he wooed soft—so soft! See them all atassel. Their green, thready bloom droops piteously indeed. A little while, and it will lose its crystal bravery, to fall earthward, dark and dank, leaving behind it no memory of fruit.

Here, tree and field show heavy-white with rime. So much they owe to the brawling water. The last touch of this enchantment, the earliest sun shall make it to vanish. Now he is risen to half the zenith's arc. On every hand you hear snapping, crashing, tinkling. The sleet is breaking up.

The crusted earth lies all a watery quagmire. Even the sharp hill-slopes run sheeted water. The hollows gather to themselves rills and pools as clear as when they fell over the world, the Ice-Queen's silvern tears.

And winds o' March do blow—blow out of all the heavens. To this sunny lee slope comes one, soft as the breath of May. With what light touch he lifts the slender hazel, at morning bent to earth. How gentle his spiriting to the wind-flowers at its root. Pale, broken, dainty darlings! you blossomed but to die. The pert, small blue sweet-heart laughs you quite to scorn. Even before you it starred the hill-side with its clustered crosses. When the sleet fell, hard and heavy, it sank to the shelter of its mossy bed. Now that sun-rays lie warm, it springs up, shouting with all its tiny voices, "Here am I—look at me. Love me—the spring's fair, first, spoiled child."

Leave far this piping flower, this puling breeze. Come stand in clear space, where all around, about, a west wind—resonant, conquering, vivifying—plays on the forest-organ the anthem of resurrection. Under trees themselves you shall not half so hear its sweep and swell, its rolling diapason, its chant of rejoicing, its trumpeting of vic-

tory. It owns full power of the air. Low as the earth it comes, up to heaven it reaches, a solid, moving wall, mighty as it is invisible.

So it blows and blows—rushing, rending, drinking up the waters from the face of earth as chaff before fire. Sometimes it veers to north. Then frost binds hard, and bites. For the most part it keeps constant in the west, and saith not the proverb,

“Wind i’ the west
Weather at the best.”

Certainly the farmers think so. Witness the ploughman’s proverb, “A peck of March dust is worth a king’s ransom.”

For when March dust flies seed time goes so well, so merrily, as to promise full harvest. Under the waxing sun lambs skip and play across the greening grass. There may be gray days, sharp and bleak, yet all the world thrills to feel that winter is behind. By and by the clouds rift—lighten—grow high and white and woolly—at last melt out of sight. Winds lull to the merest breath—you say, rejoicing, “It is April weather.”

Have a care. Who knows what treachery may lurk under that specious seeming. Who

knows what cloud is marshalling, with lightning's red wrath in its breast; in what cave o' the winds Eolus, the father of them, is tempering his cyclones for a dance of death. At morning, maybe, you wake into a hot stillness that clings, stifles, till you gasp and pant. Overhead is no fold or break. Everywhere a dense, watery opacity with no saving downpour. The hours go leaden-footed—all life is afaint, with burdened breathing in this close, stolid air.

Presently a sobbing gasp comes through it—another—another. A fitful wind blows out from the lowest cloud. A fine, sharp, crackling swell comes with it. The weather-wise sniff it, to say, shaking the head, "Thunder in the air." Soon it smites the ear—pealing, booming, sullen—afar off. The low clouds stir—drift languidly overhead, letting fall a few big drops. Above them, sailing against, in the southwest, a cloud shape comes, born with the speed of light. All its greenish-copper hue is seamed with white, darting fire. Wind-torn, thunder-riven, it leaps along the earth—rising, falling, rending, roaring, grinding to powder whatever withstands its wrath; pelting all the sweet new world with big sheets of rain, with stinging broadsides of hail; flinging

balls of fire to furrow anew the bare, level ploughland.

Quickly it comes and goes, a very scourge of the air, leaving ruth and ruin along its narrow path. A chill wind and watery sighs after it—pale and perfidious, a mourner secretly rejoicing in the havoc he is set to bewail. At last he blows him out; the sun shines, and green things uplift to his ray their bruised heads. Long before high summer they will have no memory even of hurt. But the great oak, wrenched away from the root, shall lie still and stark, with no hope of resurrection.

A LITTLE EARTH

OME tread with me the measure
of the fields. The year, the
world, has but just smiled into
full waking. A long, slant
splendor of early sun-rays gold-
tips the budding trees. Through the wind-
less air smoke rises in thin, blue columns,
to waver and fade out in the light-flooded
sky.

Now, truly,

×

“Jocund day

Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain-top.”

Listen the joyful noise of mating birds, of
tinkling waters arace to the far sea, of hoof-
beat, of chain-clank, and loud-throated sing-
ing, as ploughmen troop to turn the steamy
earth.

Verily a heartsome task. See the bright
share slip along, mellow mould crumbling
away from it to lie loose and fresh behind.
What fine, vital breath it has? Clean, uplift-
ing, truly the odor of immortality. Older

than time it shall endure till the rocks burn and waste, the heavens be rolled away as a scroll. Likewise full of contrast. Here in the lowland the fat, black earth, full of rounded, unctuous pebbles, has a fine, moist breath—subtile, suggestive—that somehow brings with it the noise of shaken reeds. Rightly enough, too. Less than a hundred years back all this level was arustle with tall, green cane. Deer fed fat on it, bear lay in wait to make prey of fawn or doe—mayhap also themselves to perish, spiked through with antler-thrusts from a stag of ten.

Settlers came in—by twos, by threes—built cabins of round poles to shelter them while they cut roads through the cane. The first white owner of these acres made a path to his next neighbor's, eleven miles away, and either hand, along every foot of it, the reeds upraised a green, whispering rampart, so high that a man on horseback was completely hidden. The few highwaymen of that time by turns blessed and cursed the cane-brake. If it hid themselves, their victims, past finding, it likewise made flight impossible, save by known and beaten ways, communication across even the shortest space a matter so difficult as to be always full of risk.

They were rarely enviable folk, those pioneers. For the most part they left behind the pine and sand of the seaboard for this rich in-lying valley. A true land of promise, flowing with milk and honey, it must have seemed to them. No wonder when the first venturous spirits went back over the mountains the fame of it lured a-many to enter in and possess.

What crystal clearness of streams, whose banks bore never a furrow—what spread of forest, unmarred by axe or fire—what verdurous glades—what wealth of vine, and flower, and nut, and fruit? Beyond all, the cane—so tall, so thick, so slender—whispering to every babbling wind all the promise, the fulness, of the rich soil at its root. It is the gracefulest plant alive. Do but close your eyes and try to see all adown this long, long furrow a myriad ghosts standing thick and tall, all slender and glistening, breaking out in sharp green leaves along their taper length, tremulous, sighing, all ashiver at the wind's least touch. What harmony sighs through it! Here is your true Pan's pipe. Syrinx is not dead, nor shall be forgotten. While one of these green things endures, the myth shall have power. Life, reading its riddle, shall understand that out of the

heart's desire, turned aside from fulfilment, shall come music and sweetness far beyond love.

Come now to the fallow, first upturned last fall. It had lain three years in clover. See the big, yellow-white roots of it standing topsy-turvy all over it. So the great plough thrust and left them, often with but the tiniest hold. Never a one, though, but has made the best of it—has kept life spite of wind and snow—now sends up its sprays of round, gray-hearted leaves. How fresh and cheery they look, all dim with the fine spring dew. Truly it is pitiful that the big share needs must crush and overwhelm the brave green buds so gallantly upthrust. Lie soft upon them, gentle Earth! You must live by such doing, such undoing, for you give out a fragrance finer than all the flowers.

Drinking it in long draughts, the scent of the lowland fades quite out of memory. What is all its light blackness beside this brown earth—so mellow, so alive to the foot—smelling to heaven of summer and heavy harvest. The plough-beasts even snuff it gratefully. They draw almost at the trot, round corners without lagging, as though they knew what it all meant—bursting cribs,

and winter days full-fed against the cold. Nor stock nor stone stays progress here. The plough speeds so steady, a bare touch on one handle keeps the furrow straight and true. Round, round it goes in ever-lessening compass. The land will be done long ere the sun is down. If rain holds away the week's end will see all the field fresh-ploughed.

Then how sorry the birds will be. In flocks, in clouds almost, they settle in each new furrow, a scant length behind the plough, hopping, fluttering, chirping, pecking eagerly at all the luckless creeping things whose deep lairs have suffered earthquake. A motley crowd indeed! Here be crow and blackbird, thrush and robin, song-sparrow, bluebird, bee-martin, and wren. How they peep and chirp, looking in supercilious scorn one at the other, making short flights over each other's backs to settle with hovering motion nearer, ever nearer, the plough. Who shall say theirs is not the thrift, the wisdom, of experience. How else should they know thus to snatch dainty morsels—breakfast, truly, on the fat of the land, for only the trouble of picking it up? All day they follow, follow. It is the idle time now, when they are not under pressure of nest-

making. Though mating is past, yet many a pretty courtship goes on in the furrow. Birds are no more constant, nor beyond temptation, than are we, the unfeathered of bipeds.

Duels, too — fierce encounters betwixt aerial warriors all aruffle, dashing, full tilt, against one another, ready for all violence within compass of beak and claw. That tetchy fellow, the bluebird, is ready to fight if another does but nod polite approval of his love. Redbird and wren are likewise pugnacious—even gentle Robin Redbreast develops an amazing stomach for quarrel. Master Blackbird is wiser far. If his dame goes flirting off with a neighbor, all he does is to sleek and preen him till the green fire comes out over all his dusky coat, sail frolicly down the furrow, seize a fat white grub, and fly with it to some high place, chattering triumph over his prize. Madame, hearing, flies to him upon the instant, there is coy reconciliation over the feast, and both go back scatheless to search for another tidbit.

Most like they choose a new field—one where the lean earth has for years run to waste. Bush, brake, brier, cover the face of it. Here no plough can pass till steel and

fire have made way for it. Once the earth is ready for turning there is a feast indeed for winged things. Though the cold, wet clay affords never an earth-worm it has rich store of bugs, grubs, beetles, larvæ. Not one of the huge clods but holds a Thanksgiving dinner for the feathered foragers. It has been for so long their city of refuge—they have nested there, sheltered them against cold and heat—they are full of twittering surprise over finding it also a happy-hunting-ground.

What pungent, savage odor—bitter, clinging—comes up from the furrow—the smell of wet clay, underlying the sharp scent of bruised sassafras and brier-root. The plough has torn up both by thousands, by ten thousands. Steel of best temper, and sharp though it be, three stout beasts abreast have much ado to drag through the tangle under-earth. How low their heads, how steady their strain against the collar. Round about the field they go—once, twice, thrice—flinging barriers of damp sod 'twixt the hedge-row and the wide inner wilderness.

What a jungle it is—brier and bramble, sassafras and thorn, furzy fleeces of dry golden-rod, over and through all a masking of yellow sedge. Through the daylight the

field-hands will work at the hedge-row. The crooked fence-corners are the nursery of all vagrants. Therein you will find cheek-by-jowl peach and persimmon, woodbine from the garden, and grape o' the woods; young oaks, seedling apples—indeed an epitome of all that grows and blows. Or wild or tame, they must give room. Axe, bill-hook, brier-scythe, flash in and out—the tangle is tossed this way and that, soon to be piled in great matted heaps well across the encircling furrows.

Sundown shall not more than see the work well done. The field lies crisp and dry, rustling desolately in the freshening wind. It seems a waste place all predestinate—one whose reclamation was always and altogether hopeless. The belting, sinuous furrows seem to say aloud, "Man has wrestled with the wilderness—and got the worst of it."

Wait a little space. See, there to windward, a small, leaping flame, carefully kindled. A torch-bearer darts away from it, another, another. Almost as you draw breath, a line of fire upflashes, climbs, spreads, wavers, goes roaring down the field's breadth. See the pure red flame leap thirty feet in air, writhe, bend, toss,

curl back in crested billows. It licks up sedge and weed and brier—all, indeed, save a few stout stems that stand, crackling ghosts and stark, in the black earth behind it. Tramp stoutly over it—the blackness is but light embers. Follow the flame, keeping always well to windward. See bramble and saw-brier change to writhing, fiery serpents. Hear the hollow weed-stems fire at the flame a fairy fusillade.

Mark, too, that tall, dead tree, standing lone and branchless, far at the lower edge. Flame has not yet touched its root, but the top sends out smoke, glows red in the gathering dusk. The wind bore a spark to it, and kindled it as by magic in the soft, rotting wood. Now the fire has reached the foot of it—how it leaps and roars, licking up bark and sap-wood, making the poor tree a pillar of fire! All night it shall stand—hissing, glowing—a fountain of red sparks. At morning it will lie prone on Mother Earth—a blackened skeleton, yet with fire still in its heart.

Now the racing flame curls over the brush-heaps—the last enemy; here shall be battle-royal. As the issue is joined what lurid columns leap up!—dancing, wavering, drawing one to another. The merry,

mad Wind loves the dance. See him blowing in gusty joy—scattering coal and brand, trying with all his might to send his scarlet sweetheart across the saving girdle of furrows. Once she was in the wood, where the heaped leaves lie so dry under dead brush, over rotting timber, the revel might go on and on—end who knows where?

The field-hands know his tricks. They stand sharply at guard, stamping out, beating back, each thready flame that seeks to cross the barrier. Deep into the dusk they wait, scattering coals from the brush-heaps, making certain that no spark has lodged in the fence itself or in the wood beyond. Stars come out whitely overhead; dew-fall begins; the smoke of the burning drifts away to the lowlands. All about you breathes the keen, aromatic scent of half-burned sassafras sticks. One stout fellow stoops to pull up a fragrant loosened root, but stops as a wild cry comes ringing from the swamp. You listen with all your ears. At last a slow voice says, "Spring must be come in earnest. Hear the whippoorwill."

WHERE THE BEE SUCKS

THE good St. Valentine a wizard? What magic is this he hath wrought out of leafless boughs? Madame Plum-tree, dwarf and thorny, wears powdering of pearl from top to toe. The Ladies Peach blush pinker than the dawn to the tiniest tip of all their flexile twigs, Dowager-Duchess Pear hath veiled her in white lace, and pert Mademoiselle Cherry is all atangle with green-white buds.

They are not weather-wise—these poor folk—for all their rank and worth. They little dream that, near two weeks back, Master Ground-hog crept out for a look at things—chiefly his own shadow, could he see it?—thus to forecast if spring were late or early. He did see a shadow—sharp, black, well-defined. The sun shone treacherous-bright that day. With a snort of contempt for such fair pretence, Master Ground-hog crept back to his hole for six weeks

longer of napping. / If thick cloud had covered the sun he would instead have gone ranging abroad for a meal of fresh grass-roots and early buds.

For he is wise in the unwrit ways of wind and weather—wise enough not to trust the fickle south wind, the all-too-ardent sun. In his shadow he reads snow and sleet, cold wind, nipping frost, that he has no mind to endure, when it is given him to lie snug, sleeping on to the spring's warm height. A churl he must be, for all his wisdom—else surely he might whisper a warning to these believing trees. Perhaps, though, silence is the wiser, the better. If they heard and heeded, what lack for all the bees.

Hear the drone of them ; see them flashing, darting in and out, winging away full-laden to the hive ; hanging, deliciously adrowse, in the heart of pink peach-flowers. What wreathy bloom it is, crowded so thick along each budded stalk. If only the honey-gatherer could suck and store the odor of it, what nectar might compare, though served by Hebe's hand ? A fine, warm, almond scent, it clings and abides. The falling blossom has richer scent than the fresh one. Richer color, too—deep,

vivid—almost a crimson scarlet in place of the delicate pale pinkness so rare and fine.

A generous flower, too—not hoarding niggardly its sweets. You may see, taste even, the clear, glistening honey-drop at bottom of its cup. What wonder bees haunt the orchard so long as one flower remains. What wonder, too, the treasure-trove borne thence is next to the sweet from raspberry blossoms the richest, clearest, fairest-flavored of all honey.

Madame Plum-tree, too, hath honey to match her thorns. Her fairy blossoms burst wide even earlier than her pink neighbor—are rifled—faint and fading, as the rosy beauties begin to peep from out their russet hoods. A fine, heartsome sweetness, too, has our lady of thorns. Not so subtle as the peach-scent, yet truly vernal—one to call up to you memory of half-heard waters, of faint skies softly blue, the laugh and cooing of a little child. Curious, is it not, that aught so tender can be nourished with sap from so spiny a stem? Does it not recall the dear souls, known to us all, who mask with rough speech hearts gracious to the core?

Madame la Duchesse, for all her white be-dizenment, is scant of honey. So, too, her

later plebeian congener, the apple, spite all her lavish bewilderment of buds. Both are sickish-sweet of scent—a heavy, sullen odor that makes the low wind afaint. Go a little way off, and it is breath of Paradise. Here, under thick-blossomed boughs, it makes you half gasp for breath.

Not so the busy bees—never so busy as in face of these many flowered small gains. See how sagely they pass the open, rifled flowerets, how eagerly they thrust them betwixt unfolding petals to reach the untouched heart. Some fly homeward, all powdered like courtiers of old days. They are heaping up pollen for bee-bread. Shortly there will be new broods—vagrant swarms flying out to settle in brown, knotty, crawling clusters on fence or tree.

But first rough weather shall darken; keen winds blow out of the sky; all the orchard blossoms stand naked, shivering, acold. Not one in the million of this white enchantment, this rosy cloud, shall come to the fruit. Smitten of frost, sapless, withered, they shall fall unheeded, while green leaves laugh out under bright, wet April skies, and make the mournful boughs again to dance in sunshine.

Then bees fly high, fly low—far and high

for forest sweets, near and low for spoil of the pastures. There dandelions uplift ten thousand small gold suns; white clover, nun o' the sward, strings pearls along its green. Not yet is it at blossomy flood-tide. That comes later—when the nun's big, laggard purple sister is bursting sparsely into flower. Then, indeed, is the short green turf mottled with white and gold. What sight outrivals a stretch of dewy sward, with sunshine flashing rainbows from its diamonds, drawing sweets from its thick powdering of bloom? May, merry month, shall spread such along all the sunny road-sides, and send to them hovering bees in winged clouds.

There the bee sucks—sucks from dawn to fall of dew—unless, indeed, the raspberry thicket lures to its breast. The honey-bearers are wise after their kind. They know one clover-head, one dandelion, may drop, another springs in its stead, through weeks of sunshiny weather. And raspberry blossom endures for but a little space—beside yielding a honey for which Titania, queen of fairies, might sigh. What wonder how they choose in this embarrassment of riches? The thicket is vocal with their droning pipe. Some wing to it straight-

away from the hive, some—the most part—fly low across the grass, sipping now from this white chalice, now from that, nearer, ever nearer, till the last short flight sets them, half-sated, in the heart of some blossom-clump, fine and green-fringed and thorny-stemmed indeed.

Whoso has eaten of the fruit of such labors must wonder that the laborers, save under stress of hunger, can decline to anything so commercial and coarse-flavored as buckwheat. It is bee-pasturage of man's providing. The honey of it is fair to see—rich and clear, and set in fine, yellow-white comb; but, ah! the savor of it—a heavy, cloying sweet, with the tang of artifice, instead of the sweet spontaneousness of Nature's store.

These rangers of the air lay wide spans under tribute. Nor vine, nor bush, nor weedy flower escapes them. Neither ripe fruit of any sort, once it begins to drip juice. They follow close upon the birds, and grow drunken often with juice of grape, or peach, or apple, or over-ripe berries. About wine-press or cider-mill they grow into tipsy loafers—buzzing, swarming, crawling, eager even to drown them in the rich-flavored floods. For ages the little, busy

bee has been the sum and pattern of industrious providence. Who knows if, after all, the model insect hath not at bottom a stratum of lazy savagery, that circumstance may develop in most human fashion.

TREES ABLOSSOM

AVE you a drop of gypsy blood?
Are you akin to the wood
sprites? Then come with me
to my woodland. It is full of
sombre light this March day.

Upland the west wind makes billows of bare
branches. Along the creeks and runnels
he is shaking out green elm tassels and
scarlet maple flowers. It is wonderful how
even a tiny stream quickens vegetation.
Here upon the edge of the sink-hole, where
the spring branch goes underground, there
is a scented snow of wild plum flowers all
over the thicket, the slim redbud is all
purple-pink, the iron-wood's long tassels
fairly drip gold-dust, while a hundred yards
away the same growths show only faintly
swelled buds. On the mill-stream, a mile
away, where the spring water again comes
to light, the difference is even more marked.
In the broad, deep valley the young oak
leaves are as big as rabbits' ears. Truly

those are living waters that roll so clear at the roots. And what a sweet, subtle fragrance loads all the air! It comes only in earliest spring. There is the source of it, that smooth, gray-barked, shrubby tree, with trunk made up of curiously interlaced stems. It is entirely leafless, yet enveloped in a cloud of clustered white fringy blossoms. See how it bends over the water, dipping a long branch in the foamy eddy at its root. Does it not seem a forest Narcissus pining for its own lovely image? Even to the tiniest twig it is loaded with blossoms, but nothing comes of them. Nobody has ever yet found a seed, and there are but three trees in a county, the woodsmen all declare. Perhaps that is why it has not even a nickname. When the leaves come out, three weeks after the blossoms, any but a woodsman would swear to the tree as a scrub hickory. The bark is as tough and stringy, the foliage of quite the same color, shape, and texture.

For an early bow-pot, though, there is nothing like branches of its white flowers crowded against the yellow scarlet of swamp-maple blossoms. Put them in a big earthen jar; no vase has room enough. Set it in your darkest corner, upon a carpet

of moss. Put ferns all around the base, and, if possible, get long sprays of cross vine to trail over the jar's edge, or to climb the wall back of it. Its green, stiff, waxy leaves, mottled with red and brown, give a needed shadow to the vivid flowers, and make up a true vernal harmony. Unless you can make some such use of them, leave the maple flowers to glorify their native swamp. Convention spoils them utterly. A vase suits them about as well as a dress-coat would a Seminole or Cherokee chief.

Let alone always the sick-sweet redbud. It is well named Judas-tree. Not only does it stupefy the foolish early bees, but its sap makes the hand that plucks it itch and burn, and is almost as irritant as the clinging poison-oak.

A little later, when dogwoods flower, you may come home with sheaves of bloom. Then it is throughout the South and West "corn-planting time," and homely folk say that the blossoming is an infallible "sign" for the harvest. If the flowers are few, corn will be "all nubbins, and few at that"; if the woods are white, cribs and barns will overflow.

As a cut flower the dogwood has but one proper place — namely, the fireplace. Stuck

in a box of wet sand overlaid with moss, the flat, white-starred branches make an ideal screen. Otherwhere it drops so quickly or is so stiffly ungraceful that it will prove only a vanity and vexation of spirit. That is, in its first estate. In October few things are more decorative than dogwood branches set thick with leaves and fairly aglow with clustered coral-red berries. Even after the leaves fall they are especially handsome, particularly when tacked flat against a plain gray or dull-blue wall. Both sugar and rock maples blossom before they leaf, and at the merest hint of spring. If the "sugar-tree" has been tapped it is two to four weeks late in blossoming. Otherwise its thick clusters of greenish-yellow fringe come out first of all. Oftener than not they are pelted with snow or wrapped in sleet before their course is run.

Nut-trees are wiser. It is high May, full and splendid, before walnut and hickory fling out their plumes of green, and fill the forest with a

"Cool, wild, bitter scent,

Better than taint of rose or balm breath rare."

It is strong, clean, uplifting. The breath of it clears the mind and strengthens the soul. If a trumpet call could be made

odorous it would smell as do these blossoms. There is nothing in life so delightful as to lie prone upon warm grass under a big, spreading walnut, standing alone in acres of pasture-land, with May sun dripping gold through the quivering leaves, with cattle lowing all about, with birds nesting in the near thicket, and the scent of crushed catkins coming strong and sweet from your hands.

The crab-apple is Dame Nature's paradox; one of those contradictions wherewith she delights slyly to confound us. For is not the blossom as sweet as the fruit is sour? Is not the grace of branch and leaf offset by the prickliness of long thorns? Far beyond the hawthorn it is the true flower of May. It is as though creative power had gathered the dawn and the dew, the grace of rippling water, the sweetness of true love, and of them shaped these dainty, pink-flushed flowerets, then set and fenced them about with a hedge of thorns. Though we have hawthorn and haws, black and red galore, they cannot be named in the same day with the crab-apple. Indeed, there is but one blossom-tree that can — that immortelle, the honey-locust. The man, the woman, who knows not, loves not,

its pendulous white clusters and rich, sweet breath, is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils of the deepest dye. Few, even of its lovers, though, know what a hold it has on life. Stick down a twig, a bit of root, anywhere, and behold, you have a tree, no matter what the environment. A Virginia planter once enclosed his calf lot with locust posts mortised through and through, and locust poles fitted into the openings. By summer posts and rails were growing at a lively rate, and had made a hedge where only a fence was wanted. Another, whose door-yard was set with locusts, dug a well sixty feet deep, and got a bit of locust root out in the last spadeful of earth. Upon still another plantation, roots of the locust planted by the pioneer owner two hundred years ago come up regularly each spring, in spite of a century of persistent grubbing.

Park and street planting have quite vulgarized the buckeye. It keeps no bit of true sylvan flavor, but grows by time and rule, and blossoms to order. The magnolia, too, is commonplace away from its native woodland. The tulip-tree defies ornamental planting. It will grow strong and stately in the bottom, or cling stoutly to life upon the bare hill-sides, but does not take kindly

to the haunts of men. It loves light soil and untrampled roots. Given those, it is magnificent. Without them it sickens and dies. None can know what a wealth of blossom truly means who has not stood in the wreathy top of a tulip-tree, looking down at the earth through twenty feet of flowers, and up to the sky through forty feet more. Late May is the season. The leaves are almost full-grown, the new twigs six inches long, and each one bending with the green and yellow cups.

Linden and bass wood, persimmon and pawpaw, chestnut, willow, each in due season furnishes sweets for the bee, scent for the breeze. Ash, sycamore, oaks, have blossoms, green and graceful, but lacking sweetness.

GREEN FIELDS

HEY are civilization's hall-mark, and make you more in love with Mother Earth than even the wooing stateliness of woodland. Especially in May—the “merrie month of May”—when winds are all of balm, and the golden sunlight drips down through tender new leaves. The world is vocal then. All the birds sing love. Each little runnel tinkles a fairy chime. Sound of all sorts takes on a curious vital resonance, and nowhere more than in the green fields, the breadths of grain and grass. There is a story in each wind that blows through their green, small spears. If you do but have the fine ear to hear, you shall learn wondrous things. As truly as all flesh is grass, there is a marvelous individuality in the things which supply the staff of life. Rye, for example, is the grain of paradox. Plunge into this field of it, a breast-high sea of gray-green,

still damp with dew, though it is ten o' the clock. No wonder the ballad heroine

“Draiglet a' her petticoatie
Coming thro' the rye.”

The stay and solace of high latitudes, it holds moisture in a fashion that is simply amazing. This it is which enables it to grow rank and tall upon soil where less hardy grain would attain but a few starveling inches. Indeed it is, in some sort, the savage among cereals. There is more than a suggestion of spear and arrow in blade and beard and long, lithe straw. Withal, it is graceful beyond words. Now the heads, just bursting out of sheath, are level with a tall man's shoulders. By harvest they will bend and droop above his head. To walk through it then will be a plunge into green gloom, with the stalks, crushed by the tread, writhing serpentwise at foot. Light winds barely ripple the heavy heads. When it comes out of the west, a lion of the air, there are billows and heavings almost to match a stormy sea. For minutes the whole breadth of it will be flattened as with a heavy roller. As the gust upcurls, the tough stalks writhe upward too, and dance in the teeth of lesser gales; that is, if the seed fell among stones or a holding clay.

Rich soil is fatal to this democrat of grains. It grows there, to be sure, in a weak, perfunctory fashion, but a moderate rain will lodge it hopelessly, and the grain itself is spongy and without substance. At the best it is not a tempting food-stuff. Rye-bread is bread of bitterness unless marvellously well disguised. Yet it keeps many millions from hunger—millions, too, who without it would inevitably suffer famine. Under favorable conditions a single seed may reproduce itself two-thousandfold. In addition, it thrives in weather conditions that forbid the ripening of other grain. On the whole, this bearded grain deserves more than well of a large moiety of humanity.

So, too, do oats, which Dr. Johnson defined as “a grain that in England is fed to horses; in Scotland, to men.” The sneer was well parried by the indignant Scot’s query, “An’ whae will ye find sic horses and sic men?” Nowadays, though, the land of cakes and heather is not singular in its consumption of “the canny aitmeal.” It has pretty well all the world’s breakfast-table for its own. But there clings always to the growing plant more than a suggestion of moor and mist. Mark the cool blue-green of these blades tossing well up beside your knee.

The field is just "in the boot." A little space, and you shall see all over it the plummy, pale, pendulous pyramids of slender, thickly-husked grain. Even more than rye, it needs coolness and moisture. A week of drought as it is heading, and the yield will not pay for harvesting. Ripe, it is the truest gold of the fields. All other straw and stubble are pale and commonplace in contrast to its glowing yellow. A curious fact about the grain is its deterioration in new climatic conditions. The best Scotch oats imported weigh nearly fifty pounds to the bushel. The American product from such seed sinks in two years to about thirty-two.

Now the wheat-field spreads you out its hundred emerald acres. Here is no hint of blue or gray, but that intense verdure that best symbolizes the time of growth and blowth. The grain is just fairly headed—waist-high, and all atoss in the mid-day breeze. When the sun rose, each green ear bent daintily earthward, dew-diamonded at every point. Now they stand straight, and feel ponderable as they brush the passing hand. Note the pale, infinitesimal flower-ets at tip of each bract. The whole field is in bloom. Pouring rain to-day would scant the harvest by half. For upon these small

flowers, no bigger than a pin's head, and hung on a stalk you can scarce see with the naked eye, depends fructification. Let them be rudely removed, and there will be only chaff and emptiness, howsoever fair the head. The danger will pass quickly. Next week the kernel will be in the milk, with only rust to assail it. That may come if there are hot days and still nights, with warm showers between. In a night, as it were, the red fungus forms on blade and stalk, and sucks up the wholesome juices that should go to feed the head. Then farewell the hope of "buckshot" grain. There may be quantity, but quality will surely be lacking. It is pitiful to see failure overtake what promised so fairly.

More than pitiful if it comes in shape of the army-worm. His visitation is infrequent—once in twenty years or so. When he does come no green thing escapes. He devastates impartially garden hedge-row, corn-field, and thicket; wheat and grass land, though, are his favorite forage. He comes without warning, attacks in solid phalanx, and moves through the field in writhing mass. If the wheat is not headed, it never will be. The field is eaten bare. If the straw has strength to turn his

teeth, he strips it of all leaves, even to the uppermost, and drops down to find another stalk. Once in a field, there is no cure for him. A deep trench, into which he may fall, is the only prevention of him. Twice a day it must be cleaned out, or the bodies of the fallen invaders would make a bridge for the enemy behind. He is a dull grayish-brown fellow, stupid and harmless to look at, yet Goth nor Vandal ever left behind him a more desolate world than he.

We will barely skirt the meadow where clover and the grasses spread out their tender mosaic. Tangled grass is the mower's abomination, and footsteps must mat and tangle the lush greenery that lies knee-deep all over it. At the branch we will pause and drink long draughts of its blossomy breath, as well as mark the pink marsh-mallows fringing the water's edge, or pluck a cluster of the wild hydrangea. It is curious how the shrub clings to its native spot, maybe a hundred years after the sheltering woodland has been cut away. As we make choice from its wealth of bloom, a soft wind stirs, and the whole world sings. "Rejoice," it says—"rejoice and be glad, O mortal! that God gives life, and lends sunshine and green fields to sweeten it."

A MOON O' MAY

WOULD you know all the glory, the glamour, of it? Then watch with me the rising, the going down, thereof. It is a full moon, big and round, dripping silver in long bars over this vernal earth. How dark the horizon lies—the deep, intense black of lush new leafage, soft and dense—so dense, indeed, it drinks up the soft gray twilight. Sunset is two hours past. All over the sky a tremulous luminance makes paler the radiant stars. The glory of the sun, the glory of the moon, reach up from west and east to flood the sweet heavens with this dusk, tender shining.

The heavens that bend so near. If you could but reach the tallest tree-top, surely the hand might pluck these fine stars from their courses—bend them to human purpose, to human will. Underneath them, what balm breathes out—smell of the earth, and grass and flowers underlaid with the

cool dew-scent. How white the jasmine's stars gleam through the dusk; how ghostly-fair the tall, gold-dusted lilies. The south wind hath sighed him to sleep, drugged with their heavy sweet. Surely Circe herself wrought never enchantment so potent. All the night through he will sleep—nor dream, nor stir.

Now the east brightens—glows to flame. Up and up a slow moon swims, a blush upon her, cleaving with silver lances the thick, low, earthy air. What glimmering tall shadow streams out over the fields, vague, grotesque—a very Harlequin of shades, patched here or there or yonder with flares of pale new light. So pale, indeed, you can but barely trace it across the dew-dim grass.

Swiftly, swiftly it brightens. The shadows deepen, shorten, grow sharp of outline. See how the young corn-rows mark moon dials all over their smooth fields. Eleven o' the clock by it—the moon stands at quarter—stars are faint and pale. What light-flood pours through the clear valley, turning all to silver the tall, unrippled grass. Wheatland lies dark to blackness. Its still, deep, heavy-headed verdure is too robust to borrow the moonshine tint. Elder-flowers show spectral in the hedge-rows. Hedge-

roses pale to the ghost of their morning hue. Old-man's-beard wears the silver of age, and vagrant, blossomy briers wave at you wands of pearl.

Hearken the deep night's voices. The swamp sends out a rumble of distant croaking, the wood a shrilling of tree-toads from all its thousand boughs. There is crying of whippoorwills on every hand—swish of their wings, too, dark and heavy, as in wheeling flight they circle from out the wood. "Whip-poor-will! Whip-poor-will!" the cry of them, goes pealing through this dim, drowsing world. There is heart-break in it, longing, passion, a wild call for justice, a fine note of despair. It chills you, thrills you, spite the toad's merry undertone, the frog's deep double-bass. It is a singing of death and silence. What though the singer be a clown on wings, who shall listen without tremor of soul, here in the midnight fields, his weird, low, wailing note?

The climbing moon lies white, straight overhead. There is no more darkness save underneath the trees. What tense, black silhouettes of all their leafy mass lie, sharp and vivid, along the wet, cool grass. Midnight has struck, and still the south wind sleeps. And still the lulling flower-breath

drifts, drifts to the dreamers of earth—and straight they cry out for a joy that is half pain. Heart of the spring-time, soul of the summer, is in it. What wonder if they who breathe it go momentarily to that undiscovered land, where the days of our years are made young.

One o' the clock. The moon is wester-ing sharply. Croaking, shrilling, have died away—the whippoorwill calls but afar and faint. This might be the enchanted island with the princess asleep for a hundred years, so still, so stirless, it lies all in the fair, white night. A ghost might sure walk unchallenged. But no, a cock crows cheerly. If spirits there be abroad, they must troop them home to the grave. Is that truly a ghost drifting up from the eastward swale? A white, thin, vaporous swirl; what well-bred shade could ask a properer housing? Now another upcurls—yet another. Dawn will find good store of mist lying low upon the tree-tops to redden at his kiss.

A sound wakes in the trees—the maddest, merriest, most trancing note. The mocking-bird is singing to his new mate—the fulness of life and love—the joy of nesting-time. A little while, and he shall make all the night vocal—flood it with melody

from dusk to dawn. A bird in the wood's edge echoes his fine, clear note. Soon a dozen will be singing—nor pause till the sun arise.

Listen, open-hearted, to their fair accord. What king can command such fine harmony as wells through these silent trees? The tricky singers pour out for you every sweet note of wood or field. Surely the nightingale must hide her head before them, the upward-soaring lark sink down from heaven to listen amazed to this richer rendering of his love-note to the sun.

Now the singers call with the note of doves. Now it is the oriole's song that goes ringing through moon and dew. Now a strain, clear as the swell of Elfland trumpets—breaking, dropping, a rain of silver notes like small, sweet bells jangled in time and tune. Lay it carefully away in memory—it is the mocking-bird's own song. That he borrows other notes is pure wantonness—as of him who having giant's strength must use it like a giant.

The May moon rides at quarter. Three o' the clock—and all about cocks crowing loud and clear. The western heaven is all one wide, blue splendor. Low in the darkened east the world's rim faintly lightens.

Here has been no night—only a clear, white shining. Yet the new day shall rise in power, and fling lavish golden largess down on the teeming earth; shall give and take away—for sunlight and waking breeze, the dew, the stillness, the clinging breath of flowers. Even now a faint air stirs. A pink east blushes to scorn a paling west. All the sweet birds wake to singing. The east glows bright and brighter. The great sun leaps to view, and clasps and shelters in his arms of light the laggard moon o' May.

IN A RIOTOUS GARDEN

IT belongs to my neighbors, the wise women. There are two of them—each tall and gaunt, with more than a suspicion of gray beard on her chin. One looks at you through keen blue eyes, from out a face all tanned and wrinkled. The other is flat-nosed, thick-lipped, with shiny black skin, running smooth as satin up to her crown of white wool. Nominally, they are mistress and maid. Really, they are friends, comrades—occasionally enemies.

This, the garden, is their pride. To keep and to dress it, at once a duty and a joy. It lies faintly aslope, to southward of the square log-house that has trumpet-vine climbing either big rock chimney, to wave scarlet arms in every wind that blows. A hop-vine clambers one side the rough porch. Wild purple wistaria runs rampant over the rough hood shading the back door. You go out from it to a narrow path, beaten

smooth and hard through the short, velvety grass.

The garden lies four-square inside tall, ragged palings. Once, mayhap—a long, long time ago—it had some semblance of walk and border—some due arrangement of its garnered wealth. A trellised arbor goes straight away from the sagging gate to a curious green wall at the other end. Grapevines sprawl over the rough frame work—not clipped and pruned to the vineyard's niggard length, but wreathen, riotous, creeping, climbing along roof and wall, hanging there in their season long trails of leaf and blossom and clustered sweet fruit.

How fair it shows in the sun—all pinky-brown, all blackly-purple, all as green and clear as a mermaid's eyes—hanging so thick under the roof of leaves. The wise women are generous in their season. Not only may you eat your fill, but pluck generous handfuls to carry away. Presently you see that they can well afford to be. Coming out on the green wall it turns all to tossing spears—a poor, small cane-brake, kept partly for use, partly for sentiment. The wise woman remembers her childhood, when cane covered the land. Between times of gathering simples and going abroad to

heal, she sits weaving at her loom—so needs store of reeds for quills. Here at their foot she stuck slips of all vines. They have rooted, thriven lustily, and hang fair, rich clusters all over and through the green, sighing wall.

Part it lightly and step within, let the lithe, stiff stems close all upon you—a fairy prison shutting you quite away from the guide who stands outside scarce two yards away.

Peaches, too, the garden boasts—scattered trees of the Indian sort, sweet and flavorful as love, bloodily red as murder. Yet to see it but in season of fruit is to lose, far and away, its best charm. Come, tread with me its round under fair spring skies, when peaches have dropped flower, grapes hang i' the bud. Look up as you pass the gate. Either hand a big mock-orange leans to kiss its mate, arching overhead a bower of thick white bloom. What curious, shrubby vine climbs over it, dropping on every hand its fine, long arms, so lightly graceful, so thick-sown all their length with tiny leaf and blossom? "Youth-and-age willow," black Daphne tells you, nodding sagely as she shows you that never a fresh purple flower comes out but a faded one peers sorrowfully from the same foot-stalk.

Truly, this garden needs a guide-book—it is so delightfully unmethodical, so full of curious things. Black *Daphne* knows it by heart. For the most part it is of her planting. That is why you see white lilac plumes atoss quite in middle of a clear, sunlit space. She loves the flower, and had no mind that it should be dwarfed or starved by rougher, more robust growths. Purple lilac; pinky, flowering almond, as daintily artificial as a Dresden-China shepherdess; stubbly scarlet pomegranate; big, overgrown, conceited snowball—she has massed all together at one side, to struggle as they will for existence.

She is tender of sweet-scented things. *Calycanthus* stands full and fair in the onion beds' middle. Honeysuckles—red, pink, yellow, white—wave, garland-wise, each in its separate place, afar from other root. So, too, do the roses—all June's hardy myriad. Now they are but tangles of green, small buds, with no hint of color save the Scotch rose, whose gold peeps warily even thus early through its green sheath. A little while, and you shall see it yellow as the sunshine's self, with sweet, short-stemmed flowers. And still a little later the winds shall rock, the bee drowse through. Hundred-leaf velvet, thornless

bouquet—how many more?—lavish stems all, that crowd into one brief month more of bloom than their sisters of newer fashion dole out through all the year.

Black Daphne loves them well. Propriety forbids that they nod from her turbaned head, but all their days of blossom she goes with her breast crowded full of stemless flowers. She saves, too, the dropping petals to dry and strew through her chest, her drawers. All her clean garments smell of them, and bring to her a breath of summer, even when snow lies deep.

Not so her mistress. She grants the flower sightly, but cannot forgive its thorns. In the garden's farthest edge her one child lies buried. The grave is rarely beflowered, but only with soft, smooth stems. The mound is a swell of green-glossed box-vine, with lily-of-the-valley aring at the edge. Beyond that come tulips, hyacinths in orderly row, with borders, one half of violet tufts, white and blue, one half of pale, fringy, clove-scented pinks. They grow and blow here in this rich, light earth, unplucked, tended always by mother hands. Who shall say that the love, the hope, the prideful ambition, closed within that little coffin, do not live again in the flowers?

Daphne has only flower-children. If she loves passing well her shrubs and vines, lowlier blossoms are her passion. And surely she was born for anarchy. Do but look at this breadth of dark earth, so light and crumbly to the tread. Again it is high summer. Things for use—beans, beets, potatoes, squash, cucumbers—straggling, crowding over the face of it, their matted green everywhere beflecked with big, fringy poppies, royal red, cream-white, or vivid pink. In between, bluets peer pertly, prince-feather uplifts its stately stalk, gay snap-dragon flings wide its painted throat. At one edge bachelor's-button fights hard with vigorous pepper-plants. A huge, branchy sun-flower stands tall above the battle. Over against, palma-christi spreads its feathery fans higher than your head, its red stalk overrun with green cypress-vine.

All sprang where they stand—from self-sown seed. Daphne could no more uproot them than she could do murder. Spade, hoe, and rake have turned aside from them, or wrought only that they might be free of hindering weeds. See, too, these clumps of heart's-ease, so velvet-dark and golden-eyed, standing in shade of green asparagus plumes. The big, silvery onions swell up

through a tangle of bright portulaca; cabbages sit cheek-by-jowl with phlox; tall, full-podded pea-vines make room on their bush for their kindred, the sweet-pea.

No foot of earth is bare. Here be green stems of broom, dreaming through a leafless summer of its February flowering. Cochorus, too, all anod with ragged yellow balls, touch-me-nots, four-o'clocks, pretty-by-nights, sweet-williams, cowslip, purple flag—all the pretty, quaintly-named, old-fashioned crew. Wild things beside. Daphne knows well the secrets of field and wood. Thence she has brought hither blue-bell and columbine—purple, red, and white—flower-de-luce, scarlet catch-fly, yarrow—green and feathery—butterfly-weed, swamp-honeysuckle that learned folk call azalea—Heaven knows what beside. Each after his kind, she plants, tends, coaxes into flower. Save, indeed, the coy yellow lady-slipper, who will not be comforted for her wood-sprites, and sends up her green stalk bare of its yellow glory.

The strength of the garden is its herbs—so many, so various—whose names were never writ in the wisest man's book. Commonplace savors, sage, fennel, dill, caraway, sweet basil, sweet marjoram, thyme, tansy,

elecampane, mint, bergamot, "Texas sage," rue, catnip, hoarhound, bestrew the whole space, cluster thick at foot of the paling, cling and abide at root of all the shrubs, or in the line of tall hollyhocks—the gardens' one trace of preciseness. Good in their place, one and all—for comfort, or flavor, or healing of small hurts. Not from them, though, does the wise woman draw her store. See this tall, weedy stalk, thick beset with purple blossoms, with dull, dark, rough, green leaves. Virtue untold inheres in it, root and leaf—what virtue, only the wise woman can tell. Some part of it cures green wounds, some part fevers, some part assuages the angriest hurt. Its neighbor comes, I think, from the swamp. It has brown, weeping stems, thick sown with feathers of gray-green leaves. Daphne whispers a pillow of them is the one sure help for sleepless eyes. Tea of these matted green stems over against, banishes vapors, warms the cockles of the heart. Indeed it were too long to tell of all the wild, strange growths here flourishing side by side. Gathered from all the four sides of wood and field, they are plucked each in its season, brewed with barks and roots and seeds into potion or philter—healing

draught it may be, or one that shall work harm.

Only the wise woman knows. Her face is a mask—tawny, inscrutable. Good she hath wrought beyond question. Ill, too, it may be—life hath a curious woof, more curious even than the gay threads flashing out from her darting shuttles. The sun sinks low; birds set up a sleepy chirp. She drops batten and treadle, to go out among the flowers. A last look shows her standing at ease, sun-rays gilding her bare gray head, with the good green leaves behind, the garden as a lush carpet unrolled at her feet.

SUMMER RAIN

T has portents without number. See the sky of mottled red that the dawn unrolls for us. The earliest sun-rays strike through it—long, white, upward-streaming lances. “The sun is drawing water,” country people say. A little later, when he is an hour above the horizon, there will likely be “sun-dogs” as well. Long before those balls of vivid opalescence have gone before him into the cloud’s dun swathe, earth will have repeated to you the story of rain, not only in dewless grass and in low-skimming flights of swallows. There is a thrilled, expectant hush in flower and tree. Poplar leaves curl and quiver till their silver lining makes light the leafy darkness; those of the elm rise up in thirsty welcome. The oaks, big bosses of glossy green, droop generously, as though saying, “Flowers first.” Dawn winds die away to a low undertone of sighing. Wafts

of heavy perfume come up from the clover. Woods and hedge-rows send out the vanilla sweetness of grape blossoms—the scent that, of all others, embodies the soul of summer. Garden air is well-nigh faint with odor of rose and lily and primrose and honeysuckle. Only the spice of clove-pinks redeems it—accents with vivid sweetness what would else be overpowering. Heliotropes, marigolds, four-o’clocks, verbenas, phlox, petunias, are true sun-flowers. A lowering day they fold up their bright hues, and stand—stern, sad-colored, patient—awaiting the downpour. There is something wonderfully human about these sun-lovers. If fate sets them in shade, they will grow tall with all their might, and creep and bend and twist, with never a sign of blossom, until they reach the sun-blaze. Often they are so spent in the reaching that the flower, when it comes, is but a poor ghost of blossom, whose pallor not even the sun-kiss can flush.

Roses love sunshine fairly well. They run riot in the dashing of warm rain. Buds unfold as by magic; blown flowers bare their hearts; faded ones dance earthward in long drifts of shed petals. If the rain turns chill, the “rose would shut and be a

bud again," only its heart is so full of moisture as to have lost power to close.

The presage of rain falls early upon the birds. Before dawn they begin singing. All the orchard rings with clear thrush notes; robins sing, loud and sweet, from the hedge-rows, undervoiced by the wrens' reedy call; the big oaks are vocal with blackbird chatter; the wild cherry at the field's edge sends you out the oriole's clear jangle, the wood-pigeon's coo; the cries of feeding partridges come faint and far from the bush pasture; crows and woodpeckers, screaming noisily, dart like feathered cannon-balls across meadow and corn-field.

Before sunrise all are silent. The barn-yard din, too, has died away. Instead of crowing, the cocks feed industriously; small chicks peep in sleepy content from under brooding wings. Cattle graze quietly, with only now and then an upward glance, in place of running wildly about, with stiff tails, lowered heads, and uplifted voices, as they did when first awake.

Out in the far pasture the colts are running races. They snuff the rain afar off, and grow fairly wild. See how they rear and plunge and prance, or run with heads daintily aside, whinnying faintly one to an-

other, or giving some laggard a mischievous nip or kick. What fire, what grace, what spirit, in these creatures, "by spur or bridle undefiled," and fine as silk in their glossy new coats! Now they have swung into a dead run. It is a race where the best horse is sure to win. Round and round they go, the rhythmic hoof-beats falling on the turf with the sound of summer surf. Watch that black fellow far outside. My word for it, he is winner. He was lengths behind at the start, but see how he runs, with head low to earth, as though the great leaping bounds were but play for his magnificent muscle. Mark the ease of his stride, the lightning quickness of stretch and gather. In the field's round he has locked the leader; now he passes him, and runs far ahead. See him stop short, fling up his tapering muzzle, and neigh defiance to those so far behind! It is time to stop. Rain is moving in from the woodland—a gray, falling wall. Well may the young racers scamper for the big oak's shelter. They had better, though, choose that wide, low-spread mulberry a hundred yards away. The air is vibrant with thunder; and look! that blinding white glare means that some bolt has struck less than a mile away. Ah!

there is another, and another. See that big black oak at the field's edge, riven into long splinters! Thunder-clouds follow water. The oak stood just in this one's path to the creek. Boom! boom! boom! how the thunder rolls and crashes! But fainter, farther, every time.

The first flurry is over. We shall have no more sharp lightning, nor drops heavy as hail. The real rain, though, is just beginning—a slow, steady fall that means “greenness to the grass and glory to the flower.”

Not to-day, perhaps, but to-morrow and for many morrows. It is the “gentle rain” that is the true rain from heaven, that feeds the thirsty land, and at last wells up in springs of living waters. The sky is a dome of gray vapor, without fold or break. We will have an hour of watery enchantment.

Along the creek boys are out with hook and line. How or why no man can tell, but fish bite their best upon a gray, rainy day. That barefoot lad, whose patched shirt is soaked through, has one big trout already. His pole is a pawpaw from the near thicket, his float an old cork, his line a length of granny's black flax thread, his bait earth-

worms, grasshoppers, and seventeen-year locusts; but, in spite of all, he will go home with a string of fish to make a scientific sportsman die of envy. Ah! there is a strike indeed! It must be the patriarch of the pool who has risen to the locust so deftly dropped just above his favorite sunken rock. See him run up stream and down, across, athwart, lashing the water into foam, or leaping out of it until half his silver length is visible! The boy will never land him? Wait a bit, and see. He, too, is in the water, wading up to his waist, slipping, stumbling, it must be cutting his bare feet on the sharp stones below, but too intent on his quarry to heed it. He has no reel, but that does not matter. A bit of stick serves to wind the slack of the line, as inch by inch he gathers it from the fighting, struggling creature. If the trout is game and wary, his captor is cunning. Slowly, cautiously, he heads for a little land-locked pool. The trout darts into it, and dives for a friendly root. The fisherman dives too, quite out of sight, though the water is but three feet deep. He comes up with a gurgling whoop of triumph, and the big fish clasped to his breast. Really he was worth the wading—not an ounce under two pounds, and with

half a dozen broken hooks embedded in the big jaw. He looks like a shield of silver pearl as he lies, flashing rainbows, on the green growths of the bank. A single bird-call sounds shrill and clear. The fisherman glances up apprehensively. It is a red-bird's note, and means the end of rain and fishing. It is answered from every side. First by the mocking-bird, who darts out from his nesting thicket to perch on some high bough and pour out a flood of melody. Robins follow, bluebird, thrush, oriole. A low wind springs and freshens. The sky rises, and hardens to gray-white, with here and there a fragment of rain-cloud under it, from which comes now and again a fitful shower.

Grassland is a green lake two inches deep, with red earthworms revelling in its clear shallows. Muddy rivulets run along the corn-rows, their faint trickle drowned in the rustle of tossing blades. To-night, when the world is still, you can actually hear the corn grow—a peculiar faint up-rushing murmur, like nothing else under heaven. In a warm, wet night corn-stalks in good ground will lengthen fourteen to sixteen inches. What wonder that such growth is audible.

Now the sun shines, not faint and watery, but with true summer heat. The whole world is vivified. Flowers laugh out in the hedge-rows; leaves whisper in the soft air overhead. And there is Master Red-bird taking his bath in the tiny pool that has gathered in a hoof-mark beside the road. Odd that such a drenching has not given him water enough. He has plenty of company. Nearly every track has an occupant splashing in its tiny depths or preening his feathers upon the brink. Here sit a pair of ruby-throats—flowers of air—aperch on a dead twig, oiling and arranging their wet green coats. There the oriole flashes black and yellow, with the scarlet tanager and indigo-bird calmly looking down from their crab-apple fastness, where, year after year, they rear their young undisturbed. Stolen waters are sweet. Perhaps that is why the birds make haste to use these little pools. They know somehow that they will not endure. Even now they are sinking into the thirsty land. The grass lies warm and dry underfoot. The air is like wine. A wonderful world, new and fresh, smiles back to the sunlight. "There was rain to-day."

IN THE OLD FIELD

ALWAYS, almost, the old field has a history. Sometimes a tragedy lies back of it — wrecked lives, a ruined home. Oftener, a long legal battle, with lands in Chancery idly awaiting its issue.

Again, sometimes, it is the manorial instinct of English blood, which, under all suns, delights to have and hold twice the breadth of land it can keep in heart and tilth.

Whatever its reason for being, always it is full of delicious vagrants. The very breezes blowing over are tricky sprites. It lies, a clear hollow in the world of belting woodland, with sunshine pouring in, a sea of molten gold.

Curious waters trickle into it from the swamp's deep-stained pools, to vein with brown threads the lush, dull-green, low places. All manner of marsh growths follow the streams: mallows—pink and yellow—blue-flag, calamus, reeds, rushes, tall,

coarse marsh-grass, now and again a cat-tail, with million upon million of yellow marsh marigolds.

In the water's edge you see the wax-green leaves, the white flowers of hart's-tongue. Big clumps of dull-pink everlasting carpet acre upon acre in faint, dim lawn, that might fitly drape a ghost of summer. Pluck of it freely, dry the pendulous clusters in a windless space, and all winter long your eyes shall rejoice. All the more if you choose, too, bents of the feathery barrens-grass, standing taller than your head. It is the feeble remnant of a great multitude once covering as with a garment the face of this earth. Old settlers know it well, and delight to tell you how, in pioneer times, a man could ride through it and tie the heads either hand across his horse's neck.

Wild, woodsy things cling to the old field. Hazel-bushes fight with the mallows and marigolds; sassafras runs riot, an army with banners, now green, now gold. Lace-leafed sumach covers its autumn face with flame; crab-apple and hawthorn make spring alive with the murmur of many bees; scrub-oak advances yearly in ever-thickening ranks, with straight, slim young tulip-trees and silver sycamores.

Who shall name or number the tangle of vines? Here be wild-grape, star-flowered clematis, poison-oak, scarlet trumpet-vine, Virginia creeper, bitter-sweet, cross-vine, partridge-berry, beside half a hundred nameless things instinct with graceful life. This one, a mat of wreathy green, is a mark of the richest soil. It feeds and flourishes only on the fatness of light, black mould. Only the root is perennial. The soft, twining stem does not peep up till May shines hot and splendid. It comes, though, with a rush, and is coiling twenty feet in air ere the long, long June days usher in high summer.

It has big, ovate leaves, growing by fours around the green stem. You would never look twice at its white, inconspicuous, clustered flowers, that spring from the axil of each fan of leaves. Wait, though, for the seed—round, green, translucent, in pendulous clusters—as big as, more graceful than, Malaga grapes. What Faun or Dryad could wish a lovelier crown?

Unless, indeed, she lingered till the coral-vine was in berry. The flexile, green, tough, slender stem has almost the strength of steel, and is beset all its length with waxy leaves of richest green, with shining clusters of red, red berries, whose color, intense and glow-

ing, puts the bitter-sweet's red and yellow out of countenance. Frost cannot wither it, nor winter pale its infinite vitality. In the first snow you find it gleaming cheerily amid briers all leafless, or around tall, dead weeds.

Mortal maidens choose instead of it "love-vine." Wise folk call it dodder; children, "gold-thread." See how it tangles in and out of the waterside growths, making webs of spun sunshine below their dusk of leaves. A true parasite, it is nobly impartial. You find it equally in sunlit breadths of clover, in this tangle of dark stems. It grows ranker upon the succulent water-fed plants.

Would you practise divination, break the tiniest jointed yellow stem and fling it behind you in the crotch of shrub or weed. Ten days later look at it. If it has withered to nothingness, so shall your undertaking fail—your lover prove untrue. Contrarywise, if a fine yellow thread begins to creep out from new knotted roots, you may go your ways rejoicing, secure of good faith, good fortune. Before the summer ends all the clump will be gold laced with the delicate deadly twining. For though the supporting stem may flourish greenly through that season, it puts away life and leaf together. New stems will spring from the

root, but there comes not leaf or bud to those that the love-vine gilded.

All the marsh-land is sweet with pinky-pale swamp-roses. There, too, the big green brake grows waist-high, and smaller ferns tangle in the shady tree-set places. The earthy banks wave to you long sprays of Solomon's seal. Pink-root uplifts to sunshine its scarlet, gold-lined trumpets, as gorgeous almost as the cardinal-flower, whose scarlet torch outflames the glow of August.

Often, too, the old field holds sweetbrier, the poet's eglantine. It is a strangely human flower—even here where Nature is so rapidly reclaiming her lost domain. It loves a rich root-hold; if warm and stony, all the better. Oftener than not it is the living, the only epitaph of a forgotten home. Vivid hedge-rose clusters, pink as the heavens at dawn, put to shame its scant bestarment of pale, small, single blossoms; yet are themselves more shamed by the exquisite sylvan fragrance of the sweetbrier's green leaves.

Upland, on the gulleyed hill-sides, "butterfly-weed" glows in summer sunshine like unto handfuls of yellow-scarlet flame amid a sea of feathery sedge. Broom-sedge the country folk call it, or sometimes "broom-

straw." Many a hearth in the old days was beswept with a bunch of it, big as the two hands could hold, bound hard and fast together with a tough white-oak splint. It is the plague of grass-land. Against its winged seed, lighter far than thistle-down, no defence shall avail.

As useless as it is beautiful, it is omnipresent. But not omnipotent. Here yellow cinque-foil, yellower mimosa, creep them and bloom amid its bristly tussocks. The pink, small partridge-pea, too, climbs pertly over its tall, swaying stalks; white, waxen silk weed blossoms nod disdain of its stiff plumes. Sorrel, pink and yellow, straggles about its root; even "Nimble Will," otherwise wire-grass, goes where it listeth without regard to the sensibilities of its statelier brother.

And where the light earth lies long untrodden, wild strawberries enter in and possess it, as though the sedge but grew of a purpose to shelter them. See this patch of them, all agleam with fairy fruit! Do but taste it—then say truly if the garden's red, luscious berries are worthy to be named in the same day with these wild, flavorful things. It was of such as they that the wise man wrote, "Certainly God might have

made a better berry, but certainly God never did."

This flat, wet breadth is the dewberry's chosen home. Here in May you shall see twenty-foot-long trails of white blooms, prone on the earth amid sedge and wire-grass, with a cloud of busy, gold-dusted bees sucking sweet content from all the flower-hearts. Here, too, in June you may come through dew and sunrise to pick sweet, black fruit, scarce less lucent than the dew.

Most likely the partridges will be there before you. Then the first broods have just begun to run freely from the nest. The brown mothers know to a day when this dainty fruit is ripe. There is no prettier sight than one of the small, shy creatures, a berry in her bill, calling her brood to the feast, while her mate stands sharply at attention.

To see it you must needs move with feet of silence, or have "receipt of fern-seed and walk invisible." If you do but stir or break a twig, the old birds give a little quavering cry, the young ones melt into the grass—the earth—their elders meanwhile fluttering away with tossing, squawking, and beating of wings.

Birds of all feather flock to the feast of

dewberries. About the vines you may meet Robin Redbreast, that noisy coxcomb, the red-headed woodpecker, sober thrush, gorgeous oriole, the big, black log-cock, blue-bird, wren, and jay.

Master Mocking-bird, too—a fellow of infinite jest. Sometimes it is his humor to go, slow of wing, to a laden, crowded vine, uttering, as he flies, the cry of the cruel blue-winged hawk. It may be only a grown-up jest. Most likely, though, it is done with intent to frighten away bigger birds, who might dispute with this winged humorist the best place at Nature's feast.

A little while, and the raspberries hang blacker, sweeter, more full of fine savor, in all the shady thickets. To that feast come garter and chicken snakes as well as redbreast and red-head. The harmless serpents acoil about the vines evoke no protest from those peaceful birds. Yet those feathered termagants, the cat-bird and the mocker, set up a wondrous hue and cry if once they spy a reptile.

Blackberry time brings the old field other visitors than those that creep and fly. Pigs wriggle through rotting fences to feast on fallen fruit, coons and possums steal in by the glimpses of the moon. Day by day

housewives, market-pickers, come, and go away full-handed. So, too, do the gray squirrels—the Ariels of the wood.

For the blackberry is a very democrat. It thrives best in the freedom of waste land, growing over all for all. Its best-beloved haunt is an old, old orchard, where it may root and twine about half-dead peach-trees, or gnarled, half-bent, close-stemmed seedling apples, starveling reminders of the days when the old field was closer in touch with humanity. This small, imperfect fruit often makes up in savor for what it lacks of substance.

Plum thickets are, in some sort, the ghosts of long-dead gardens. The original root, perhaps, defended the fence's weakest corner. When it was torn away, the sturdy growth remained to mark the vanished home-seat, to hang fair-colored, juicy ovals by the thousand and ten thousand to tempt or refresh the wayfarer who stops for a minute in their thorny shade.

Woe to him if a wild plum tempts his lip. Its rich bloom promises sugary sweets; yet, until the fruit has lain mellowing for days on the warm earth at foot, it is almost as bitterly astringent as a green persimmon.

Saith the Arab proverb, "The reward of

good works is like dates—sweet, and ripening late.” For date read persimmon, and you are not far off the truth. Persimmons grow often in the woods, but reach their last and best estate here in the old field. It is a wonderfully vital plant. A chance-sown seed will be in three years a tree coming into fruit. One, too, that can be got rid of only by the most rigorous grubbing. June sees its green flowers full of subtlest sylvan fragrance. Six weeks later all the twigs are sown along their under sides with hard, pale-green spheroids that in two months more are yellow and dusted over with whitish-purple bloom.

Thenceforward they merely hang high till the time of killing frost. If that keeps off till December, your true persimmony persimmon clings to its roughness, albeit here and there an early faint-heart is eatable. Master Possum is the best guide to such an one. He is at once connoisseur and epicure, whose taste you may safely follow. Most trees are sweet and stripped by Christmas. The very roughest hang on until February—a special providence to all manner of wild things, when their usual larders are deep under the snow.

If chance sets such fruit in your way, taste

it without fail. The flavor is unique—something betwixt a reminiscence and a promise. Besides, the old field yields hazel-nuts for Halloween, crab-apples to tantalize you with their exquisite fragrance, wild grapes, red and black haws. Indeed, whether of savor or beauty or sweetness, the half hath not been told.

WHEAT HARVEST

SUMMER day betwixt dawn and sunrise. White mist wreaths hang about the tree-tops, grass land and clover spread a gray shimmer of dew.

In the east a clear shining, with the faintest rose tinge showing through its translucence. There is no breath of air. The big new leaves hang still and stirless, save when some bird in full song flashes in and out. The whole world has voice. From the wood comes the locust's shrilling; crows wheel and caw in the blue overhead. There is a low call from the bittern, flying straight and swift to her nest in the marsh two miles away, and stealing under and through it the plaintive cry of hungry young hawks from the cradle of sticks high up in the big poplar. Jarring notes these, that serve to accent the flooding melody of robin, bluebird, thrush, and oriole. Surely a thousand throats are attuned in the shelter of hedgerow and thicket, where wild

rose and elder and grape blossoms by ten thousands send wafts of vivid fragrance into the morning air. A heavier scent underlies and strengthens it—something subtle and penetrating, faint yet vivifying, like the smell of clean, fresh-turned earth. It is the odor of wheat-fields yellow unto harvest. See how they spread broad, billowing reaches that the first low level sunbeams turn to midsummer gold! If, indeed, Persephone came back to earth in such guise, well might Demeter, the great mother, rejoice and make festival over the coming. Here are the year's first fruits, the most golden gift in all the horn of plenty. Mark the grace of it. The sere blades drooping at the root, stalks upright in their bravery of golden mail, bent bearded heads, with a dew pearl on the tip of each defensive spear. Some few, you will note, stand pertly upright. The harvest-master will tell you there is nothing but chaff in them; and, if so minded, you can draw a moral of the humility of full heads. But not at the minute. Sharp through the sylvan chorus come the clang of whetted steel, the blur of wheels and hoofs, and men's voices. The cradlers have trooped over the fence, and stand whetting their blades under the big mulberry, from

which they have scared a flock of noisy blackbirds. They will work here in the fresh land where big stumps forbid the use of machinery.

At the farther edge, through the wide gate, comes the self-binding reaper, spick-and-span in red paint and bright steel. It is a ponderous affair of wheels and reels and belts and aprons. There is something almost uncanny about it. The four mules who draw it go at a trot, and faster than eye can follow huge wire-bound sheaves are tossed so far aside as to be out of the way next round. It does twenty men's work, and does it thoroughly; but for the true harvest flavor you must follow the cradlers. Stout fellows they must needs be, and well in their prime. It is a rhythm of motion, a harmony of mighty muscle, to see them arow, sweeping the golden grain into straight, gleaming swaths. They cut the field in squares, and as a corner is reached the leader steps out, and breathes himself till the last man has brought up his swath. Then they fall in, one behind the other, with the precision of soldiers on parade. Sweep for sweep, blade to heel they go. Now the leader quickens his stroke. It is ten o' the clock, dew has vanished, blades will

hold edge, and muscles are warm and supple for a race. "All good men follow me," he shouts over his shoulder, whirling his bright blade through the bending grain with the speed and force of some mighty engine. The good men are not slow to follow. With straining muscle, with panting breath, they surge forward. The air is alive with the glimmer of steel; grain falls as before a whirlwind. The day is white-hot—unbearably so to an idler, but grateful and life-giving to workers bathed in perspiration from head to heel.

When the farm-bell rings dinner-time the square is almost done, and there are rabbits galore in its small remnant. Wheat is Molly Cottontail's chosen summer ambush. With her children she has run in and in from the flash of steel, little dreaming that they will be left no abiding-place, no stalks of refuge. Swish! swish! swish! in ceaseless round now go the gleaming blades. One drops out, another, another, from the swiftly narrowing space. It is but a thin fringe now, with a dozen small, frightened, puny things darting hither and yon through it. The last swath falls. There is a wild, exultant whoop, a sudden scurry of feet, the leaping of poor Cottontail towards all quarters

—pursuit, capture, laughter, and shouting. The captors hang their cradles carefully in the shade, and go jocundly to their waiting dinner.

See what a green tent the great mulberry spreads here in this sea of gold! The limbs droop quite to meet the springing grain. You have but to reach forth a hand and pluck the luscious fruit. If you like not the flavor, come on to the near hedge-row, where wild raspberries hang ripe and juicy, and dainty enough for Titania's banquet. Make a cup for them of grape-leaves, and your feast shall have true woodland savor. Or, if you have a mind for flowers, fill your arms with milk-white elder clusters, with pink trails of wild rose and wax-white milk-weed blossom and garish butterfly orchis, besides clematis and brake fern, and scarlet pink-root and yellow cinque-foil, and a hundred nameless beautiful things that blush unseen through wood and field. Gather, and go quickly to shelter. The noon heat is like a furnace. It will shrivel up your blossoms even quicker than it cures the grain. Sheaves half green this morning lie dry and yellow, ready to be put in the shock. Long ere nightfall the whole field will be thick set with the golden cones. Towards evening

there may come clouds, scattered white cumuli that foretell fine weather's continuance. As one drifts over the sun the harvest-master looks up and smiles at the grateful shadow. He knows what it means—that the pains of seed-time will not be lost at harvest.

HIGH SUMMER

GOOD green world is rolling from the silvern stillness of dawn to the glory of golden day. Low cloud rims the eastern world's edge, a Titan's rampart, over which the sun is sending long, white arrows far up the brightening sky. Underneath it, what enchantment! What winds of balm blow low from shorn meadows, from breadths of rank clover, where sleek, mild-eyed cattle graze knee-deep in purple bloom! What bird-song wells up from each tree and shrub! Clear and sweet, it tells of love in the joy of fruition—a different harmony truly from the exultant, din-some clamor of nesting-time. No wonder the winged choir is happy! The nests are ateam with fledglings, and field, hedge-row, and orchard yield now rich largess of grain and berry and creeping things, all alike toothsome to small, hungry mouths.

As the winds blow the birds sing high

summer; so, too, does the dew proclaim it. Touch the branch above, you shall be drenched in a fairy bath; step but once from the path, your feet are sodden. And was ever aught fairer than this feathery oat-field, bediamonded at every point? On blade and stalk, on each drooping grain, the bright beads stand arow. The sun sends down a shaft, and lo! a world of rainbows flashes back to you from the tossing blue-green mass. May has dew, indeed, grateful alike to soul and sense, but not to be named beside this lucent love-gift of still midsummer nights. Midsummer fairies have blessed it, too. Go through it as you will—lave you in thick leafage or tramp sturdily over streaming grass-land—you shall be none the worse of it. Not even if you dare invade the corn-field, with its rank upon rank of dark-green knights—true warriors all, that shall put to flight the grim ogre Famine. Plumed knights are they, with every plume true gold. See the yellow dust that powders all the field. Mark, too, the fine, faint incense-cloud that the dawn wind has scarce strength to blow away from the field of tossing spears. The breath of it in the nostrils is half barbaric—neither sweet nor bitter, yet full of subtle suggestion. Again

you see Choctaw and Cherokee, Seneca and Oneida, range the fair land, and hold corn-dance or sing death-song. Truly these warrior stalks, green and sturdy, shall serve while time endures to recall that lost race.

For the most part, there is only bare black earth at foot of these lancers of plenty. Now and again you see a tuft of crab-grass sending its slender claws all along the clean furrows. Here, too, where a runnel brings down the wash of the garden, there spreads an acre of morning-glories. How they climb and writhe from stalk to stalk! What witchery of tender lines they spread here in this green gloom! White, blue, pink, crimson, royal purple, glaring scarlet, spotted and striped in all fashions, the wreathen bells hang, as tenderly translucent as though shaped from dawn and dew. Truly these be sweet bells that shall never jangle out of tune. In the open they would live scarce an hour; here, high noon will find them fair as the day itself, with yet a loitering dew-drop in each pearly heart.

Far different are the marsh-blossoms glowing so yellowly upon its border. They might be made of sun-rays massed and minted, so stiff, so golden, do they nod. Prouder than pride they stand, turning full heaven-

ward the bravery of their brown velvet hearts, enrayed with hue so dazzling it outvies the summer sun. Until frost falls they are fadeless; scentless, too. What wonder that no hand cares to pluck! Of a verity, sweetness is sometimes better than light, especially if you happen to be born a flower. *apples*

Or even a fruit. Here, in the orchard, harvest-apples hang palely golden amid the clustering leaves. Fair to see, indeed, but not for a minute comparable with the mellow, pinkish-streaked Junes. Who eateth of them shall not find

“Dead Sea fruit, that tempts the eye,
But turns to ashes on the lip.”

Ripe, Delicious Peaches

Walk but a little farther, though, and apples shall not tempt you, howsoever much of Eve our mother there may be in your soul. At the farther edge you come on peach-trees bent to earth with a rich burden. Big, downy ovals, pink and white or yellow and crimson, and fairly bursting with sweet juice. Pluck one from a topmost bough, one that the sun has but just warmed on one side, while the other is yet cool and dew-wet; eat it upon the instant; then say if you would change for nectar and ambrosia, though served by Hebe's self. Whoso nev-

er sees peach-trees ablossom, or in this manner eats of the fruit thereof, misses somewhat of life's pure joys. At flower, its almond scent is the finest note in April's harmony of perfume; at fruit, the odor is as truly the crown and perfecting of summer sweets. It is like nothing else under the sun. Breathe it with shut eyelids, and you shall see visions and dream dreams. It is Nature's last touch—the crowning mercy of her marvellous handiwork. Peaches picked for market three days or six before ripeness have never the ghost of it. Here it comes, hot and sweet, upon all the low winds that breathe rather than blow. On their wings it follows—follows far out into the grassland, where sheep, shorn but a month, graze in full-fed content. What eyes the creatures have—stupid, gentle, appealing, full, too, of timid curiosity! Drop your handkerchief upon some small shrub or brier, and mark how they will circle about it with lifted heads, longing, yet fearing, to approach the fluttering thing.

Noon comes with short shadows, with stirless air. A hot shimmer wraps all the world. Sounds die in it to a drowsy hum. Even the cicada's rasping is a monotone of peace. Bees shelter them in the hearts of flowers.

The babbling runnel drones a slumber song. And, lying in deep shade, with the lulling sough of leaves overhead, you look abroad to say, "God's world is very good."

DOWN THE CREEK

WHATEVER the season, it is a place of delight. The creek itself is no sluggish stream crawling betwixt muddy banks. In winter it is a bold, blue torrent, brawling rarely over pebbles and around boulders. Spring makes of it almost a river, swirling and boiling from hill to hill. Heats of August shrink it to a bare thread of bright water, stealing in long runnels through the water-worn grooves in its limestone bed. Sometimes they take most curious shapes. Here is a capital W written in limpid wavelets upon a stretch of solid stone. Where the channel falls it is no trouble to step across it. About every half-mile comes a "lake," where gravel beds, fallen timber, and dead leaves have built an alluvial dam and spread a long, bright pool, wherein frogs and fish and muskrats disport themselves the summer through.

Oddly enough, when the wood-birds go

bathing, they prefer the dancing ripples to the still shining of the pools. Instinct, perhaps, tells them of the greedy fish and big, hungry turtles that lie in wait in the depths. See that pair of wood-ducks wheedling and chattering about the half-dead sycamore that bends over the stream. Mrs. Duck made her nest in the soft, rotten wood at top of it. She has just hatched out a dozen balls of yellow down, and is setting about getting them down to the water. Once there, they will swim like ducks indeed. But flying is as yet beyond them, and the nest is twenty feet in air. Look close, and you will see the mother bird poised with half-spread wings just outside the nest. Slowly, cautiously, with low cries, her mate pushes one of the ducklings quite upon the middle of her back, gives a sharp, satisfied quack, and at once she sails down, settles herself in mid-stream, dives gently, and leaves her baby sitting on the water without in the least knowing how he got there. With a shake of the wings and a quack that says "Take care!" she is off to the nest, and keeps it up till all her little ones are launched. As she brings the last a cruel thing happens. Right below her flock there is a swift up-swirling of water. Something brown and

unwieldy comes almost to the surface, then sinks like lead, and takes with it the plump-est, downiest of all the yellow darlings. Inside a minute another is dragged down, and another, and still another. The snapping-turtle, which, once he has taken hold, "never lets go until it thunders," is greedy to-day. Anyway, he has a weakness for ducklings. He would eat the whole dozen of them if the distracted parents did not hurry them ashore.

There they will not be in very much better case. Foxes live in the caves all along the bluffs. Minks, too, and weasels, and coons. Any night you may hear them splashing about in the water for mussels, crayfish, and such small deer. Master Fox is no fisherman, but in many ways an antic fellow. It delights him no little to find a safe, sunny rock overhanging a glassy pool, where he can bask in broad daylight or stand on tiptoe and play with his tail, nod his head, and seem to laugh outright when his image in the water repeats each motion. He is dainty in his drinking—will cross the creek a dozen times to lap and lave him in its coolest spring. As each lake has its bluff, each bluff has its spring. If its waters gather in plough-land they are apt to be warm

and still. If they drain grass or woodland, and come out under fifty feet of rock, they will be cool and sweet as moonlight over snow. Here is the Fox Spring *par excellence*. It gathers in the big South Wood, whose edge you see fringing the top of the bluff.

The bluff faces north—a sheer wall of blue limestone, seamed and broken into huge ledges. In the cleft of one a young hickory has got root, and springs straight and tall six feet beyond the top. All manner of wild vines grow in other clefts—grape vines, wild ivy, poison-oak, trail down almost into the water. The glory of it, though, is its ferns. The trailing rock-fern runs all over the face of it; each seam and cleft is a thick fringe of maidenhair, knee-high wherever it gets good root. At the foot it springs into a veritable fairy forest, gemmed here and there with the coral of Indian turnip and Solomon's seal.

All the rocks about the spring that sunshine never touches are beset with lichens and liverworts, green and gray. Twenty feet away, in a mass of mould that was once a fallen tree, is a blackberry clump, bent to earth with rich fruit. Eat your fill of it, and carry home a good few. What if you have no basket? Berries like these grow only

where dew and fairies are plenty ; and here are sycamore leaves as wide as your two hands. Pin a mat of them together with their own leaf-stalks, bend a willow twig about the edge, and heap it with berries half as long as your finger and meltingly sweet. Then wreath the basket about with yellow love vine and feathery grasses, set it out in the dew to-night, and morning will show you that the day of miracles is not wholly past.

Drink of the Fox Spring before you leave it. There is no such water in three counties. You may use the ancient gourd that hangs on the root above it. If you are wise, though, you will lie all along the cool brink of it, and let the living water lave your lips ; or else kneel, gather it in your scooped palms, and drink and drink the nectar of the wood-sprites.

The stream is delightfully vagrant. It bends, turns, and doubles upon itself in each half-mile. The bluffs alternate with curious regularity. The next one faces south-by-east. There you find always the first hepaticas. All winter its big, red-brown leaves curl and cling to each clefted rock to break in late January, or by St. Valentine's at latest, into wreathy stars—white, paly pink, or blue, or purple.

The bluff itself is low—a bare ten feet, with big rocks standing out all over the sheer face of it. A big hill crowns it, and goes up to the level of the plateau behind. There the water-nymphs have their flower-garden. Anemones grow there; daisies; violets; the wild cowslips, with flower like the hot-house cyclamen; sweet williams; blue-flag; columbine, purple and scarlet; sweet brier and bramble rose; and white August lilies. Beside them a great multitude of nameless, delicately beautiful things. There is one trailer whose leaf recalls the mimosa, and whose white blossom seems a cluster of sweet-peas made for fairy wearing. Another hangs out a fringe of white cups, shaped like the lily-of-the-valley; and still another shakes long, yellow, gold-dusty tassels in each sweet spring wind. The chiefest of them though is a vine, a woody climber, with handsome, dark green leaves and flowers of true wall-flower yellow, but in shape and size like a nasturtium. The root of it loves water, and the richness of crumbling rock. It grows at the water-side, and clambers up the rocky face to fling down torrents of trailing bloom. The native purple wistaria has much the same habit. Its pale, pendulous clusters make the creek-side throughout

April a long dream of bloom. In May there is the flash of scarlet Virginia creeper, beloved alike of butterfly and humming-bird. Master Ruby-throat often builds his wee nest in its shelter, and always draws from its deep cup his choicest sweets.

In the pebbly reaches that spring floods cover yearly you find pink and purple larkspur, the curious root known locally as "Adam and Eve," Jack-in-the-pulpit, yellow celandine, and yellow, wild mimosa. Wherever there is a bit of fine earth blue grass springs spontaneously, starred with a million dandelions. Countless May apples burst up through it, too—there is apt to be a pawpaw thicket—and if the earthy bank abuts upon the water a fringe of green, stiff rushes.

After the first frost go down the creek for chestnuts and scaly-barks. You will walk through a glory of yellow leaves, with the smell of new-fallen ones coming sweet from under foot. Grassland is green as in May. Only weeds and stubble lie sere in the low sun-rays. The winds breathe, rather than blow, yet the ripe nuts patter, patter, at each sigh of them. Gather good store, but leave plenty for the squirrels. Winter is at hand, and they are rightful heirs to Nature's bounty.

When it does come, the few days of bitter cold about the winter solstice, there is Fairyland all down the creek. The lakes skim over with clear, commonplace ice. In the swift runs there is ice only along the edges. But ice of such clear shining, such wonderful shapes, as freezes nowhere else. Each leaf is armored in lace of diamond, each twig and grass-spear has its pendent pearl, moss and lichen are transfigured, stone and pebble made harmonies of frost.

All the shelving bluffs, whence waters drip so cool through summer days, are hung with huge icicles, points of fluted pearl. They grow upward as well as downward. If the frost holds a week they meet in hour-glass fashion, and stand white ghosts of fair water that only the south wind can make again alive.

He is not slow in rescue. He comes at night, with a roar and rush of rain. In a day the ice is broken up, and a turbid torrent, full of drift and silt, goes racing to the river valley, to rest at last in the sea.

IN THE ROSE GARDEN

STEP lightly; it is enchanted ground—the one realm left to fairies and their queen. Do you not see them at hide-and-seek among the leaves? The moon, low in the east, has one white star for company. Over and beyond it steals the pale luminance of new-coming day. In the rare, tremulous, tender light, mark what jewels gleam on fairy robes of pink and pearl, of yellow and crimson, and scarlet and creamy white! No diamond has such fire, no pearl such roundness; the most cunning workman cannot set them so daintily about. All night long there has been high revel here, with honey for the banquet and wine of perfume. The noise of it, elfin music and singing and laughter, stole into your sleep, and awoke you, with wet eyelids, from a dream of youth and love. As the horned moon climbed over the sky's rim the chant grew madder, merrier; dancers flew quick-

er than light. Now the morning-star pales out of sight in the pink heaven. All the horns of Elfland blow a faint, final fanfare. The sprites pelt one the other with diadem and coronet and wreathen ropes of pearl, A bird sings loud and clear, the white light strengthens, and drowsy-eyed folk who know not fairies look abroad, and see roses—red or pale or white—all dipped and decked in dew.

What sight so fair, even to every-day eyes? Queen Rose is the poet of blossoms no less than the blossom of poets. Here in this corner is sweetbrier, breathing out a lyric tinged with savor of the woodlands, from branches beset with small, pale, shrinking flowers. Too small for all her soul of perfume, it exhales from the leaves as well. Beyond comes a border all awreath with golden bloom. Truly its splendor is epic. No Field of the Cloth of Gold can outvie this its name-flower. It is vividly vital—a picture of rampant growth and blowth. All the wide trellis is overrun and bestarred with golden blossoms, yet long new trails lie on the earth about the root.

And what royal grace clings and abides in even the half-open buds! True aristocrats, they grace any station whereunto they may

be called, yet give out sweetness and good cheer if they fall to the lowliest use; even more so than that ruddy milkmaid, the hundred-leaf, whose pink, wrinkled, crowded disks nod pertly from the near thicket. Is there not a pastoral—full of Corydon and Phyllis, and love-rhymes and milking-songs—writ large in her crumpled petals? Truly you must be dull, indeed, if you do not read it at first blush. She is the rose of use, not beauty. Her hundred leaves yield rose-water of most vernal savor. They are best of all, too, for drying and scattering in places that you would make daintily sweet. Next comes the blush-rose, delicate as dawn, a madrigal of dew and summer and sunshine all compact. In among it that blossomy spend-thrift, the damask rose, drops trails of scarlet clusters. If battle-song ever takes visible form and substance it must be like these blood-red flowers. There is something war-like even in the smell of them, coming hot and sweet through the summer air. So, too, this soft, faded flower, on the other hand, recalls and embodies a cradle-hymn. It is sweet as mother's love, softly pale as the mother's cheek where baby fingers so love to wander. Now Gloire de Dijon tangles you in her largess of creamy-hearted bloom.

The breath of it is like incense—penetrant, intoxicating, subtly sweet. It brings all the vivid languors of a waltz. You see the flower drooping from beauty's hair against beauty's breast, and there steals over and through you the spell of rhythmic motion. Somehow it changes to a bridal chant—a choral throbbing with hope and love.

Ah! here is the reason of it—this Lamarque, whose matted mound of prickly green holds up to the sunlight five hundred pure white roses. The fairy queen herself must have sat there last night. Nowhere else are the dew pearls so large, so lucent, so thickly sown. The tiniest leaf-point is agleam; every blossom hangs its bead; while a singing bird, hid in its green depths, seems to say aloud, "Happy is the bride that the sun shines on." Then must this bride of roses be blessed indeed! Overhead all is clear shining; the wind sits in the south, and barely stirs the leaves. All day—for many days—there will be golden weather. Long ere it is ended moss-roses will be ablossom. Sweet as they are modest, they flower but in high summer. The very breath of it wells up from their deep hearts. The angel who made gift of moss in return for grateful shade must have added, too, the perfume of

a good deed. It is one of nature's harmonies, where form is allied to color,

"Like perfect music unto noble words."

Whoso shall fitly voice it will stand forth acknowledged of his fellows poet by right divine.

This flower, so darkly crimson it is black in shadow, is a new Inferno, full of the pain and passion of lost souls. Close at hand you see a big, blowzy, red-and-white blossom; ungraceful—flaunting—it may be, yet, for all that, a flower of peace—one of England's "blended roses bought so dear." It takes you back to Queen Bess, in whose coronation pageant there came images of "her Majestie's grandmother, of York, in a fayre white rose, her Majestie's grandsire, of Lancaster, in one all royal red, and her Majestie's self, in one strip't red and white." Here be monthly roses, love songs one and all, pink persistent glories beset with many thorns. Cinnamon roses, too. And what artist shall so paint for you farm-house gardens and quaint, deep door-yards, or country churches with simple folk trooping in on Sunday mornings? The breath comes clean and sweet and uplifting. Care steps away. You stand open-eyed, at peace with

life, with the world, with your fellow-men,
and your sore heart echoes, with no mocking
strain,

“ Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.”

GHOST-LAND

T is wrought out of the tragedy of transition. What so fair as this wooded, swelling hill-top in its first estate? The good greenwood — so lush, so tall, so full of magic, of mystery—covered all the face of it. Here oak held up its cloud-compelling height; here beech dripped rain of sunshine through its fine, swaying leaves; winds sighed them asleep in the poplar's rocking breast, or went, spent with sighing, to the lowland from the walnut's lacy boughs.

Below, the river ran wide and dark. Half way the long slope a little spring broke out, tinkled down a fairy waterfall over limestone ledges, betwixt cushions of thick moss. Wood flowers—the shyest, the rarest—crept up to laugh with the babbling runnel. Goldy-locks wept there her sunlit showers; lady-slipper too, finer than fairy foot e'er trod, mats of white violet, purple larkspur

lances, the fine, white, filamented stars of woodland lilies each in its hour of blossom lit up this sylvan shade.

What birds sang over them through days and nights of June! What dews distilled! What rain fell soft out of heaven! What sunrise rose red beyond the river! What magic the moon wrought when mists came up from the water to lave the thirsty leaves!

The friendly water! Always the voice of it—booming, babbling, laughing down the ripples—thrilled through leaf and bough to the woods' deep heart. It sang promise, prophecy—promise of rain in season, prophecy of long days to fill up the tale of years, lead on to green old age.

The friendly, fickle water! Still it races to the sea—leaping, laughing, singing aloud the old, old song of hope and peace. Still it sparkles in sunshine, plays in the dancing eddies; though all the trees stand ghostly bare of leaf, of bark, of bough. The spring's roiled tribute drips slow to its gliding breast. Fire has burned out the green life of moss and fern. Here and there some constant flower upthrusts from a cleft root—a maiden mourning on the field of fight where her green, tall lover stands stark and dead:

The hill-top has been deadened over.

All the young, small growth had the axe laid at root. About the great trees it traced only the ring of death—chipped broadly away the thick bark to leave a ghastly glaring belt. First the brave tree laughed it to scorn. His root ran strong with sap; his heart was all untouched. He decked him in all his bravery of tassel and bud and leaf, and laughed a welcome to summer. And all his new leaves grew broad; the wind sang through; birds nested in their shelter; he nodded to his next neighbor, "Ah ha! ah ha! Those pigmies down below, girding at us with their steels—see how well fooled they are! They shall have labor for their pains."

"Verily," nodded the neighbor—yet somehow his leaves hung all adroop. A shrilling sigh ran through them—the south wind calling them to play. A frolic wind, keen and hot from the lowlands, a miser of moisture, drinking wherever he might the dew, the juice, the life. All day he blew out of a shadowless sky. Night found the poor trees without voice or motion, save the hoarse, cracked rustle of stiffened leaf-bough. In dew, in silence, it bewept them. The wise Night knew, all too well, for them there was no resurrection through tears.

Nor any ever save through transmutation. See how it hath conspired with the rain and the fine weather—with the hail, the snow, the sleet, the fire—to melt them, resolve into their original elements these spectres of dead greenwood. Through years the band hath wrought. The great trunks stand aglisten, bare and white, with never a hint that here so late they ruffled it, aflaunt with summer greenery, amask with winter's gemmy boughs.

Their tangle of tall shadow drops down upon the earth, makes the sunshine palely spectral for all its summer strength. What black, black earth! Through fire it has gained all the waning trees have lost. As the gentle conspirators flung down bough or trunk, a great heap blazed on the hill-side, or smouldered to coals and ashes. Ploughs have scattered, not hidden, them. They crunch underfoot at each step on the ghost-land. Well called, is it not, spite of its tall, green corn, with golden tassels so high above your head? Long ribbons of leaf droop, locking across the rows. A man can but just well reach the yellow and crimson silks that a little later shall be bursting ears. The wind chants through it an organ-peal to waft away to the far, far-

ther hill the sweet heavy breath, the golden dust of tassels.

When storms sweep all the river's trend, what grumble of thunder, what singing of winds here in these dead, tall ranks! No more may they bend and rock before it. Stark stiff, they must stand—or fall to rise only in new growth. Who knows if they sigh not for some pitiful hurricane to sweep down all their ranks in one sudden mercy of ruin? But no! This Old Guard dies. Never wilfully shall it surrender space and roothold on this our earth. There is brave defiance in each upstanding stem. See how they have stripped them of cumbering bark, and stand in armor of steel against the powers of the air, the gnawing tooth of time.

A brave fight, truly—lost from the beginning. Man, the conqueror, is driven of hunger, no less than the lust of land. Year by year the ranks shall thin, the plough speed more unchecked, the woodland spring shrink to a thread, vanish quite away. Wheat shall laugh here unto yellow harvest, clover bescent the air, grass burgeon tall, and cattle low all over this, one of the thousand hills.

And the river shall ripple, ripple—booming at spring's flood-tide, laughing low over

the rising bar—to flout sleepy summer winds. Why shall it not rejoice? Out of the eater hath come forth meat, and corn, and wine, and oil of gladness; out of the strong sweetness indeed—of love, of life, of hopeful endeavor. What though the wild-wood flowers be ghosts, the wood-birds vanished, the Dryads fled—yonder, in clear sunshine, a garden lies abloom, a voice as from heaven sings low a cradle-song.

HORSE AND AWAY

WAKE, O sluggard! The cock
crows clear for dawn; the cool
black darkness pales to tender
gray. Saddle; mount upon
the instant; shake free rein
and stirrup and tossing mane, then away as
the arrow from bended bow.

The creek lies a mile ahead. Down,
down you go — a long, gentle slope, from
whose sparse flints the hoofs strike fire.
Truly it is breath of life you draw in this
rush through dew-fresh air. A fair world,
indeed, smiles up from either hand, but you
have no eye, no thought, for it.

The thrilling, breathless motion wraps
you away from other sense. Till the long
incline is covered and you draw rein at the
creek, you look not at wood or field, or the
east faintly mottled with rose, or the blue-
gray overhead, wherein pale stars fight still
a losing battle with the day.

The mirroring stream makes of them

points of white fire in a magic underworld. How fair the slippery water above its bed of bare rock or smooth pebbles! Here at the ford it runs arrow-swift, scarce fetlock deep. Black Princess paws it daintily with impatient hoof, till all the stream is roiled. Trifle, the chestnut, will none of that. Whirling swift about, she plunges mid-stream up-current from her stable-mate, as though to say, "I drink always at the fountain-head."

Royal blood often carries whimsies. Hers is of the bluest—

"She can trace her lineage higher
Than the Bourbon dare aspire.
Douglas, Guzman, or the Guelph—
Or O'Brien's blood itself."

She has all the marks of royal lineage. Note her fine, thin crest, her silken coat, her limpid eyes so full of intelligent fire, her flat, clean legs, whose muscles stand out like whip-cords with never a trace of fringing hair.

What feet are hers, too—small, firm, unerring! Her skimming gallop is as the flight of a bird, her leap a veritable soar. It is a deep drain or tall timber that stops her. Besides, she has the Arab's endurance. Turn her upon grass after a hard

day's run, she frisks and caracoles like a colt at play.

Princess may be—nay, is—the better weight-carrier. She is heavier, stouter, too powerful indeed for symmetry. Yet you shall ride all day—many days—before you find cattle to outmatch the pair whose heads are now turned up-stream to the bathing-pool.

Nature, our mother, builded it, with Chance for her architect. Fifty years ago a huge dead tree-trunk fell slantwise athwart the stream. Drift silt, gravel, bedded it so firmly in place that now a bar makes across the channel, holding the laughing waters still and clear in a pool breast-deep above it.

Well may the water be clear as new sun-rays, cool as the dawn. It comes from the springs bubbling out at foot of big gray bluffs. This narrow valley is veined and threaded with them. Each pellucid wavelet is yet surcharged with the vital force drawn from Earth, the great mother.

How they leap and dance up-stream through the flumes of blue-gray stone, hasting, hasting to this smooth reach of bright water, from out whose clear-shining engirdling trees and rock and shrubs laugh back to you, as real as this upper world. At last

it tires of playing the painter, and ripples merrily away, a fairy cascade, over the dam of Nature's building.

The pool lies in green gloom. A huge bending sycamore leans far over it. Ash, maple, locust, elm, rise column-wise about it. A little farther, and you come to rank upon rank of oak, hickory, walnut, all atangle at foot with hawthorn, iron-wood, crab-apple. The farther bank is matted with shrub-cottonwood, that is tufted with round, white flowers. This side a reach of bare, flat stone juts out into the water, still warm with the sun of yesterday, despite the cool night-dews.

Stepping-stones, flat and smooth, lead down to it from the bath-house. That was, three hundred years ago, a smart young white-oak, the vigorous pioneer of what was still a prairie world. Time brought it age and girth. A hollow came at the foot—ran up through the towering frame. The tree became a living shell, hiding a body of death. By and by bees found it—the hollow became a chamber of sweets. A dark bee-hunter found the hoard, and set his mark upon the tree. A little later a rival hunter discovered it, stole the honey, and sought to conceal the theft with fire.

Kindled in the hollow root, it roared upwards like a furnace. All the huge top fell—rent and riven as it touched the earth. Part of the stout shell defied the flame, and stands—blackened, leafless, branchless—an obelisk of ruin.

Through a hollow in its base you may walk upright. A rough blanket curtains it. Within you find a locker with great store of towels and bathing-sheets. Wrap you quickly in one, and run, barefoot, to the pool, there to plunge and lave you to your soul and body's content.

Wade, float, splash. The pool at its deepest comes but well under your chin. There you may drop all hampering vesture, to clothe yourself luxuriously with water. Ah! the creamy, thrilling chill of it. Involuntarily you laugh aloud, flinging handfuls of diamond drops high above your head that the filtering sun-rays may turn them all to rainbows.

Vagrant rays are they, dripping in through the bank's thick leafage. But overhead you see the sky. Behold! there, too, is a rainbow—vivid, yet broken against scurrying clouds that chase one the other out of a darkening west. What saith the weather-prophet—

“ Rainbow at morning,
Shepherds take warning.”

There will be foul weather ere sunset.
The wind proclaims it, blowing in low, sobbing gasps, with breathless spaces between. In the far empyrean warring hurricanes are marshalling their legion clouds. Under them a belt of air lies, absolutely stirless. There is never a wave amid its faint white cirrus lines. This fitful wind goes barely so high as the tallest tree-tops. And still the sun shines.

Not wan and watery, but with all his golden strength. The warmth, the brightness of him, befool one brave red-breast to pipe his fair-weather song. Or was it, indeed, some belated Dryad, or gnome, or elf, overtaken by the dawn, and winging now away to shelter in the wood's dark, peaceful deeps? Truly, the note is heavenly—round, full, wildly sweet. Eerie almost in this brooding hush, through which you smell now the subtle fragrance of new rain falling a mile beyond.

Reclothe you, and climb the farther hill. From its top see the long, slant, silver lines sweeping up the clear valley. The road runs wide and level, straight into the heart of the rain. Breathe the cattle a minute—

then away, away, as though Death lay behind, Paradise before.

Away! away! The air sings in your ears; wide fields reel past; the hedge-row trees show tall, green-sheeted ghosts. Horse and rider are at one—drunken with wine o' the morning. Trifle's pink nostrils are aflame. She snuffs the breeze, lays her small ears back, and, with a low, exultant whinny, leaves Princess a length behind.

For the wink of your eyelid only. The black mare is at her quarter—her girth—her shoulder; the dark crest flashes past the bright one; two pairs of eyes gleam with emulous fire.

Neck and neck, with spurning hoofs, with straining muscles, in the wild, electric rush of generous blood, they cleave the rain-wall, heedless alike of thunder pealing overhead, of lightning flaring yellow and spectral on the earth at foot. Ever and anon a flying hoof is tipped with fire. Truly, blood tells—and no dead giant of all their famous line ran ever a gallanter race.

What drops fall so fast out of this rainy heaven! So big, so bright, softly warm as a dream of summer. The kiss of them, as they pelt you and patter, is something for glad remembrance all the days of your life.

For one brief minute it endures—then the good beasts have borne you into the clear shining beyond.

From this high hill of vantage you see a dozen showers, with sunlight laughing through, chasing one the other across this green, good world. But little reck you of shower or shining. You ride as for life, your blood at racing pace, your nerves athrill, tingling to your finger-tips, crying out exultant as your speed outstrips the languid wind.

Five miles of it—then the road runs downhill. You need barely draw rein—the soft, wet clay is sure footing and safe. Now you splash through the creek, and go more soberly along the wood road—a vista of shadows—

“Lovely, lonesome, cool, and green.”

It runs away from Fairyland. There is the home gate, looming dark and dripping. Beyond it lie corn, and cattle, and men at work in the fields. You pass through, and find you again in the world of every-day.

AUGUST LILIES

Now garden blossoms they, but creatures of field and wood. Leave the level lowlands, so burdened with summer's largess of grain and fruit, and ride into the hill-country. The narrow red road winds betwixt quaint, ragged fields, all whose fences are bedraped with vine and brier. Here and there you see log-houses, with big outside chimneys all overgrown with the scarlet trumpet-vine. Down between the hills spring-fed runnels make sparkling threads of silver. In the narrow levels on either hand the hill-folk raise their scant crops. The hill-sides, cleared for fire and fencing, have been cultivated until the soil is gone. Now they gleam red and bare in spots, seamed with deep gullies, and sparsely beset with wild growths. In betwixt the clumps you see lilies by thousands. How they live, what sustenance they find in the stiff clay, is

one of Nature's kindly mysteries. But there they stand and grow and blow. Year by year the carpet of yellow-green fans spreads farther and farther, and sends up new blossom-tipped lances to put the ogre Barrenness to flight. Where the road dips, look up on either hand. Saw you ever aught more enheartening than this springing of fresh beauty from desolation? It is an army of hope. Its banners are orange flecked with scarlet. Mark how lithely they bend and sway in summer's sweetest wind! One small, six-cleft cup would go quite unnoticed. Here, in serried ranks, thousand upon thousand, they spread a glory of sun and summer over the waste places of the land. Leave them ungathered; they are creatures wholly of the open. Besides, they yield fruit after their kind—a sort of glistening berry—that in winter keeps many a wild thing from hunger.

Come away to the woods. They are green and thick and deeply shadowed, with damp black earth at foot. Winter and spring it is a quaking bog, where you might sink at any incautious step. Now you may go, free and fearless, to its very heart, and fling yourself down upon a moss carpet where the foot sinks out of sight. A little way

off is a clear, stagnant pool; a red-bird flutters in the shallow of it, two squirrels come down to drink, and all about in the soft margin you see the footmarks of all manner of woodland creatures that slake their thirst with these bitter waters. The pool lies, a cairngorm mirror framed in ebony and emerald. The water of it drains through fallen oak leaves and oak roots, and takes on a translucent brown. At one edge stand two or three big trees that the stagnant water has killed. Their branches have dropped, leaving columnar trunks that the climbing poison-ivy has covered to the topmost point. Was ever aught fairer than this life embracing death? Overhead the straight sun-rays stream down, and are tossed back in golden shimmers from the flashing water to play hide-and-seek in the intimate greenery of the vines. All is still—so still! A ruby-throat flashes out from among the green columns. Your eye follows. He is poised on dazzling wings before something white and slender and lightly waving in one of the dark forest aisles. This wet woodland is free of undergrowth. You run after the bright bird, and find the fair lily of the woods, treasure-trove only of true sylvan solitudes.

What a contrast to the starred hill flower! What thick-fleshed dark green leaves, fairly palpitant with sap! What sturdy, stately stalks! What breath of balm from the still dewy heart! Science will tell you this is no lily; a *trillium*, wise folk call it. Within her star of narrow outer petals the blossom spreads, a six-sided cup of thinnest, most flawless pearl, full of gold-tipped stamens, and with a drop of clear honey oozing from the pale green heart. Ruby-throat sips with pure delight, and goes away with a gold powdering upon his green glistening coat. A drowsy humblebee comes after him. Though she blossom so apart, the woodland queen never lacks for wooers. How should she, indeed, when all the air is heavy with her breath, when each breeze that kisses her perforce whispers the sweet secret to all other winged things? A rare blue butterfly floats in after Master Humblebee. He would be worth many times his weight in silver to an enthusiastic collector. It is only in such environment that you ever find him, and even here rarely once in the year. His wings must be quite four inches across; dull silver underneath; on top, a velvety silver blue, with spots of pearl and scarlet; and in the centre a big blur of darker blue.

Gather a stalk or two of lilies, enough to satisfy the lust of possession. Possibly they will revive after the outing is over, particularly if you bind them with damp moss and leaves.

Curiously this marshy wood lies atop the hill country. Go across it another way—through lanes, and along bridle-paths, skirting some babbling stream. Now the road climbs sharply, then dips to a huge pond. There is a crossway track through it, where the water is barely ankle-deep. Either side it would swim man or horse, if swimming were not impossible for the rank growth eddying and surging through it. Mark the huge round leaves, as big as a small umbrella each, with stems thicker than your finger. They cover the face of the water, and run riot over it. What tangle and cable of stems must be hidden in its murk! The wreathen carpet of green bosses is all starred with flowers—cream-white, many-petaled, with a fleshy golden disk for heart. It is the yellow lotus, lovelier even than Egypt's own flower. A perfect blossom, with the width of your two hands. They are sun-flowers, if they do not claim kinship with the Sphinx. His first beams fall on their opened hearts; his last see them

drowsily folded. Here, in its own place, queening it over the rocking leaves, with the setting of field and sky, what so magnificent? Is it not well worth a day's ride to see breadths of such bloom? There is no crowding. Each royal blossom is set in its own sufficient green space. Yet you take away the sense of a tossing sea of leaves, with foam of cream-white flowers cresting each wave of it. By and by, when the frost comes, the flower-hearts will be round capsules set all over with sweetish, oval, nutty seed. That is what gives it the name of water chincapin. Cut a generous sheaf of blossoms—you will never break the tough stems—then thank God that it seems good to Him to make lilies of the field, the wood, the water.

THROUGH FIELDS AFLOWER

O in the full sunshine. Theirs is not a beauty that needs the glamour of dawn and dew. Through the long days of high summer earth has drunk sunshine and steeped herself in vital force. Now she gives it back tenfold. All her waysides, her waste places, are flushed and gilded. Purple and scarlet and yellow run riot all over her face. Stubble is sown thick with tall stalks of evening-primrose — so thick, indeed, that the fine pale blossoms gleam starwise over its green breadth of weeds. And what sweetness wells up from their powdery hearts! — a heavy, clinging fragrance that makes of the languid breeze the wafts of a censer. Each flower, too, uplifts a golden cross, as though Nature's priest, duly anointed to shrive the dying Summer!

For she is dying, though her doom is writ in flowers. True, the rose remains, and laggard lilies linger in garden nooks. But here

in the hedge-row the craven milk-weed, six weeks past blossom, flings a silky flag of truce to the coming conqueror Autumn. And all about hill-slope, pasture, and way-side wall golden-rod shimmers in masses of brazen yellow. Humblebees love it beyond all other flowers. Indeed, it is in some sort manna in the August desert to all winged things. Tiny butterflies, white and yellow, haunt and hover about it in fluttering clouds. Honey-bees and the curious wood-wasps grow drunken upon its sweets. All day they cling, drowsing deliciously, to its blossoming plumes. Night even does not always sober them, though it bring dew heavier than a summer shower.

Leave them undisturbed. A little while, and their lotus-eating must end. There are tenantless sprays aplenty to make a sheaf in which you may set the iron-weed's umbel of richest purple. Surely Tyre's own hue did not rival it. The law of compensation runs through all of nature's works. The primrose, dying in daylight, yet perfumes a waking world. And this rough, weedy stalk waves high above your head a crown for which "royal" is all too poor a word. And what prince of Holy Church ever outglowed the cardinal-flower, now gleaming in slender

scarlet beauty in the swales and along the runnels! In good neighborhood you find dittany, once sacred to Venus, and still accounted a potent philter by some simple folk who surely should know better. If there is magic, it must lie in the smell. The flower is minute, an ugly reddish-purple, and the reddish stalks and yellow-green leaves rarely grow higher than your hand. In the moist places, too, you find clematis, trailing drifts of green-white stars over whatever is within reach. No wonder it climbs and clings! Each leaf stalk is a tendril ready to lay hold of the smallest coign of vantage. No wonder, either, that it so covers the face of earth! Its seed is legion. Even now the first blossoming has changed to green feathery sprays that at the touch of frost will launch by tens of thousands their winged argosies.

Here be vagrants, stolen from prim garden-beds, and laughing in light over their freedom. All this fence corner is crowded with tall pink rocket. The rosy panicles nod saucily amid the tangle of wild grape and brier. What scent they have, what color, what robust richness of crowded bloom. A little way farther you find poppies—a rank cluster, white, drooping, thick-fringed—ex-

haling the very breath of slumber from their deeply hidden hearts. Years ago a chance seed lodged in the root of a huge stump. It grew up, blossomed, and bore seed after its kind. It fell on good ground and safe, and now the mouldering wood is each summer a mound of white blossoms. A little later the gatherer of simples will come and cut poppy-heads to dry and mix through her hop pillows, that are the sov'reignest thing on earth for wakeful souls. If she leaves but one there will still be a plentiful sowing for next year's flowers.

In number as the sands of the sea, in difference as the stars of the sky, the aster spreads her milky-way of blossom over field and wood and highway and hedge-row. Here a tall clump waves its rims of purple and hearts of gold defiantly above your head; there a thousand small white sprays cover the earth at your feet. Between, each note of color, each gradation of size. If one star differeth from another in glory, how much more one star-flower! Small or great, they bloom and burgeon, and in large part make up the glory of "the happy autumn fields"—gorgeous autumn, whose harbinger and sign-manual is burned in yellow and red on this green late-summer world. See

that branching road-side walnut. All its leaves are pale gold. So many strew the earth beneath that you see the tracery of trunk and boughs. The more clearly that poison-ivy clothes them as with a garment, and all its leaves are the fine ruby crimson that some mystics make the true color of life. One who is fanciful might look, and easily persuade him that he saw here a soul of fire burning through a golden shell. Blackbirds, though, have no eyrie fairer. A full hundred of them perch amid the red and yellow, and shatter the sweet silence with jarring cries. They know, these small creatures, that growth is past, fruition at hand. Before the garnering is ended they will wing away, nor be seen again till a new summer shall blush along the hills.

WHAT SAITH SEPTEMBER?

FAIR month, truly—golden fair, spiced with breath of the orchards, the vineyards' winy smell. Now springing root, now swelling bud, now waking seed, make answer for the ten talents, the five, the one, wherewith spring saw them laden—whereto summer brought usufruct. Or great or small, the tale of them is made up. Woe to the land if frost, if drought, have left it lank and lean!

Come away to the thicket where the muscadine trails free. A rampant vine, climbing, sprawling,

“The silver morns, the burning noons,
Lie tranced amid its bright festoons.”

Up under them, all about you, see—by twos, by threes, by fives—the sweet, rough-rinded fruit, twice the bigness of your thumb's end, thick-dusted with blue-black bloom. The smell of it fills the wood-side—a deep musk odor, heavy, palpable—with yet a

tang—vinous, savage, as its coiling, assertive stem. The charm, the languor, of the far East are in it, curiously in leash with the new West's vital crudeness.

Eat of the fruit—sweet to the taste, bitter to the tongue, melting-full of fine, sharp, aromatic juice. If you have Job's patience, even in part, it will yield you wine o' the rarest. Pick for it only fair, large fruit—ripe, sweet, full-flavored. Press each black-bloomed globe 'twixt the fingers and thumb till juice and pulp fall out, then fling away the skin. Therein lies the burning roughness—the ill, fox-grape flavor. From the hulled meats you shall drain liquor fit for the gods. A month of hiss and bubble, six of fining, fattening upon the lees—a pink, sparkling flow shall rejoice your eye, your palate, put heart into your doing, fill all your soul with color, warmth, perfume. Crushed and pressed with the hulls, there will be only red roughness, muddy, bitter, good to no use of edifying, yet mounting to the head. Of a verity, Earth, our mother, gives the vine; man, her child, must answer for its use, its abuse.

All the earth lies dry and warm, and palpitant in sunshine. The touch of it is vital. Lie at length here in the pasture, prone on

its springy turf, and let the strength of it, the sweetness, the balm of healing, lap your tired soul to the Elysium, sleep—such sleep as comes never within four walls, or to the downiest couch ever fashioned by man's hand. Sleep, and dream not. This the hour of fruition, needs not to borrow charm of such insubstantial stuff. A full world and goodly lies all about. Upland, orchards blush red and yellow; lowland, stubble, meadow, corn-field, chant in high, colorful notes a swelling prelude to Nature's harvest-home.

What scent comes out of the corn-land—rare, fine, subtile as breath of elfin flowers? All the russet rustling stretch is steeped in its balm. You drink it in long gasps, and turn away, sighing—it is full, so full, of spring, and dew, and dawn, and hope, and youth. Only pease-blossoms! See the matted, leafy tangle of them all under the corn. The painted, patient winged flower shows white or pinky-purple or palest melting blue. Now where be Cobweb, Moth, and Mustard-seed—this field-sprite's good compeers—Titania, Bottom—all the fairy crew? Who knows but if you lingered into moonrise you might find them all at revel here, with Master Pease-blossom for host.

In his cool, green fastnesses of shadow they might lurk and leap even through garish day.

Maybe they sing, those small people, to keep earth from bewailing her silent birds. All her green, shady ways teem with winged creatures — big, lumpy fledglings, not yet steady of wing ; early broods, all aruffle with conceit ; old folk, spent and voiceless, in the strain after smart new clothes. Song is a memory. They flutter and preen in silence, hopping from branch to bough, hovering, fluttering, skimming low to earth, with head aside and quick up-glancing of eyes. Now and again a dropping note breaks through the fresh, sweet morning, the hushed, dewy eve. By and by they will be singing farewell to this summer land. Already blackbirds settle, in winged clouds, upon tall tree-tops, and sit faintly debating their southward flight. They tarry in this Jericho till their wings are well-grown—their voices as well. Before they go hence you shall hear from them clamor indeed—a wild, harsh, metallic crying, utterly discordant, yet full of barbaric charm.

Master Oriole flew away at the first red leaf. Too much an aristocrat for large families, his nestlings came to full flight before the summer ended. Besides, his is a

journey of halts. He travels at ease, as becomes a gentleman of leisure. Fifty miles this week, a hundred the next and still the next, soon bear him safe below the line of frost. Everywhere he is grand-seigneur to the tips of his wings. No plebeian flocking for him. He disdains other company than his own small family, even though it wear his royal black and yellow.

Not so Robin Redbreast. A true democrat he, haunting your door-step, singing so free from his mud nest in the fence, rearing two, it may be three, broods each year—massing him, at last, with a dear five hundred chirping fellows, for his cheery following of the waning sun. As yet he has no mind of it. See him—sleek, full-breasted, with an eye of meditative content—pecking about the grass. Is he not the moral of a thrifty farmer who has put on his new Sunday suit to look over his bursting barns? Robin takes no shame for the pen-feathered rawness of his late young brood. They are in the world—their own wits, legs, wings, must make and keep them of it. Thus, too, the farmer to his brood. Often from that self-reliant school come men who make history—no doubt, too, birds of clearest song, of strongest wing.

Winter has no terror for the bluebird. Here in the land of his birth he flits and sings—a true provincial, clinging ever more and more to dear, familiar, homely ways. The redbird bears him company. So does that pert, black-coated fellow, with rust-red breast, and smart small-clothes of lavender. “Joe Ree,” the country folk call him, from his last insistent note. He nests low—on the ground, in some sedge tussock, or the spreading ambush of a branchy weed. His song mounts aloft—a bubbling melody of trills and turns, sounding always higher, clearer, to the last rollicking call, “Joe-ree! joe-ree! joe-ree-ter!”

He fares far afield—a shy fellow that only the wind, the rain, the dew, the wood-sprites know intimately. These flights of circling swallows cling to human company. Almost they cover the face of the sunset sky—wheeling, dipping, closing to ever-narrower round, as one by one they drop to shelter in the tall chimney-throat. Within it, the rumble of their fluttering wings is thunderous, yet the farm-folk would on no account drive them away. Lightning never strikes the chimney wherein swallows roost—at least so they firmly believe. They think, too, with Dan Shakespeare,

"Where this bird bides, the air is delicate."

What wonder they have welcome for the winged protectors from wrath of heaven and plagues of earth? Only sharp frost shall banish this circling multitude. Through chill mornings they lie late abed, nor stream away till nine o' the clock, to skim and wheel high under the waning sun. When the pinch comes they vanish, nor pause nor stay their wings till the southland welcomes them. Year after year their constant wings return to the birth-spot, there to mark spring's high flood.

A jocund time this should be. The earth, the fulness thereof, lies smiling peace to a perfect heaven. Yet somehow there creeps in an under-note—a wailing minor of loss and waste. Faint, ah, so faint! you hear it in the singing waters, the full, rich, rustling leaves, the low winds sighing out of the sky to lose them as wafts of balm. Through them September saith to this fair world, "Laugh, dance, lie in the sun; eat, drink, and be merry. To-morrow you must die."

IN "THE MOON OF FALLING
LEAVES"

WALK afield every day of it. Whether sun shines, or rain drips, or white frost bites and stings, you shall find a liberal education in the hectic beauty of death ; not cruel death, but a tender doom, sweet with the glory of full harvest, and spanned with the rainbow of spring resurrection. Truly, the red men called it well "the moon of falling leaves." Each waft of winy air brings fleets of fairy argosies—russet, scarlet, gold, and crimson—to anchor on the breast of earth. With what drifts of them the south wind covers fallow and grass land ! All the woods are pathless now—footway, cart track, mill road, alike knee-deep in leaves. The highway, even, broad and beaten though it be, shrinks to a ghostly trail through a fluttering world of color. Here big walnuts overhang it, and overhead you see the blue heavens through lacework

of bare black boughs, with the faintest flutter of lingering leaves. A little farther, you tramp through the hickory flat. Is there magic abroad? Have genii or gnomes caught you suddenly into a golden world? There is gold all about you—overhead, underfoot. It must be these lithe, gray-stemmed woodland giants stored all of sunshine in their hearts, and now exhale it through their leaves. In the grayest day here is warmth and splendor—a flame of radiance that makes yet darker the sombre oak-wood. Now, when soft winds sift out of a cloudless sky, what words shall paint its splendid languors, its glory of scent and light and color? At foot the foliate gold treads softer than velvet. A clean, burning fragrance uprises as you press it. Here is not only leaf, but fruit—nuts of all sizes, all flavors.

It is their bruised hulls that you smell, though upon damp mornings the leaves are hardly less fragrant. The wood is alive with squirrels. See the pair frolicly chasing one the other around a huge shagbark! They are young ones who as yet know not the burden of existence, whose pressure sends so many others hurrying, scurrying, all the day long, laying up store of nuts against the coming cold. These two have

but just set up housekeeping in a convenient hollow of the big, bending oak. Life has so far meant to them a summer of buds and berries and milky corn and green, tender nuts, with sleep in a leaf cradle rocked by summer winds, and morning scampers through seas of dew-wet boughs. Only glimmering instinct tells them of imminent deadly change. What wonder that they make ready against it in such light-hearted, haphazard fashion! Now they cease their scamper, and drop down to earth, burrowing daintily in its deep leaf carpet! One rises upon his haunches with a nut in his jaws. The other darts to seize it, and for a minute the two roll over and over, a furry ball with two waving, plummy tails. It flies swiftly apart; the finder hops upon a rotting tree trunk to chatter malicious triumph. His mate scurries up likewise, and sits dejected a foot away as his sharp teeth pierce the hull. She has quite given up the contest, and is sore-hearted over it. Nuts are plenty, indeed, but surely her new husband need not show such selfish pride in the first find. Presently she creeps past him to the log's other end. He looks sharply after her, out of the corner of his eye, then darts to her side, pats her lightly betwixt the ears, and

as she turns to face him drops the nut of contention safe within her two dainty paws. At once she falls to ravenous gnawing. He looks on a minute, then rubs his head caressingly against her, and hops away for new treasure-trove. They will take home scarce a dozen nuts the day; but surely they risk nothing by such delicious idling. What if the children do carry away the shagbarks, the butternuts, the hazelnuts, chestnuts, black walnuts even, here are acorns pattering down, a russet hail, hardly less sweet and toothsome to these shy wood-rangers.

What various charm lies in this fruit of the oak! See these shallow, fine-grained cups filled with long, glossy, brown-black ovals, and growing in clusters of twos, of threes, of fives, so thick along the tensile white-oak branchlets! The post-oak's cup will scarce go on your little finger, and clusters daintily at root of tufted leaves. "Chincapin acorns," the children call them. You can bed near a dozen of them in one of the over-cups' big, deep-fringed shells. Spanish-oak acorns are dark, delicate, graceful as the tree itself. Red oak, turkey-oak, yield rough, commonplace mast. You might gather all by the bushel in any ten yards of

woodland. Besides, are there not acres of sweetish rich beechnuts along the bottoms and upland hill-sides, to say nothing of hips and haws, persimmons, and such small deer?

In the oak-wood leaves lie heaped and mounded. How they rustle and spring as the foot presses them! Even in death they keep the impress of strength. Especially the black-jack's crimson foliage, richest in hue of all the sisterhood. The tree is not handsome—gnarled, scrawny, rough of bark, with stiff limbs angularly outspread from the crooked trunk. "Too crooked to lie still," the woodsmen say, even after you have painfully chopped to the knotty heart and sent it crashing to earth. For eleven months of the year it stands, a sylvan Cinderella, so uncouth that the very birds laugh it to scorn. Frost changes all that—hangs a mantle of rubies over all the boughs. The glory deepens, brightens, endures. Far into November you may see the flush of it glowing sparsely along field and wood-side. Often the red, glossy leaves dance down with the first snow, and show like autumn's life-blood staining the mantle of her conqueror.

What charm fills all the fields! Frost, like adversity, makes an end to weeds, yet hardly sears grass and grain. What a faint,

tender hue tinges the fallow where sprouting wheat upthrusts its tiny spears! Meadows show green as in May. From ploughland you sniff the fine, subtle fragrance of new-turned earth; athwart and between hedge-rows wave flames of sumach and sassafras, all awreath with clematis and wild grape and wax-leaved bramble-brier; partridge-vine, too, brave in deep-green leaves and coral-red berries. It puts to shame the laggard flowers that yet lurk in sheltered nooks. Aster, golden-rod, even the deep-blue gentian, look poor and pale by contrast. Spice-wood, though, quite outdazzles it. All the thicket is aflaut with its red, red fruit and big, rough leaves. Up among them Indian-turnip thrusts her glowing cone—a torch of flame to light the summer's flitting. Ginseng, too, holds up even richer red. Is it not wonderful that the flower of it—so pale, so weak, so utterly without distinction—should be forerunner to such splendor? Is it not typical of some lives? But why vex you with speculation when such sweet haze rims the world, such airs breathe through, and over all sifts the long benediction of sunlight and falling leaves?

ALL IN A MIST

YOU wake into a ghostly world, where thick, white dampness clings and abides. It is the dead Summer's winding-sheet, pitifully spread by Nature, our mother, to soften the scathe and ruin of black frost. Day and night her bond-slave, the South Wind, has sucked, roaring, from the far gulf these billowing vapors that kiss and cling, and weep soft tears for the flowers they cannot bring back to life.

Dawn-light is shrouded to dullish gray-dark. Cocks crow through it, faint and spectral. Cattle low dully, as though sending their voices astray in some vast void.

Presently a fine, clear note sifts through the blurred noises—penetrant, vibrant as the call of fairy bugles. Bob White is drifting afield. An early riser he. That is his feeding cry, never heard save just after autumn dawns. They are constant small creatures—he and his sort. No matter how

far afield the daylight may see them, twilight finds them always close to the home-nest.

A pretty sight, indeed, if you can but manage to steal upon it. There will be twenty, thirty—it may be fifty—small brown creatures, huddled all together, their striped heads aring outside. At the touch it breaks up into whirring wings or scurrying feet, running hither and yon. Not till the intruder is miles away will they begin calling one to another through the hushed dark.

Wondrous weather-wise, too, are these small deer. If they breakfast with cheery piping, feeding straight away to the woods, look for a hot, dry autumn day, full of windy sunshine. When they hug the thickets close snow is in the air; when they make for thick, rough cover—sedge, briers, high grass—bitter winds will come out of the north to freeze your marrow, to cut and sting.

They are peeping now from the corn-land—it will be warm and wet all day. A clear, jangling chorus cuts sharply through their calling. Field-larks are at Matins—twenty yellow-breasts arow upon the big oak, for so long a landmark of the pastures. Its huge boll is dank and dark, all its big limbs dripping. The plashing drops beat a fairy

tattoo to accent the melody of these small throats. Merry Master Yellow-breast, you have no fear of ghosts. All in the white cloud you break your heart of music to hail the new day.

Slow, faint, yet ever-brightening it comes. Low, level sunbeams dissolve in the mist and distil them tears of radiance from sparse red and yellow leaves. How slow they fall from this blood-red gum-tree—slow and still as the passing of a dead, dear hope.

Uplift the face to them. May-Day's even dew is no more freshening, revivifying. Now the air thins, but does not clear. Mist still wraps the world-as a garment, but has lost its shroud-whiteness and taken on a gray translucence. All things are seen as in a glass darkly. Even the red boughs overhead—redly crimson as murder—take on a tender color as languid airs stir faintly through.

A miracle has been wrought along grass-land and hedge-row. You have seen them dank or dew-bright this many a time and oft. Rarely in such raiment of pearl-sown gossamer as now enfolds. All in the bright weather the spiders spun it—swiftly, deftly, with cunning patience. Winds blew low,

rain did not visit the world too roughly—else the fairy craft had been vain. It wrought too delicately for mortal eyes. You would never have known of it but for the generous mist that has delighted to embroider it in royal fashion.

Here is a web fit to robe the fairy queen herself. There, one scarce the bigness of your hollowed palm. Ropes of pearls run all about—now athwart the path, now from some twig of vantage, else dropping from point to point of the hedge-row's thorny tangle.

Close and low at its root you see a silk-wrought tube, whose clinging meshes have trapped a big bumble-bee. Poor, merry, clumsy fellow! All his bravery of gold-powdering, his bravado of humming, could not save him from the cunning snare, where now he lies confined. Surely, though, the mist loved him well. See what jewels, more than royal, gleam over the fatal web. A prince of the air, he will have truly royal sepulture.

Something falls faintly against your cheek—a floating filament fast to a twig a dozen yards away. There are hundreds—thousands—more awake in the humid air. Were they spun in mere wantonness, or do they

serve as railways whereon the spinners run swiftly about their world? Up, down, across, athwart they go—a labyrinth with never a possible clue.

How green the grass shows under it! May has not tenderer verdure than these new spears. So fresh are they, so smiling-bright, what wonder the low cloud kisses them. Low and lower it drops. Overhead, the eye pierces to far, faint ethereal blue. To left, to right, the billowing vapors wrap all the world from sight.

Something whirls through the dimness—something white with glancing wings. The pigeons have left their cote, and dash bewildered through the mist, vainly seeking the stubble where daily they feed fat. One, not yet fairly in flight, flutters down to your feet—tremulous, helpless, utterly afraid. How the poor heart beats as it lies in your hand, all its pretty white feathers aruffle, a world of appeal in its soft, clear eyes! Touch it tenderly, warm it at your breast. A little while, and it will feed from your hand, come to call, perch joyfully on your shoulder—it may be even ruffle and preen it upon your arm. A true-love bird it is, ready to give you all its warm heart if you do but show yourself willing to take it.

Harsh screams break up the muffled morning stillness; there is wild swooping earthward of some huge feathered thing; more cries, a great running to and fro. The peacocks are awake—have been, indeed, this two hours—yet have barely agreed with themselves to leave their roost—the tall oak by the gate. Gaudy savages are they, all and several, yet never was watch-dog so vigilant. At the faintest stir their wild shrilling murders sleep. It was this trustworthy quality, maybe, that made them the bird of chivalry. Your true knight swore always “By the peacock and the ladies.”

In general they are no sluggards. It is the mist, surely, which has kept them a perch till eight o’ the clock. How queer and ungainly the cock-birds look!—long, limp, draggle-tailed, darting hither and yon, now seen, now vanished—a race of feathered ghosts.

For the mist is rolling in, thick and thicker. The south wind is under it; it must fall as rain or rise as cloud. A rift breaks through it—there far to the right. One hand it goes up and up, heaving, tossing, ever rising, away to the rimming hills. Within the half-hour you shall see it sail down wind, a drifting cumulus, white and high, that by

nightfall will have a heart of red electric fire.

The other half folds back, rolls away as a scroll, to rest, white and wreathen, over the tall trees marking the creek's course. There the sun, lying so warm on the still valley, shall melt it out of sight. Even thus early it owns the power of that low, slant, golden shining. Underneath it, what dripping freshness, what vivid, fruity scents, what tender smile of late, pale blossoms in this the sunset of the year.

TONGUES IN TREES

IF Woodland is not vocal to you, you must indeed be dull and of the earth, earthy. If the wood-sprites do but love you, what wisdom, what harmonies it holds! Whisperings soft as the breath of violets; clear singing of spread boughs in the fine upper air.

To hear them in full chorus go listen when the leaves, fresh-fallen, lie heaped underfoot, and through the bare, billowing tree-tops the evening-star gleams faint. You shall hear then first the strong note of the Oaks. Brothers all—yeomen of the forest—standing always at guard; the same sap thrills each core, spite of their different leaves.

One tree is white and tall and slender, with the strength of good courage in its tough, tensile fibre. Another is rough and ruddy—a huge, hearty fellow, brittle and coarse of grain. Still another stands dark and slim and so straight as to woo the

woodsman's axe. Yet another uplifts his dense, pale column—hard, fine, close of grain—beset on every hand with drooping, viny branches.

Do you not hear them shouting, "For Earth—our mother," as—or light or dark, or tall or branchy—they do battle with the powers of the air? Truly, their locked arms are a shield guarding her tender breast alike from sun or frost. And what queen-mother might not pride her in such serried array of good, tall warrior-sons?—ready to dare alike the wind's wild wrath, the lightning's scathe. If they fall she has but to lap them in her soft, cool breast; and from death shall spring the resurrection—the light—the life.

Ah ha! Here is Sir Walnut. The rabiddest Red Republican of the wood cannot deny him a title as his right. By grace of environment he is either knight or courtier. Here in the forest depths he soars columnar—a pillar of sylvan state. It is fifty feet, if one, to his feathery crown of boughs. Given room o' the fields, he will branch and burgeon until a regiment might shelter and feast in his shade.

There is suave grandeur in the rise of his boughs, the down-dropping of his twigs and

branches. Even the straight, seamy outer shell seems to say aloud, "Here is no commoner, but wood of the sap royal." Maybe, too, in its darkness, it holds more than a hint of the dead it shall encoffin. Even cedar has not better endurance in damp earth. Pioneer hands lay heavy upon it when farms were being won from the wilderness. A hundred years later the walnut stumps remained—to fetch, in many cases, more than any intervening crop.

Master Hickory is a sylvan politician. Shadow him, estop him as you will, he manages always to creep into full sunshine. By preference he grows, stands straight—a lithe, vital, arrowy fellow, who might dare all storms, yet bends to any. A handsome gallant is he in his green summer bravery, yet with eerie suggestions in his bare, blunt, writhen autumn boughs.

"We bow to rise," they say, swaying hither and yon in the chill wind. From their pliant tossing you would never guess what warmth and good cheer and sweet, smoky sap are stored up in the trunk. A fire of hickory logs is the finest cheerful missionary. Even the smoke of it hath virtue. It heals green wounds—that, too, whether you suffer them of mind or body.

Fair Mistress Tulip-tree, I salute you.
Truly you may be set down,

“A daughter of the gods, divinely tall,
And most divinely fair.”

Fair even o' winter, when you boast only
your lacy branches, your smooth, gray-
purple bark. What words shall paint you
when summer winds lose them in your love-
crown of flowers, when bird and bee lie
afaint in the Elysium of your bloomy
breast? What is it you sigh down your
slender height? “Loving is living!” Then
must you be blessed indeed, O Madonna
of the forest! The Sun loves you, the
Wind, the Earth and her children, and all
tender winged things.

More even than that good white nun, the
Beech, with her veil of fine twigs, where the
winter through there cling wisps of her rus-
set leaves. Truly she is a Sister of Charity,
flinging food and shelter to bird and squirrel
and merry child. Full, too, of the meekest
humility for all her royal port. Up and up
the eye follows her white height till, for
very weariness, it is fain to follow no far-
ther. Years ago Love carved Love's name
on the smooth lower trunk. Now—alack
for humanity!—the word remains, though

love and lover are dead and dust. In the quaint, tipsy lettering read the tree's sad-dening message. "All is vanity," it saith. "Life doth fade as a leaf. As for the dead, their works do follow them."

A little space and Wild-Cherry trees cover the face of earth. A tall growth and goodly. It rises so straight, so stately, to fill the world with its fine, faint almond scent. These be woodland senators, justifiably proud, nodding one to the other, "After us, the judgment."

Beyond them a Sweet-Gum towers. Seventy feet of straight roundness to the first limb. Will you gainsay that here is a knight-errant, rising thus high to spy out wrong and oppression?

Close beside a Sugar-Maple tosses and preens her, conscious of the sweet sap treasured at her heart. There is the village belle, intoxicate with her own charms, and all oblivious of her sister, the Swamp-maple, born tragedy's queen. All through the white winter she sleeps, dreaming of blood—blood that the spring pours over her, a rain of scarlet blossoms.

The Sycamore—Scripture's plane-tree—has surely the legal habit of mind. His coat sets so loose he must be forever turn-

ing it. Besides, he makes a point wherever trunk and branches meet. Assuredly the causes o' Christendom might be writ large upon his leaves.

Jack Ash is a sailor born—lithe and tough as becomes one sprung from seed shaped for a true fairy-oar. All the family of Poplars—white, blue, yellow—are country gentlemen, big, bluff, hearty, upright, and soft of grain. Here stand a dozen, none of whose girths four men's linked hands could span.

At one side lies the parent trunk—fire-scarred, hollow—wherein you may stand upright. A bent, gnarled Sassafras grows in the crumbling stump of it. While the great Poplar towered aloft, the Sassafras clung, half starved, to a cleft in its root—a very harlequin of turns and twists, at which no doubt the monarch of the forest in life was properly amused. Now he lies dead, with the dwarf mopping and mowing above him, drawing strength and sustenance from his ruin.

No doubt you have seen such cases. Life is strangely parallel through all its channels. Some trees, some souls, grow small and crooked, no matter what the environment—or maybe because of it.

Here is Dogwood glowing scarlet in the berry, maugre her snow of blossom. A true

prude she—with fire under her snow, and likewise bitter of heart and root.

The parable is endless. You may trace it on every hand. Tongues there be in trees to tell all of human story. The Willow waves, drooping in grief; the Locust flaunts, thorny as pride.

If one star differeth from another in glory, how much more one tree? All have their uses, their semblances. The rain, the sunshine, fall on all alike. From them is wrought the sweet, the bitter, each after his kind. And who shall say, shall gainsay, that sweet or bitter lies nearest the heart of Nature, our mother?

SUNDOWN

AIRY-GOLD rims the far up-land sky-line. It is the merest thread of sunlight lingering on oak-woods all arustle in their yellow-russet bravery. Above them gray-purple haze melts soft up to the clear heaven, cloudless, save for the low, western bank flaming, fire-scarlet, along its upper edge. Truly, you might fancy it some dim underworld castle, with storm-winds at bay in its thunderous breast and waging bloody battle for freedom.

They must win it ere long. The air is tense. Vivid, too, with scent from sere grass and ripe fruit and fresh, new-fallen leaves. Through the heavy stillness sound carries marvellously. The windless caressing air woos the ear to linger and listen.

What a medley it brings to the hearing! The pounding and grinding of hoofs, of wheels, upon the highway; the loud rattle of heaped wagons straining home from the

corn-fields; the clamorous low of cattle trooping in from outlying pasture-land; the keen, hungry squealing of pigs unfed; the house-dogs barking in a dozen farmsteads; now and again a cock's crow breaking through. Over all, accenting it into time and tune, a ringing rhythm of axe-strokes anear and afar.

What a dear sound it is! It brings the sense of hearth and home, means sweetness and light, and warmth and love. If all the world and his wife could but sit by a wood fire, what a lessening there would be of the sum of human unhappiness.

For is it not, indeed, the soul of good cheer, made beautifully manifest in billowing smoke? in leaping flame? red coals? nay, even in clean, pearly ashes? What treason, stratagem, or spoil can endure its clear shining, or take hold upon a soul warm with its vital heat! Envy, malice, and all uncharitableness must vanish up the chimney. No foul thing surely can abide the hearth-fire's glow.

Alack! the sundown symphony is made up, for the most part, of wailing minors, that drown the cheery axe-stroke—yea, bury it out of hearing. Black dark is not so desolate as this cold twilight. It is more pitiless

even than sunshine to the dim fields bare and wide, the waning woods, the hedge-rows, heart-broken over their ghosts of flowers. From the going down of the sun to the coming out of the stars the sky shows a hard, unloving brilliance—drearier, more desolate, than grayest clouds.

Though no twig stirs in the wood, a subtle sighing sweeps through it. All the Dryads are ashiver for their poor dead leaves that soon—ah! so soon—the cold, white snow shall cover.

At rest, here in this little clearing at the wood's edge, their cry slips into your heart. In the open it is still good daylight. Here, where trees shut in three sides, all is ghostly clare-obscure. Is that a ghost calling through it? Verily, it is a weird wailing that smites the dusk. Out from the deep forest-vista something sails, slow and noiseless, upon wide wings, with eyes of green fire. A dead tree towers, stark and white, just in the middle of the clearing. One of the big brown horned owls is flying in to perch him upon its topmost point. What sweep, what spread of wing he has—five feet, if one, from tip to tip. What a loud flutter of furling as he settles slow upon his unsteady perch!

Again you hear his cry—low, harsh, wailing. So might a lost soul call back across the Styx for the partner of its ill-deeds done in the body. The cry is answered—once, twice, thrice. Other wings are spread; other fiery eyes gleam through the deepening dusk. Five huge creatures are flapping, lurching, hooting atop of this sylvan ghost—the poor tree, bare of all its pretty frippery of branch and bough. Only three big prongs remain to it. The first comer chose the highest for his seat, and perches there defiant of the later ones who wheel threateningly around him.

Presently there is a bird on each tip, ruffling hate and scorn at the two who lag superfluous on the scene. But the sluggards are in no wise cast down. They have pluck, or temper, and to spare. See them circle to the clearing's utmost verge, then sweep, full flight, upon their fellows so insultingly uplifted. Mighty human that! Who of us has not burned with the righteousness of our wrath against some conspicuous self-poised usurper—our yearning to dislodge him?

Evidently one of these usurpers is a faint-heart, all unworthy to wear his feathered spurs. He avoids the shock of battle,

drops half-way to earth, checks his descent with a quick outstretching of wings, and sails off down the woodland, sweeping so low as almost to dazzle you with the gleam of his green eyes.

Peace comes of his exit. The rest somehow make terms, and perch together, flinging their wild, intermittent hooting out into the darkening world. What powerful, tremulous discord they set up! as audible a mile away as here within ten rods.

From a near hollow oak a screech-owl begins to call. How contemptuously the big wings overbear and drown the cry of their puny congener. He is an odd fellow—a sort of pretentious poor relation, owlish mainly in his voice. That is eerie enough in all conscience—to superstitious folk, the sure forerunner of death or ill-luck; which you can, however, avert by flinging at the bird either salt or a sweet potato over your left shoulder.

The dusk has other voices. Far down the hill a faint cry sounds, and is answered from the bluff. Your ear would fail to mark it in other than this thick, still, hearing air. There is blood-thirst in the cry; cunning, too; and the cautious wisdom of experience. Reynard the Fox gives tongue but rarely.

Something out of the common must be literally in the wind.

It is something—something overhead—on wings as swift almost as light. High betwixt you and the peeping stars you see a dark pyramidal line. A shrill, trumpeting challenge drifts down, down. Wild geese in flight, and hungry. The wedge breaks up—wheeling, shrilling, they drop into the corn-land and begin to feed.

Reynard the Fox knew that they would, and called his mate to a feast. Of a verity, there must be things undreamed of in our philosophy. Else how should one wild creature thus sense afar off the need, the purpose, of another?

Looking with all your eyes, you will not see Reynard the Fox. For such errand he hath sure receipt of fern-seed, and doth walk invisible. You cannot help but see that furry diplomat, Brer Rabbit. Depend on it, his seeming of timid innocence is much more than half a counterfeit. He scurries out from the brier-patch, almost under your feet, goes swift as an arrow down wind over fallen leaves to the wood's edge. There he will crouch him till you go your way, when he will be off to the orchard for apples, the field for corn, and finish with a salad of green young clover buds.

Night has fallen fully now, yet brought no dark. The sky is aflame with stars, burning big and white in its clear round. A wind comes out of the north—crisp, stinging, deadly. Morning will shine over ice on roadside pools—a world thick-powdered with diamonds of the frost. Get you in to the fireside, there to sit close, forgetting this nipping, eager air. You feel the blowing of it. Inferior animals, so-called, were warned of it at sundown.

AFTER FROST

HEN comes the wine of the year. What though flowers are nipped and summer birds all gone, the world lies lapped in liquid melting haze, the scent of fruit and corn comes keen from field and orchard ; over all, soft, late sunshine sifts in long, low, slanting lines. Frost itself is cruel. It comes heralded maybe by a thunder-gust ; there is the pour of big drops or the pitiless pelting of hail, a vivid flash or two, and crashing peals overhead. Then out of the northwest sweeps something keen and deadly. The clouds vanish. All night long that biting breath sweeps over the face of earth. At dawn the world looks much the same, only flowers and creepers are oddly stiff. Half an hour of sunshine shows what havoc has been wrought. Summer lies in ashes, with hardly a rose left for her bier.

All day the sharp wind blows, and for

yet another day. Then it veers west, southwest, south, and sits steady for a fortnight. Breathing rather than blowing, you can barely feel it as you walk abroad. The nut-woods are a glory of yellow leaves. Overhead they have thinned to a mere gold-lace against the blue. Underfoot they lie knee-deep, a rustling, fragrant carpet, in whose depths you find scaly-barks, chestnuts, big hickory-nuts, or white walnuts. Black walnuts are so big and plenty that the sparse leaves cannot hide them. A fruitful tree will completely cover the spread of its branches with the yellow-brown globes. For hazelnuts and chincapins you must go to the thickets. Both love and cling to deep, rich, sunny virgin soil. Unless they are very plenty, the squirrels will be apt to get all. They are something of epicures, those small, saucy fellows, and disdain mere acorns if they can feed on choice sweet nuts. See! They have rifled the clusters; but you need not go away empty-handed. A wild grape runs riot here, and hangs its black, sweet clusters in easy reach—quite too easy, in fact.

You have only to pluck and fill your basket, whereas the orthodox thing for a grape hunter is either to “pull down the

vine," or else to climb the sapling that upbears it to the very top, then clasp it with both hands and swing off, bringing tree and vine to earth. Grapes so obtained have almost the savor of forbidden fruit—a wild, fresh, woodsy flavor, with a tang of frost that no clusters from the vineyard may hope to equal.

A little farther on stand persimmon-trees in clumps. The small clear space about them held a pioneer's cabin eighty-odd years ago. There is no trace of it now, save the big flat stones that mark the hearth and these thick-growing trees.

Persimmon beer was the height of liquid luxury in those days. To make it, the ripe fruit was gathered, mashed, and kneaded with corn meal into big flat cakes an inch thick. After baking, these were broken up in water, and allowed to ferment. The result was a clear, pale, yellow liquid, sweetish-sour, with a faint sparkle to it—in short, the champagne of that primitive era. These trees did not furnish it. Instead they sprang from seed thrown away in beer-making. They are bare of leaves now, but hung thick with soft, sweet, tawny-yellow globes, thick-dusted with purple bloom. A week ago they looked fully ripe, but if you

*Persimmon
Beer*

had tasted one the bitter roughness would have clung to your mouth half the day. Frost has sweetened them.

It is the same with black haws. Children and 'possums count them well worth eating. Grown folk are apt to find too little fruit to the amount of seed. Even the birds, save in stress of snow, refuse the big, coarse, red ones that shine like rubies all over thorny branches. The rare, small, red one, growing in clusters much like the garden currant, is a dainty morsel for any palate. It loves the lowland—all the hawthorns do—and seldom grows twenty feet away from water. Its leaves are among the last to fall. Gather laden branches of it, if only for their beauty. Box-elderberries are the only things that compare with it. Mark the grace of them—round beads, true coral red, hung in clusters by white stalks from out a thick crimson-fleshed bract. See how thickly they are sown along smooth, slender, green branches that join at almost right angles to make up a big bough! The boughs come out as squarely from a smooth, yellow-gray trunk. The tree never grows very tall—thirty feet at most. Frost fairies may well choose it for their revels. If it is so lovely by daylight, think what it must be

all aglitter with diamond dust in the gray shine of stars !

Here the ground is thick with buckeyes. Steal one when nobody is looking, and slip it into your pocket to ward off rheumatism. If anybody sees, the charm is broken. Take a handful of crab-apples, too, for perfume. They will smell of the wilds while they keep a drop of juice. Gather silk-weed pods for luck. The darkies say that if, when they burst into a torrent of white floss, your breath will not blow it away, good fortune will abide with you till the silk-weed is again in seed. Flowers are scarce enough to be precious. This cluster of blue gentian blooming in the thicket brings joy indeed. Bear it home in triumph ; and if you care for curious forms, go through the deep oak-wood, and dig up a clump of wax-white Indian-pipe as well. Take along some of its native earth, and plant the flower, that is without leaf or root, in a low, flat bowl. Wreath it with oak-leaves and fern, and lay a handful of scarlet sumach so the Indian-pipes will peep up through it ; or if you are weary of the color riot, leave the earth bare except for a few acorns and acorn cups. The over-cup, fringed half an inch deep about the edge, is handsomest of all. Fail-

ing that, white-oak or post-oak will do excellently well.

Through days of splendid languor the south wind blows on to dawns of mist, wherein spectral trees weep slow tears. Each grass-blade wears a diamond. Rabbits frisk and nibble in dew-dim clover. At the far verge a red-bird, a perch on a tall, swaying weed, swings and sings, and at last flies away. Wood-doves, in clouds, hover and settle in the corn-field. A flight of larks preen their yellow breasts, and chatter noisily in the big, bare sassafras that has been a hedge-row landmark this many a year. Out of the mist above comes the appealing cry of a young hawk. He is lost in the world of vapor, and calls for his elders. Something glimmers in the grass too tenderly yellow for the hue of decay. A dandelion, too impatient to await the spring, has flung wide its unminted gold. That means sunshine within the hour. The flower never opens in face of persistent clouds. Even now the ghostly glamour fades, a ball of red fire swims overhead, the low sky lifts, and an every-day world lies smiling up to its maker and builder.

IN AT THE DEATH

Fox Hunting

THREE o' the clock. A wester-
ing moon makes cloudy silver
over all the sky. Now and
again, through rifts overhead,
long pale lights dance, drift
athwart the world, chasing one the other in
spectral fashion. The fresh earth lies dew-
damp, plentifully besprinkled with the big
bright tears, distilled from this warm mist,
through every bough and twig. Clothe you,
and stir abroad. Singeth not the ballad-
monger,

“A southerly wind and a cloudy sky,
Doe proclaime it a huntynge morning”?

In such an one, no doubt, George Washing-
ton, Esq., set forth, when, as his diary re-
cords, he “went a-hunting with Jacky Cus-
tis, and caught a fox.” Listen at the river-
ford the splash and beat of hoofs. Now
the long note of mellow-winded horns comes
strongly up-wind, undervoiced with a whim-

pering chorus of yelps and cries. The fox-hunters are out. Not garish gentlemen in "pink and leathers," with huntsmen, whippers-in, and all the rest. Instead, men of the soil—owners, tillers—each with his hounds at heel—a couple, or two or three. See them sweep up the dusk valley, where each cross-road and farm-gate sends out a new rider. It was reveille, indeed, that the hunter's horn sounded under this waning moon.

What riders! Such as they gave rise to the fabled Centaurs. What if they know never a trick of *manège*, of the schools, where else shall you find such hand, such seat, horse and rider so entirely, so harmoniously, at one? It is a rhythm of motion, wherein grace has wedded strength. Look well at the black colt and his master. Mark the fire, the spirit, of the beast—his fine, uplifted head; his arching neck, with its thin, silky, tossing mane; his clean, flat legs and streaming tail, that the wind sweeps out as a very pennon of night. The creature is not bridle-wise. Less than a month back he knew not bit or rein, or lash or steel. But one rider has ever crossed his back—the lean young athlete there, who sits him so light, so firm, so easily swaying, bends him

to his will with a wrist of iron, yet pats and soothes as he might a frightened child.

Sweetness and strength! That is all the magic. The rein is a channel through which intelligence goes most subtly. Fear, anger, nervousness, flash along it to the tender mouth—set up their counterparts in the poor beast. So, too, do strength, courage, radiant good will. The black colt knows his rider—feels him vividly to the core of his quick intelligence—will serve him unquestioning to the limit of speed and stay.

Each is a type. See them forge ahead, the dogs, meantime, running in leaping circles through field and wood either hand. What lank, lithe creatures they are—you see plainly the play of muscles under their silken coats. No kennelled darlings they, racing, fine-drawn, with coats and pedigrees of newest fashion. Yet their blood is rich and old. For two hundred years the south country has ridden to their like—blue-mottled, black-and-tan,

“With ears that sweep away the morning dew,
Crook-kneed and dew-lapped like Thessalian
bulls.

Slow in pursuit, but matched in mouth like
bells.”

A whimpering challenge comes sharply

from the left. Nobody heeds it—it is only the puppy out for a first run, as yet scarce knowing the scent he seeks. Most like he is trailing a rabbit—but no, what bell-note echoes him? Rattler, king of the pack, cries loud and free. Sounder, Ring, Speaker, Lovelocks, Lady—all the rest break out in thrilling jangle, set all the valley aring. Up, up it swells, truly a jocund noise, under these pale, low clouds, this watery moon, this reddening east. They are headed up wind; the cool air comes back to you heavy freighted with the wild music. Hoof-beats sound sharply through it. The black colt is but a fence behind from the leading hound. What sharp, exultant shrilling comes out from his rider's throat! All the hunt is whooping, yelling, as it streams through dusk of dawn. A wild crying, indeed!—one never yet subjugate by mere vowels and consonants—one, too, that, like the seat on horseback, must be learned in childhood, practised sedulously through youth.

They would laugh to scorn, these bold rough-riders, your “Stole a-wa-ay! Hark for-rard! Tally-ho!”—though they come of the blood that knew all niceties of venery—so shouted when the fox broke cover, “*Tail-*

lis hors," otherwise, out of the thicket. All those dead-and-gone gentlemen of England's good greenwood now are but dry-as-dust ghosts, for all their prowess and splendor. Their sport lives with their race. Shorn though it be of form and consequence, it might warm the cockles of their fleshless hearts to see in what lusty strength these slips of English stocks keep up the pastime of old days. The old order changeth—the natural man survives. While time endures, this Saxon, whether of the old world or the new, shall love, as he loves naught else in life's gift, the flash and leaping of trout lured to death in still pools, the singing of bullets sped straight and well, the breathless ardors of the chase, the race.

Master Fox has doubled. Now the full cry rings down wind. See the dogs tumbling, writhing, over that crooked fence. They have been running almost on view—heads up, tails down—so close upon their quarry there was no need to lay nose to the tainted herbage he had crossed. They caught the scent hot in the air. All the hunters knew it when they heard the last wild burst of furious dog-music. So, hearing, they sat straighter in the saddle, gave their good beasts the spur. A little while, and they

would be in at the death—the next field, certainly the next hill-side, must bring it.

So they crash pell-mell over the low road-side fence, as the hounds top the high one bounding the pasture-land. Still Rattler leads, with Sounder at his collar. But see them stop short, fling noses to wind, set up a whimpering cry—all the pack is at fault. Master Fox is passing cunning—either he has dodged back under the horses' feet, or hidden him so snug the dogs have over-run him. See the good creatures—all lathery, panting, with lolling tongues—run crying about the field, dazed out of all weariness by this astounding check.

A minute—two—three—still the trail is lost. There is babel of yelps and shouting, each master calling loudly to his most trusted hound. The black colt champs on the bit, frets lightly against the rein. This ringing run has but well breathed him—the noise of it has set his wild blood afire. Or ever again hound shall bark, horn shall blow about him, he will follow, follow, with, without, a rider. How fine the daylight shows him. Sunrise is past, though no yellow beam stabs through this woolly sky. The hunters will breakfast late, if they hold their purpose to kill before it. A horn breaks

faintly out, is instantly away from lip, and all the field in motion.

Master Fox is cunning, but Lovelocks is cunninger. See, she has followed the fence a hundred yards up wind, picked up the trail where he leaped to earth after running along the rails, and is after him, calling, with all her deepest notes, to man and hound to follow and save the honor of the field. Beautiful, beautiful—see how straight she goes! Her fellows, streaming after, can do no more than yelp, as with big, leaping bounds they devour the grassy space. Ah! Master Fox, tricks will not serve you, save you. You have run gallantly, but Lovelocks will not be left behind. Nearer, ever nearer, she comes to the dark, sweated, hunted thing, that seems a mere shadow on the grass in front of her, so straight, so skimming, is its steady flight. Brush down, tongue out, he toils, pants, away. If he can but reach the woods, his rocky den is in the hill-side just beyond. To it he strains—yet never shall he gain.

Almost Lovelocks is on him—her hot breath overruns him; he swerves—darts aside—doubles—but all in vain. Ring is at Lovelocks' shoulder, Rattler a yard away, with twenty more at back, the black colt

treading almost upon their tails. Quickly, cruelly, their jaws close on Master Fox; the black horseman snatches him-away, sends a wild yell down wind, blows a long blast of his horn. Lovelocks leaps up for a pat from his hand, stands aquiver with delight as he, her master, flings the carcass at her feet before the eyes of all the field.

GATHERING CORN

LOW fair, blow free, O wind of the west! Set the bare trees all arocking in this world of haze. Blue it lies, foldless, swathing. Up into it, far to south, swims a globe of red fire. This fine, blue, clinging Omphale has shorn heaven's Hercules of beams, drinks his light into her spaces, drips it down, a warm, pale shining, over the frosted fields. They lay glistening white at day's dawn, thick-sown in all their breadth with fine, sharp, pricking crystals, crunching under-foot as though you trod down a fairy host at guard.

Black frost, say farmer-folk, foreshadowing the mark of it. Timely, full of use. Now apples shall part freely from the burdened boughs, and come to the palate with a new, fresh tang, infinitely delicious. Now all the stubble's weedy, creeping riff-raff shall be as smoking flax before the plough, no more to choke and hinder the turning of

fallow fields. Now, too, corn in the ear hangs flint-hard—nowhere any sap in stalk, or root, or leaf.

Come away to the gathering! Not from the shock. There, it is mere prosaic snatching of ear from husk, with by and by a noisy rattle of wagons, a quick tossing in—the baldest commonplace of labor. Instead, you shall go afield—in standing corn—crossing to reach it wheat-land late sown, and faintly pierced with tenderest, new, small spears, each with a diamond on his tip, stolen by this warm light from the vanishing frost. Beyond is the first sowing—a green luxuriance, matted, dripping, thick and tall enough to hide a rabbit—a hundred, indeed, if so many there sought refuge. Now you come to the bars. See how snug they are laid to one side, quite out the way of wheels. Not till night drops down will they rest again in socket. All day this small, dark person of fluttering jacket and baggy trousers will sit here “minding the gap,” presumably seeing to it that no vagrant cow, no acquisitive hog, passes this open portal to spoil the corn within.

Monotonous, you think. He would hardly agree. He has a knife with one real cutting blade—his bird-trap wants a trigger—

here in this vigilant solitude he may hack and notch and shape to his heart's content, unvexed with pestering mites of brothers, sisters, who at home give him no peace. Besides, he rides here in the wagon—a full half-mile. An imposing chariot truly, withal gaudy—gaudier even than strong. Wheels and running-gear shine scarlet as sin; the lower body is green, striped red and white, and topped with gay yellow side-boards that double its depth.

What rocking bliss to stand peeping above them! The vehicle has never a spring. With the team at the trot, what shaking of passengers—what bouncing, bumping, of whosoever dares sit. The proper thing is to ride standing—feet wide and hard-set upon the buffeting foundation. If you can but compass it, you may go without turning a hair, though the mules race uphill, down dale, across cloddy levels. Six of the good creatures—gayly pranked out, with bright chains all aclank, with harness supple and well-oiled. Evidently Jim, the wagoner, loves his team next himself—better in some points it may be. Every head-stall has a wrapping of the gayest scarlet, the big, black wheelers flaunt, each at his ear, a silver-white ox-tail. The clean-limbed

sorrels at the pole wear, instead, boughten tassels. Far in front the trim dun leaders show brown-ringed coon-tails at the bridle-ear, nodding with each quick stride. So Jim, the wagoner, has warded off "conjuring;" made it sure, in his own mind, his team shall thrive, pull true to the last ounce, nor balk in the dark at sight of ghosts. Jim is innocent of book-learning, has never heard of a fairy—yet what he does not know of mules, of "spells," is scarce worth the telling.

Wagoning, too. A science that, you may take my word. See him sit so straight, so light, in the saddle, there, on the nigh wheeler's back, his long whip limply trailing, his single rein half clutched. The road turns sharply through the open bars—so sharply you think a single span would have a care of passing it—how much more this long-drawn team. To Jim and his sort it is less than nothing. A quick wrist motion, two sharp cracks of the whip in air—unchecked the leaders swing to the turn; the wheelers follow; an inner wheel lifts a little, grinds hoarsely, drops to earth, whirls inside the field, missing by a foot the nigh post, against which it seemed to you it must certainly go full-tilt. This trick of wrist and eye—this

poising calculation—is the perfectness of practice joined to natural aptitude. Waggoners, like poets, are born, not made. Jim was in the saddle, master of whip and rein, long before his bare toes could reach a stirrup's length. Not under compulsion, either. He loves the work—it is in the blood. His white-headed great-grandfather—toothless, tottering—delights still to tell to all who will listen of long trips across sand and clay in “ole Ferginey” highways, hauling ole marter's crops the hundred miles to tide-water. His son drove head of the emigrant-train across the Blue Ridge into this new land of promise; his grandson piloted the carriage through peaceful, prosperous days. Though Jim has been born to freedom, hereditary traditions, inclinations, are not less strong. He feels him, none the less, born into the place of plantation wagoner—would be half heart-broken if another had his seat.

His mules—his by love, not possession—rarely know the touch of whip—the long, leathern snake—writhing, coiling, snapping almost with noise of pistol-shot, in, around, over them. The sound of it is to them as the noise of drum and trumpet to soldiers on parade. Its quaverings, flourishes, mean to them, Go! Halt! Trot! Steady! Hold

back ! Pull for life ! They know their driver, too—well enough, indeed, now and again to take a freakish liberty, presuming on his soft heart. He gives to them sweet hay, clean beds, sound corn, sweet water, the best of grooming, the nicest adjustment of strap and chain. He gets of them a faithful strength that moves mountainous loads, let ways be never so sticky, so foul.

He knows their strength—and never asks the impossible. “Done gimme all dey got—cain’t do no mo’,” he would say, in the thrice-impossible event of stalling with a load. To-day he works them full strength. The corn-land earth is light—the corn extra heavy. Before he has driven twice the fields’ length the wheels will crush deep in the mellow soil. See him swing the wagon across a row, the tall stalks crashing, crushing to earth. How heavy the ears fall ! how high they hang in the rows either side ! what rain of them the four gatherers toss reverberant in the bed ! Each pulls two rows, snapping off the long ears with one dexterous turn of wrist that leaves the coarse outer husk still fluttering from the stalk. How they pile in mounding heaps, as the wagon moves slow—each mule of the six nibbling as it pleases him at such ears as

hang in reach. How lithe and sleek they stand!—wise-looking creatures and meek—something humorous withal in the wag of their solemn ears. Evidently corn-gathering is an occasion. Manes are roached, tails banded to a hair—even the ears trimmed inside till you see the play of vein and muscle lying just under the clipped, silky skin. They will have no more careful toilet upon Christmas Eve, when all the plantation folk, small and great, will ride behind them to town to make ready for the day.

How brave the west wind blows! Speech is drowned—over-voiced in the rustle of dry blade and tassel. The load grows as by magic. Twice Jim has tramped it firm in the corners. Yet still it lies at middle high above the wagon-sides. And the field's round is not once made. At this rate there will be corn and to spare—a wide abundance presaging plenty, profit, for all who live by the land. To them corn is basilar. It means not merely bread, but meat and milk, and sleek, strong teams; strength in winter; speed for the plough. A bursting crib is the husbandman's best backer—one by whose grace he may look fortune square in the eye, and blench not, if perchance for the minute she frown.

Somewhat of the jewel, is there not, in these slender, long ears, so silken of husk, so thick-set with shining, flint-pearl grains? They hang four, five even, to the stalk. What wonder the wagon-bed so quickly overflows. This is the grain for bread—the true “Little Willis.” Properly shelled and ground it gives meal as round, as pearly, as fairy hail, of the wholesomest sweet—the one corn truly to make one in love with its bread. Now and again it yields a red ear—otherwise there is no stain of color save the slender, dull-red cob.

Jim has swung away, full run, for the crib, all his simple soul elate over such abounding harvest. Almost before you dream it he will be back, eager as a child to measure the depth of his good-fortune. Leave him to the joy of fulness here in the swale. Come away to the creek-side. Either hand the bottoms have been corn-fields time out of mind. This, the near one, has held its gatherers many a day. There the fatting hogs have rioted since late September days. What tangle it lies now, of bent stalks, of nipped pea-vines, of fresh-rooted earth! The smooth, fat, small-eyed creatures lie at ease, lazily grunting, in beds of sweet earth. Fifty—sixty—maybe more. No wonder

they have stripped this field. See, across the stream another wagon is making haste to supply their clamorous throats.

What big, round ears it bears; yellow as gold, wrinkled all over the face of them. With their big, coarse cobs, their spongy texture, their ungainly-bulk, they seem scarcely of kin to the slender flint corn. Yet what depth of hue is theirs! The yellow of them is splashed, dotted, made alive with the blackest crimson, most glowing strawberry scarlet, with purple to shame the amethyst's deep heart. It is not pearls that shall be cast before these swine. Instead, something richer, more colorful—also, no doubt, much more to their mind.

Andrew, the cropper, has fetched in this load. The rig is his own—one that moves Jim to the liveliest derision. A sway-backed brood-mare makes half the team, a small, wicked-looking, unkempt mule the other. The wagon's four wheels began life each as part of a different vehicle. The bed is another survival—apparently of the unfittest. Yet Andrew eyes both with the pride of possession—walking solemnly behind, while his small son, aperch on the load, shouts, "Gee-up!" and "Haw-w-dar! Whut ye doin' now?" with much jerking of rope-reins.

Looking closer, you see he sits on the merest smattering of corn. Underneath are pumpkins, kershaws—yellow and green, round, oblong, with necks, without—from the bigness of your head to that of a bushel measure. Now the cloyed hogs shall have a dainty dish indeed. See the rush to rend and fall upon it, tooth and hoof. Andrew looks on with a darkly satisfied smile, muttering the while, “Poun’s er fat dar, gent’emen—poun’s er fat in dat load. Lek de Bible say, you eat an’ squeal metty brash—you gwine die, not ter-morrer, but soon as de moon gits right.”

This is to friend Andrew the glory, the inner meaning, of all these autumn days. Racing by, they bring hog-killing—Christmas—the plenteous, the merry, clasp to his year of toil.

The sun stands straight overhead; the wind drops; the haze thickens. Yellow crepuscular light lies soft upon the world—the world so adrowse in this thick, warm air. Last night was the third of frost. Now there shall come, most like, days of long, rolling cloud; of sparse, dripping rain; of south wind softer than the summer knew. Earth will lie sodden, sopping wet, a quagmire to wheel and hoof. When again the

west wind dries out the corn, Jim will say, as he stands harnessing at morning, to Andrew, the cropper, "Putty rough on yo' spike-team, Brer Andrew—dis yere rain; but my mules—oh, shucks! man, 'taint no mud can stop dem—not dis side whar daddy lived—back yonder in ole Ferginey."

A HUNTER'S MOON

RULY there is magic in it. So high, so white, it hangs, the flooding silver of it washing out to dun pallor all the lingering scarlet and yellow, and purple and flame, of this late autumn world. The charmed wind lies in leash. Nor breath, nor ripple, stirs in the low leaf or the high. From the runnels mists creep slow and slower, to lie in long, straight wefts above the chilling earth. Now turf and weeds are damp, glistening with fine beads that in sunrise shall show as frost. Through the hush a lone, late cricket chirps desolately faint. Far and faint from the wood's deep heart the owls send out their shouting "whoo-whoo-whoo-whoo-hoo-oo!"

For all that, 'tis no moon for sighing—this jocund orb, swimming up the east. It showed crescent, ran to quarter in the nights of gay October. Now, at full, it lights the sere fields, the thinning woods—

a true hunter's moon, by help of whose shining you shall take and spoil the wild creatures that walk abroad by night.

Sport of the rarest, an you have true hunting blood. Without it the night shall not, for you, be filled with music; indeed, you are like to get nothing but weariness of body, vexation of spirit. Given so much of primal savagery life holds few pleasures to match the glimpses of such a moon.

See! Black Daddy is waiting in the cabin door, his burly bigness sharply silhouetted by the red fire-shine inside. He leans heavily on an axe, fresh from the grindstone, holds a half-dozen unlit splint torches lightly under one arm. A brindled dog, with ridiculous short tail, crouches at his feet, seemingly supine, yet with every sense alert. Outside, the clear moon-rays show a smaller black fellow—so dark, his eyes shine fiery-green from under his low lashes. He sits very upright, his bow-legs making queer, bulging shadows on the turf—head aside, ears sharply cocked, tail faintly aquiver. Each fibre of him stands at attention. Axe, torches, are to him language visible—he has no mind to be left out of the sport they foreshow.

Black Daddy loves his dogs—better, al-

most, than himself. By the hour he will tell you tales of them—Music and Damsel. Days through, they run at his heels; nights through, they watch outside his door. Priceless both, though the one is but a lurching mongrel, the other a cross-bred hound. Dogs of renown both, spite such blots of the scutcheon. Music is the better coon dog, Damsel has no equal for trailing a possum. Both have the finest keen noses, able to pick up the faintest scent, and trail the quarry hot-foot to his lair.

Very often one is taken, the other left at guard. Naturally they hate each the other with deadly dog-fury. Music has laid his two paws over his master's feet, put his head between them, is quivering through and through, giving out the while little, low, piteous whimpers, his plea not to be left behind. At sound of it Damsel, whose name belies his sex, growls slightly, beats the earth more vigorously with his tail, then rises, trots a little way down the path, looking back over his shoulder to see if he is followed. Now he stops short, slinks backward half a rod. The cabin door shuts to with a great bang—Daddy stands fair in the light, with Music still glued to his heels, but uttering quick, joyful yelps. A breath's space Damsel lis-

tens, then is off, with arrowy rush, down the path to the woods.

Daddy raises a mellow shout, the signal of assembly to his stout young followers, who tumble out, leaping, singing, "patting Juba," as though they had not been gathering corn all day. When he offers them each a torch, they set up a great crying-out, and toss them instantly in a handy fence corner. "We not er gwine huntin' ghos'es— an' de's 'nough moonshine fer coon er possum," says the boldest malcontent, running away after the dogs.

Now the rest step sturdily out. Daddy, leading, looks up at the pale stars. There he reads the hours. It is nine o' the clock, so dewy-damp the scent must lie and hold, even in sedge and weeds. The open is bright as the morning. It will be two hours, though, ere the moon stands straight enough to light the wooded hill-sides leading up from the creek. A rolling who-whoop comes over his lips. You hear a youngster say, "Dat's it, Daddy! holler possum." The next minute all have fetched a compass, head straight for the old field.

Grapes abound there, persimmons hang sweet and plenty. Master Graycoat most like is afeast in it, with all his sisters, cous-

ins, aunts. Mark Damsel's mad delight! See him leap and circle—a black ghost, light and swift—wider, ever wider, in his round. Often sedge quite hides him, briers swallow him up, but nothing daunts or hinders. Ah! he has found—hear the low, yelping cry that Music so enviously seconds. The tones are wondrous individual. Music's note might be all-compact of echoes from his dozen ancestral strains. Blood tells—especially hounds' blood. Damsel's clear belling sets all the field aring.

Hither and yon he dashes, nose to earth, tail high and waving. Truly, Master Possum came in by crooked ways. The trailing dogs give tongue but sparely, so swift, so winding, do they run along his track. Around, across, it goes, now along the cresting upland, now deep in the thick swales. Now comes chorus of deep baying. Damsel has treed—there to the right, in that single tall persimmon-tree. And look! this clear moon shows two of the gray gluttons crouching close in its slender upper boughs. No use to try and shake them out; the slight limbs would bear scarce a heavier weight than theirs. It is a case for the axes—ah! how swift they fly. Almost before the baying dogs catch breath the

slim tree crashes to earth, with two seeming-dead creatures still fast in its top. See the long, bare tails, each coiled snug about a limb. Not a quiver, not the turning of a hair, though Damsel darts at one to give it an angry shake. Daddy rescues it, his fellows the while making the night-world ring with shouting. A far hill catches the sound, flings it back a mocking echo.

Somebody begins to chant,

“Oh! Mister Possum, ye think ye’s mighty soon,
But ye sho’ ter git cotched by de light er de
moon.”

Daddy sniffs at the singer. “Better be savin’ dat breff ter hole ’im. Take dis yere stickful, boy, an’ go gilpin’ ’long home.” At the word you see that he has split a stout stick, six feet long, a little way at either end, put the tail of a possum in each cleft, and is balancing it across the chanter’s shoulder, little as that person likes it. He opens a remonstrant mouth, but is waved away. Daddy is autocratic—disobedience means no more hunting with Music and Damsel. Hark! they have found again—Music this time in the lead. But how queerly they run—giving tongue faint and uncertainly—a perplexed note, as though saying, “We fear to follow our noses.”

The scent runs straight—with now and again a gap—as though broken by a leap. Now the dogs head for the sink-hole, running fast—almost as hard as they can lay legs to earth. They bark furiously—a guttural, angry note, different far to the baying of Master Possum. Ah! they have stopped short—there, beside that thick, thorny clump overhanging the earthy cavern. See them leaping, howling, with bristles upright, with gnashing fangs. Hist! Hear the spitting growls from the thicket. They must come from beast of prey, not beast of game. Daddy listens, his head to one side, mutters “Varmint,” then steps back to plan the attack. A minute later he has lighted his torch, and with two men at his back, armed each with a stout pole, comes up to the angry dogs. He tosses the blazing brand far into the thicket, springs aside barely in time to escape something—fiery-eyed, furious, strong of claw—that leaped hissing, yowling, at his throat—lies, savagely defiant, spite the blows rained over it, the dogs’ angry rushes.

Daddy speaks to them in sorrow, in anger. “Git erway, you fool dawgs! Whut done come ober you, chasin’ cat dat erway? Right smart ole wild-cat he is—but shucks!

I don' lek ter be so fooled." Music slinks off, his tail betwixt his legs. Damsel looks about critically, as though to say, "I knew all the time it was not quite the thing. Depend on it, alone I should not have made the mistake." The poor cat is tossed into the sink-hole's dark depth. Daddy picks up his torch, carefully puts out each spark it has left in the tangle, and goes away to the woodland, a faint, smoky pennon trailing out behind.

He strikes straight for the river channel. Just here a creek makes into it—the tall timber abounds in hollow trees, wherein Master Coon makes his abode. A rare night-rover he—lying sluggish all the day, nor rousing him till darkness has covered the face of earth. Now the cocks crow midnight; straight moonbeams pour white through the flecked boughs above, and turn all to silvern ghosts the woods' dim colonnades. Doubtless he is well abroad—hark! Music has found—is running as for life. "Who-oo! hi-yi-yi-ya! hunt him up, ole dog! hunt him up!" Daddy yells at the note—and is chorussed by the rest. The sound fills all the river-valley, lying so still, lapped in this slumberous calm. Far down it, on the other side, an answering shout breaks

out. Other hunters, no doubt—all good men and true; but never envy them—they may have dogs, get game galore, but they have not Music and Damsel, whom to follow is a liberal education in a coon-dog's points.

The cry, the yelling, is their very breath of life. How wide Music runs! how high he leaps, sniffing with lifted nose, now this tree, now that. Ah ha! Master Coon has been found away from home—cut off from it, indeed—and is making for it through the tree-tops. Over there he left the earth—ran from bough to bough, from tree to tree, till he thought the trail safely broken. Music knew the trick well—caught the scent hot in air—has picked up the trail where Master Ringtail came down—is after him hot-foot.

A breathless scamper, truly. Away! away! through thicket, through clear forest, running, stumbling, falling, over rocks or fallen timber, now resting for a minute, now hasting as though life lay in speed. Ever in front to guide you, the short, shrill yelpings cutting sharp through the night, the wild yelling, the deep halloo, sent back, forth, from bank to bank. Now the sound of axes, a dull crash, comes from the hither

side, upborne with a shout of triumph. "Dey's cotcht fus'—but I lay we gits de bigges' coon," Daddy says disdainfully, inflating his lungs for a return halloo. Before it is half out of his throat a wild, full barking fills all the air. Music has treed—Damsel comes tumbling over—together they leap and plunge, noses in air, flinging their full cry up to the branches above, where lies Master Coon, now plainly visible, his green eyes shining hate of all below.

This refuge should secure him. The tree is two feet through—thirty feet to the first limb. Climbing is out of the question. Whether the coon is worth the cutting down depends on the strength of your muscles. It is but play for these "good men." By time you are well breathed, quick strokes have sent the tree to earth. As it falls Daddy gathers his beloved dogs to him, a hand on either collar. "'Tend ter yo' coon yo'se'fs—I wants my dogs 'nother night," he calls, holding hard the straining creatures, so madly eager to attack their fallen foe. The good men rush at it with clubs and axes—it darts, creeps, leaps, through the brush, eludes their striving, and dashes safe into the woods.

Followed, it is not overtaken. Music runs

off on a fresh scent, trees in a hollow, and sees the fighting captive chopped out of it. The moon drops westerly—oars sound on the river. Here are hunters from the other bank, come to gossip, join forces, and finish up the night. Now, indeed, the chase shall stir your blood. They have brought six good dogs. All in cry, the heavens shall overflow. It is find, follow, kill—the first cock-crow sounds. The night has grown chill, though the huntsmen do not feel it. Suddenly some one shivers, with a hint of chattering teeth. Make a log-fire on the instant. The axemen are hewing hard at a big tree that looks to have a handsome coon colony. Before it falls you may warm you through and through.

And afterward. While the fire was abuilding, somebody stole away, rifled a near potato-patch, and has filled the fire with sweet, yellow yams. The sight of them brings hunger indeed. Until they are roasted, eaten piping hot, no foot will stir. Not even Music's or Damsel's. See how quiet they lie by the fire, nose in paws, with shut eyes, dreaming, no doubt, of the night's victorious runs. Beyond, the river ripples, the moon drops low and lower, frost skims the leaves till they rustle underfoot. You tread

them as air. The soul of the night, of the chase, has gone into your blood—you are drunken as with new wine. Sleep comes to you tardily, but of a sweetness before undreamed—such sleep as truly

“Knits up the ravelled sleeve of care.”

If you wake late, what matter? Daylight is garish, commonplace—cheaply exchanged in any measure for such glamour of sound and sight as last night knew.

IN MONOCHROME

YOU come through a world of wailing to a low, strange land of death. The sky drops near and nearer, apall with dun mist that has never a break, a fold, a hint of rifting to the blue beyond. The wind is a long, keen sighing, not cutting, chilling you to the marrow. Now and again it swells to a sob. Surely Nature hath set herself at penance for the waste, the spoiling, of flower and leaf. See the fields wear sackcloth of black, rough stems. What ashes must lie under, upon, the wide, smooth breast of them, grinding, rasping, till they shiver and cry—a fine, faint note in this dun Miserere.

Nowhere any softness—any hint of hope of spring. This land knows never the bloom, the brightness, of it. High summer even is here but a sun-bright gray-green ghost, compact of thick, dark leafage, of dim, slant shining through dusk boles to

dry, dead earth. One hand, the waste comes down, the slant of it bare and galled, criss-crossed with net of gullies through and over its pale clay. Now and again a starveling cedar has got root-hold, and leans desolately atilt over the narrow yawning. What dull funereal hue the tree has! Seedlings but mid-leg high have no character of youth. You see age, sighing and sombre, in the lift, the branching, of them, as plain as in the scraggy parent stem, whose withered boughs show gray and skeletonwise, through its sparse green tufts, so niggardly beset with blue berries.

Pity the poor tree. Here it is an alien growth. This cold clay deadens, stunts it. No wonder it is forever sighing for the rich, black, rocky hill-sides, where it comes to strength, use, beauty—such growth as might honor even cedars of Lebanon. Fate, in shape of winter birds, set it here, where life is but one long death; where only it cumbers the waste, endures as best it may the burden of the years.

Nearer the swales wave plummy pennons. Sedge covers them breast-high, all atangle with long briars and wild-creeping things. Up through it dead mullein stalks thrust their tall stiffness. All about is a tossing

of gray-brown furzy weeds. From their root a dull thread of wetness steals through the low, sour earth, out into the space of silence, ruin, death.

Here it slips across the wood-road. Have a care. To set foot on a wrong spot is to go knee-deep in the quagmire. Look to the other hand. There lies the great swamp. This water feeds the road-side pond that at last drains away into it. What sullen, sullen water! So wide, so gray. The year has been wet. See how far beyond its banks the trees stand dead—a high, whitish ring about each trunk. Water made it—sour, stagnant water that shut life away from their root, albeit they were all growths of the marsh-land—sweet-gum, water and swamp oak, big, straight-bodied elms. Spring brought them bravely into bud—the rains descended, the floods came—the pond spread and spread. For weeks it lapped their roots, their trunks—sickness fell upon them—as in a night they withered. Now they stand, gray and crumbling, outside the deadly water, a sere, sombre background for its low, lapping shield.

How tranced it lies, for all this ruffling wind. You would never dream that still and silver seeming masked murder for man

or beast. The water is but barely breast-deep, with no tide, no current. Danger, sure, cannot lurk in aught so calm! Look at it again. The road runs past it—thirsty beasts might pause to drink of its clear depth. Yet never a hoof-mark dints its soft margin, sparse wheels stay not, even the wild creatures keep them afar off. *quicksand*

You have not thought what lies under—quicksand—heavy, sucking, holding—of perilous depth. Once fast in it, you must pray for a bullet, the lightning's flash—any quick, merciful ending to its gripping agony. Verily it is a sea shall give up neither living nor dead—out of which nothing comes ever save Jack o' Lantern to bewilder and betray. *Jack o' Lantern*

He holds here highest revel. Of still, warm nights you may see his fairy lights adance over all the wooded swamp. Now they circle some huge, bent trunk, now leap bounding to the branches—for the most part, though, plod slow and fitful, as though they were indeed true lantern rays, guiding the night-traveller by safe ways to his goal. Master Jack is full of treacherous humor. Follow him at your peril. He flies and flies, ever away, to vanish at last over the swamp's worst pitfall, leaving you fast in the mire.

Wise folk say he has no volition—he but flees before the current set up by your motion. We of the wood know better. There is method in Jack's madness. He knows whereof he does. Science shall not for us resolve him into his original elements—turn him to rubbish of gases and spontaneous combustion. Spite his tricky treachery, he shall stay to light fairies on their revels, scare the hooting owls to silence.

Come now into the swamp. The waters are shrunken—you may walk dry-shod from root to root. See them, writhen, crawling along the gray, hard earth—so hard and smooth the leaves have rifted away in long, deep ripples. Here is nothing to check them—no enlacement of low tangle—only the big, bare-bolled trees, above these serpent roots. The winds at play have left earth's face all bare. About the roots it is powder-dry, and hard and gray as stone. Here and there a low space holds yet a deep, brown pool, so clear you can see the thready roots below, so still it mirrors you, the boughs dark above, with dull, gray sky behind.

These be remnants of spring waters, outer and visible signs of depths and flowings below that no summer sun may touch.

The first rain will melt the crusted earth,
set the big roots creeping deep and deeper
—make all this mile-long forest passable for
naught that hath not wings.

Winged things love it not—save, indeed,
the bittern, who builds here her nest, booms
sullen over the marsh-land all the bright
summer through. Sometimes the wood-
pecker comes aforaging—sometimes, too,
the log-cock flies screaming across the
gloom. Never any singing bird—robin,
red-bird, thrush, oriole, nor wren. Now one
crow caws loud from the pond to his fel-
lows in the swamp. Far overhead a buz-
zard circles on spread wings, settles, drops,
as though here he found a feast.

FRESH FIELDS AND PASTURES NEW

LET down the bars. Corn-gathering is over. Now Star and Spot, and Brandy and Daisy, Sook, the bell-cow, and frisky young Blossom shall leave their short grass for the corn-field's rich luxuriance, there to crop and nuzzle, and frisk and low, till the winds blow chilliest winter. There they may choose 'twixt the green herb and the dry. What cow of good taste loves not the picking of the field? The fine fresh shucks are toothsome indeed. Besides, are there not plenteous tidbits of nubbin—surprises, now and then, of the full ear overlooked?

All serve to sauce and savor the lush green rye. Sown in August through the standing corn, its green mat hides the earth—stands high about the ankle—rich, tender, full of juice, a very paragon of pasturage now that the frost nips hard.

Here, in shelter of the corn-stalks, his tooth

has lost its sharpness, his breath its sting. Through bare grass-land the wind blows keen. These sere ranks, battered and broken though they be, hold him smartly at bay—cut and shiver his legions to a long, low, shrilling sigh.

Blow high or low, these good creatures take no thought of him. See them run hither and yon, through the length, the breadth, of it all, snatching here a green mouthful, pulling down there a russet stalk, capering, lowing, tossing the head aside, madly joyous, full to overflowing with a dainty lust of possession.

Bell-cow Sook tries vainly to enforce her right of precedence. All summer—for how many summers?—she has swung her tinkling sceptre at front in all pastures. She has led—the rest marching meekly behind. Here, in this late green largess, they low her quite to scorn.

Mistress Blossom even—as by right of her Holstein blood, her staring, black-patched white coat—swings her long tail impertinently in the bell-cow's face, and meets the avenging rush of her insulted monarch with a strenuous uplifting of heels. Ah me! Times do change—and manners with them. Mistress Blossom has quite forgot that three

years back she, coming motherless, a bare week old, to this strange place, found in Sook, the bell-cow, a tender foster-mother, amiably willing that the new comer should share with her own calf her flow of rich, warm milk, the rough side of her licking tongue.

Maybe Brandy's memory is longer. A rich red she, with faint roan markings on back and breast—a big, handsome, full-uddered creature, with character writ large all over her. See her look of large-eyed wonder at the ingrate Holstein. Three seconds she pauses, her mouth full of dropping green, one fore-foot in air, then, with a bellowing snort of rage, she dashes at the offender, pummels her soundly with rapid horns, bears her to the knees in her impetuous rush—then turns away, flirting her tail, as though to say, “I am all for peace—but, really, such manners I never could abide.”

Sook, the bell-cow, marches away with never a look of thanks to her defender. No doubt she is properly grateful—but, oh! the misery of coming to need defence—worse, a thousand-fold, than the original hurt. Brandy is a good creature—well meant and all that. But—but she would have done better not to see that the power of the sceptre was waning. Besides, if she finds it

thus easy to rule, may she not be tempted to reign? That were, indeed, intolerable. Better, a hundred times better, see Blossom, for all her sins, usurp the crown—the bell. She has at least the merit of strange, high blood. Bell-cow Sook herself owns Devon crosses. Brandy is pure scrub, albeit her milk is the best, the richest, the most plentiful, of all that comes to the pail.

Now from the bars come loud bellowings—noise of many hoofs—the young cattle in irruption—twenty steers and heifers, wild all with this embarrassment of riches. By twos, by threes, they run, prancing, lowing, up to, around, each of the milky mothers, now industriously at graze. What queer noises rise up on all sides—cries, bleating, long, faint calling. The younglings lock horns, push, tussle, fall prone to earth, pick themselves up, and rush away after a fresh antagonist. All summer long they have grazed side by side. The old pasture to-day would see them dejectedly peaceful. It must be the sense of enlargement—the sudden freedom of this so long guarded field has gone to the head, and set them lunatic with joy.

Brandy has spied amid the youngsters her last year's calf—a saucy red beauty,

the mother over again. With a rush she is beside the young creature, licking it lovingly all over the head and ears, cuddling it under her chin with a low, joyful moo-oo. Then she trots contentedly to the farthest edge—the youngling close beside—there to feed or lie in the sun till the bars are let down and the milk-maid's cry comes pealing over the field.

Black Betty's voice is clear and sweet. "Sook-cow! Sook! So-ook! So-oo-ook!" she calls over and over through the waning day. Slow, heavy, full-fed, the herd marches to her behind the bell. They break to awkward running at sight of her. She holds high the little splint salt-basket, and drops for each a separate pinch—"a lick," she calls it—in some spot of bare earth on the hard outer road.

With what haste of lapping tongues they devour it. Fancy yourself full-fed on water-sweet herbage—then think what eager longing for the pungent, saving tang. Brandy, in the relish of it, forgets the young eyes so wistfully regarding her just inside the bars. When the last white grain has vanished, the salt earth even is scooped, she lows a good-night to her big baby and ambles away to her small one.

Suckling calves have freedom of the wheat-field. The cow-pen is there upon its hither verge. See the frisking clamorers clustered outside, sending a chorus of bleats to greet and hasten their homing mothers. Pretty fellows! All fine as silk, with gay red-and-white coats and velvet muzzles. Saucy, too! See them race about, with tails curled daintily over the back, a merry soft lightening in the big dark eyes.

Calling, answering, the cows come down the lane. Half-way they break to running—come full-tilt to the cow-pen's gate. Once inside, each goes soberly to her allotted place. Betty lets in a calf—Brandy's. Evidently she is prime favorite with the milk-maid. Softly, deftly, she "suckles the calf," shifting his small, eager mouth from teat to teat. As much low milk as he pleases, so he leaves her the cream. She leans contentedly against Brandy's warm side, till creamy froth ropes down from the calf's quick mouth. Then comes a tug of war. Betty seizes both ears—tugs, tugs—breaks his hold, loses her own—totters—falls flat—springs up with a laughing cry, again muzzles her enemy, wraps his head in her apron, and backs him, tossing and struggling, to safe outer regions.

Betty is an artist in her own line. See how deftly, with what dainty touch, she washes the udder clean, wipes it dry, bathes her two hands, sets a big tin pail on the ground, and begins to play a tune in it with thick, white, foamy streams. Brandy stands throughout, the sum and pattern of mild-eyed patience. Once she turns her head, as if minded to lick Betty as she licked her calf. Evidently she thinks better of it, and looks straight away into the sunset, through the steam of her fragrant breath. Soon the big white udder hangs limp and wrinkled. Betty takes her head out of the hollow of Brandy's flank to say, as she lifts her brimming pail, "A pound er butter—down weight—every day of de week, dat whut my cow's good for—an' raise her calf too. Butter yaller as gole at dat. Tell me 'bout Jersey-cow much as you please; ef any Jersey beat dat, I wish dey wus fotcht ter dis neck er de woods. I heap ruther see it 'an hear talk on it."

COME CHRISTMAS-DAY

ECEMBER winds do blow, blow,
blow. Out from all the heav-
ens they sweep and swirl.
Now the sere land shivers, the
groaning trees bend low. Now
barely the dead leaves rustle, the thistle-
down wings away. Wind o' the north
brings ice and sleet; wind o' the south sheds
tears in flood over the poor year's dying.
East wind sighs sullen through swathe of
chill mist. West wind blows on to brave
blue skies that may fitly roof this holy day
of feast.

Christmas, crown o' the year! Golden
clasp to its round of light and shadow.
Truly the bells of it shall ring out, "Plague
I banish, peace I bring." Welcome it roy-
ally. Spread out for soul and sense a feast
of fat things, good to the use of edifying.

Go along woodland ways, and spoil them
in its name. Take to your hands remorse-
less every green thing. Spare not sighing

cedar bough, nor garish holly ; break long trails of wax-green brier ; pluck by armfuls of the hill-side fern.

How green it lies, prone on Earth's breast, nestled in russet leaves. Seize it, and spare not. The fairies are all asleep in deepest caves of Gnomeland. Did they stir, they would help you elfishly thus to rob their brothers, the snow-sprites, the ice-fays. Pluck the great leaf, the small ; weave your wreath, or arch, or ribbon of them ; hang wall, door, pillar, with their lacy emerald. The very soul of Christmas clings and abides in it—more than even in the holly so ruddily bedight, so wreathed and woven through Christmas song and story. A cheery green, no doubt, yet something barbaric, with its gloss, its sharp leaf-points, its crude glow of berry. Use it with sparing wisdom, else the glare of it shall put out of countenance the tender soberness of cedar and fern and thorny smilax. Break long boughs scant of berry—but here and there a coral gleam—to set high in dull corners or shadowed nooks. Wreathe them above your chimney-piece, in welcome to Kriss Kringle ; set here and there a stem about marble or picture ; as you love the season leave unmade star, wreath, or cross.

Lift your eyes to the mistletoe waving overhead. A rare clump truly—thick-sown with greenish pearl. It feeds, too, upon oak-sap. In time of the Druids such root-hold had made it sacred. At Beltane, the year's high holyday, the chief priest had come with all his train to cut the bough with a golden knife and bear it in state to the altar. Rarities, you see, have always been precious. Mistletoe grows for the most part on other than oak-trees. Like most parasites, it loves best the succulence of water-side growths. Almost you can trace the creek's windings through the wood by the yellow-green blotches of it, splashed through the bare tree-tops.

An uncanny growth, this rooted vampire! The stiff, thick, straight-branched stems are just the green of the small leaves. It owns no grace, no sweetness—even in fullest berry. Like some uninteresting persons it boasts only "the claim of long descent," the charm of tradition. In virtue of them give it plentiful room. Hang it high in hall and stair—let it droop from your lintel, whitely bestar your garland. The wood yields it lavishly. Take of its abundance with open hand.

Take, too, dark trails of cross-vine. The

stiff, smooth, mottled leaves, drooping by twos all along the slender stalk, will hang fresh and unwrinkled upon your wall for weeks. Twine it light about your mirror, so its image shall show in the glass, or wreath with it the picture of your love, or drop it in long festoons from under knots of gay holly, and light its dark twining with silver-feathering of clematis in seed.

Here be dead boughs, all forested with gray lichen, dead bark with rich embroidery of gray and green. Choose you good store of both—they light up wonderfully. Beside, their soft tones bring harmony out of chromatic discord. Choose, too, thick mats of moss—the greenest, the velvetiest of all the wood. Take with it the wild roots it shelters, and set moss and roots, with a fringing of fern, in fair, wide, shallow pots. They ask neither sun nor earth—give them but space and water they spread you a feast of green, whereon the eye may rest till its lid drops and in sleep come dreams of the summer world.

What dinsome clamor swells up from the wood-pile. The axemen are all chopping for life, cutting “Christmas wood”—enough to feed all the hearths till the New Year shines in room of the old. They sing

at their work—ah, so cheerly! How the bright steel eats through the logs! December though it be, each dark face is beaded thick with sweat, albeit they stand in shirt-sleeves tossing the fire-sticks hither and yon.

Choose now a Yule-log, remembering the while that the soul, the spirit, of Christmas abides but through its burning. Not this sightly hickory. Big and solid as it lies fire will go through it in a single night, leaving never a brand to lay away for next year's kindling. This round, dense post-oak were longer-flamed, yet still too brief. Green poplar on the dogs is a snare, a delusion; dry, fire burns it like windy stubble. Ash, elm, white-oak? All good, but not best. Ah! here is the wood of endurance—this gnarled, rough, knotted black-jack—two feet through at butt, so dense, so close, as almost to turn the axe's edge.

Cut your log thence, and bear it straight to its appointed place. How black the wide-throated chimney yawns. It is five feet betwixt jambs, with a wide, generous hearth. Lay your log flat upon it, close against the chimney back. Set in front of it the tall, heavy, wrought-iron dogs; pile them high with round sticks, small hickory logs, and chips, and bark. Fill all the space

underneath with fine, dry splinters, then leave it untouched till the Christmas Eve shall come.

Light it then with a handful of red live coals. Watch them smoulder—smoke—kindle to creeping flame. A little while, it roars and flashes high in the chimney-throat, leaping, hissing, crackling—now blue, now yellow, at last clear red—the glow, the glory, of Christmas—so fine, so hot, Kriss Kringle might leave pack and reindeer to sun him in its blaze.

Eleven o' the clock. The blaze is a steady burning. Twelve, red coals overflow to the wide hearth. One, in the morning, fine frosting lies on the coals. Two, three, here is pallor of ashes enshrouding the red heart. Back of them the big log shows black and stark—burned half to the heart, still faintly asmoulder. As cocks crow in the dawn it gives out the barest crackle; the hand may pass unscathed where last night was such fierce shining.

Once, twice, many times, flame shall lick and roar ere the stout timber crumbles to ashes. Sit in the light, the warmth, of it; take thus strength to your soul, your spirit. So shall you front, clear-eyed and smiling, the stress, the shining, of the brave New Year.

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