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Transcriber's Notes

Obvious spelling and punctuation errors corrected. On page 296, "raste" could be meant to be "haste" or "taste" - it has been left as in the original. Inconsistencies in hyphenation in the original have been retained.

The original text used ‹ › as parenthesis instead of ( ), this style has been retained.

One of the color illustrations is referred to as "THE MOOR" in the List of Illustrations and as "THE MOORS" in the original caption. The caption has been changed to "THE MOOR" for consistency.

Page headers from right hand pages have been retained as sidenotes and placed by relevant text.

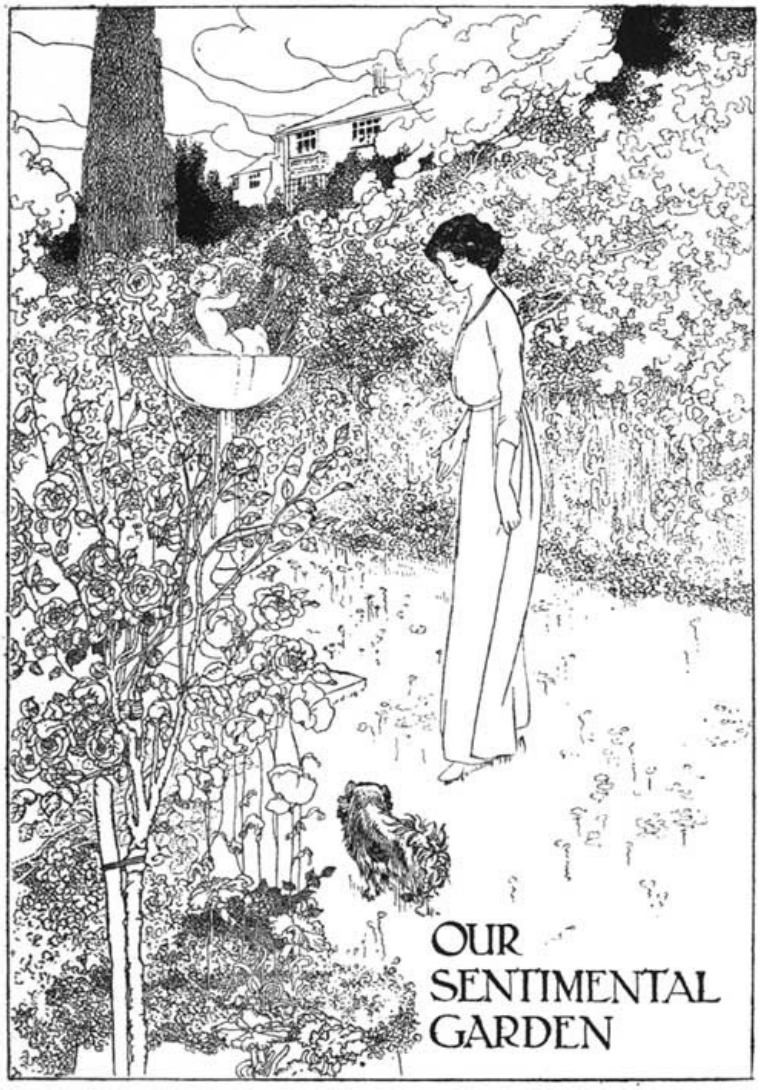
There were two chapters named XXXII in the original. The second XXXII has been renumbered XXXIII in this text, and subsequent chapters also renumbered.

The alignment of some images was changed to fit the flow of text given the inclusion of sidenotes.

Color illustrations and corresponding captions have been moved to fall at chapter breaks and may be clicked on to view larger versions.

Illustrations that ran across two pages have been rejoined on one page, with a small vertical white space in between the two halves where they did not exactly line up.

The cover has been created by the transcriber from the title page and has been placed in the public domain.

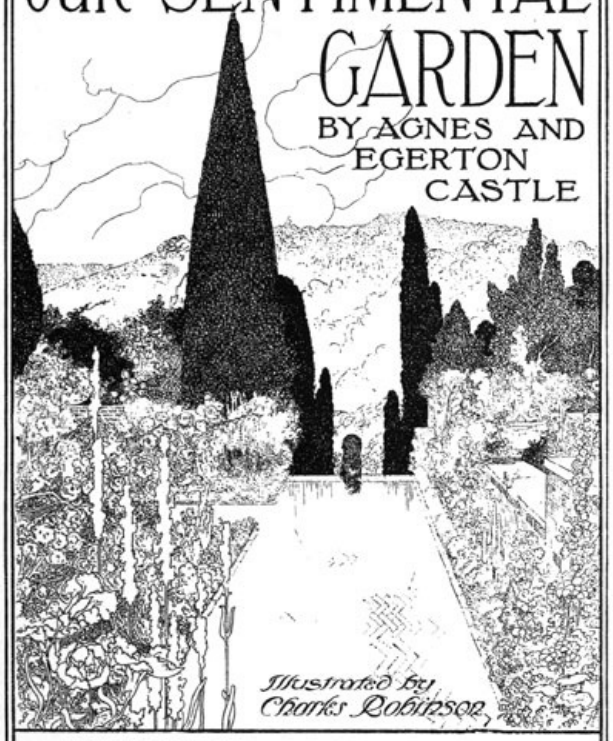


OUR SENTIMENTAL GARDEN

THE HEMICYCLE

OUR SENTIMENTAL GARDEN

BY AGNES AND EGERTON CASTLE



Illustrated by Charles Robinson

PHILADELPHIA: J. B. LIPPINCOTT CO
LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN
MCMXIV

OUR SENTIMENTAL GARDEN

BY AGNES AND
EGERTON
CASTLE

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Printed in England

To our Kind Neighbours, of Rogate,

SIR HUGH & LADY WYNDHAM

who viewed the "Villino" garden,
even from the beginning, with indulgent
eyes; and, with friendliest tact,
persisted in descrying possibilities of
grace in the wildest tangle, this
chronicle is affectionately inscribed
in pleasant remembrance
of too rare visits.

September
1914

Over the hills and far away,
A place of flowers crowns a rise;
And there our year, from May to May,
Comes with a breath of Paradise;
There the small helpless soul that lies
So sweetly, innocently gay,
In little furry things at play,
With perfect trust can meet our eyes;
Over the hills and far away,
Over the hills.

Over the hills and far away,
In every rose a dream we prize,
While thousand tender memories
Flutter about the lilac-spray;
To-day, to-morrow, yesterday—
Each unto each make glad replies;
Over the hills and far away,
Over the hills.

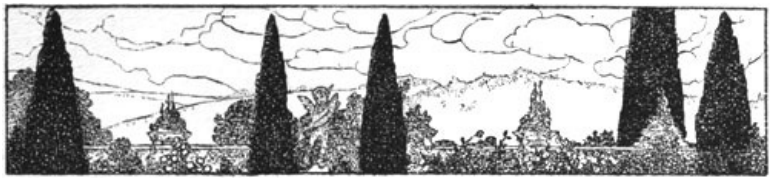
ELINOR SWEETMAN

Never was trifling chronicle begun so light-heartedly as this chatty, idly reminiscent book of ours—and now it is under the great shadow of war, of death and suffering, that we see it pass into its final shape!

The "little paradise on the hill," with all its innocent pleasures, its everyday joys and cares; with the antics of the "little furry things at play," the sayings and doings of the "famiglia"; the roses, the bulbs and seedlings; our alluring garden plans, our small despairs and unexpected blisses—our earthly paradise, as we have said, seems like an unreal place. We wander through it with spirit ill at ease; oppressed, as by a curse, through no fault of ours. The sight of an Autumn Catalogue (hitherto so tempting, so full of promised joys) evokes only a sigh. The offer, from the familiar Dutchman, of bulbs which "it will help Belgium if we buy," turns the heart sick. We know we must not buy bulbs, this year, because we shall have to buy bread—bread for those who will surely lack it—and yet, if we do not buy, others in their turn must needs go wanting. And here is but the merest drop in the monstrous tide of evils wantonly let loose upon humanity by the self-styled Attila! There are times when, looking out upon our place of peace, we feel as though, surely, we must all be lost in some fantastic nightmare. It is a September full of golden sunshine; as this night falls, a benign, placid moon rises over the silent moors into a sky the colour of spun-glass. The breeze choirs softly through the boughs of scented Larch and Birch. All is beauty, harmony—while in those fields yonder, south of the sea, the Huns.... Pray God, by the time the Spring begins to stir shyly once more in our copses; what time the Crocus pushes forth its little tender flame, and the Snowdrop (with us fugitive and reluctant) bends its timorous head under our hill-top winds, we may indeed look back upon these days as upon some dreadful dream!

Meanwhile—even as the Villino itself is now to become a home of convalescence for some of our wounded, still unknown, but to be welcomed soon; even as the Cottage is to be a refuge for women and babes fled from burning Belgian hamlets—the following pages, breathing content and all the harmless ways of life, may perchance help to beguile thoughts surfeited with tales and pictures of mortal strife. We hope that, as a sprig of Lavender, or a Cowslip, by his pillow might for a moment relieve the blood-tinted vision of a stricken soldier, so, perhaps, some unquiet heart labouring under the strain of long-drawn suspense, will find a passing relaxation, a forgotten smile, in the company of Loki and his companions.

Sept. 1914



LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOUR

OUR SENTIMENTAL GARDEN

I

t is easier to begin with our beasts.—First, they are much the most important, and secondly, there are only six of them. Our bulbs lie in their thousands with just a green nose showing here and there now in January and are nameless things: only collectively dear, if extraordinarily so.

It will instantly be perceived what kind of gardeners we are, and what kind of garden we keep. We have scarcely a single plant of “individuality.” We do not spend ten guineas on a jonquil bulb, nor fifteen on a peony. To our mind no flower can be common: therefore we lavish our resources on quantity. I was going to say: not quality, but that is where, in our opinion, the modern kind of garden-maker goes wrong. What is in a name? Where flowers are concerned, nothing! But how much, what treasures of joy and colour, of shade and exquisite texture, of general blessedness in fact, lurk in the beloved crowd of the nameless things, that come to us designated only thus: “Best mixed Darwin Tulips”; “Blue bedding Hyacinths”; “Single Jonquils, best mixed,” and so on! We once descended so far as to order “a hundred mixed Delphiniums at 10s.,” and when, last June, we looked down on a certain bed in the Reserve Garden from the seat under The Beech Tree ‹which commands that enthralling spot› and saw the blue battalion glowing with enamel colours draw up against the moor beyond, we felt not at all ashamed of ourselves—yea, we felt conceitedly pleased.

But our beasts are individual indeed; and, as it was said, there are only six of them.

CONCERNING THE PEKINESE

The first in order of importance is the Pekinese, who, purchased at a moment when we were much under the enchantment of the “Ring,” we ineptly—yet, from the ethnological standpoint, not altogether inappropriately—called Loki: his coat is fiery red, and he is an adept at deceit. When we want to impress strangers we hastily explain that he is Mo-Loki, son of the great Mo-Choki, the celebrated champion. Loki ‹who frequently assures us that he was a Lion, in Pekin› was born on the roof of the Imperial Palace in High Street, Kensington. His appearance and behaviour are such as bear testimony to his princely lineage. We let him run a great deal when he was a puppy, with the result that his legs are a little longer than is usual with members of the Imperial Dynasty, but “Grandpa”—Stop! It is as well to explain from the outset that, since the advent of Loki in the family, Grandpa is the name that has devolved, automatically, upon the Master of the House: the infant Loki’s mistress having assumed, from the very necessity of things, the post and responsibility of mother ‹in Pekinese ma-ma›, it must follow as the night the day that her father “illico” became Grandpa.—To resume: though his legs are a trifle longer than is usual, the Master of the House says he is much more beautiful by reason of this distinction. And we all agree with him.

Loki will not believe that the Manchu masters have fallen in China ‹of course it is not from us that he has heard these distressing rumours›, so he still demands as his right the best silk eiderdowns to lie upon, satin for his cushions, grilled kidney for his breakfast, freshly poured water in his bowl every time he wants to drink; and expects immediate attention at lunch and dinner-time, play-time, “bye-bye” time, and all the other times when he thinks he would like

his chest rubbed. He sits up and waves his paws with imperious gesture; or else rolls over on his back and puts them together in an attitude of prayer. He had not at first much oriental calm about him. Indeed, when he first came to us his one desire was to play with every living thing he saw, from a cow to a chicken; but the cow misunderstood and ran at him, and the chicken misunderstood and ran away. The poor puppy was perplexed and wounded. He always believed every new Teddy bear toy to be alive at first, and would receive it in a rapture of tail-wagging and nuzzling kisses, until what time, it dawning upon him that Teddy was a senseless fraud, he set himself to shake and worry it like a little fury. Now he is older and wiser. He pretends not to see cows, and condemns chickens; he will growl at a strange dog, and bite and shake a new toy the very first day. Thus, alas, do years make a cynic of the young idealist!

LOKI'S OWN ANIMALS

He only plays with his own animals. These are: Susan, the Butler's dog, and Arabella, the Lavroch setter, a long, lovely, lithe, foolish creature, whose surname is Stewart, having come to Villino Loki out of far Scotland from a distinguished member of that Royal clan. Arabella, who is ten times the size of Loki, turns him over and over, tramples on him, nibbles and licks him till he is unspeakable. He will leap at her nose, hang on to one of her long flapping ears, race up and down the slopes and round and round the green terraces, till they both collapse, and their tongues hang out of their laughing mouths, seeming to flicker with their panting breath, and become as long as the tongues of dragons on old manuscripts.

A matter to be noticed is that they never play in their walks with us across the moors—apparently that is against dog etiquette—but they will lie in wait for each other at the garden gate on the way home, and the fun and the pouncing and growling jocosities begin the instant they are inside.

Susan doesn't play with the other animals, though she exercises an irresistible fascination upon every dog that comes within a mile of her. She has a kind of Jane Eyre charm, we suppose, for it is not at first visible to the naked eye. She always does remind us of a small elderly German governess, for she is squat, undemonstrative, and eminently—oh, eminently!—respectable. She is a fox-terrier. She has, however, one terrible weakness. Her only joy is to have stones thrown for her. She is not, therefore, an agreeable person to take out for a walk, for she will get right under your feet, dig up a stone, point at it, and bark, "Throw, throw!" with a shrill persistence that goes through your head. And if you are weak-minded enough to yield, then

indeed you are undone. You will be kept throwing till you wish her in the Dog Star. She will scratch up stones till her paws are raw. This we think a great defect, but Loki sees no flaw in her.

CELLARERS YOUNG, CELLARERS OLD

When Susan's Butler first came to us, we had suffered acutely from butlers young and butlers old, butlers bashful and butlers bold—all of whom drank steadily. One nearly murdered his Buttons. Another, engaged by correspondence, vouched for by the agency, announcing his years as forty-five, arrived huge, decrepit, asthmatic; almost, if not quite, qualified for an old-age pension. The eight o'clock dinner he found it impossible to serve before nine; and then that ceremony became a perfect torture of dazed crawling, enlivened by stertorous breathing, for which asthma and chronic alcoholism disputed responsibility. When the Master of the House, who is very tender-hearted, intimated that he thought that, for the good of the newcomer's health, they had better part with the utmost celerity, the veteran assented resignedly with the husky gasp peculiar to him.

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"You know," said the Master of the House, mildly, "you are not quite what you represented yourself to be. You said you were forty-five!"

"I think," wheezed the Ancient Cellarer; "I think I said forty-seven, sir."

"Oh, forty-seven!" The Master of the House was a little satiric. "Even if you had said forty-seven, you are a great, great deal more than that!"

"Sir," said the delinquent, with a beery twinkle, "no butler can ever be more than forty-seven."

This, we understand, is a maxim of life in the profession.

A third—he was young and beautiful—had a fondness for a brew called gin-and-ginger, which had so cheering and immediate effect upon him that, having left the drawing-room after tea the very pink and perfection of propriety, he would announce dinner in an advanced condition of jocular elevation, and when the plates slid out of his hands he would survey them with a waggish smile, as one who would say: "Bless their little hearts, see how playful they are!" We became anxious to secure a servant who would have more than a few streaks of sobriety, and when Susan's owner came, we felt we had secured that pearl. He came in a great hurry ‹without Susan› because of the equally hurried departure of the beautiful hilarious one. After a week or so, we asked him if he would consider us as a permanency. He said he would have to consider us a little longer. After another ten days he informed us of Susan's existence, and announced his intention of going to fetch her. We breathed again.

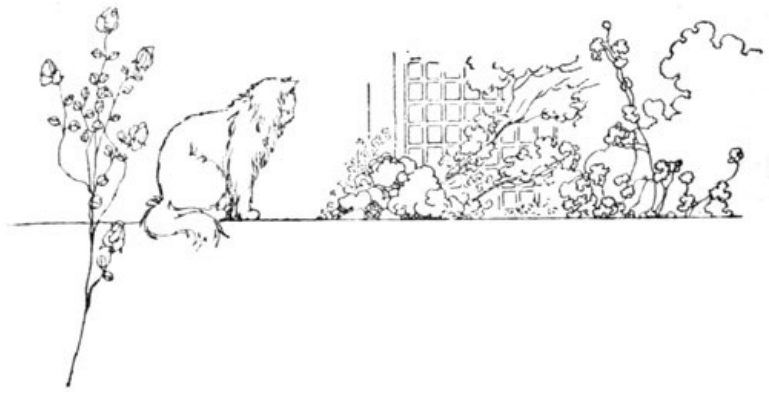
7

IN THE MATTER OF O'REILLY

Juvenal—that is his name—is very fond of animals. A little too fond, we thought, when he invited a military friend's dog to stay, during the owner's absence at manœuvres. This animal, by name O'Reilly, arrived in dilapidated, devil-

may-care, barrack-yard condition, which was a great shock to our Manchu prince. He also had pink bald elbows and knees. His hind legs were longer than his front ones, which gave him an ourang-outang gait. As became his Milesian name, he fought every one he met on his walks. Why he did not fight Loki, we do not know, for Loki loathed him and, we believe, suffered acutely in his poor little Chinese soul all during his stay. Yet unwelcome as he was, scald, ungainly, tiresome, there was something pathetic about the creature. He had a way of looking at one, deprecating and pleading at once; and he would display such rapture at the smallest token of toleration, that, despite our satisfaction at his departure, we had an ache in our hearts too. We have a shrewd suspicion that the corporal-major who owned him was a rough customer, and that poor O'Reilly's life was not that happy one which every "owned" dog's ought to be. A dog should not be treated as a dog.

As for cats, once they have passed the giddy days of youth, in which they are imps, sprites, goblins, pucks, furry, fairy, freakish things—anything but mere animals—one cannot help feeling a certain awe with regard to them. Despite the many cycles of years that have elapsed since their ancestors took habitation with us, they have remained true Easterns. From father to son, from mother to daughter they have handed down secret stores of occult knowledge which they keep jealously to themselves, a sacred inheritance of race. Those eyes that fix you with pupil contracted to a slit, and look through and beyond you into mysteries undreamt of by you: that lofty detachment, that ineradicable independence, that relentless indifference: have we not all felt by these signs and tokens how completely the cat puts us outside the sphere of his real thoughts and feelings? Priests or priestesses they seem to be, of some alien creed, soul satisfying, contemplative, with sudden savage rites. Have you ever watched a cat with regard turned inwards, meditating? Its body sways, but the spirit bubbles softly as if it were seething in content over a mystic fire. It does not want you to join it in its rapture, like your dog. It has no desire to admit you into its comradeship. It is as self-contained and self-absorbed as the highest grade Mahatma.



KITTY-WEE THE LOVELY

Kitty-Wee, the Lovely, is chief of our three cats. She is a Persian lady with a wonderful robe of silver grey, faintly blue, and orange eyes inherited from that most beautiful, most evil monster, Tittums the Bold-and-Bad, her father, who spent his adorable kittenhood and his stormy youth under our London roof, until his habit of lying in wait for the servants at odd corners and jumping at their elbows, made it imperative for us to part with him. He was then adopted by a gentle parson's daughter, in the freedom of whose country dwelling it was hoped that he might sow his wild oats and settle down into respectability. But alas! the day dawned, when lying on the rector's cassock in the dining-room, he was so incensed at the reverend gentleman's polite request to move, that he chased him round and round the room, ran him down in the hall and bit him. The churchman was not an unreasonable

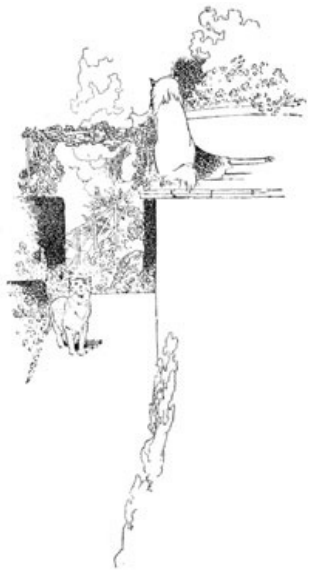
being and had made many allowances for the frailty of degenerate creation; but he drew the line at the violation of his reverend elbows. Tittums was once again, with many tears and heart-rendings, passed on. This time to a lady who keeps a cattery. We hear that he has become a model of every virtue, and that she only wears a fencing mask and boxing gloves when she combs him, because on the day when she left them off, Tittums, in a fit of absence of mind, bit her through the thumb. Anyone who takes a cat paper can hear more of this most distinguished beast, under the name of “Saracinesca.”

Kitty-Wee is supposed to have inherited her father’s superlative looks—only he was “smoke”—and her mother’s angelic disposition. If occasionally a spark of the paternal temper flashes out, the gardener’s wife ‹with whom she prefers to dwell› says “Kitty is a bit nervous to-day.”

KITTY-WEE’S MESALLIANCES

It was after Kitty-Wee’s first *mésalliance* that she took up her abode with the worthy pair in the “little cot,” as Mrs. Adam calls it, at the bottom of the garden. Persian princesses, from the time of “A Thousand and One Nights” onwards, are proverbially capricious. But what perverse freak of youthful fancy induced our delicate silver-pawed highborn damsel to fix her young affections upon Mr. Hopkinson was and is, a painful mystery.

Mr. Hopkinson, a very hooligan among cats, so degenerate indeed as to have lost all his eastern characteristics, and to have assumed a positively “Arry-like, bank-’oliday, disreputable, Hampstead-Heath kind of vulgarity,” was a lean, mangy creature with a denuded tail. He had a black spot over one eye; the other eye was conspicuous by its absence. We could hear his raucous voice uplifted in serenade, suggestive of accordeons, night after night, and his guttural whisper of “Me ’Oighness” behind the bushes when we went on our walks. Every effort was made to discourage the preposterous suitor. But, alas! Kitty smiled. The infatuated Princess escaped the vigilance of her distracted family. Perhaps it is best to draw a veil over the consequences of this rash alliance. Kitty indeed did her best to obliterate them, refusing to do anything but sit heavily on three black and white kittens with ropy tails. She only purred again the day the last one died; “Oh! she was pleased, Mam,” said the gardener’s wife; “quite took up again, she did.”



Kitty-Wee’s next matrimonial venture, though likewise, we grieve to say, morganatic, was very much more successful. In fact it is to it that we owe—Bunny! The name, the lineage, the very personality of Bunny’s father is wrapt in mystery; but judging by the splendour of Bunny’s black fur, it is to be conjectured that Kitty-Wee’s choice was of a dark complexion, and if not royal, at any rate of noble blood.

Two brave brothers Bunny had, but he is the sole survivor; all the more cherished. And really, even if he lacks his mother’s supreme distinction, we cannot but feel proud of him. Waggish, gentle, humorous creature that he is, he will hang round the neck of Adam, the gardener, like a boa, for a whole morning together; or stalk the dogs from tree to tree, pounce on them at unexpected moments to deliver a swinging friendly slap on Susan’s fat back, or to waltz with Arabella, or to inveigle Loki, with odd freakish sidelong gambols, into a mysterious game of his own, which, as our little Chinaman has something of the cat in him, he seems to understand.

We are very glad that Adam had Bunny to console him, for Kitty-Wee's offspring has an odd resemblance in size and appearance to Cæsar, the late Garden Cat, much beloved, who alas! went the way of all fur ‹with a melancholy little assistance from the chemist› shortly before Bunny's appearance in this plane.

"Oh, Miss," said Mrs. Adam, on the Sunday that followed that Socratic tragedy, "last night was the most dreadful night we ever spent! It was the first time for thirteen years we hadn't had a cat in the house! Oh! Miss, I thought Daddy would have broken his heart. He just sat with his head on his hand, and sighed. Really Miss Marie, I don't know when we've felt so bad." 13

It will be seen that Mr. and Mrs. Adam have the right feeling towards "little sister cat and little brother dog," as St. Francis of Assisi would have called them. This suits us very well, and oddly enough, Villino Loki is a kind of paradise for things of fur and feather. Cat and dog live in a strange harmony. To see Loki kiss Bunny, or Bunny clasp Arabella round the neck, is as pleasing a sight as you could imagine. And if Kitty-Wee occasionally boxes Loki with a kind of delicate compactness, it is with her claws in. As for Juvenal, the butler, whose pantry is full of singing birds, no sense of etiquette will restrain him from public blandishments when Loki is on the scene. George, the footman, can be heard addressing him—Loki—in back passages, as "My loved one!" And Tom, the old long-haired English cat, rules the kitchen.

THE VICISSITUDES OF TOM

Tom has reached the patriarchal age of eighteen years, and is cherished by the master of the Villino. He has had many vicissitudes. He was stung by an adder during our very first summer, years ago, on these moors, and lay for a day in a coma with one paw swollen the size of a child's arm, to be saved by doses of brandy and milk. A few years later he was caught in a trap. How he got free no one knows, but we found him crawling, piteously complaining, with a shattered leg. With the help of the cook, who followed the tradition of the establishment and was Tom's slave, the leg was set with strips of firewood, the bone being very successfully mended. It so happened that the Master of the House had, about the same time, snapped his *tendo-plantaris* at tennis; and it was a sight to see them both when they stumped down the wooden passages—the master dot-and-go-one on his crutches, Thomas following in his splints, dot-and-go-three. 14

Tom

The amateur surgery, however, was not completely successful. Though Thomas' bone knit, the poor mangled flesh remained unhealed, and at last the cook conveyed her darling in a basket to the most celebrated London animal doctor. Thereafter ensued a time of horrible suspense. Telegrams went briskly backwards and forwards. Dr. Jewell "doubted if he could save the limb." Tom's adoring family could not contemplate

the tragedy therein implied. “Better euthanasia!” we wired. “Will do my best for little cat,” the sympathetic Æsculapius of God’s humble creatures replied. Hope and devotion triumphed. Tommy returned to us with three legs in large fur trousers, the fourth as close as a mouse. The fur thereon has never grown to full length again. We fear it will never grow now.

Dear old Tom is toothless, and he is getting a little bald on the top of his head; but he is a beautiful creature still, and a dandy. His four spats are always of an almost startling snowiness; his shirt-front ditto. He is not very fond of any of the other animals, and was so revolted by Kitty-Wee’s *mésalliance* that she could not show her face in the kitchen without his instantly using as severe language as ever John Knox to Queen Mary. “Hussy!” was the mildest of his terms.

THE DUTCH GARDEN

II

Where we live, high on the southern moorlands of Surrey, the desolation of winter never seems to reach us; unless, indeed, upon certain days of streaming rains, or weeping mists that rush rapid and ghost-like up the valley, and blot out the world from view. But those days would be dreary anywhere and in any season.

Our funny little house, more like an Italian "Villino," perhaps, than anything English, stands high, midway between the rolling shoulders of moor and the green-wooded dip of the valley. And the moor has always colour in it. There are some sunset days when it seems not so much to reflect as to give out rose and purple and carmine. And now in January it is a wonderful copper-brown, with the tawny of dying Bracken and the yellow of young Gorse. And opposite to us a belt of birchwood is purple against solemn green of pine. And the purple and solemn green run right down together to the bright verdure of fields and dells; then up again to moorland, where the fir trees march up once more against the sky.

There are Larches in these woods, and Oaks, so that the spring tints are almost as wonderful as the autumn. When the Furze and Broom are all guinea-gold on the moor, the young Bracken begins to creep in green patches that are pure joy. Later on the Bell-heather breaks into a deep rose which, with the sun on it, holds such a glory of colour that you could scarce find its match in an old Cathedral window. And when this splendour begins to turn to russet, then comes the tender silvery amethyst of the Ling, and spreads a mantle all over those great shoulders of wild land that is of the exact hue most beautiful to contrast with the full summer woods and the blue of an August sky; a combination so matchless for colour-loving eyes that it seems as if one's soul were not big enough to hold the complete impression. And when our Delphiniums rear themselves against this background, we feel, looking on it all, as if we could sing for the mere rapture of it; or—having no voice—roll in the grass like Loki or like Bunny.

17

A LITTLE PLACE OF ONE'S OWN

For a long time we—Loki's Grandfather and Grandmother—had said to each other that we must have a week-end cottage. We were so tired of hiring other people's houses, summer after summer, and of the labour ‹not unattended by some pleasurable excitement on Loki's Grandmother's part› of pulling their furniture about, and hiding away all the family portraits and the choicest works of art, to make the alien spaces tolerable to one's own individuality. So tired, too, of the boredom and worry of having to restore everything to its pristine ugliness and hang up the enlarged photographs and the dreadful oil paintings on the walls once more—a tedious task, albeit enlivened on one occasion by the thrilling discovery that, having consigned these treasures to an oak chest in the hall, most of them had grown fur; and that on another the oil painting of your detested landlady, in middle Victorian chignon and the hump of the period, has received a scratch on the nose which no copious application of linseed oil will disguise. We always detest our landlady ... though not as much as we loathe the tenants who may happen to hire a house of ours.

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At the end of each summer, therefore, we would make elaborate calculations to prove what a great economy it would be to have a little place of our own. Finally these plans and desires crystallized into action. When Loki's Grandfather returned from a round of inspection to the hotel where we were staying in the district

we fancied, and told Loki's Grandmother that he had visited a funny little house with a terrace upon which he "saw her"—in his own phraseology—she was extremely sceptical. And when we drove down the hill to view his discovery, and were literally dropped from the side road through a perfunctory gate into the steepest little courtyard it is possible to imagine, and she beheld green stains on the rough-cast wall of the white small house, her scepticism increased to scoffing point. She was blind to the charms of the pretty pillared porch. The narrowness of the entrance passage filled her with disdain. Though she grudgingly admitted a possibility in the drawing-room, it was not until we emerged upon the terrace that her preventions vanished. —That rise and fall of moorland in such startling proximity, and the way in which the house and its terraces seemed to cling to the hillside and be perched in space between the giant curves and the dip of the valley beyond, fairly took her breath away. An artist friend described the first impression of the view in these words: "It is so sudden!" For a long time, even after the queer, fascinating spot had become our own, this wonder of "suddenness" always seized us.

It still seems incomprehensible to us that anyone could have desired to dispossess himself of so attractive a place—an Italian "Villino" on the Surrey Highlands is not to be found every day.

But, after all, it only became a Villino after our ownership. It was just a small white house on the hillside before that. Heather and Gorse, Bramble and Bracken pressed hard upon the small area of the property which was at all cultivated, between densely growing clumps of pine and holly.

THE FIRST TRANSFORMATIONS

The courtyard is no longer dank: it is widened, levelled, and walled in against its high fir-grown strip of bank. It is guarded by bright green wooden gates, and three sentinel Cypresses that begin to mark the Italian note.

As for the lower reach—the Reserve Garden now—which in former days was a dumping-ground for horrors of broken glass, potsherds and tin cans ‹a dreary patch of weeds and couch grass withal›, it is unrecognizable. Especially this year, when, to the herbaceous border, to the espaliered apple-trees, and to the neat little turfed walks, we have added a Rose-Garden between screens of rustic woodwork which are to blaze in the full luxuriance of the adorable Wichuriana tribe.

Where the jungle waxed thickest, fair paths have been cleared. An avenue bordered by a double row of tall slender Pines runs from top to bottom of the hill, with a view of our neighbour's buttercup field on the one hand, and of our own Bluebell and May-tree glade on the other. It requires a positive effort of imagination to recall that this was a literally impenetrable thicket when we first came.

A VILLINO ON SURREY HILLS

Nor is the house less altered. As it was hinted before, a small white Surrey house has, by some singular, scarcely intentional process, become enchanted into an Italian Villino. Of course, some structural alterations were necessary.

On entering the red-tiled hall ‹once the pantry!›, at the end of which the glass door giving on the terrace frames Verrochio's little naked boy, struggling with his big fish, flanked on each side by Cypresses, you might easily fancy yourself at Fiesole or Bello Sguardo, but for the unmistakable northern stamp of the moorland beyond. Passing through the other glass doors into the inner hall, the first object to meet the eye is the big della Robbia over the gracious figure of the

Madonna kneeling against a blue sky with dear little green clouds upon it. Through the open dining-room door you have a vision, all golden orange, of different deep shades. The Scotch builder we employed for the construction of the two new wings opined that “the scheme was verra’ daring.” Personally, every time we go in, it warms the cockles of our hearts. We had the golden-hued carpet especially dyed. We chose the tangerine distemper for the walls. We had, indeed, considerable difficulty in obtaining the higher note for the curtains. Antique chairs, with seats and backs of brown leather tooled like old bindings, we brought from Rome; from whence also came the yellow marble sideboard table on its gilt-carved legs, above which a bronzed cast of Gian di Bologna’s Mercury springs out from that orange wall on a flamboyant gilt bracket, with a grace we have never seen that adorable conception display anywhere else. We found a handsome, but anæmic, oak fitment in this room, filling the whole right wall with cupboards, panelled overmantel, and bookshelves. It is no longer anæmic, but polished by our industry to a pleasing depth of amber gloss.

THE DORATORE’S ANTIQUES

So Italy walked into the little white Surrey house almost as soon as the doors were open to us. But it is in the drawing-room that she has mostly established her self. It is so filled with dear Roman things that we can think ourselves back again in that haunt of all joy, when we cross its threshold. It is full of associations of delightful days, of quaint beings. There is the rococo *paravent*, gilt and carved in most delicate extravagance, which we bought of the *doratore* in the Piazza Nicosia. That fire-screen—a real Bernini, once the frame of an altar-piece—now holds in its strong bold oval a pane of glass where perhaps some wan Madonna shewed her seven-pierced heart. The *doratore* picked up these things in old villas and disused churches. His booth was indeed a sight to see.—Having recently been on a visit to Rome, Loki’s “great-aunt” was naturally charged with many commissions in that quarter. Armed with a letter of directions from the Italian scholar of the family, she and a Lancashire maid wandered down there one misty afternoon in November, at an hour when all the crazy little houses of the ancient Piazza seem to fold up and huddle together in the purple Roman dusk.

The *doratore's* wares winked through the dimness; and having duly knocked their heads against wreaths of dangling frames in his doorway, the pilgrims proceeded to steer a perilous path among the heaps of gilded *débris* within.

The *doratore*, made visible only by his paper cap, was seated in a nest of angels, tinkering at a fat cherub and whistling gaily. Hearing steps he poked his head through the large oval of an empty mirror, and stared unconcernedly at the visitors, whose advance was punctuated by cataclysms of falling frames, church candlesticks, and other "*oggetti religiosi*."

At the fifth or sixth tumble, he rolled away from his angels with unimpaired cheerfulness, and apologized.

"*Scusi, scusi!*" Smilingly he picked up a broken wing and a bit of acanthus leaf. "*Scusi!*" again. "Aha! a letter!"

Here the fat laugh merged into a bellow which made the walls ring, and brought a dirty little urchin tumbling down a ladder from some loft overhead. The urchin diving under a heap of prostrate apostles, produced a stick with an iron spike, which he held respectfully under his patron's chin. The doratore stuck a candle on the spike, lit it, and with the flame in fearful proximity to his bearded face, proceeded to open the letter.

"Aha! from the noble family at Villino Loki!" Here he took off his cap with a flourish and did not replace it. "The *signor Inglese*, is he well?—*Mi piace.* And the *gentilissima signorina* who does me the honour to write?—*Mi piace, mi piace.* And Mama?—Better?—*Bonissimo!* Please the good God to bring her again to Rome. But not this month," waving a warning finger before his nose. "In April. In the *primavera*, Rome is as salubrious as she is beautiful. Now what does Mama want? Brackets? Angels?—*Ecco.*"

He pointed to a pair of fantastic creatures that jutted out like gargoyles under the ceiling. "What? Not pretty? *Ma! Scusi!* they are *antichi bellissimi*—they come from a castle in the Abruzzi; there is not their match in Rome." Snapping the candle from the imp, on whose locks it was unheededly guttering, he waved it round his own head, waking up unexpected companies of saints on the walls and making pools of light and darkness among the golden hillocks.

"They are exactly the noble family's taste," said the *doratore*, replacing his cap with an air of finality. "She said *cinquanta lire*—she shall have them for *quaranta*!"

Recognizing that this incident was closed, Loki's aunt thought she would do a deal on her own account, and picking up a little antique frame, fell back on the only Italian word she knew:

"*Quanto?*"

The *doratore* unexpectedly priced the frame at twenty-five lire, and cheap at that, and all of a sudden the little shop was filled with confusion. The would-be purchaser wished to take away her prize, the *doratore*, misunderstanding, vociferated that nothing would be broken on the sea-journey; the Lancashire maid struck in with English addresses for the other wares; finally, the candle-bearer was sent flying round the corner to fetch a friend who, by the grace of God, had the gift of tongues.

Breathless, he returned, with a bundle of rags hobbling along on a crutch, by his side.

"*Benissimo!*" exclaimed the *doratore*, with a sigh of relief. "This gentleman, *signora*, is a friend of all the artists in Rome! He knows English, French, German—everything!"

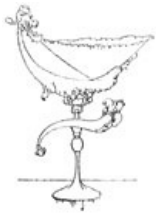
He then performed the ceremonious rites of introduction! "Signor Guiseppi Renzo, a person of great worth and learning.—The noble lady belonging to the family of my cherished patrons, i Castelli."

The bundle of rags swept off its battered hat with a flourish, disclosing a wall-eye and a three-weeks-old beard, and remarked, in Italian, that the weather was beautiful for the

time of the year.

"But not so beautiful as in spring," said the *doratore* encouragingly. Upon which Loki's aunt bowed too, and smiled and murmured, "Oh! *si*, *si*—I mean no." And then feeling dreadfully uncouth and ill-mannered in presence of so much courtesy, picked up her frame again and looked helpless. Instantly the interpreter warmed to his office. In fluent if curious English, he ascertained her wishes, and then communicated them with much gesticulation to the *doratore*, who slapped a fat forehead, exclaiming in a contrite manner, "*Va bene, va bene!*" Finally, the imp was dispatched on a last errand in search of a little open carriage, and having carefully wrapped the frame in a copy of the "*Corriere*" produced from his own pocket, the bundle of rags hobbled out into the Piazza, where he and the *doratore* stood bareheaded to wish the ladies a safe journey to England, and a speedy return to Rome.

MORE BRIC-A-BRAC



It is little wonder that the *doratore* should cherish us. The drawing-room of the Villino on the Surrey hill is chiefly furnished out of his store. Therefrom come the Venetian chairs, the huge *Goldoni* armchair, the two cabinets of rusty gold. The hanging cabinet is full of Venetian glass, picked up—of all places—at that roaring cheap emporium, Finocchi's, in the hideous modern corso fitly dedicated to *Vittorio Emanuele*. ‹To think these bubbles of ethereal loveliness, these liquid curves, these foam-frail phantasies, should have been discovered, unshattered, in such a spot!› There from the walls a wistful *Giovannino*, with pious, sentimental, guileless head inclined, looks down from his golden background, a true bit of early Siennese simplicity and faith. He came to us from the talons of a voluble Jew in the *Via due Macelli*, from which unclean grasp were likewise rescued those meek companions, "St. Bernardino of Siena" and "St. Antoninus," on the opposite wall. St. Bernardino's face is quite out of drawing, but, nevertheless, rarely has any presentment been more impregnated with holy benignity. The gentle pair hang just above a statue of Polyhymnia.... Oh! that "*Manifattura di Signa*," in the dark purlieus of the Via Babuino! It is a blessing that we only discovered it the last week of our four months' stay in Rome, and that our resources were then at a low ebb; else, indeed, the exiguous limits of our new country home never would have held our purchases. Another "Madonna" between the rose-coloured curtains in the narrow window.

Yes, indeed, there are a great many "Madonnas" about the place. There is an undeniably papistical atmosphere.—An old gentleman, of developed intellectuality, who stumbled in upon us shortly after our establishment, could not conceal the horrible impression it made upon him. His thoughts would have been easy to read even if the hurry of his adieux had not so plainly proclaimed his disgust. Seeing his eyes fixed upon the majolica statuette in question, we ‹perhaps with a little malice› informed him that it was known as the "*Madonna del Bacio*." It was then he rose, not quite swallowing down his "Faugh!"

AN OLD-TIME NOTE

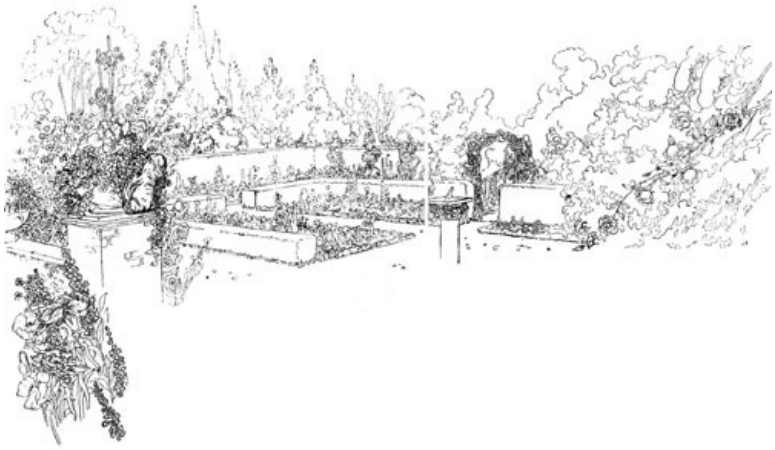
"You had not expected to find such superstition abroad in an enlightened age," we murmured politely. We cling to these old-world symbols—some of us by conviction, others for mere love of the beautiful past.—A little mistake? The wrong house, say you? How could we have been so stupid as not to guess!—Of course, you wanted the bungalow at the other end of the village. Yes, Mrs. Ludwigsohn is everything that you can desire to meet. Up-to-date cap-a-pie. Socialism, rationalism, suffragism. You can begin on the suffrage: she will saw the air with her right hand in a convincing platform manner. A delightful, capable woman! She feeds her infants scientifically on proteids. And there are Röntgen pictures—anatomical, you know—in the hall, that you will find more

inspiring than della Robbia. Oh, you will get on with her splendidly. We know her ... slightly. Indeed, we blush when we think of our one and only meeting: it was so inharmonious on our part. She began to argue—and instantly had us in a cleft stick: “Soul?” she exclaimed, fiercely interrupting an incautious remark. “Soul? there is no such thing. I deny it.—Prove,” she cried, “prove I have a soul!”

Poor lady, how could we? No—the Villino is certainly no place for the higher critic; for the lady of ’isms. We are not rationalistic in our tastes; we love old and simple things; prefer to take much for granted in life and enjoy the good peace that is vouchsafed.

SIX GARDENING VIRTUES

When we first began to own a garden we could not bring ourselves to wait in patience for developments. We expected our beds to bloom as by magic. We vehemently ordered pot-plants because no seedlings could be expected to “do anything” in June; and the disproportion between our bills and the result filled us with dismay. But a garden is at once the most delightful and cunning of teachers. How kindly are the virtues it inculcates! —Patience, faith, hope, tenderness, gratitude, resignation, things in themselves as fragrant and beautiful as the flowers, or like the herbs, a little repellent of aspect, but sweet in their bruised savour.



Now we have even been taught to take pleasure and comfort from the vision of the beds in their winter preparation, where with the believer’s eye, we anticipate the fulfilment of the spring. In the little Dutch Garden under the new wing, the two long beds between the clipped Bilberry hedges are full of compact cushions of Forget-me-not. Through these the green noses of the china-blue Hyacinths, that are to make lakes of colour and scent at the end of March, are beginning to push upwards.

The winter has been very mild.—Another garden lesson: too much spoiling in infancy is bound to produce forwardness in the young, and the inevitable result of withering snubs!

When the Hyacinths have faded, the Forget-me-nots will have spread a sheet of tender beauty over the unsightliness. ‹Did we mention that a garden teaches charity?› And between this flying scud of blue foam the Darwin Tulips will have already reared bold green snake heads which will gradually become invaded by tints of mauve, rose, dark purple, until the day when their glorious chalices will open, as if cut out of living jewels, translucent to the light.

DUTCH BULBS AND ROSES

The Dutch Garden is bounded by a clipped yew hedge on two sides, divided by a rustic archway where Pink Dorothy rambles in June and onwards. Against this hedge there are two long beds lying to the south, filled with crimson and red roses: in spring edged with Darwins and Arabis, before Mme. Normand Levavasseur spreads her disappointing maroon clusters. On the north side the brick wall of the terrace, divided in its turn opposite the archway by brick steps, is flanked by Darwin tulip beds. The beds under the side of the house to the west have also Darwins with a carpet of Forget-me-nots and a fringe of Arabis. The space that runs back to the outer wall under the study windows is planted with Gloire de Versailles, Pyrus Japonica and the ubiquitous Tulips and Forget-me-nots.

There is one thing we have succeeded in impressing on the patient and kindly Adam, and that is that we “cannot bear bald spaces.” Our bulbs lie as close as they can without injuring each other. Our Wallflowers, even now, in January,

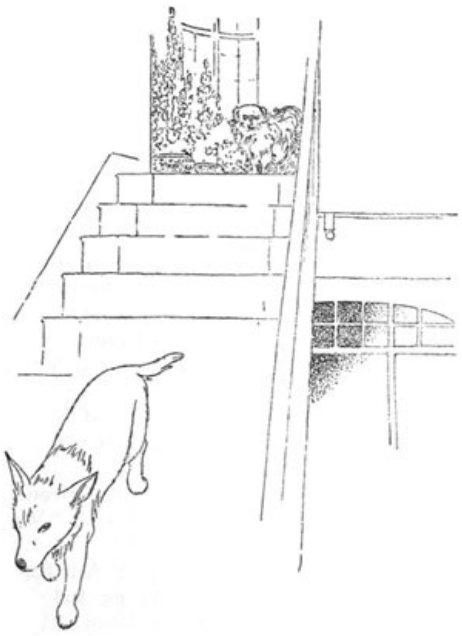
jostle!

In the bed that runs right along the bricked upper terrace, there lie, awaiting the call of the different months ‹please add docility and punctuality to the moral list›, behind a deep border of Mrs. Sinkins, a double row of Crocuses, a row of Thomas More Tulips, a little hedge of white and red “Polyantha” Roses, and groups of “Candidum” Lilies. At intervals, on the top of the terrace wall, are large Compton vases which will foam with Forget-me-Nots, and thrust clusters of Hyacinths up against the Moor by and by. Just now they carry little yellow torches of Retinospora Aurea, which Adam said, when he first planted them, looked, he thought, “very lonely,” but which, each rising from a field of green moss, stand out, we think, with a classic dignity against the sombre magnificence of those rolling winter hills.

And did we say that one could ever in any circumstances wish Susan into the dogstar? Alas! poor dear little Susan, she reposes in a raw, ostentatious grave in the Oak Tree Glade with six bulb spikes at the top of the mound. We should like to put a granite stone there with the words: “Here lies Susan, a good dog.” All that was possible was done to save her, and she was the most pathetic, gentle, patient creature; at the very end, seeking blindly with one small paw for her master.

FORBIDDEN TERRITORY

Poor Juvenal was so disconsolate that we did not know what to do. We hit, however, on the happy thought of purchasing a small white Highland Terrier puppy from a litter on sale in the neighbourhood. Bettine ‹thus she has been christened with a fine disregard of local colour› arrived, a dirty, cringing, abject little wretch; but the atmosphere of Villino Loki has wrought so great a change that she is now a perfect imp of mischief and general cheekiness. The Master of the House says she is like a Paris gamin, and that Gavroche is the only name that befits her. The days of cringing are certainly over. Her long ears cocked, her wide mouth derisively open, she defies authority, with attitudes and expressions that can only be transcribed by such remarks as “Pip, Pip,” or the gesture which the French know as *Pied-de-nez*.



The other dogs at first protested fiercely against this substitute for their beloved Susan even Arabella curling a ferocious lip, and striking out with her fringed paw. But now they have accepted the new comrade with all the generosity of their fine characters. Loki himself makes no objection, except when she ventures upon territory which he regards as peculiarly his own; such as the grand-maternal bedroom.

The month that has taken away the harmless humble life of Juvenal’s fox-terrier, has also brought the news of England’s loss in one of her most gallant sons. He was a friend of the household, and Loki, I am sure, does not forget—for a long memory is one of the Pekinese characteristics—how the South Pole hero played hide-and-seek with him in his puppyhood for a whole hour, one summer’s day, like a very child himself. The family of Villino Loki have memories, too, of that friendship which they valued so highly; and they will always carry the vivid picture of the strong brown face, with the blue eyes that were at once as guileless as a child’s and full of a far-away vision, as if they never ceased to contemplate their high and distant goal. The world is crowded with bumptious people who do nothing at all that is useful, if they do not do harm. Here was a man who had already accomplished mighty achievement and was set on mightier still, and there never was anyone so modest, so anxious to push others forward

and keep himself in the background. He was asked by one of us to write a line in an autograph book, and he set down characteristically a tribute to another:

> “The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
> Grapple them to thy soul with hooks of steel....”

We laughed ‹after that futile fashion that becomes a kind of habit nowadays› and said, “We always think that sounds so uncomfortable!”

He raised those blue eyes, half humorously, half deprecatingly. “You make me feel ashamed of being incorrigibly romantic.”

It was we who felt ashamed.

“We are sure,” we answered, “you have a good friend somewhere.”

“Yes,” he said, “the best ever a man had.” 36

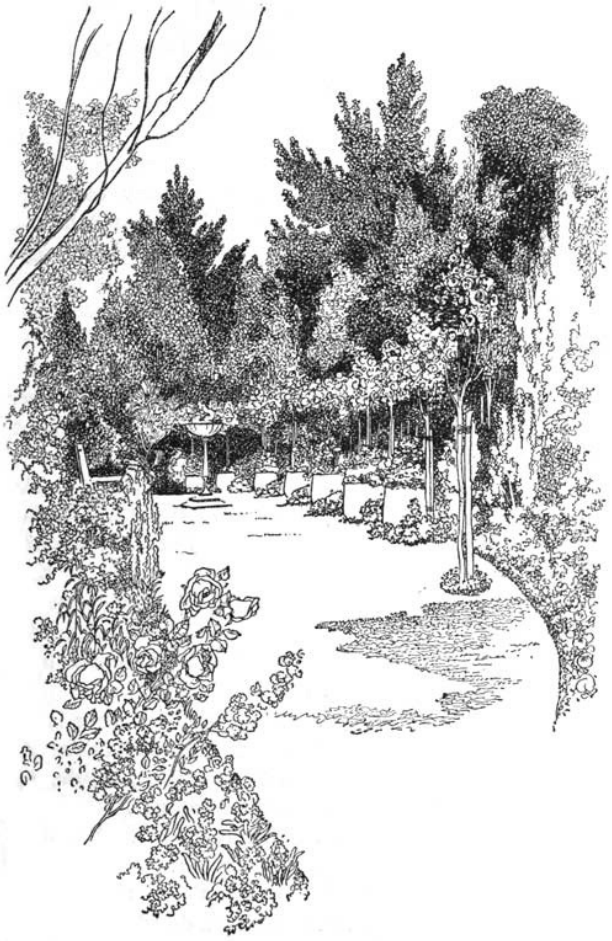
We are glad to think that friendship was with him all through and at the end. In one of the last letters ever received from the doomed Antarctic Expedition the tribute is paid again: “No words of mine,” writes he, “can describe what he is.”

TOM’S GRAND MANNERS

The birds have eaten every single bud on our baby almond trees—the first year that they have had any flower buds at all. Ungrateful little wretches! the Master of the Villino sees personally to the replenishing of the numerous bird-baths and drinking-pans; and Juvenal provides them with cocoa-nuts filled with lard and baskets full of crumbs—aided by Gold-Else, the cook, who loves little creatures in fur and feather as much as the rest of the household. Tom, the old cat, is very happy under this lady’s kind rule, and, to show his appreciation, accompanies her in stately fashion every night up the kitchen stairs to her bedroom door. The act of courtesy accomplished, she as solemnly reconducts him downstairs again to spread his couch for him—a sheet of brown paper, by his request.

The Hyacinths are breaking out of their green hoods, shaking blue bells; but our Scillas seem to be going to disappoint us. This sandy soil on our Surrey heights is not at all appreciated by bulbs. Snowdrops will have nothing to say to us, unless in a prepared bed. Narcissus Poeticus disappeared altogether after one year’s blooming. We are trying to naturalize Bluebells in a glade which we have cleared—and in which this year has been planted an avenue of pink May trees, to end at the bottom of the dell in a group of white Azaleas—but we are not at all sure that we shall succeed. However, we have our compensations: Azaleas thrive, and so do Rhododendrons. We are year by year adding more of the former to the wild slopes. 37

Below the terrace, yclept the “Hemicycle,” a path bordered with Azalea Mollis was a perfect glory last May, although it had only been planted the preceding autumn. The “Hemicycle” was a little fairy glade of Crocus a week ago, the second in February; and we have still hope of the Scillas which surround our bereft almond trees. A rough wall rises from it to the Upper Terrace, over which Dorothy Rambler will fling its lovely blooms in immense trails by and by; and its stones themselves hold a never-ending succession of delight in the shape of Arabis, Aubretia, Cerastium, Thrift, and the like. Yellow roses climb up to meet the Dorothy, and the dear little pink China Rose grows in bushes all along the front between the Lavender plants which we are trying to acclimatise, but which, year after year, are blighted by the frost before they have had time to grow strong.



Satisfactory as our wall-garden is, there is a wall-garden at a cottage in a neighbouring village which never fails to fill us with envy every time we see it. It belongs to two maiden ladies, whom we have christened Tweedle-Ann and Tweedle-Liza. They are so extraordinarily like each other that even they themselves ‹we have heard› hardly know which is which. They have the same rotundity of figure, the same uncertain obliquity in one eye, the same cheerful rosy visage, the same sleek bands of grey hair.

When the Master of the House was a young man, an Irish servant was heard to observe to him, gazing rapturously at him as he walked away from her vision, all unconsciously, in his shooting-garb: “And indeed he’s a lovely gentleman. Them jars of legs!” ‹As a matter of fact, Loki’s Grandfather has very nice legs.› But Tweedle-Ann and Tweedle-Liza, in short, sensible grey tweed skirts, bending their portly forms over their wall garden, have more than often presented to the passer-by a vision....

The Japanese say that reticence is the very soul of art. Our aspirations are always towards the artistic, but there is something touching in four ... exactly similar ... side by side...!

A TERRIFYING GOOD WISH

To digress once more: Loki’s Grandfather is no doubt a man of fine proportions; though he is not at all plump, he has all the athlete’s dread of becoming so. Once when we were stranded at a small wayside station in Ireland, without even a bench to sit upon, he began to while away the time by testing his weight on the automatic machine. The indicating needle travelled considerably further than he expected! He was standing, transfixed, staring at the pointing finger, when a very old woman with a shawl over her head, holding a very small boy by the hand, suddenly broke into loud paeans beside him:

“God bless your honour!—Isn’t it the grand gentleman you are! Glory be to God, may you grow larger, and larger, and larger!”

“For heaven’s sake,” cried Loki’s Grandfather, wheeling round in horror, “don’t say such a thing!”

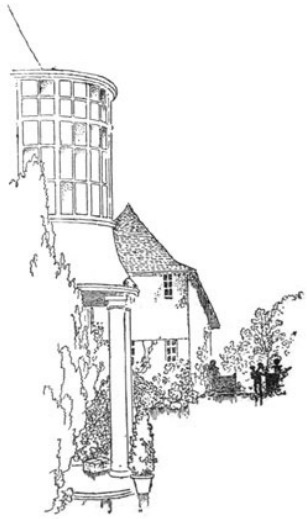
“And indeed I do, yer honour.—Look at him now,” she went on, shaking the little creature she held by the hand, “you’ll never see a finer gentleman. Don’t you wish you had a Dada like that?”

Then she burst out again and continued to wish him increase in Sybilline tones. They were both so extraordinarily serious, she in her benisons, he in his terror of the curse, that as Loki’s Grandmother sat on her trunk she was weak with laughter.

A LOCAL POET

The Master of the Villino had a charming little experience last spring. Some time before, in the winter, he fell into conversation with an old sweep, who was tramping up the hill, the evidence of his life-work thick upon him. They discoursed of many things, for the sweep had a wide range of interests. They spoke of the moorland place as it was in bygone days; and of the learned Professor whose eulogies first put it into fashion; of the lectures on Science delivered by this latter; and of the way in which the spring first shows itself in the lower copses while it is still winter on our heights. The sweep knew a dell where the primroses were always a month in advance of any other spot. He had a soul for primroses, unlike Wordsworth’s horrible Peter—which reminds me of the delicious remark made to Loki’s young mistress by an old pensioner in Chelsea Gardens. He led her

to the plot he cultivated for himself, with all the childish eagerness of the aged, and pointed to a single yellow crocus, blown this way and that by the wind, for it was a shrewish day. “Look at it, Missie!” he cried. “It’s as playful as a kitten.”



We do not know at what hour in the bleak late February morning the little box was left in the porch. It was found there by the earliest maid, and brought to the Master of the House with his letters in due course; a box that obviously had lately contained carbolic soap. Inside in a nest of moss, carefully covered with red bramble leaves, was a bunch of primroses tied with red wool, and the following “verses”:

“Beneath the moss and the mast,
Though the weather has been wet and cold,
I manage to raise my head
Down in the Sussex wold.”

Thus it began, speaking in the name of the Primrose, to enter, rapidly and boldly into the sweep’s personality:

“To-day I passed by the way,
So I stayed and picked you a few,
To show I do not forget
The chat I had with you.”

Here the muse got a little tired; but it ended up with unimpaired cheerfulness:

“I hope you are hale and well
And now I must say Addue,
Yours respectfully,
STAR.”

Over the page there was a charming P.S.:

“Perhaps you have younger fingers
The flowers to unfold,
Mine are rather clumsy
Being big and old.

Pleasant Hours,
Live long.”

It is the kind of little incident that seems to happen at Villino Loki, where animals and human beings are queer and unexpected, and live together in simplicity and cheerfulness.

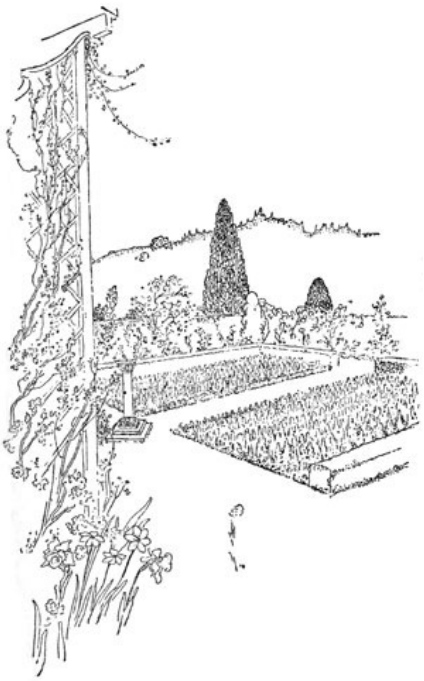
Travelling along the pleasant path of life, on the reverse side of the hill, the downward course ‹how graphic is the French of it for the later and "smaller half" of our allotted span: *sur le retour*›, there is a tendency to dwell more upon memories and proportionately less on ambitions. The prospect now ahead, placid and mellowed as it may be, naturally dwindles to narrower margins. Its interest is more of the immediate order; deals mostly with hopes and doings of the coming season. And, the circle of recollection widening, things distant in the past appeal with proportionate insistency to the mind's eye.

"DREAMING BACKWARDS"

I believe this is the case with all thinking creatures ‹says Loki's Grandpa —who has fallen into a reminiscent mood›. With one whose lazy and musing propensities, whose delight in day-dreams has proved his paramount weakness, the habit of "dreaming backwards" and hunting for old impressions has become as haunting, in these years of the sixth decade, as was, in salad days, the "dreaming forward" and the straining for a sight of things still below the horizon.

For instance: in a life which has always been one of constant book-companionship, the printed passages which most delight me are those which, having been first read in another age and re-discovered in this one, bring back a pulse of some long forgotten impression. The impression may be one that sober and critical memory does not record as having been so particularly enthralling at the time—yet it now comes back with a subtle fragrance all its own.

The long darkness of winter provides the richest reading hours. And if the page-turning is by the side of a wood fire— as happens on this, the coldest day of the year—if it is in a deep armchair with the lamp throwing its quiet rays over one's shoulder, why, it is apt to become interspersed with long spells of wide-eyed dreaming. The fire burns with that special clearness, that kind of conscious eagerness which one observes inside the hearth upon a keen frosty night. In the town a frosty night is but a cold night. But here, on our country hill-side, when winter, albeit officially over, is in reality still with us, a frosty night inevitably turns our thoughts to the threatened hopes of the garden.



Now, as one who knows practically nought of the gardener's "Arte and Mysterie," my interest in the matter is of the irresponsible kind. I look forward, of course, and keenly, to the satisfying display, first of our sappy, turgid fragrant Hyacinth beds in the Dutch Garden ‹somehow, the Dutch Garden seems to belong more particularly to my own side of the Villino—to be a precinct of my study in fact› than to the proud-pied array of the subsequent Tulips, nodding in the breeze over their bed of close clustering Forget-me-Nots. This is the annual treat provided in the spring—for Grandpa's especial behoof at Villino Loki—by the industrious care of the knowledgeable ladies. Nevertheless, as I say, my interest is of the general order; not of details; not of ways and means. I expect, in the maturity of every season, delightful achievements, and find them; but I take

little part in their planning. I am of no use for device and not called upon in council. I thankfully enjoy the results; and this is perhaps not the worst part the Master of the House could play in the year's transaction.

Only on two occasions have I volunteered a suggestion with regard to planting—and both are related to early, very early, reminiscences.

Creepers of all sorts we have in profusion. Ivy, of course, and Jessamine and Honeysuckle, and the gorgeous, if short-lived, Virginia-Ampilopsis its name, I believe. But there is one thing, I pointed out, I must have also, and that is the blue clustering, the incomparably fragrant *Glycine* of my early childhood's days. Wisteria is its proper English name.

Odoriferous bushes, again, we have, of every description. Ribes, Cassia, Gummy Cistus, what not?—lurk in ambuscade at the turning of paths to waylay you with their gush of essence, not to speak of the Azaleas in their banks; but all these perfumes, in their subtleness, belong to the middle years. No memories of the complete freshness of time cleave to them such as belong to the simple Sweet Briar.

So, now, the two rooted creatures of the Villino, which may be said to exist there more specially for the behoof of Loki's Grandpa, are the Briar bushes at the end of the Lily Walk and by the *Schöne Aussicht*, and the still tender but promising Wisteria climbers in the re-entering and most sheltered corner of his study walls.

FLOWER LOVES OF CHILDHOOD

And it is for those young hopeful Wisterias that on this frosty night I feel a concern. Last year we had a score or so of purple clusters; we look to a goodly increase during the coming *Renouveau*.—‹You perceive the old, obsolete French word for Spring comes back of itself!› The anticipation of the near future, within the shrinking vista of coming pleasures, elicits as usual a return to the widening past. In this case the past that is recalled is that of a childhood spent in France.

The book lies forgotten on my knee. The brown Meerschaum grows cold in my hand. My eyes, lost in musings among the flame-fringed logs, now peer beyond the past half-century—at a time which seems verily as far distant and as little related to the present as that year 1636 stamped and still faintly discernible on the antique cast-iron backplate of the fireplace.... I see a farm-house in a village of that province which in ancient days was known as Ile-de-France ‹I hate your modern régime *départements*›, by name Mesnil-le-Roy; not far distant from Mantes, the natty little town on the upper and green-watered Seine, generally adverted to as *Mantes-la-Jolie*.

GLYCINE!

Therein, during nearly a whole year, for reasons of delicate health, resided a certain very small English boy—French enough in those tender years. In this delectable old place, so full of good-smelling things in their seasons: hay, and grain, and fruit, and at all times the health-restoring cow, the house was in the spring-time covered with Glycine. And with the adorable Glycine the small boy, who loved flowers as much as milk and fruits and beasts, fell forthwith in love.

How that coquettish Jappy plant came originally to find a footing in so rustic a corner as Mesnil-le-Roy is more than I can account for. Your French peasant is not, as a rule, addicted to the delights of flower raising; and, in those distant days, Wisteria was still something of a rarity anywhere. But there it was, already in the sturdiest strength of its age, embracing the old walls, forcing its fibrous wood into every cranny of the greystone, framing every window, striving up the chimney stacks—and filling the air with honey sweetness. It must have taken at least two score years to reach such a size. 48

With the English boy, then barely four, it was a first love. He feasted on it with his every sense. From morning till eve he would be sucking the base of some blue corolla plucked from its calyx, for the sake of that intense sweetness to which the thing owes its Gallic name of *Glycine*; he would, whenever he could, run round and rejoice his eyes with the delicacies of pale green and purple, drink in the scent, and listen hypnotized to the never-ceasing buzz of honey-seekers in the sunshine. And, in the morning, his first thought, as he crept out of his small truckle-bed, was to go and plunge his hands into the dew that glittered upon these Glycine branches nodding in from every side at the mansarde window.

Like all first loves it was, as you see, violent. Well do I remember how, for months after he was removed back into the Paris house, the small boy would ply his mother with the yearning question, infantilely incorrect but vernacular: "*Quand que nous retournerons aux Glycines, Maman?*" always to receive the non-committal but consoling:

"*Tantôt ... tantôt.*"

This "tantôt" is the wonderful "by-and-by" which never comes to be!

And like all first loves this one was utterly forgotten in later years—to reappear, however, in the sere and yellow of age. For years a many, a purple Wisteria spreading about the eaves of a south-country house, was to me only a purple Wisteria. It was a creeper, and it was nothing more. It was not a "*Glycine*" until I had a creepered wall of my own. Then it surged before imagination's eye with all the glamour of *les premières amours*, to which, in accordance with the old French saw, "*on en revient toujours*." 49

Now, therefore, at Villino Loki, nothing will serve but a *Glycine* to creep along those walls which are more especially my own; to embrace my south windows and nod in at the casement. And the suave-breathed Eastern beauty, first brought over to the West and god-fathered by Professor Wister, will privily remain Glycine for me; although I may draw the indulgent visitor's attention to her under the better-known name of Wisteria Sinensis.—I have, by the way, an ever-ready pretext; for I learn from "The Language of Flowers" that the special significance of this blossom is "Welcome, fair stranger!" I mean to have a profusion of it, for old sake's sake. Besides, is it not meet that Loki should not be deprived, during his villeggiatura, of the company of some Chinese living thing?

VI

Strange how sharp and detailed will some of our very early memories remain in after life, when even important scenes of our later years are so easily forgotten! That old farm of Mesnil-le-Roy is still a clear picture, vignetted, so to speak, upon grey pages of oblivion.... I can yet see the orchard, strewn with myriad fallen apples—the byres, whereto at sundown returned the slow-pacing, dreamy, placid-eyed milch cows; the giant walnut-tree, with one of its main branches blasted by lightning—blasted on the stormy night, during which "thunder had fallen" freely ‹as the little boy heard the labourers say, awe-struck, in the morning; but during which he had slept under the brown-tiled roof without the slightest disturbance›.... I can see the *Four Banal*, that co-operative bread-oven, a relic of mediæval institutions, which was still common enough in those days; where you could have such an entrancing view of lambent blue flames lined with yellow when the door stood open to receive the unbaked loaves; and where the air smelt so divinely of hot wheaten crust when they were removed on completion....

It was, by the way, on that alluring spot—the boy used to find his way there regularly on the days when *on cuisait*—that he heard a certain remark, which to his child ears had no special meaning, but which remained on memory's tablets to assume later an interesting significance. The country folk were very kind. The little English boy, left for the good of his health at the farm of *père Pelletier*, was known to everybody; was accepted and treated as one of the community. Rarely did he stroll, as might any roaming puppy dog, into an open door of the village without being supplied with a generous sup of milk, or a *tartine de raisiné*; or again, in season, with a *pomme cuite*. The roasted apple, be it said, browning and lusciously oozing caramel, was a standing affair in that old-world village. There was, however, on that day, a benighted wayfarer who obviously could not reconcile with these rustic surroundings the yellow-haired, barelegged little boy gravely gazing at the glowing oven.

"*D'ousqui sort, ce gosse-là?*" ‹for which barbarous lingo I take leave to give as an equivalent: Who's the kid?› asked the man. And the answer came: "*Ça?—ca, mais le p'tit godem, donc*." ‹That—why, that's the little "goddam."›

THE LITTLE GODEM

Le petit godem!... Such was the name under which that young innocent was known at Mesnil-le-Roy, and, be it understood, in all cordiality and benevolence! Of a certainty not one of those excellent people had the remotest idea of the meaning of their "godem:" with them it was only the established equivalent for English.

The term is a noun, not an expletive, which has come down through five centuries—from the days, in fact, of the English occupation of France. Among the written records of those stirring times we come across many a passage in which a Duguesclin, a Maid of Orleans, or a Dunois is heard to mention hatefully "*les godems*," or "*les godons*

d'Angleterre." Now, all that fertile country of the Vexin, the Ile-de-France and the Beauce, of which the fat farm land of my old *père Pelletier* was so fair a sample, was obstinately fought for by the English for the best part of a century. Mantes-la-Jolie—now mainly famed for its river terraces, its sweet water grapes and its savoury *matelottes* or eel stews—was once a fortified place of note, taken and retaken by French and English more than once; but finally captured ‹in 1418› by the noble Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, the Achilles of England, as the French themselves dubbed him, and firmly held by the "godems" for more than thirty years. To have heard that mispleasing word used dispassionately, merely as a substantive, is indeed a link with the past.

Strange paths of the musing thought, winding from Wisteria Sinensis to the days of our conquering English archer!

I spoke of these childhood memories as of oddly clear pictures emerging here and there out of grey mists of oblivion. Another now detaches itself in the same way from the clouds of the very distant past. 53

It belongs to the following summer. A perfume of Glycine still lingers about it, no doubt; for there again, upon the stone and through the curvetting iron-work balconies of the fair Louis XV house overlooking the park of St. Cloud, pale silvery green leafage, with here and there a cluster of faint blue, spreads in a well-regulated display—widely different, though, from the foaming profusion of the Mesnil. But the impression more specially associated with those happy St. Cloud days is the incense of the Sweet Briar.

SWEET EGLANTINE

What has happened —I pause and ask indignantly—to the Sweet-Briar of the world? Whither has the celestial, the entrancing scent of the true Eglantine vanished? Our twentieth century Briar is still—there is no gainsaying it—a delicious being, in its ephemeral exquisiteness of flower and its pleasant, if but slightly more lasting, leafy odour. But never, in subsequent life, have I captured again the sudden delight first brought to my childish nostrils by a puff of breeze that had passed over some hidden clump of sweet Eglantine. This first impression is connected with certain grassy alleys piercing deep the grand old-world park, or rather forest, of St. Cloud, which were my favourite playgrounds in the early sixties of the last century. ‹There is something distinctly suitable to the status of Grandpa, albeit merely "brevet" rank as in my case, in memorising thus about a past century!› 54

I can see the five-year-old arrested short upon the turf, in the midst of the hot pursuit of a blue butterfly, by his first whiff in life of Rosa Rubiginosa: so might a setter halt and stiffen, having got the wind of a grouse.—The source of the fitful stream of fragrance was hidden among clumps of forbidding brambles. Besides, there was no following the trail: it seemed ubiquitous. Like some Puck in his most tantalising mood, it would lead up and down, up and down—luring now to right, now to left, now straight ahead, anon seemed to whisk past from behind, until, in a kind of "dwam," the child would give up the baffled purpose and pensively trot home by the nurse's side.

For days the ambrosial fragrance dwelt in his little turned-up nose. It haunted the sensitive child-mind much as, later, in budding manhood, the remembrance of some enchanting face seen for an instant and then lost to sight. He had at last to confide his hopeless passion to his mother. It smelt ‹he explained› like

the *Pomme Reinette* of the dessert plates, but oh, so much, so much better! The reference to the well-known and excellent variety of apple left no doubt about the nature of the plant which had exhaled the elusive trails of perfume. “Reinette” became the accepted name of the woodland charmer and the hunt for Reinette bushes in the more devious paths of the wood a daily occupation.

With these expeditions is associated another first acquaintance that made a singularly strong impression.

There was, at the end of one of those heavenly grassed alleys, a group of brushwood greenery from which the unmistakable fragrance flowed deliciously across the path when the wind blew from a certain direction—I should say, now, from the west; for the path led to Garches, a place which, some eight years later, during the siege of Paris, became notorious as the scene of some very ferocious bayonet fighting. Undoubtedly there was a wealth of the desirable “Reinette” amid that underwood. But, to the mild surprise of nurse or mother, or whoever it might be who escorted the child upon his daily constitutional in the wood, nothing could induce him to draw that particular cover. He developed an ingenuity ‹or rather should it be called a disingenuousness› for pushing investigations or carrying on a game in paths that gave this spot a wide berth. Whenever possible, even, he found some specious argument for avoiding the Garches-ward alley altogether. No one, I believe, ever knew the reason.

THE BLANCHING, LAUGHING ASPEN

The fact is that, hard thereby, as if standing sentinel, rose a company of tall, slender Aspens—trees that, in a small boy’s estimation, did not behave as mere trees should. He had realised this, with a suddenness that first made his heart jump, and then rooted him on the spot, one day when, having caught up his scent, he was rushing with a whoop to the capture of his bush. The Aspens, up to that instant quite placid, palely green, grew all at once white with excitement and nodded their heads to each other; after which came the noise of their leaves; not the honest rustle of green trees, but derisive laughter; sounds, too, weirdly human, ringing as though in mockery of the discomfited invader.

Mark you, there is something decidedly uncanny in the deportment of the Aspen and its gracile, long-stalked trembling leaves, the white undersides of which any puff of wind exposes simultaneously to view—turning, on the instant, the whole of the green to foaming silver. There was no doubt about the matter then. These paling and odd rustling trees completely overawed Master Louis ‹Louis is Loki’s grandpa’s baptismal name, now sunk into disuse›, though, in his budding masculine pride, he kept the secret of his abhorrence very close within his own little bosom.

On one occasion, however, when he had had to make up his mind to walk past the blanching, murmuring group unless he were prepared ‹which he was not› to explain the nature of his objection, he asked, with a fair show of indifference, what manner of tree it was which “made that funny noise: he-he-he-he.” “One would say,” he added with elaborate airiness, “that they make a mock of one!”

When informed that “*Tremble*” was the name thereof, he became sunk in fresh unpleasant musings, and was fain to look back, fascinated, over his shoulder, each time the chuckling called after him.

The sound of the breeze, as it ruffles through the leaves of “Populus tremula,” is like nothing else in the woods. I have always retained my interest in the “Tremble” of my young days; and in the course of time it became one of delight

instead of terror. I would give a good deal to have one of my own: one living not far from my bedroom window. It would be good to hear it laughing gently outside, when one first woke, and to know that it was powdering itself, so to speak, under the rays of the rising sun. But there are no Aspens in our part of the world. And, as for planting a council of these in the hope of silvery rustle and light effects, why, it is perhaps somewhat too late in the day! But I still seem to hear and see them with the ears and eyes of that dawning spring of life in the St. Cloud days.

VII

Poor little old town of St. Clodoald! In later years I spent an afternoon hunting up its distant remembrances. Alas, but it was like looking at some worn-out engraving, some faded dun picture once known in all its brilliancy.

Obliterated was the dainty white stone Palace; scene of the revelries and the bright-coloured elegancies of the Regent; favourite retreat of Marie Antoinette; theatre of the "*Dix-huit Brumaire*" drama; early home of *l'Aiglon*! The Château de St. Cloud, the summer residence of the last Napoleon, had been burned by the Prussians—even as they burned the bulk of the town—in 1870.[1]

Many a time, when, not so many years ago, we could read daily the shameless slander, the wilful calumnies, of the German press on the subject of the "barbarity" of our soldiers during the South African wars, has my mind flown back to the picture of charred and jagged ruins standing against the rise of the hill which once met my eyes when I looked for the quiet, happy prospect I had known.

THE OLD PARK OF ST. CLOUD

The town, when I last saw it, and its ancient church had been rebuilt; but the Palace was a dismal ruin; and the park seemed scald and deserted. Gone also, worst luck of all, the *Lanterne de Diogène*—the quaint tower at the river-side opening of the main alley, built in the pleasure-loving days of *Louis-le-Bien-Aimé*. ‹It was called a *mirador*: I believe a structure of that kind is now known as "gazebo"—deplorable word!› From the top of it a magnificent panorama of distant Paris could be descried.

The neighbourhood of *la Lanterne* was the great trysting place of nurses and guardsmen, and the playing ground of children. On that day of back-dreaming exploration, I had been looking forward, with a kind of tenderness, to gazing once more on its bizarre shape. There is a well-known *ronde*, dating it would seem from the Middle Ages:

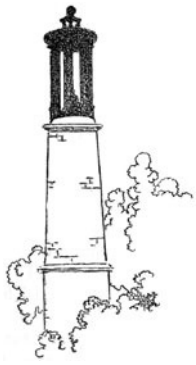
"*La Tour, prends garde—*
La Tour, prends garde—
De te laisser abattre!"

which is sung by the Gallic infant, in a game somewhat cognate to our: "Here we go round the Mulberry Bush!" It used to be danced under the shadow of this tower; and, in a child's way, I had always instinctively associated the unnamed stronghold of the ballad with this peaceful erection.

Alas for the dear old *Tour*, it was destined to be laid low, after all, in spite of our eager warning! The terrace on which it was built was seized as the emplacement of a battery of heavy Krupps, for the bombardment of the obstinate capital yonder away. The *Lanterne de Diogène*, in its white stone and clear outline against the trees, offered too distinct a mark to the answering gunners to be tolerated. It had to be levelled. It was never rebuilt. I could find nothing appertaining to it but the grass bordered slabs of its foundations....

Lost, too, to me was the particular alley redolent of the memory of both *Reinette* and *Tremble*; no doubt absorbed in

some of the metalled motor roads that now traverse the park.



The *Grande Cascade*, however, which Lepautre, by order of Louis XIV, devised for the glorification of the Duke of Orleans' future home, was still there. Its tiers of white stone steps over which the water, on *Grandes Eaux* days, used to pour down, foaming yet disciplined, in symmetric balustered channels, between ranks of allegoric statues standing like guards and lacqueys upon a royal stairway—still descend, framed by huge umbrageous elms, from the middle height of the hill to the wide marble *bassin* on the river level. How fully the great garden designers of the *Roy Soleil* understood the life-giving virtue of moving waters in their grandiose if freezing conception of the formal landscape! Here, in the midst of the nature-made beauty of the old Park—where there had been forests, more or less wild, ever since Gaulish days—these architectural waters have a startling effect; incongruous no doubt, but the artificiality of the stone-work has been mellowed by two centuries and more of summer suns and winter frosts. And these monumental streams are beyond compare more beautiful than their prototypes of Versailles and the copies erected in other Continental residences in imitation of the *Grand Règne* manner. This Lepautre was a man of fine power, in the style of his age. But he had also the servile fawning mind of that age. Soon after the triumph of the St. Cloud Park, he could find it in him to die in three days of jaundiced envy because some other design of his had been passed over by the King's eye in favour of one by Mansard! Yea, to die of heart-burning, even as that greater man, Jean Racine, who, some years later, gave up the ghost in despair over a harsh remark passed by his royal master in a fit of temper; even as Vatel, the *maître d'hotel*, who fell upon his sword, and put an end to a life dishonoured by the failure of the fish at the celebrated Chantilly banquet!

61

Yes, the old cascade, at least, was still there, that once had filled the five-year-old's imagination with a sense of the supreme in earthly grandeur. The *Jet Géant*, also; that spouting jet that reaches a height of ... but no, why cramp the stupendous into figures? Figures are finite things. The shaft of hissing water, in those days of confident wondering, reached the limit of the conceivable before it fell down again, in its thundering showers, through the iridescent bow, the *arc-en-ciel*, that could always be looked for when the sun shone on it at the sinking hour. But, alas, for the middle-aged visitor who sought for a taste again, however transient, of the noisy joyousness, the brilliance, the colour, locked up in memory's casket!... The *cidevant* royal park—now *Propriété Nationale*, and duly stamped, wherever room can be found for it, with the priggish and lying motto: *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité* was dull and drab and neglected: silent and morose. The *Grand Monarque's* extravagances in stone seemed positively shamefaced. The whole place—this artificial park within the ancient woods—had the melancholy of things outworn and disowned.

62

FIRELIGHT PICTURES

Yet here, in my armchair by the firelight, up on the side of our dear Surrey hill, I can still picture sharply to myself the summer life of St. Cloud as it was in the careless precarious days of the Second Empire.

The Empress Eugénie, then a young wife, and one of the most beautiful women of Europe, lived at the *Château*. And the Park, though thrown open to the people, was kept trim with jealous care. Roads generously sanded, lawns watered and mown with systematic care, parterres ever bright with flowers, all was marvellously different then from the present day shabbiness.

I seem to see again, even with almost a lifetime's experience

intervening, the vivid scene impressed on the observant and eager eyes of the child. The gay-hued crowds of ladies in all the then elegance of scuttle bonnets and crinolines; the bevies of children, of every class, but all joyous and noisy; the bands of marching youths, buzzing the popular airs of the year on the euphonious *Mirliton*; the siege of every "kiosk" where the wafers hot from the mould, or the cool lemonade, were dispensed; the swans, stately but voracious, being fed upon the great pond; the bright coloured beribboned *nourrices* squatting with the nurslings on the circular benches within sound of the *musique militaire*, and the inevitable giant bearded *sapeur* in flirtatious attendance; the quite too beautiful officers with tight waists, waxed moustaches and swaying gold epaulets—what not?

Before the great gates, solemnly walking to and fro, or standing picturesquely sentinel, there never wanted a party of veteran grenadiers in their towering brass-fronted bearskins and white cross-belts to produce the desired "Old Guard" effect. Or it might be heavy-moustached troopers, *Guides*, with sweeping plumes over the huge *colback*; with pelisses of fur and eagle-embroidered sabretaches, copying, on their side, the grim appearance of Napoleon's ‹the real one's› body guard.

The whole place, indeed, was pervaded with the "immense" uniforms of those pretorians: those long service professional soldiers for whose showy maintenance the Imperial Government stinted an otherwise dwindling national army—disastrous army, destined, despite its gallantry, to be so soon decimated, swept away, by the legions of *das Volk in Waffen* wielded with the ruthless mastery of German generalship!

FORGOTTEN BRILLIANCIES

For such as have only known France since the strictly utilitarian days that followed the great *débâcle*; days when the notion that any kind of smartness is incompatible with "republican efficiency seems to have become an obsession" it is difficult to realize the gilded magnificence of the *Garde Impériale*. Still less, perhaps, in these anti-militarist times, the idolatry of the people for its *beaux militaires*. Of a truth, on a sunny day, they brightened the park walks almost as much as the Geraniums in the great stone urns, or the forbidden golden fruit in the orange tubs!

The authorities were sedulous, especially in such places as St. Cloud, to keep the pleasant side—the pride, the pomp and circumstance—of soldiering in evidence. The happy little town was awakened in the morning, was apprised of noon and again of sundown, by the incredibly joyous "sonneries" of the *Lanciers de l'Impératrice*, whose trumpeters specially gathered from far and wide, could sound all tuckets and points of war in an admirable harmony of high overtones blended with the noble, grave sounds of the ordinary calls.... Entrancing music to the little boy, in the glycine-clad house of the *rue du Château*, who would start awake, hearken, and then turn round and go to sleep again in great content. The drums of the *garde montante*, headed by the olympian *tambour-major*, sedulously tossing and twirling his cane, daily rattled the window panes as in great pomp it ascended the hill, palace-wards. It never failed to draw the same crowd to the same doorsteps. Estaffettes clattered hourly along the narrow paved streets, on their way to and from Paris; glittering, clinking, full of official importance, and with an eagerness no doubt wholly uncalled for by any existing necessity.

All that colour and bustle and pleasant make-believe of strength and “tradition,” was typical of all one has since learned to associate with that Empire on the high road to ruin. But it had its attractive side for those who had not found it out; and, seen through the prism of distance, a picturesqueness that modern France, so systematically democratized, is scarce like to know again.

The ways of our musings are as devious, as unexpected, as those of a general conversation: there is no presiding spirit to keep us to a standing topic! This topic, with us, should be "Our Sentimental Garden." And our tattle should, really, be connected, even if but distantly; with plants or scenery; with country life and friends ‹or foes›; with emotions or reminiscences plausibly evoked by the flower side of life. Happily it is pleasant enough to be brought back to the right theme; as I am just now by a thought of the head-line.

REDISCOVERED DELIGHTS

To one who has taken somewhat late in the day to a life in the country, most of its interests seem to be a rediscovery of early, simple, and intimate delights; to be connected with impressions long forgotten.

There is an episode in the biography of Jean-Jacques Rousseau which, if I remember aright, bears upon this point. I have not got the *Confessions* by me—it is, no doubt, in that cynical autobiography that the anecdote is recorded—nor, indeed, any other work of that exceedingly antipathetic writer. ‹This is the usual course: the books I require for reference when in the country happen oftener than not to be on my London bookshelves; and *mutatis mutandis, vice versa*!› The precise wording cannot in consequence be given here. But it is a small matter; the story is to this effect:

In his young and singularly impressionable days, Jean-Jacques was taking a country walk with one very near to his heart. At a certain spot of the garden, or the wood, in which he was tasting the subtle joys of *solitude à deux*, the lady suddenly exclaimed:

"See, yonder is a *pervenche*!"

"Indeed," returned the youth, little intent then, upon the beauties of the outer world, and gazed absently upon the tender blue peeping out of the tender green. "So, that is a periwinkle?" And he resumed the thread of his interrupted discourse.

But, later—much later on, in twilight days of his life—some one happened again to say in his hearing:

"See—a Periwinkle!"

And Rousseau, now old Jean-Jacques, amazed the company by an almost incredible exhibition of sensibility.

"*Une pervenche!* Where—where?" he called out, throwing himself down on his knees to look for the flower, with eyes bathed in tears.

If this is not quite the exact tale, it matters, as I said above, very little. It is the story, in its essence. The age of sensibility ‹praise be to our fate!› is no longer with us; but there is something permanently true in the picture it sets forth. To the *philosophe* of mature years the mere word *pervenche* suddenly recalled, in a poignantly intimate manner, the first love of his spring-time. *Veteris vestigia flammae!*

And we are not to wonder that the echo from a world irremediably lost should have affected the morose, self-centred reprobate in an uncontrollable manner. I venture to think that, with the least sentimental of us, the sudden rediscovery, of some long forgotten youthful impression can hardly fail to evoke, however transiently, a certain dreamy

emotion: half pleasure, half melancholy.

Now, in the case of the Master of the House—and he is thankful to realize it—early memories of delight in flowers and such things are associated, not with the troublous times of young manhood's protean heart affairs, not with the *Sturm und Drang* days of the dawning moustache, but rather with the quaintly fanciful inner life of boyhood. They come back borne upon the colours and odours of such early friends as Lilac and Acacia; common Wallflower—*Giroflée*, our Gillyflower; wild Violet and Primrose—*gallicé "Coucou"*; Hollyhock or rather *Rose-trémière*; Lily-of-the-Valley; *Muguet*.... It is the old French name that most readily slips from my pen.

Owing perhaps to a childhood spent almost wholly in France, and to the completeness of the break that necessarily ensued when the English born but French nurtured boy was at last allowed back to his own and proper land, all these memories seem to belong to a world utterly apart—to something rather fantastic, unconnected with later life and interests. Moreover, being of childhood and of a time when the world seemed uniformly kind, they retain an allurement all their own. One pleasant recollection of those far-off days does not hook on to others, bitter, regretful, or let it be even merely ruffling ... inevitable chain of responsible experiences!

Our early memories are like works of art: they have a way of perpetuating in beauty things that perhaps were not really beautiful in themselves. About them there is an unconscious selection which, having been made by a mind still essentially serene, has contrived a subtle harmony of all the elements. Upon the pictures of its store, a child's memory lays an emphasis strangely different to that which the critical powers of later growth would set. And it is this quaint insistence on certain "odd corners of things" which ‹among other reasons› makes them so dearly personal and private to the older mind.

In my own case, as I have said, they belong to a world still more remote than the childhood of most men of "Grandpa" status—a world which has not even the link of language to connect it with the present!

Paradoxically, this is perhaps the reason why I take so much pleasure in finding these happy-hued and odorous things now rising, and living under their right English names, in a garden of my own. To the other denizens of Villino Loki they are part of the excellent general company foregathering in our garden: but to me they are in many ways my intimates. We seem "to have known things together"; things doubtless of no importance, but pleasant to recall in casual intercourse.

The Lilac and Acacia, for instance, were the flower-bearers of the tree-planted playground of that jocund old school where I received the first rudiments of education: the *Institution Delescluze*, then situate in a kind of backwater of the faubourg St. Honoré at the angle facing the *Palais de l'Elysée*. It has, alas long since been swept away to make room for modern mansions. This ancient *Institution*, or preparatory school, would seem to have dated from the distant days, early Louis XV probably, when the north side of the then lengthening noble *faubourg* must still have been occupied by meadows and orchards.

By the way, it has never occurred to me before to look up that little topographical matter authoritatively. I do so now. I have here a copy of a wonderful work, the "perspective" map of Paris as it stood in the 'thirties, of the eighteenth century. It is called the *Plan de Turgot*, having been surveyed, and engraved, in lavishly decorative style, by order of *Louis-le-Bien-Aimé*, under the care of the celebrated *Prévost des Marchands*. The book is quite the most fascinating of its kind I know—and I think I have handled as goodly a number of such works as any man alive. ‹The nearest approach to it, in point of what one may call picturesque perspicuity, is the wonderful bird's-eye view of Edinburgh set down by James Gordon of Rothiemay, and engraved at Amsterdam by F. de Wit, about a century earlier.› This plan of Turgot is an elaborate affair indeed—an atlas of twenty large sheets, showing practically every individual house of any importance. Would we had such a work in existence dealing with Georgian London!

Well, to investigate.... Aye, here are the orchards and market gardens, beginning at the very back of a narrow line of houses, covering all the ground of what nowadays is a close network of stone-fronted streets! Here stands the Hôtel d'Evreux, the last, moving westward, of that array of lordly mansions: the Hôtels de Montbazon, de Guébrian, de Charost, de Duras.... A few of these patrician dwellings, each with their own formal gardens stretching southwards to the Champs Elysées, have retained to our own times their dignity unimpaired. But where are now scattered most of these grand French family names, since the tornado of the great Revolution? But, to our map.... Yes, this Hôtel d'Evreux —whilom appanage of Madame de Pompadour, now the aforesaid Palais de l'Elysée; residence, in due rotation, of the swift-changing presidents of the Republic—is here under my finger. And its position unquestionably fixes, some two hundred yards westward, that of the now vanished *Institution Delescluze*, so interesting to me. And here spread themselves the orchards, of which the existence a moment ago was, after all, only a matter of surmise!

PLUM-TREE GUM

My discovery adds particularity now to the remembrance of that mellow place.... A goodly number of antiquated fruit trees were scattered about the *cour de récréation*. I can now carve it, in fancy, out of the cultivated land shown by the engraver in the most engaging conventional manner, at the back of the northern street front—an acre or so. Perhaps a little more; likelier still, a little less: recollections of this kind have a knack of magnifying affairs. It is bounded by grey walls, tall and thick, but distinctly decrepit. The trees were, of course, long past bearing, through age and neglect; but they were pleasant company, whether snow-laden, or in summer

affording their scanty shade. Plum trees they were, I should say. At any rate the rough bark of their boles distilled a kind of brown gum which was in great demand among us small boys for immediate consumption; and sedulously scooped out, as soon as discovered, with the help of the stump end of a steel-pen nib.

Interspersed among these remnants of the forgotten orchard were the odd groups of Lilacs and Acacias previously mentioned. The latter, the Acacias, were tall and above interference. But strict were the standing orders touching the bloom of the Lilac, and dire the prospect of *pensum* or *piquet* to the youthful scholar who should dare to pluck the fragrant bunches!

Thus came the Lilac to assume a character at once sacred—or, at least, "taboo"—and at the same time perennially tantalizing. It was long before the realization dawned that *Lilas* were not the rare and precious blossoms that so uncompromising a prohibition appeared to proclaim. As a matter of fact, the *Lilas*, *Blanc ou Rose*, is one of the commonest of spring objects in France. Almost might it in its popularity be regarded as the national emblem of the *renouveau*, much as with us the pallid, delicate Primrose is held to herald the last of wintry days. 73

The old French name for the latter is *Primerole*, suggestive by its etymological connection with "prime," of the youth of the year. We have made of it Prim*rose*, through the usual process of popular phonetic adaptation, which ever tends to make a word sound like something already familiar. So that the old *Primerole*—meaning simply an early floweret, *primula*—has become with us "the early rose"! The French dubbed it *Primevère* a learned equivalent for the *Coucou* of the rustic tongue, to symbolize the advent of vernal days.

The name brings at once to mind the well-known yearning lines:

"*O Primavera, gioventù dell' anno!*

O gioventù, primavera della vita!"

In France, however, the accepted harbinger of *les beaux jours*, is not the

"Pale cowslip, fit for maiden's early bier,"

not the faint Primula but emphatically the Lilac—the Syringa Vulgaris; the joyous *fleur des humbles*, as contrasted to the noble Rose.

"*Oh, gai! vive la rose,*
La rose ... et les lilas!"

runs the refrain of olden days.

During the last century or two it has grown as common, almost, around villages as the hawthorn, the *Aubépine* itself. 74
But it is perhaps best appreciated in the towns. While the tender purple bloom lasts, there is scarce too modest a working home's window-sill or mantelpiece for the display of a *branche de Lilas* stuck in the gullet of a water-bottle. And your gay-hearted *grisette* or *midinette*, early afoot in the streets, will always spend her first *sou* of the day on a sprig of the sweet-breathing rosy cluster.

LAYLOCKS—LILAS BLANC

One may learn, whilst intent upon other matters, many unsuspected things about objects even as familiar as the common "Laylock." ‹A collection of old letters of Georgian and very early Victorian days, with which we have had much to do at one time, show a preference for this phonetic rendering of the name.› Thus it appears that a valuable febrifuge "principle" is obtainable from its fruit; that its wood, veined in pleasing colours and very fine-grained, is in high request for delicate articles of turnery and in particular for inlaying; that a perfumed essence is sometimes distilled from it that is almost

indistinguishable from Rhodes Balsam—and so forth.

Those, however, are not the points of interest which have made it imperative to have a plant or two of “Laylocks” in our Sentimental Garden. ‹They do fairly well, be it said, in their own specially sheltered, suntrap corner of the ground.› No, there is in life an ever-growing motive—old sake’s sake. Syringa Persica may mean much to the operative gardener, but it can never mean *Lilas blanc* … *Lilas rose*!

As for the Acacias, in that queer old courtyard—distinctly exotic creatures, aristocrats in the company of those palpable sons of the soil, the caducous orchard trees—I still wonder how they ever came there. Their rôle in the life of the small-boy school seems to have been that of a butt for cockshies, and thus passively to foster a notable precision in the use of those small river pebbles with which the playground was covered. A game, deeply favoured by the young scholars ‹but not recognized by the authorities› when Acacias were “in,” consisted in the bringing down of some selected bunch of fragrant, creamy flowers from its lofty station with the minimum number of pebbles. The feat was the subject of wager, the stakes stated and paid in steel nibs. Nibs—in the tongue of the aborigines, *becs-de-plume*—were accepted as currency and legal tender. It would be truly interesting to find out how this particular token of exchange came to be established among the youthful communities of French elementary schools. Be it as it may, the convention was hallowed by tradition “whereof the memory of boy ran not to the contrary.”

GARLANDS AND ACACIAS

When, however, the pale yellow, incense-smelling, honey-tasting racemes were “out,” the devoted Acacia became the object of other, slightly different, balistic attentions. The boys, be it stated, were regularly released from the durance of bench and desk every hour for some ten minutes ‹a commendable system with seven to ten year-olds› during which the courtyard became clamorous as any aviary. During these short intervals of recreation, too short to allow of any settled games, a favourite occupation was the adorning of the 76
inaccessible branches with long streamers of coloured paper, previously manufactured at home—*guirlandes* by name. These *guirlandes*, some twenty or thirty feet long, were wound with sedulous care round a suitable stone, leaving a small length as trailer; the apparatus was then cast up in a parabola over the tree-top. If the indirect fire was successful the trailer caught in the leafage, unrolling the remainder and releasing the ballasting stone. The most successful shot was, of course, that which left the streamer properly entangled on the topmost boughs. Each boy had his chosen and declared colour, or mixture of colours; and the trophy remained, flaunting his achievement “in its own tincts” as long as wind or rain permitted. It afforded the small breast a distinct satisfaction when, reaching the school of a morning, the boy could see his pennant still flying in the breeze....

Such is the strength of the association of ideas that I never could come upon a roadside plantation of Acacias in the hot plains of Hungary—where the tree is used as commonly as in France the Poplar, that inevitable feature of the great highways—without adorning it in imagination with the multi-coloured *guirlandes* of my first school.

If there was no reasonable accounting for the presence of Acacias at the *Institution Delescluze*, the great Poplar, on the other hand, that raised its height in the very centre of the *cour*, had a well-authenticated history. A relic of Revolution days, it was then in its eighth decade, in the strength of its age; having been planted, at the same time as 77
hundreds of others, as a Tree of Liberty—Populus, emblematic of *sans-culotte* ascendancy—at the time when the royal Bastille, emblem of another form of tyranny, was laid low.

For some cryptic reason, by the way, the democratic Poplar, which had subsisted through many changes of régime, and had become undoubtedly too ornamental a mark of antiquity to be destroyed, was never honoured by the flights of our banderoles. Perhaps it was a result of political prejudice, which in France characteristically affects the views even of scholars at the hornbook stage of life. Or perhaps it was that

the old *Peuplier* was the site of the disciplinary punishment known as *piquet*—the playground equivalent of our nursery "corner."

GLAMOUR OF YORE

Poplar and gummy Plum-trees, Lilac and Acacias, courtyard and indeed the whole *Institution*, had already disappeared when I bethought myself, for the first time after so many years of oblivion, to go and gaze upon the scene once more. It was quite in middle life. I had lately been reading that sad and strangely affecting work, "Peter Ibbetson," the first, and to my mind by far the best, of the three novels written by Georges du Maurier in the late autumn of his days. By the thousands who for so many years had, week after week, enjoyed the delicate humour and pencilling of the great Punch artist, the book was received with a favour that paved the way for the greater popular success of "Trilby." But I doubt whether it ever appealed to any denizen of our planet as intimately as to the Master of the House.

Those who have read the curiously original novel which, like so many first attempts at fiction, is autobiographical—autobiographical as to feelings, if not necessarily as to facts—may remember his description of the English boy's early "French days;" and, later on, of the mature man's poignant impressions on revisiting the old playground of his life. Now, there were so many points of resemblance between the surroundings of Du Maurier's hero's childhood and my own; so many allusions to the kind of things and the kind of people I had once been familiar with but, as time flowed on, had dismissed from mind as removed from real existence and new workaday points of view; they were presented, moreover, in so sympathetic a manner, that one need hardly wonder at the sudden resolve that rose within me, to go and look up the old place again.

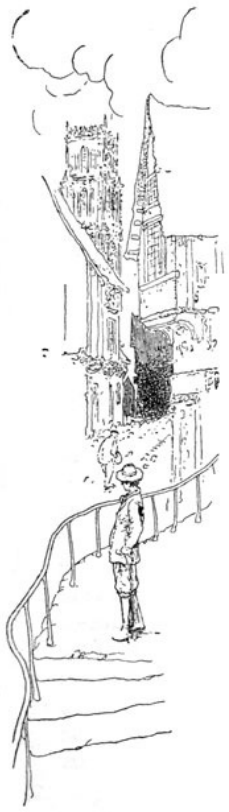
Such a desire, when it comes, has something of the twist of hunger about it—it is *une fringale*, to use a word for which, oddly enough, we have no counterpart. But, alas! delight in scenes of the *beau temps jadis* is not to be recaptured! It may but be espied in fitful, elusive glimpses. The world has moved on and the *genius loci* has fled. Have you ever found out that the return, after many years, to a place oft dreamed of until then and with never-failing tenderness, besides leaving you blankly unsatisfied, seems to have killed the glamour, to have broken the magic spell of memory? The dream is dispelled. It will henceforth nevermore haunt your pillow. You have seen the phantom of the past with the eyes of nowadays; the new picture has replaced that of the dream—for ever.

Well, *la boite Delescluze*—as we irreverent youngsters called that respectable institution—unlike those other places, St. Cloud, for instance, which were fated to evoke but a melancholy disappointment, could not be beheld again with the carnal eye—not the least vestige of it. And it is, no doubt, for that reason that so many memories still come flitting back, smiling and clear, of that forgotten cradle of scholarship.

XI

A glowing log rolls down from its allotted place on the hearth, sending into the room a jet of wood smoke, blue at the stem, white feathering as it spreads out; and the pungent smell immediately revives a fresh set of scenes from the past.

NOSTRIL MEMORIES



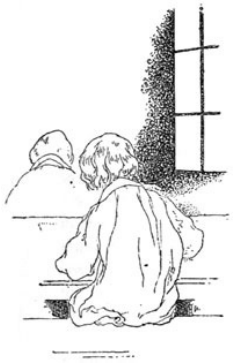
That nothing brings back old memories so suddenly and so vividly as perfume is a commonplace remark. But I wonder whether the extraordinary persistency of a first impression, in the case of odours constantly met with, has been so generally noticed. Perhaps I am peculiar in this sensitiveness. Smells, pleasant, indifferent, or otherwise, which one is liable to encounter in the most varied circumstances, should, one would think, cease in time to recall any particular period of existence.

For example, the delicious smell of roasting coffee—an aroma not common in England—may well bring you back, at a jump, to some foreign, unfamiliar experience of your youth—to that early morning walk in the little Flemish town of which you have forgotten the name; where, as you sauntered down the street, you were greeted at nearly every doorstep by this pungent savour. The black cylindrical family roaster, its berries rattling musically within, was being carefully revolved over its bed of live charcoal by the boy of the house, or perhaps by the housewife herself. The delicate, diaphanous sky-blue smoke of the beans, as they reached the perfecting point of their charring, struck your eye as gratefully as the fragrance it conveyed to your nostrils. No wonder that, after a long spell, even a distant whiff of that odour of promise should bring back a definite picture. But that essences of such everyday character, say, as petrol; or that which accompanies the peeling of an orange, should still have the power of bringing me back, instantly, to the hours of my early schooling, is in truth a curious matter.

In the case of petrol, perhaps, the connexion is less extraordinary. Until the age of the motor was ushered in—and that is barely a score of years ago—the smell of “petroleum,” as it was still called, could come upon the sense as an odour out of the usual run.

Whenever I come across it now, it never fails to waft me back to the old class-room of the *Institution*, the *Etude No. 3*, where I first made acquaintance with the possibly wholesome but not otherwise attractive redolence of the *lampes à petrole*. That was during the short days of the year, when these luminaries were brought in soon after four o’clock, and suspended over our young heads—a ceremony coinciding with the last hour of *classe*—at the end of which the assembly would be dispersed for the day: the bigger boys walking back to their neighbouring homes, the smaller being fetched by their *bonnes*, or it might be the footman; or yet, in unpropitious weather, by anxious parents in carriage or *fiacre*.

Quaint place, that *Institution*—when one looks back on it from this far end of the road! I think I can breathe its peculiar atmosphere this instant—and see the queer, long, low room, with the beams across the ceiling; the whitewashed walls, covered with highly coloured elementary maps and graphic pictures of the metrical system applied to measures lineal and cubical, solid and liquid, and to the national coinage.... There they are: the



six rows of benches and desks, each with its half-dozen youngsters, some elaborately drawing a steel nib, in strokes alternately swelling and slender, over a copybook of bafflingly soft paper, productive of periodical splutters; others reading ‹in earnest or in pretence› a chapter of *Epitome*; others, again, committing, with dumb mouthing, a fable of La Fontaine to memory for to-morrow's recitation, until such moment as the cracked voice of the courtyard clock striking five should proclaim the hour of release. The usher, ensconced *in cathedra*, at his high desk; a smaller lamp for his especial benefit burning ‹and smelling› by his side; a book before him.—In his own walk he must have passed, methinks now, for something of a dandy, in the cheap line; for he remains associated more with sedulous trimming of nails, with pulling out of curly brown whiskers; with a nervous, tricky settling of collar, tie and cuffs ‹obviously false›, than with anything else.... He yawns amain. He consults his watch, and closes it with a click in the midst of the great silence of the room—the silence made more sensible, rather than disturbed, by the recurrent splutter of a pen-nib, or the turning of a leaf of *Epitome*.

That *Epitome Historiae Sacrae* was a primer adapted to first year boys—a small buckram-bound book compendized, poetically expurgated, and made in truth singularly attractive to the young imagination—more attractive even, I fancy, than those Fables of La Fontaine and of Florian that, read in the light of "short stories," were such favourites. It was, by the way, called *Epitome Sacrae* or even *Sacrae* pure and simple, in the same manner as the volumes allotted to the two subsequent years were known respectively as *Latinae* and *Graecae*.

I would give a fairly large coin of our present money for a copy now, could I come across one in some old bookstall on the quays. But, from their very nature, the cheapest books are among the rarest things to recover at second hand.

SCRIPTURE STORIES

It was within the pale green covers of that queer little tome that I tasted for the first time the literary savour of the various *genres* in tale-telling; of pastoral and romance, of idyll and tragedy. One could not truly say that any very strong impression of a sacred character was conveyed through the collection of Holy Scripture stories. But it is doubtful whether anything read in after-life was stamped so clearly on the imagination as the poetry of Ruth amid the ears of barley, of Rebecca and the pitcher of water, of Rachel; as the romance of Joseph and his brethren; as the tragedy of Samson and Delilah; as the war pictures of Jericho and Jerusalem. It may have been a jumble of disconnected tales—and, for the boys, nothing more than tales—but each remains cut out in clean outline and brightest colours that are never likely to fade. To this day a field of golden corn, newly reaped, in pastoral Dorset, under a hot harvest sun, will raise the bright phantom of Boaz and the gentle gleaner. A country lass at the fountain, or even merely the rim of some disused and filled-up well, aye even such cryptic names as Jakin and Boaz, the pillars, will conjure up again some picture first raised from the pages of that *Epitome Sacrae*, read under the light of the brown lamp gently swaying in the draught of the school-room above our ruffled heads ... and steadily smelling of petrol!

XII

Connected with those enthralling first tales, now that I come to think of it, is the development of certain simple tastes in food which have endured through a life not altogether devoid of gastronomic discrimination. Among these may be mentioned a special delight in lentils—later on extended to other members of the pulse tribe, but in its origin especially concerned with lentils. It is to be noted that the *Epitome* rendering of what in the Authorised Version appears as red pottage is *un plat de lentilles*. Now lentils, stewed in some toothsome reddish sauce ‹not innocent of the savoury onion› was a standing Friday dish in the refectory at Delescluzes ‹together, be it said, with a *Saint Jean* fish-pie—Saint Jean being the equivalent of our own mediæval “Poor John,” otherwise salt cod›. The small boy, however, who was destined, at the maturity of time, to become the Master of the House at the Villino Loki, was allowed a fair mutton chop of his own by special compact with M. Delescluze, as a concession to his Protestant heresy.

THE DELECTABLE LENTIL

The arrangement had been made when the dietary of the *jours maigres* came, quite accidentally, to the knowledge of his anxious parents. Such a concession might have bidden fair to scandalize the youthful republic at dinner time—if not perhaps on purely dogmatic ground, at least upon a question of invidious privilege. But it happened that the intended beneficiary of the bi-weekly *côtelette* had been struck by that puzzling tale of Esau’s birthright so readily exchanged for a *plat de lentilles*.—Red pottage had become invested with an almost mystical quality.

There is often a good deal of auto-suggestion connected with matters of food pleasure. At any rate the Friday *plat de lentilles* ranked among the most desirable of eatable things, in his young opinion. The answer to the jeer that greeted him from the neighbour on his right, as the appetizing grill was laid by the grinning attendant for the first time upon the wooden board before him, was a prompt offer of half the flesh portion for the whole of his allowance of pulse—and a similar disposal of the remainder on the left-hand side. One chop for two plates of the savoury mess: the barter, as far as the pleasures of the table were concerned, was one of gain, for all parties. It had the further advantage of cutting at the root of conversational unpleasantness. The exchange of a single fat, heretical chop for two helpings of orthodox meagre fare became an established compact—one, it must be said, which demanded not only secrecy but adroitness for its fulfilment.

The redistribution of the courses was usually carried out under the shelter of an enormous *broc* ‹a relic of conventual furniture›, the French representative of our old English Black Jack; an obese, jug-like, wooden contrivance with iron hoops, containing something better than a gallon of the anodyne mixture called *abondance*—one part thin red wine to four of water. It was a supply which could, without danger to sobriety, be drawn upon, as the regulation had it, *à discretion*.

The parties to this lentil transaction, which took place at the end of the long table farthest from the eyes of the presiding usher, had to bid for turns.... Where are you this day, you the only two whilom reprobate amateurs of chops on fast days whose names I can yet recall? You, Victor de Mussy, with the notable store of infantile catches and conundrums? And you, Guilleaume Moreau, of more plebeian stamp, who used to look up words for me in the dictionary—a task I truly loathed—at the rate of three words for one *bec-de-plume*? If you are still in the land of the living, I would take a fair bet that it never occurs to you now to order, of your own accord, a dish

of lentils!

THE INCOMPARABLE ORANGE

Another persistent “nostril memory,” as I have said, is that of the orange. It is a curious one. Of a certainty I must have eaten of the golden apple many a time before that notable night when I was first taken to a theatre. And yet it is invariably that delirious occasion which is recalled, for however fleeting a moment, when the bursting of the essential oil cells of an orange peel sends forth its fragrance.

The drama was “*Bas-de-Cuir*”—an adaptation of Fenimore Cooper’s Red Indian tale “Leather Stocking.” When I say that the part of “Leather Stocking” was taken by Frederic Lemaitre—personified genius of the old Romantic Melodrama!—that the playhouse was *Les Folies Dramatiques*—it will be patent to anyone familiar with the annals of the Paris stage that I refer to a very distant period. I could not have been more than eight years old. In those days, apparently, the custom, delectable to the boys if less so to their elders, of consuming oranges between the acts had not yet fallen into desuetude.

88

It is very odd. There are as we know a large number of recognized methods of eating an orange: from the elaborate and super-epicurean Japanese dissection within the skin, which removes every pellicule and every pip out of the fruit, preparatory to “spooning” the pure pulp, with or without sugar, down to the simple suction known as “Mattie’s way.” Whatever be the process, the effect never fails if I stand by: as sure as the first puff of fresh orange peel meets me, so is my mind instantly brought back to some scene connected with “Leather Stocking”; to some sense of the very first dramatic emotion ever known—the silent laughter of the trapper; the faint, distant war yell of the Huron; the darting of the bark canoe down the rapid; the crack of a gun: the flare of the camp fire—what not? It is, of course, but a transient flash now, but there it always starts, harking, for a second or so, back half a century in the middle of completely unrelated thoughts and in surroundings the least likely to evoke the past—in the silence of a sick bedside, or amid the hot dustiness of a holiday crowd; or even, at dessert time, in the company of some fair neighbour whose young, healthy powers of table enjoyment enable her to conclude a regular dinner with a whole orange eaten in the appreciative and fragrant manner known as *à la Maltaise*.

89

Scent alone, and that only for a second at a time, possesses this fantastic power. The taste of marmalade, for instance, is fraught with no special memories. As for the pleasure of sight in connexion with the orange, it is now concentrated upon the half-dozen trees—in pots, but bravely bearing year by year their little burden of fruit destined to grow for purely ornamental and “Italian” effect within doors at the Villino.

What a marvel would an orange be considered, had it not become an object of our everyday life! We take it as a matter of course; but how much poorer would the world suddenly seem if oranges became henceforth unobtainable! And the lemon! If lemons cost a guinea apiece, I once heard a physician say who had a special experience of its wide-reaching healing powers, then would mankind appreciate the treasure it has at hand! One-half of its being, and by no means the less important, the rind, is deplorably neglected. We deal with it as with a practically worthless husk. If we more generally understood the value of its ethereal oil, we might save ourselves many a spell of unaccountable physical depression. I can personally testify to numerous instances of feverish bouts cured solely by a hot decoction of lemon zest.

A similar virtue, by the way, seems to reside in the leaves of the Citrus Limonum. In southern countries—especially, I am told, in Spanish America—these leaves are obtainable in the

dry state, and used as a febrifuge and alternative “tea,” or rather tisane, with marked results.

XIII

THE INVALUABLE ONION

Talking of the proper need of appreciation that might be rendered to some of nature's goodly gifts, if only they were presented to us as something rare and novel—what of the humble but invaluable onion? "The onion," as Stevenson says in his masterpiece, Prince Otto ‹and great was my satisfaction when I first read the pronouncement›, "which ranks with the truffle and the nectarine in the chief place of honour of earth's fruit."

Truffle and nectarine are doubtless honourable terms of comparison, but I make bold to believe that any well-constituted jury of epicures would not hesitate to award the humble onion the place paramount among all the savours of civilized cookery. There are a certain number of curiously constituted people who absolutely refuse to countenance the onion in any connexion, however subdued and distant; who profess, whether in æsthetic affectation or through some innate queasiness, to look upon it as pure abomination. There are also those who assume a similar intolerant attitude towards tobacco. But who shall deny that, even as tobacco to the meditative and restful moments, the savoury onion has not added through the ages an incalculable zest to the hour of physical restoration? There could be no cuisine, on any varied scale, without it.

"If the onion did not exist," said a great *cordon-bleu*, paraphrasing a well-known philosophical pronouncement, "it would have to be invented."

Discreetly introduced, and subdued by happy blendings, it holds the finest of *fumets* for your gastronomist's palate: and, in all its own undisguised vigour, it will invest the coarsest or most tasteless food with never-failing allurement for robust appetites, whatever changes be rung upon the raw or pickled, the white-boiled, the golden-fried, or the brown-stewed.

It must have been that russet background of onion which justified my youthful preconceived notion of the pricelessness of "Red Pottage" as an article of food. It no doubt fixed the taste for life. Of course, in all matters of earthly enjoyment, the "psychological" moment ‹which, by the way, is so often purely physiological› plays an important part. Certain tastes reveal themselves only as pleasurable in certain surroundings. A draught of coarse, dark wine of la Mancha, sucked out of the goat-skin sack, with its obtrusive, pitchy twang, will be a pure delight on the side of some dusty, stony Castillian road. And no one who has not had, in some wild out-of-the-way mountain village, to break his fast at peep-o'-day upon a chunk of grey bread, stone-ground and tasting of the wheat-fields, a handful of salt and a couple of Spanish onions, will ever know all the excellences of that juicy bulb.

It is reported that, like his furiously assertive relation, garlic, the onion has very definite medical virtues. Some claim for it a power to cure sleeplessness—dreaded distemper—and also various antiseptic properties. This is as may be. The province of the precious plant, the duty which it fulfils well and simply, is that of supplying savour to things that may be nutritious but lack appetizing virtue. Many are the instances that might be adduced in support of this economic plea, but none more directly to the point than that of the *soupe à*

l'oignon, which your thrifty French housewife contrives at shortest notice—the traditional "soup meagre," object of such bitter contempt in our beef-gorging Hogarthian days.

This new culinary topic sets me once more back in the streets of old Paris, on the occasion when I made personal acquaintance with the possibilities of a penny meal—the best appreciated breakfast I have ever known.

It was in the very last of my French days. Paris had then recovered from the miseries of the German siege and the nightmare of Commune anarchy, three years past. Within the next few months a new life was to be opened to me in England. The prospect of the great change, albeit fraught with some features of gravity, was exhilarating.

The *Lycée*, for all its admirable scheme of studies, had lately been abandoned in favour of a quaint old British scholar, very poor, very learned, who lived on the heights of Montmartre, in the oddest little house—so filled with books that almost everywhere one had to move literally edge-ways. The very stairs, for lack of shelves, were piled on both sides with volumes, old and modern, tattered or nobly bound, stored regardless of subjects, merely in sizes for the sake of room.

Long could I talk about you, O my dear Mr. Gilchrist—you with the keen eyes and the vigorous hook nose ‹always half-filled with snuff›; with the flowing beard of venerable threescore and ten, who taught me to read "the classics" after the English manner, *i.e.* with a regard to quantities; who, for the modest and evidently much wanted fee agreed upon, gave me daily at least five hours tuition ‹sometimes more› instead of the stipulated three! Hours, be it said, that went by lightly enough in that queer, snuffy room, where we sat facing each other on two straight-backed chairs—eager boy and no less eager old man. For, the Latin and Greek tasks over, there always followed excursions, one more fascinating than the other, into the deep and still unknown forest of English letters. And such was the variety and the happy choice of excerpts that, incredible as it may seem, the scholar of fourteen was oftener sorry than elated to leave the garrulous and enthusiastic mentor on his hill-top and return to the paternal house in the lower planes of the Champs Elysées.

An odd way of life for a youth, during those last few months of spring and early summer in Paris! It was full of glad aspirations towards the future, it is true, but at the same time not without an almost regretful enjoyment of the present. The distribution of time was peculiar. There was in it a kind of unconscious anticipation of that light-saving Bill of Mr. Willet ‹which has so little chance of being embodied in an Act›. The queer boy, in his transition stage, had taken a cranky turn on the subject of hours. Having made up his mind, on the one hand, that he had an enormous amount of new things to read and assimilate before his fresh start in England; and, on the other, having heard that one hour of morning study was worth ‹on what authority it matters little now› two after noon, he had invested in a specially ferocious alarum clock. The merciless clamour of this machine drove him out of dreamland daily at a quarter to five *ante meridiem*; and, strange as it undoubtedly was, it is not on record that he ever failed during that period to obey the summons.

A SEDULOUS SCHOLAR

There must have been somewhere at the back of so unnatural a submission, of such a persistency in a purely self-imposed and unnecessary discipline, a sort of romantic smack of mediævalism.... The "sedulous *escholier*" ‹so warmly commended by Saint Louis› was found awake and already absorbed in his search for lore

as returning day began to whiten his window.

The net result was a couple of hours of really earnest work before it was time to dispatch the morning bowl of *café au lait* and the *pain de gruau* and hasten to the ascent of Mons Martis, where impatient Mr. Gilchrist looked for his scholar's appearance at eight sharp. It was very special reading—English History—a subject with which the *cours d'histoire* at the Lycée could only deal in a sketchy manner; but the early-rising *escholier*, greedy of new knowledge, was fortunately helped by the appearance in that year of Green's "Short History of the English People," and fell under the charm of the captivating work.

XIV

PLAYING TRUANT

I have said that it is not on memory's record that the whilom schoolboy, now in his mediæval student mood, failed to rise at the appointed clock crow. Of a truth he rarely had less than his eight hours good sleep, glad enough as he was to retire to rest at nine —"curfew time." But it must be admitted that on one occasion or two he succumbed to the weakness of compounding with his studious resolutions. The French equivalent of playing truant is *faire l'école buissonière*—a taking term, redolent of the allurement of hedgerows and free green fields. And it is the memory of one of these *écoles buissonières*—or rather, in this case, *écoles riveraines*—that, through the usual devious paths, brings me back to the forgotten question of *soupe à l'oignon*.

It must have been a very early day in May, for at a quarter before five, when the imperative rattle was sprung, sun-rays were just beginning to dart between the curtains. The birds in the Champs Elysées kept up their concert through the morning silence of the gardens with more persistent enthusiasm than usual. And on looking out of window, under such a pure sky, the out-of-door world looked quite extraordinarily inviting. It would have been folly to decline such an invitation!

The "Short History," opened at a chapter of the Hundred Years War, was left for the nonce undisturbed: the scholar sallied forth to roam under the tall trees of the *Cours la Reine*, intent, no doubt, on returning after a short stroll. But there is in the early morning hours, especially on such a morning, the spell of the "invitation to the road." The river-side, so fresh and green, and the unending line of giant plane trees on the quays, as he swung along to meet the sun, still low behind the Isle of Notre Dame, drew him on and on. He decided only to return for breakfast and Gilchrist. Then he bethought himself there would be time to stroll through those populous quarters which, unlike the residential districts, were still in many ways the Paris of the Middle Ages. That was the Paris which held for him then so potent an interest—the Paris within the walls of Charles VI; the town of Armagnacs and Burgundians, which had been governed by Bedford for his infant English King; the crowded space, in short, between the old Louvres and the new Bastille, which had been kept in order by the tramping of English men-at-arms. One inquisitive excursion led to another—nearly two hours had been spent in delightful ferreting; there was no time to return home for breakfast before the Gilchrist-ward ascent. Meanwhile a positively wolfish hunger had begun to assert itself. The scholar "searched his pouch." This was quite in mediæval style; and what was decidedly in the same style was the discovery of but two poor deniers for all asset! His usual pocket-money allowance was then reposing on the bed-side table, far away, save for these two pennies luckily forgotten in a waistcoat pocket.

This discovery was made, ruefully enough, as he was looking about in the vicinity of Saint Eustache for some respectable *restaurateur* wherein to obtain the matutinal coffee. But two deniers—twopence, *vingt centimes*—would never purchase breakfast at any table under a roof. What the devil...! Well, twopence in this workmen's district would buy bread enough, anyhow, to appease the sharpest-set morning appetite. Saint Eustache, as every one knows, is close to the Halles Centrales, the great food emporium of Paris—a kind of combined Smithfield, Billingsgate, Covent Garden, and Leadenhall Market. The now frantic owner of the two pence was darting about the galleries in search of the first bread-stall, when he was arrested by a floating savour, truly ambrosial. As he stopped and involuntarily, if quite obviously, sniffed, a tempting voice rose beside him, engagingly familiar: "*Oui, elle est bonne, ce matin. Tu en veux, beau garçon?*" And so saying, a fat smiling *dame de la*

Halle, with an alert eye to business, plunged a ladle into a deep iron *marmite* and filled a generous-sized white bowl, something a trifle under a pint in capacity, with a steaming brown pottage, that in the circumstances was positively irresistible: "*Combien, la mère?*" asked the truant scholar, falling into the speech suitable to the place, and fingering the two modest coins with doubt and anxiety, even as might a ravening Villon, a destitute Gringoire.

"*Combien, mon p'tit gros? Mais un sou, toujours!—Et au fromage*," changing her tone to mock deference as one addressing a client of importance, "*au fromage, dix centimes*, *mon prince!—Mais, bernique! n'y en a plus!*"—she added, laughing complacently and tossing her head in the direction of a second cauldron that lay empty on her left.

The more luxurious cheese pottage being "off," and time of importance ‹it would, volunteered the culinary Madame Angot, take ten minutes to prepare the next potful› the famished wanderer proffered his penny and received his grateful bowl together with some eight inches of "long bread" in lieu of his half-denier change. And, leaning against a pillar, he set himself to the enjoyment of what, as I have remarked before, was the best breakfast of his life.

SAVOURY POTTAGE

Hunger is the finest of all possible sauces—a truism even more than a proverb. The snatched crust, the draught of clear water in the palm of the hand, at some dire moment of want, is more welcome than the most cunning dish, the rarest cup in the easy tenor of life. But the plain bread and the clear water, however eagerly seized, must ever savour of hardship. Now this halfpenny worth of *soupe à l'oignon* bore none of that character, for all that, as far as nutriment went, it consisted of naught but bread and water. It had all the attributes of a civilized meal: it was hot, savoury, immediately comforting.

As I disposed of it at leisure—for it was scalding, and had, besides, in an Epicurean way, to be husbanded as a relish to my portion of simple loaf—I watched the rotund but brisk dame prepare another instalment of the superior, or penny, brew against the next influx of customers. The first *clientèle* ‹it appeared in course of friendly if fitful conversation› came about six o'clock—journeymen without a *ménagère* at home, on their way to their day's task; or night-workers in the Halles, on their way to morning sleep. The next one would begin soon—clerks, workgirls, and small employés who have to be at their post about eight. Then the demand for the penny bowl would rise afresh about noon.

To one who was even then tasting the full value of the finished product the method of production had the interest of actuality, and was otherwise enlightening. And, *pardi!* it is worth recording, as an instance of what could be done with raw material to the value of twelve sous—less than sixpence—to provide twenty people with a savoury dishful of broth and leave a distinct turnover of profit.

These—as far as I could judge—were about a score of medium-sized onions of the more pungent kind ‹twopence, four sous or four cents›; half a pound or thereabouts of butter, salt butter it is true, but your Parisian insists wherever he can upon *cuisine au beurre* ‹six sous›; a ladle-full of flour ‹say one farthing, half a cent›; something like two sous' worth of stale bread, baker's shop remnants. Leaving the cost of firing out of consideration—and in thrifty ingenious French hands it would be small—the return would be like thirty per cent. on the outlay.

As for the technique of the brewing, it was simple but elegant. The sliced onions, fried in the butter at the bottom of the iron pot to a pleasing sunset colour under the

watchful eye of the matron, were at the right moment powdered with the allowance of flour and stirred until the suitable appetizing brown was achieved—"The flour is just to thicken the *bouillon*, you understand, my lad," the benevolent operator was pleased to comment, noticing inquisitiveness.—Then, at the precise moment of alchemic projection, the sliced shreds of bread were precipitated in the caldron, and gently turned round with a wooden spoon to let them take unto themselves all the unction of the butter, all the essence of the succulent bulbs. And presently the whole thing was drowned under a cataract of scalding hot water ‹some two gallons›. After a bubble or two of boiling the combination was completed and the savoury caldron was set aside upon a nest of smouldering ashes, ready against the next breakfast seeker.

And the *escholier*, having absorbed the last crumb and the last spoonful, hastened, greatly refreshed, by every conceivable short cut to his heights of Montmartre—*Mons Martyrum*, by the way, some etymologists insist on dubbing, in opposition to the *Mons Martis* theory, in regard that it was the site of the martyrdom of St. Denis, the French "Champion of Christendom."

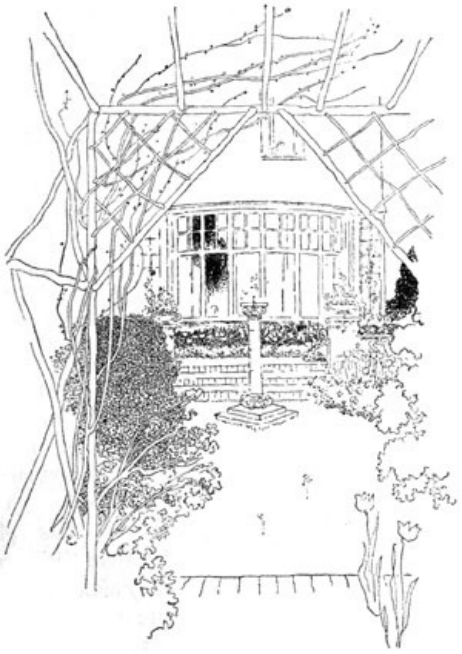
VIRGIL ON "DOGGIES"

He was a trifle late—no doubt as a result of short cuts—and Mr. Gilchrist proportionately stern, just at first. But the dear enthusiastic teacher gradually mellowed under the influence of that morning's reading—the "Georgics," most enchanting of all Garden Talk volumes. The old scholar's geniality had completely returned by the time we reached that "doggy" passage of the Third Book beginning with "*Nec tibi cura canum fuerit postrema*."

I can still see him smiling confidently at me over the line, "Let not thy dogs be the last of thy cares...." There was something prophetic about it!

Here, two score of years later, as I dream of the past, lies Arabella stretched by the fire, now and again heaving her great sighs of comfort. Bettina, curled at my feet, looks up adoringly at the master and wags her stump of tail whenever she meets his eye. As for Prince Loki, he has commandeered the best deep armchair, where he lies flat on his back, with front paws folded upon his bosom, and hind legs stretched out in abandoned beatific fashion, snoring melodiously.... *Cura canum postrema*, indeed!

The Hyacinths are all out in the Dutch Garden. But alas, the winds of March!—they grew and gathered and became a gale and laid some twenty of our silver-blue soldiers prostrate. Their fat juicy stalks snap all too easily. In the pots on the terrace wall, half have been swept away. However, thanks to our close planting, only the eye of the initiate could perceive the gaps. Right under the study windows there are still twin lakes of exquisite pale sapphire, breathing fragrance.



In the bank below the Dutch Garden, the Narcissus, which have been set to the tune of two thousand, are swaying long lemon-coloured buds out of a field of green spikes. There are, in that tongue of land, two Buddleia trees which have grown to unusual height and girth and are a mass of orange balls in due season. And there is a band of Iris to which we are perpetually adding, but which, mysteriously, never seems to increase. There is also a shrubby bit where you will behold a wild rose tree; two nondescript flowering evergreens; a darling little Scotch Briar, one mass of yellow Pompons, entrancing by their wild scent; those disappointing bushes known as Altheas, so eulogized by garden chroniclers; and a Rheum.

We planted the Rheum last year. This March it astonishes us by the leaf buds it has produced. They are like stormy, sinister, crimson blossoms with gaping yellow mouths, and look poisonous and tropical: altogether out of place in a Surrey moorland—especially with the innocence of the grey Lavender plant that grows beside them. What a thrilling thing a garden is and how full of surprises!—do Rheums always do this, we wonder?

CARPETS OF BLUE

All the Compton pots along the terrace are filled with blue Hyacinths and Forget-me-nots; all the beds about the house are stuffed with Tulips and again Forget-me-nots. Now, some people ‹we read in a garden-book the other day› eschew this plant, *Myosotis silvestris*, because “it spreads so rapidly that it may almost be regarded as a weed.” We are the kind of people who like our flowers to spread like weeds; especially when, as in the case of this attractive sinner, every bed becomes a delicate cloud of blue from which on long stems the Darwins rear their cups of wonderful colour.

A little later on, we mean to make the same use of Nemophila, which last year, in spite of ceaseless rain, kept bravely blue in the patch where it had been sown until quite the end of autumn.

Every one tells us that Madonna Lilies will not succeed in our soil. We are making another effort with giant bulbs, which, so far, promise splendidly.

Fate, in its unexpected way, has provided us with a double row of red Duc van Thol Tulips on each side of the two little rose beds that run down the grass slope

under the bench yclept "*Schöne Aussicht*." That particular slope, by the way, in the pristine days of jungle, was the worst bit of wilderness. Heather, Gorse, Bramble, Bracken and underwood made it simply impenetrable. Now, cleared and turfed, it leads the eye gently on to the Pine Tree Avenue; to the green of the fields beyond; to the valley and the distant hills. In a triangular bed at the top a clump of Lilac has been planted and carpeted beneath with "Bachelor's Buttons." Already it is very gay, although the Lilacs are only in bud. We believe these double Daisies go by another title in gardening circles, but this is a name associated with youthful memories. They ought to flourish the whole year round, since bachelors will always be in season. We shall see.

There is nothing that gives one a more intimate sense of the joy of spring than the renewed song of the birds. It is good to wake at early dawn and hear the soft sleepy calls and cries with which they first rouse each other, then the exquisite voice of thrush or blackbird, singing as it were under its breath the morning hymn which is one of the most touching things in Nature. 105

Just now a small bird was spinning out a monody as delicate and continuous and attenuated as a spider's gossamer—some feathered mother, we fancy, cradling her eggs. We never heard any song quite like it before. Adam shakes his head and says we are bringing the birds about the house with our winter largesses; but one might as well be told that if you want to keep your house tidy you should banish the children!

Says Victor Hugo:

"*Préservez moi, Seigneur, préservez ceux que j'aime,*
Frères, parents, amis, et mes ennemis mêmes,
Dans le mal triomphants,
De jamais voir, Seigneur, la ruche sans abeilles
La printemps sans oiseau, l'été sans fleurs vermeilles ...
La maison sans enfants!"

Substitute "*jardin*" for "*printemps*" and you have our views. We have no children in this house, worse luck ... except the fur ones.

CONCERNING CALIBAN

Caliban, the garden man, has again broken his "pledge," a little quicker than usual this time, and we fear we must be firm and keep to our last ultimatum—that unless he takes it afresh he will have to go. Caliban always reminds us of a prehistoric man. Whenever one meets him he looks exactly as if he had just reared himself upright from running on all fours, and would drop down again immediately as soon as we are out of sight. 106 He has an excellent hard-working wife, and works very well himself—until the last pledge has quite worn away. We are sorry for Mrs. Caliban, the mother of three prehistoric babies: for we hear that Caliban, in the philosophic language of the district, "knocks her about a bit," when he has had what he calls "his glass of beer."—"You couldn't wish for a nicer husband, when he's sober," she vows, poor woman, and is pathetically hopeful every time the oath of abstinence is administered! It is dreadful how many bad husbands there are in this small district. In another family the father is so well known that the mere mention of his name is enough to stiffen the employer of labour.

"*Dere Miss, my husband as been very unlucky and strained hisself again and ad to give up his work.*"

Thus the poor wife starts the usual appeal when the inevitable has occurred and there is no more bread in the house. We are quite accustomed to these missives, which indeed might be stereotyped with space left for the date. Although the brother of a local policeman, this black sheep is altogether so hopeless, that, in order to keep his poor little

progeny from growing sable in their turn, we have placed a lamb out here and there in divers charitable folds. Alfie, the last rescued, is a more original letter-writer than his mother. This was the document that he sent her from that happy Home for Little Boys where we trust he will grow up with an unimpeachable fleece.

> "*Dere Mother,—I hope this finds you well. I hope James and Vilet and Alice are well and nice and good. This is a very nice place. I hope you will tell me when you are going to call that I may be in. God bless you.*
>
> *"Yours trewly,*
> *"ALFRED."*

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In yet another family, the head of which was in the habit of spending ten or twelve shillings a week regularly on cigarettes and tipple, until Nemesis overtook him in the shape of consumption, the pretty, hard-working, fiery-haired Irish wife declares without a thought of unkindness, that if she could only get him "out of the way for good" she could "do all right" for herself and her three small children.

THE VILLAGE CURSE

If ever woman has a voice in social reform, though with a few glaring exceptions legal interference with the liberty of the subject is abhorrent to Loki's Grandmother, and she has little wish herself for suffrage or any other rage, she vows that she will vote and vote and vote for any measure that may tend to eliminate the Public House from the countryside—curse of the small home that it is! In every one of these cases there would be comfort and happiness in the family were it not for the perpetual temptation to the breadwinner.

The blacker the sheep, sad to say, the larger as a rule the family of doubtfully hued lambs. Mrs. Mutton—the letter-writer—is "not so well just now." She is pathetically anxious that the new babe may be born alive, having lost the last one. Loki's Ma-Ma went to see her the other day, and found her with a knowledgeable neighbour who has promised to "see her through," and in a state of profound gloom, not unmixed, however, with a faint, pleasurable importance.

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"Oh, Miss, we have just heard of such a sad thing in the village. The nurse, she's just been up to tell me—a pore young woman, Miss, gone with her first!"

"Oh, dear!"—Loki's Mother is duly impressed, but anxious to distract Mrs. Mutton's mind—"That is very sad. I hope you're feeling pretty well to-day, Mrs. Mutton?"

"No, Miss, I'm very poorly these days. Mrs. Tosher here says she's never seen any one like me. 'What can it be,' she says, 'that makes you like this?' Don't you, Mrs. Tosher?"

"Yes, my dear."

"I fell agin the water-butt this morning," goes on Mrs. Mutton, in the melancholy drone that is habitual to her. "A kind of weakness it was come over me. I hit my eye—something awful, Miss, as you can see!"

The signorina had been tactfully averting her gaze from that black orb; she now blesses the superior tact which enables her to contemplate it calmly.

Mrs. Tosher—a large, jovial, untidy female with a shrunken "blue cotton" inadequately fastened by two safety pins across her capacious bosom—gives a heavy but non-committal groan. Mr. Mutton's name is not mentioned. The water-butt explanation is accepted without demur.

"Of course, she's 'ad a shock to-day, Miss, you see," says the village matron, and brings the conversation back to the original topic, which is one of great attraction.

"Yes, Miss, it 'aving been just as it might be me, Miss." Mrs. Mutton sighs, and looks in a detached, if one-sided manner, out of the grimy window. The visitor perceives there is nothing for it: she must hear the details. Wisely she resigns herself.

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"What happened?"

“Well, it was all along of two suet dumplings and some chops, Miss, which wasn’t as they ought to have been, having been kept in the ’ouse too long, you see. Wasn’t that it, Mrs. Tosher, my dear?”

“Yes, my dear, and some ’ard bits of parsnip.”

“But it was mostly the chops, Miss, they’d been kept, you see. The doctors, they couldn’t do nothing for her.” Mrs. Mutton sighs and lifts the fringe of her shawl to the damaged eye. Tragic as the tale is, Loki’s Mother visibly brightens:

“But then the poor thing was poisoned,” she cries cheerfully.

“Yes, Miss, potomaine poison along of her condition, being the same as mine, Miss.”

“But, Mrs. Mutton, anyone—”

“No, Miss.” Mrs. Tosher intervenes: she cannot allow this foolish attempt at consolation to proceed. “The doctor said it was along of her condition.”

“Yes, Miss, it’s the condition as done it—all along of a bit of chop—kept like—and ’ard parsnips.”

A friend of ours once told us that a doubtful sister-in-law had written describing the weather as “boysterious.” The word pleases us. It looks so much more graphic, spelt thus, than in the ordinary way. Well, we are having a “boysterious” time with shifting winds, this end of March. All the poor Pheasant-eye’s leaves are bruised and drooping, and the little field of Narcissus under the Buddleia trees is bent and tangled. To-day Adam has rolled away six tubs filled with last year’s Hyacinths and put them in the border before the rough wall in the front courtyard, against which we have last autumn planted Wichuriana Roses in divers shades of yellow and tawny, chiefly “Jersey Beauties.” A row of Polyanthuses, “Munstead Strain,” are blooming in front. The Hyacinths are blue. The effect ought to be pretty in a week or so. When the Hyacinths are over we shall go back to the old pink climbing Geraniums for the tubs, and they will, please Heaven, flourish from June onwards between our yellow roses. We think we will plant pink Geraniums, but we are not quite sure, for last year we had red “Jacobys” in those tubs, and very well they looked. We should not at all object to them in contrast to the roses.

HONEYSUCKLE AND BITTER APPLE

Last night Loki’s Grandmother began to plan a new garden extravagance. She finds it very soothing when sleep abandons her pillow. We have not half enough Honeysuckle —that’s a fact. She thinks she will order a dozen pots. She has also a desire to get a dozen Clematis, chiefly Jackmanni, in the mauve and purple sorts, and plant them in their pots— the only way, she believes, in which even the commonest sorts will grow in this ungrateful soil. Honeysuckle, we know, thrives here. One summer we took a house on a hill near this, a little house buried in a wood, and the whole place was exquisite with the scent of Honeysuckle. It was grown all about the house, and over archways in the garden. Horrid archways made of wire they were: but it didn’t matter, the Honeysuckle was the thing. We wanted all we could get of it, for there were other odours, not at all so nice, that lurked about. The owner of the house, thrifty soul ‹at least we suppose it goes with a thrifty soul›, waged war against moths with *naphthalene* and Bitter Apple, which are *anathema maranatha* to us. We have had our nights poisoned in a house in Scotland with the reek of Bitter Apple in the blankets. We don’t know what people’s noses are made of that they can voluntarily surround themselves with such a pestilential atmosphere. The owner of the awful blankets also keeps her furs with the same evil-smelling precaution; and we can trace her entrance into the most crowded winter tea-party in London if she has as much as passed up the stairs.

Besides Bitter Apple inside the honeysuckle-covered house, there was a pig outside—not on the premises hired by us, but in the adjoining place, where there was a school for little boys. When the wind blew from the direction of that school, the garden was odious, Honeysuckle and all. The first day we hoped it might be accidental. Then Saturday came, and we suppose the odd man did a turn at the sty, for there was peace till the next Tuesday, when the wind blew from the south again. Then Loki’s Grandmother marched into the room of Loki’s Grandfather ‹there was no Loki then, so he wasn’t a grandfather, but that is immaterial› and dictated a letter to the schoolmaster. Loki’s Future Grandfather protested. It is the kind of thing he hates doing. She drove him into the garden to smell. He tried to say he couldn’t smell it. Then she changed her tactics and hinted at insalubrity—a case of diphtheria in the village, and the danger to Loki’s Future Mother. That had him. He went in and sat down like a lamb. She dictated, as has been said. If anyone wants to know the kind of letter in which to remonstrate upon a neighbouring schoolmaster’s pigsty, he cannot do better than copy this model:

"*Dear Sir,—I must apologize for troubling you but I feel sure that you are unaware of the offensive condition of the pigsty which adjoins our garden—*"

"Offensive?" said Loki's Grandpa doubtfully.

"Offensive," said she firmly. "Offensive, you can't put anything milder. It's disgusting, pestilential, a public nuisance." "*There is so much sickness in the district—*" she dictated on.

"Oh, I don't think I need put that." Loki's Grandfather was getting bored.

"You must," said she; "that will fetch him more than anything. Isn't he a schoolmaster? If it gets about that he's got an insanitary pig—"

Well, the letter was finished with this artful twist. It had the most brilliant and unexpected results. Not only was the schoolmaster profoundly grateful for having his attention drawn to the matter—and the pigsty really was better ever after—but he expressed his gratitude in the most effusive terms. And he and his whole family called, and we went to tea in a thunderstorm at the school-house, which apparently had been built the day before yesterday, for the plaster was so wet the whole place steamed, and Loki's Grandmother caught the cold of her life.

RUMOURS OF THE PIG-FARM

It is a very singular thing that in Ireland, the Padrona's native land, supposed, and with reason, to be very inferior in the matter of cleanliness, the pig should be so much better cared for. Never have we found the sweet airs of that beloved country impregnated with "*bouquet de pigsty*" as they are in every farm here. Of course most of the pigs in Ireland—nice, clean, intelligent, active creatures—roam cheerfully about the roads all day, and share the family domicile by night. But even on properties which own a separate habitation for the "gintleman that pays the rint" it is swept and garnished for him in a manner seldom seen over here.

In the particular region of Dorsetshire where Loki's Great Aunt dwells there is quite a pretty house and grounds nearly always tenantless by reason of the pig-farm at the back. The farmer who kept the farm was amazed and indignant when one of the passenger tenants remonstrated with him and threatened him with the Sanitary Inspector. What if his pigs were noticeable? "Pigs ain't pizen," he said. I dare say, to him, by reason of associations with his bank account, they were sweeter than violets.

Personally we should never keep pigs for choice, no matter how interested we might be in farming. However we might insist on the spotless condition of their dwelling-place, however affectionately we might invite them to the frequent bath and rejoice at the clean pink of their skins, the horror of the moment of inevitable parting would always be before us.

A near relation of ours was the centre of a certain horrid little anecdote, likewise connected with pigs, that is nevertheless humorous enough. It happened in Dorset, in a picturesque manor-house, the walled gardens of which abut on a comely, prosperous farm. One April morning the air was rent with the agonizing clamours of protesting pigs; and she, whose tender heart suffered with the pain of every animal,

was rent too with compassion.

“Oh, what,” she cried to her hostess, who was also her daughter, “what can Mr. Boyt be doing to the poor, poor pigs? Oh! Polly, I’m afraid he’s killing them!”

Polly was not at all sure in her own mind that this was not the case, but she was stout in asseverations to the contrary.

“Oh, dear no, darling; nobody ever kills pigs this time of year. They’re just cleaning out the sties, that’s all. You know what pigs are, darling.”

In spite of a fresh and most dismal explosion, her mendacity rose equal to the occasion; and her final statement, that she knew for a fact that pigs weren’t half fattened yet, produced the intended effect, and the dear visitor was convinced. 115

TIRING WORK

Later in the day when all was stilled once more, and the lovely April afternoon as full of country peace as it should be, the two went out and down the lane; the guest in a donkey-chair and her daughter by her side. To the latter’s discomfiture on their return they met the portly form of Mrs. Boyt, emerging from the walled garden with an empty egg-basket. Mrs. Polly was very anxious to skirmish the donkey-chair past with an ingratiating and nervous giggle; but neither the donkey nor the lady in the chair would fall in with her strategy. The lady in the chair had a liking for Mrs. Boyt, and was amused at the thought of a little chat with her; and the donkey, like all self-respecting donkeys, was bound in honour to stop dead when it was most wanted to advance. Perhaps, too, Mrs. Polly’s artfulness had aroused lingering suspicions, for the lady in the chair was very firm:

“Good evening, Mrs. Boyt. ‹No, Polly, it’s not cold at all. No, I’m not going in yet.› How is Mr. Boyt?” 116

“Mr. Boyt he be fairly, thanking you kindly, ’m. Of course he be a bit tired this evening.”

Mrs. Polly, with a wild eye, intervened.

“I’m afraid it’s tea-time, darling. H’m—H’m—A beautiful evening—Mrs. Boyt, my Mother was admiring the little calves—Come on, Bathsheba!”

In vain she clucked, in vain she pulled the reins; Bathsheba merely twitched an ear. The clear voice from the bath-chair put all efforts to turn the conversation on one side with a decision which swept her into silence.

“Tired? Did you say your husband was tired, Mrs. Boyt?”

“Yes’m. Pigs be very tiring.”

“Pigs, Mrs. Boyt?—Oh! what was he doing with the poor pigs this morning? He wasn’t—he wasn’t killing them?”

“Oh, ’ess ’m.” And, blind to the horror and disgust on her listener’s face, Mrs. Boyt proceeded with unction:

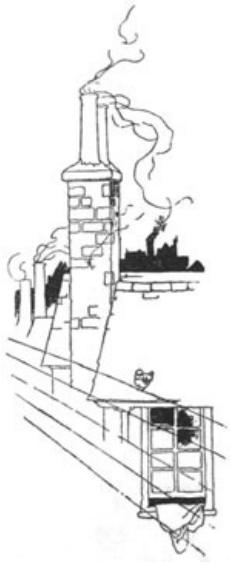
“Beautiful pigs they was, six of them.”

“Oh, but he didn’t do it himself?”

“Oh, ’ess ’m.” Mrs. Boyt was much shocked. “We allus do it ourselves, I do hold en, and Boyt he do stick en—very tiring it do be for us both!”

It was only Mrs. Polly who saw the humour of the situation in after days. The beloved lady in the bath-chair remained overwhelmed with the tragedy. It was not a subject that could be referred to again in her presence.

XVII



How delightful it is to come back to our moors after London! Loki's Grandmother's heart always sinks when the bricks and mortar begin to spring up about the road, and the houses close in around her. Sometimes she thinks that what weighs upon it is the sense of all those miles of squalor; of all those hives of human misery; of all the sin and suffering. Perhaps, however, she is influenced by mere distaste of the crowd; displeasure in living one of a herd in a jostle of houses; the ignominy of being a number in a row with undesired neighbours on either side! Who would prefer to look on pavements, area railings and lamp-posts; to listen to the roar and turmoil of a life one has no ambition to share—a life vexing the peace of night and day, rather than feast the eyes on cool green loveliness, on rolling moorland; the ear on vast delicious silence or the choiring of windswept woods? How, in fact, can anyone who has the choice live in town, instead of in the fair, quiet, spacious country? One cannot feel one's soul one's own in London: bits of it are perpetually escaping to join the giddy midge dance. The individuality evaporates. But then—there are concerts, and Wagner's operas; and one's own select friends and the interest of the great intellectual movements! The splendid activities of life seem to pass one by in the country. Well, we suppose, like everything else in existence, one must take the see-saw as it comes, and accept the bumps for the sake of the soaring. But we are always glad to come back to Villino Loki.

A SCHEME OF AZURE AND TAWNY

The discoveries one makes in the garden after ten days' absence are thrilling. The three rows of Thomas More Tulips under the dining-room window are colouring to a glorious orange, and the Forget-me-nots planted between them are showing little sparks of blue. The tawny Wallflowers at the back are not all we could wish; but, even pinched as they are, the effect of their many velvet hues is satisfactory. There is a single row of double Tulips ‹Prince of Orange› at the edge of the bed, between the Forget-me-nots. In a week or so, looking up the terrace, there will be five lines of flame running gloriously out of the blue; a sight to delight the eye, against the curious bronze purple the moor wears just now.

The Scillas, which we thought were going to fail us, have been a tremendous success, and still form pools of glowing blue round the almond trees. Next year we intend to make a feature of Scillas. They are such tiny bulbs that they can scarcely interfere with anything; and we shall slip them in among the perennials in every corner, besides putting more in the grass terraces. We are also going to run riot with "Steeple-Jacks," especially the light turquoise kind. They last an immense time and are of a delicious tint. The long border of Campanelle Jonquils that we have planted in what we call the "Bowling Green" are drawn up as for a review, stiff and straight like little soldiers in bright gold helmets. Next year we shall invest in three or four thousand Daffodils for the rough places under the trees, and we mean to star the banks with Primroses and Wild Violets.

We have made a vast improvement these days by turfing most of the walks, and we now look out on a delicious sweep of green. The Lily Border and its opposite neighbour, the tongue of land with the Buddleia trees and shrubs, look infinitely more attractive thus set into the verdure. Great clumps of yellow Polyanthuses and self-sown Forget-me-nots

make it gay while we are waiting for the Narcissus Poeticus, the Poppies, the Lilies and other joys to break upon us. The field of mixed Narcissus under the trees is going to be one sheet of blossom in a few days, blown about, though they be, poor darlings, by these fierce and cruel winds. The papers are full of exclamations over “winter in April”: so far our high-pitched garden has stood it well. This is the advantage, we suppose, of its natural backwardness.

We are now fired with the desire to turf the Dutch Garden; the path under the second terrace, *i.e.* Blue Border, and also the path leading from the Bowling Green, so that we shall look down on a succession of green levels, each with its wealth of flowers. We want to make the whole little place shine like a jewel out of the rough setting of the moor.

TEMPTATION

Talk of the zest of gambling! ’Tis impossible that it could more possess the soul in defiance of purse and prudence than the garden mania. If Loki’s Grandmother had hold of a cheque book ‹which she hasn’t› she is afraid the family substance would flow away from month to month into bulbs and blossoms, 120
tubers and saxifrages, clumps and climbers; not to speak of such prosaic but necessary accompaniments as loam, manures, lawn-mixtures and “vaporisers.” She would build at least two new greenhouses and double her garden staff. And perhaps after all she wouldn’t be half as happy as she is. For she might be led into “named novelties,” and garden rivalries, and splendours of artificial rockeries where in the centre of vast beds of slag some microscopic curiosity no larger than a spider would spread a fairy claw in the shadow of a monstrous label. Perhaps she might be bitten with an unwholesome passion for Orchids, and spend the portion of her only child, and all the fur grandchildren, on the devilish attractions of those plants which are, we are convinced, flowers of evil.

Just now her last extravagance has been to order three and six worth of White Honesty at ninepence a dozen, to plant in among the new Rhododendrons; and she is suffused with satisfaction at the prospect of anything so cheap and charming. We recommend the effect, discovered quite accidentally.

We have really abominable weather. It is very unusual.

“Oh, to be in England,
Now that April’s there!”

is an aspiration justified as a rule by a tender interlude between the tantrums of March and the asperities of May. Last year April came in skipping like a kid on the Campagna, 121
even its freakishness full of attraction. Is anything more charming than to see the kids playing among the flocks, as one drives along those roads of haunting and mysterious beauty—under that sky incomparable in its gem-like purity; to see the shepherd in his sheepskin seated on a fence with his legs cross-bandaged, the shrill pipe to his lips; to hear his wild strain and know that it was all just the same a thousand years ago and more? The kids, as they leap out of the scattered flocks, are cut against the blue as on some classic frieze; the tawny, melancholy plain falls and rises and falls again till the hills amethystine, snow-capped, close the field of vision in the far distance! The broken line of an aqueduct gleams as if golden.

“To be in Italy,
Now that April’s there!”

Loki’s Grandmother believes she would give up her country and Villino Loki, and expatriate herself for ever gladly. But Italy is not expatriation, it is the home of the soul. ‹Loki’s Grandpa says he quite admits all that—but that for a permanency he prefers his Surrey hills.›

The fires on the Campagna are rose-carmine as the pointed

flames pulsate upwards. Our fires here are only just the usual yellows. Where is it that Italy holds the secret? Is it in the translucence of the atmosphere? How the sunlight there lies on a common plaster wall! How the stone flushes! Just a little white Villino on a hill-side stands in a radiance of its own, and is not white at all but topaz coloured!

To-day, the fifteenth of April, has been as grey and bleaching a day here as we never wish to meet again. Even the spears of the Narcissus are bruised and drooping.

Mrs. Mutton, poor soul, has had a dead infant. It is perhaps scarcely to be wondered at, as she had another encounter with the water-butt shortly before the event; but she is as much “taken-to” as if she had been hoping to bring an heir-apparent into a realm of splendour. The doctor, to console her, asked her hadn’t she plenty already.

“I did think it unkind of him, Miss! It does seem ’ard! I did so seem to long for this one to live!”

We had a confidential conversation with the experienced matron who was ministering to her, and we mentioned the water-butt with some severity. But Mrs. Tosher would have none of this. Hers is a large mind philosophy:

“Ho! well, you see, Miss, it’s just as it takes them. I don’t say as Mutton isn’t a bit fond of his glass; but after all, Miss,” she smiled indulgently, “you must remember he was a bit upset-like. It isn’t as if there ’adn’t been a reason. When ’e ’eard there was going to be another, it turned ’im against ’er. Of course, poor feller! That was only to be expected like —”

“Good Heavens!”

Mrs. Tosher smiled more broadly than ever at our innocence.

“Some men do take it very ’ard!”

Words failed us. We could not reason upon such a point of view.

At the bottom of the garden the “little cot,” as Mrs. Adam calls it, which she and her husband have made so pretty, has been the scene of a similar domestic event which makes the contrast still more poignant. A little Eve, in fact, has been born into our small garden of Eden. She has received a joyful welcome. That most attractive child, black-eyed Adam Junior, with the mysterious intuition of childhood had recently been bombarding heaven for a little sister. He is now thrilled and triumphant at the success of his prayers. We personally are quite pleased with the addition to the *famiglia*.

We wonder whether it is because of the Italian atmosphere that has so unaccountably descended on Villino Loki that we and our establishment are really falling into relations not unlike those which so happily subsist between master and servant in Italy. The Master is not master, but Father-in-chief; the servant are not servants, but members of his family—the *famiglia*.

We were afraid our last winter in Rome had spoilt us for English ways. We had a delightful famiglia there. Fioravanti di Rienzo, the pearl of cooks; Camillo Lanti, the clever, busy, and quite reasonably peculating butler; and Aristide ‹surname unknown›, the superb coachman, all begged with tears to come back to England with us.

“Take but a postcard,” cried Camillo, “and write upon it ‘Camillo, come,’ and instantly I start.”

“Will ever anyone drive the Excellencies as I drive them?” Aristide demanded. “I would learn the ways of Londra in a day—two days. To learn the ways of Londra, that would be nothing; but to drive another family, that I feel I cannot ever again!”

It was Fioravanti whom we loved the most, and whom we did really try to get over to us later. But it was a case of binding engagements on one side and the other. He had given his

A FEARFUL DREAM

word, as a man of honour, to remain a year with his new family, and we were pledged to some new cook at the moment when he was free. So it all came to nothing—which was perhaps just as well. He was a choleric little man. Loki's Mamma dreamt he stabbed the kitchen-maid and buried her in the garden, which was not at all an unlikely thing to happen, for, like Vatel, his dishes were his glory, his honour was bound up in them, and the race of Cinderellas in this land would inflame the blood of such an enthusiast.

ROMAN MEMORIES

This is not to say that all Italian servants are like those three. We had some very thrilling experiences in the shape of Roman rascality during our first weeks of housekeeping there. After the odd custom we had one woman servant to three men; and, as the genus housemaid does not exist at all in many parts of the Continent, we had extreme difficulty in procuring a *donna di faccenda*. We had a whole large house in the Via Gregoriana, and it was imperative we should have something female to scrub its bedrooms and bathrooms.—Scrub? It is not a word you could get any Roman to understand the meaning of, much less put into application; but still we had to get somebody to sweep the dust into the corner or under the rug, and pass an occasional wet rag languidly round the rim of a bath. Loki's Ma-Ma, being the Italian scholar of the family, engaged the staff. She was enchanted with the appearance of a splendid young girl from the Campagna, with cheeks like ripe nectarines, and a coroneted black head. Alert and brisk as a mountain kid, she seemed to us. Alas! who could have thought it? The creature was a bacchante! She ordered in a cask of wine all for herself, and then ran out the second evening and never came in till the next morning. Having danced with Bacchus all night, she was altogether unfit for any Christian habitation in the morning. It may be all very well to sleep off the red fumes on a thymy bank in a pagan world; but it's not at all poetical or attractive at close quarters within four walls! A sordid, pitiful, revolting business! And the happy mountain kid, who proved after all to be only a bad little gutter goat, had to be driven forth when the legs that had caracoled so much were able to crawl again.

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Aristide had a profile like the head of a philosopher on a Roman coin. He was a magnificent driver. We had a pair of powerful, fiery Russian horses, and they wanted all his skill. Whenever they took to plunging—and when they did so they struck sparks out of the stones and filled the street with the thunder of their hoofs—Aristide's method of reassuring "his family" was invariably to gather the reins in one hand and blow his nose with great *désinvolture* with the other. He always turned sideways to do this, flourishing an immense pocket-handkerchief, as one who would say: "Behold! how calm I am!... Have no fear!"

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Only on the occasions when we discarded our carriage for the use of a motor was the harmony disturbed between Aristide and ourselves. He would droop on his box for days afterwards and take the characteristic Roman revenge of declining to shave.

Loki's Grandmother developed a sudden and violent attack of influenza on one of these motor expeditions, and had to be conveyed home in a collapsed condition.

"Ah," said Aristide, "if Mamma had been with me, this would not have happened! Autos are nasty feverish things."

We were very sorry to leave our Roman house, with its delicious proximity to the Pincio. It was a very old house, with a round marble staircase, deep-grilled windows, and a delightful tiled inner courtyard filled with green, where a fountain splashed day and night—a courtyard into which the sunshine literally poured. A great many of the objects which now give us pleasure at Villino Loki we placed originally in that double drawing-room which the owners of the house had left in somewhat denuded condition. 127

ORANGES AND ALMOND BLOSSOM

The gardener of the Barberini Palace kept us supplied with hired plants. Never have we seen Azaleas or Orange trees grown like those, with such exquisite artistic freedom. We had a Tangerine tree that was a complete joy. This arrangement worked beautifully for the first month. But unfortunately the gardeners, father and son, were professed anarchists and, when they were in their cups, their ethical principles overcame their business sense. Loki's Grandmother had one day to stand by helplessly while Loki's Ma-Ma was cursed and vituperated in a foam of vulgar Italian for innocently requesting to have a faded Azalea replaced. Not being able to speak Italian herself, she could not come to the assistance of her more talented daughter.... And both felt ignominiously inclined to cry!... Alas! that any spot so beauty-haunted should have been desecrated by such coarse and stupid passions! Those gardens of the Barberini, with their Lemon groves and Orange groves; the lush grass filled with Narcissus and Violets, and, in the Roman way, with water dripping from every corner; with the bits of columned wall and the statues and the three great stone pines against the blue sky! It is all Italy in one small enclosure. 128

We moved from the Pincian Hill to much less interesting quarters; but, with the luck that followed us all through that happy time, quite close to the Borghese gardens. There we had a black-and-white tiled dining-room and a long drawing-room all hung with pearl grey satin and a wonderful Aubusson carpet. And when the room was filled with almond blossom there were compensations for the exiguity of our accommodation. The lady who was obliging enough to accept us as her tenants ‹for a rent that filled our Roman friends with horror at our profligate extravagance›, although bearing a noble Austrian name, it was darkly whispered, had a commercial origin. Her businesslike spirit certainly showed itself in her transactions with us; for neither blankets, nor cooking utensils, nor the necessary glass and china were forthcoming, in spite of magnificent assurances.

"What will you?" said Fiori, our beloved little chef, shrugging his shoulders, "*Sono Polacchi!*" "The Countess," he informed the young housekeeper, "sent in her maid, and I showed her the few poor pans, the miserable couple of pots she expected me to do with. 'Is it not enough?' she cried. 'Enough?' I answered. 'Enough perhaps for your lady, for a service that is content with an egg on a plate, or one solitary cutlet! But my noble family must be nobly served.'"

Excellent Fiori, he used to trot upstairs every night to receive his orders, clad in the most spotless white garments and a new white paper cap, which he doffed with a superb gesture on entering the room. Upon receiving a well-deserved compliment, he would spread out his small fat hands and bow profoundly, exclaiming, "My duty, Excellency, only my duty!" 129

In one single instance was his entire content in our establishment clouded; that was when, in a moment of abstraction, he forgot to send up a dish of young peas—the first in the market—which he had prepared with his own superlative skill, and adorned with a pat of fresh butter whipped to a cream at the top: "*All'Inglese*," he called it. We believe he spent the evening in tears, and he could not speak of it next day without emotion.

"Useless, useless, to try and console me, Excellency," he exclaimed. "I am profoundly humiliated, I shall never get over it!"

The Blue Border.

The warm weather has come with a burst in this last week of April. We have torn ourselves away from Villino Loki to London pavements. The Floribunda trees are covered with red buds. We expect a glory when we return. Loki's Great Aunt has presented his family with twenty-five shillings worth of purple Aubretia, with which ‹much to Adam's annoyance› we have decided to carpet the blue border. The Blue Border, we think, is under some evil bewitchment. Our late gardener assured us that no "human gardener" could find room for another plant. Yet it was the only border in the garden that "came up bald," if one can use such an expression. Perhaps we had too much initiative and he too little; a combination bound to result in failure sometimes, if it is accompanied on one side by plunging ignorance, and on the other by "slowness of intellect, Birdie, my dear."

To come back to one's garden in April after ten days of strenuous London is a wonderful little experience for people who care for the pure joys of the young green and the spring flowers.—There is an indescribable panorama of woodland beauty on the hills opposite Villino Loki. A great marching regiment of pines, straggling upwards, emphasize the tints of birch and larch—tints which no pen, hardly any brush, could portray. The very sunlight seems caught and sent forth again from the pale yet vivid sheen. The White Broom is pearled with bud; in a few days it will burst into bloom and toss plumes as of some fantastic, fairy knighthood above the yew hedges that enclose the Dutch Garden.

The dogs' welcome to their lost masters and to Loki ‹who, of course, always accompanies his family wherever it goes› is very genuine, and rather obstreperous. Bettine runs in and out of the room, up and down the furniture, as if in joyful pursuit of imaginary rats. Arabella, fond and foolish as ever, tries to crawl into everybody's lap. Being about the size of a young calf, these blandishments are not encouraged. Loki, little Fur-man, as we call him, has a different way of expressing his feelings. True, he runs about and yelps rapture to the other dogs; but he sobs and cries like a child on reunion with any of his own, and half swoons with rapture in our arms. Sometimes it seems as if the love in his heart were too big for his little flame-coloured body, and must burst it in the endeavour to express his joy!

MISUNDERSTOOD CANDOUR

Loki is always very bumptious and pleased with himself in London—being Only-dog there—but he cannot bear visitors beyond a certain limit. Friends who come to tea are very much touched and charmed at the sight of the "dear little dog" going from one to the other, sitting up and waving his paws with frantically imploring gesture.

"Sweet little fellow—what can he want?" they say, and vainly offer tit-bits from the tea-table. Loki's Grandparents of course cannot answer, "He begs you to go away"—but such unfortunately is the true explanation. He sneezes with rapture when the door is closed on the last departing guest: he then is able to lead his Grandmother upstairs for the evening romp. His Grandmamma has weak health, which is no doubt the reason why he has fixed on her as the only person who understands the true inwardness of his games. They are very exhausting to mere humans, and he has a great deal of cat perversity in his composition. He spent the

whole time of a recent dinner-party sitting upon a chair in full view of the company, ceaselessly begging with prayerful paws; “Oh do, do go away!” As usual he evoked a great deal of undeserved sympathy—meanwhile his tactful family held their peace.

Bettine is growing into the hobbledehoy stage. A few weeks ago it was an entrancing spectacle to see her playing with a butterfly on the moor. It was a yellow butterfly, and we think it must have understood the rules of catch-who-catch-can, for it fluttered along just ahead of the white puppy’s nose. It was a little vision of youth and spring to snapshot for the gallery of mental memories. Loki’s female relations, who are given to transcendental discussions, sometimes wonder whether in the next world they will be vouchsafed these dear small pleasures which make up the best of life down here. Unless we find our animals there, there will certainly be something missing. Surely there are flowers in Heaven, and birds—why not those faithful creatures in which a soul seems so often struggling into birth?

HEAVEN, AND OUR BEASTS

“My little god, my little god!” Maeterlinck makes the dog say to his master. It is certain that man, in making the dog his companion, has in some sort endowed him with spiritual faculties. And it is this piteously loving, confiding, blindly adoring, dumb creature that has been selected by the “master minds” of the day as the chief victim for the horrors of scientific research!

Indeed, that humanity should thus use its God-given dominion over the helpless lower order of creation is an idea so hideous that it can only have emanated from the Powers of Darkness. All the glib arguments that this animal torture benefits suffering man seem to us as much beside the mark as they are immoral. Almost every crime can be justified by some such theory, from the century-old customs of child exposure in China to the modern Suffragette outrages. And already the boundaries on this speculative field have been extended so as to include members of the community whose defencelessness or unimportance preclude unpleasant reprisals. How many unfortunate patients, for instance, are quite unnecessarily operated upon in our great hospitals? Within our narrow personal experience we have known cases where life has been absolutely sacrificed to the “knife mania.”

Loki’s Grandmother, who feels very strongly on this subject, has always wanted to write an article giving chapter and verse of the facts. She would have headed her instructive pages with the title “Killing no Murder;” but she knows no magazine would publish them because of the storm it would raise.

During a recent severe illness of hers, one of her nurses, whom she used to call her “ministering devil,” was very fond of entertaining her—at moments when the patient was too weak for speech—with the hopes which many eminent men of science now entertain of being able, some day, to get a bill passed permitting vivisection on the condemned criminal!

Why speak of such abominations in these pages dedicated to kind, happy days and sweet garden thoughts? Only for this reason—that it is the policy of ignoring, of cowardly turning away from unpleasant subjects, on the part of the great majority of the world that makes the thing possible at all.

One of the first orders we give a new gardener is that nothing is to be slain at Villino

Loki except the Green Fly and the Rose-Beetle. The birds may devour all our buds, strip up our crocuses, and denude our raspberry canes ‹if they get a chance›. The mole may tunnel and burrow and raise his convulsive mounds in our most cherished lawn—and that is certainly a test of garden endurance—we will have no traps! As for the squirrels, we are afraid we have cleared too much in our wilderness to tempt them now. But one of the family actually bought little green tables in order to spread repasts for them near their favourite haunt.

In certain wild corners of Dorsetshire squirrels become almost familiars in such households as are kindly enough to set forth a dainty, now and again, for the frolicsome company. One understanding person of our acquaintance was given to spreading nuts on a certain window-sill, where every day the squirrels used to come and fetch them. One morning she was a little later than usual in this attention; on coming into the room, she was startled by a knocking on the window, and there on the sill sat a thing, all fur and bright eyes, knocking with its fairy paw! We think Loki has a good deal of the squirrel in him. There are no end of nice little beasts that Loki resembles. Sometimes we declare that he is least of all dog.

THE WILD PATCH

It is a wonder that people do not make more use of Broom in their Wild Gardens. We have seen a woodland path where great bushes of alternate white and yellow Plantagenista made riot in the sunshine; but it was too regular an arrangement to harmonize with scene. A wild garden, however cultivated secret, should grow as naturally as possible. It is a rather interesting experiment to fling the contents of a packet of wild flower seeds about one’s banks and unkept spaces. One forgets all about it; and, behold! after the second year, there are all kinds of engaging discoveries to be made: patches of grey-blue Campanulas, bold Foxgloves, Loose-strife, white Campions, all the more delightful because forgotten and unexpected and fitting into their surroundings as no amount of planting in can make them do. A giant Mullein has just made itself a home under the fir-trees and stands as if it had always been there, boldly and defiantly established in its proper place and determined to maintain it.

We caress the project of planting tall Ericas and Mediterranean Heaths on the borders of a certain rough path; and in between the Heather we shall make drifts of Colchicum, so that it may look lovely in all seasons. We do not consider that Colchicum is properly placed in the garden. Its summer leaf is too coarse, and it is hideous when it dies off. Mrs. Earle has made the same remark in one of her delightful books.

VISCOUNTESS, AND OTHERS

It will be very interesting to see how the new Roses turn out. A good many were ordered on the strength of the catalogue description, from

three different rose growers. Hybrid Perpetuals do not do with us; neither do pure Teas stand our cold, otherwise we should riot in “Lady Hillingdon.”

“You never can go wrong with a Viscountess,” said his gardener to a friend of ours.

He was a man of lightning wit—as all lovers of “Savoy” operas know.

“That is a very interesting statement of yours,” he said in that brief, unsmiling manner that added zest to his quaintness. “I have been given to understand the contrary.”

We can go wrong with a Viscountess, unfortunately, and do. As we have said, Hybrid Perpetuals do not behave well with us, except, perhaps, that model of excellence, Ulrich Brunner.—Morals are a question of climate even with roses.

Loki’s Ma-Ma ‹to be discursive—and we are afraid that this chronicle is nothing if not discursive› was a great favourite with this genius of mirth above mentioned, who made the world ring with honest laughter and whose heroic death brought many tears, at least to Villino Loki. He used to call her “his little Lemur” because she had a way of clinging to her mother, in her first debutante days. 138

Never was there a man so tender-hearted. On his estate no wild thing was to be robbed of its life: not even a rabbit. Loki’s Grandmother used to be a little timid in his company, because of this gift of swift humour. She never felt able to meet him on his own ground—except once when in a windy June he told her that he had begun to take his daily swim in the lake, and she shuddered at the thought.

“Cold!” he cried, “not a bit of it! Delightful! You shall take a dip with me when next you come to us.”

“No,” she retorted—and it was the only time in all their pleasant intercourse that she was ever brave enough to make a pass with him—“No, I had rather get into hot water with you.”

Alas, alas! That lake! We felt the menace of it even then. It was there, trying to save another, he found his death.

It has often been said that real wit is a thing of the past. Certainly the younger generation’s idea of pleasantry is a kind of rough-and-tumble fight as compared to the neat, delicate thrust-play of an older world. But this friend of ours had a gift quite apart, a mixture of humour, wit and satire, something dry, comic, quaint, peculiarly his own.

“It reminds me,” said a clever relation of his once in our hearing, “of an old wood carving.”

We understood what he meant; the odd angles, the sharp turns, the simplicity, the brusque sincerity—and withal how richly genial!

In a single instance one of us beheld him almost meet his match, and that in a most unexpected manner. The pretty fairy lady, his wife, happened to comment with surprise upon the fact that a woman who had been very rude to her should have attempted to greet her upon a recent occasion as if nothing had happened. 139

“She actually held out her hand!” she concluded.

“Well, my dear,” observed her lord, in his serious way, “that is the member most usually extended.”

To the surprise of the whole table, a shy lady on his left, who had not yet uttered a word, said in a small meek voice: “She might have put out her tongue!”

We never met that shy woman again. We should like to. “Please will you keep your Pickle out of my preserves,” he wrote to a neighbour whose dog was given to roving. The neighbour bore a name well known in grocers’ lists.

For two days the wind has been blowing over the moors from the east. The sound of it through the trees on the hill-side is like the roar of a torrent; and now and again it is like

the wash of waves upon the beach. A very unseasonable wind, but it makes a grave and beautiful music. Fortunately the Dutch Garden with its wealth of Tulips is sheltered, or there would scarce be left an unbruised petal.

People are very much struck by our beds of Myosotis, surmounted by the swaying chalices of the Darwins. The simple plan of the blue carpet for these slender May Queens seems to them very wonderful and new.

OAKS AND BLUE GLADES

“Oh, look! What’s happened? Is it real? It’s like fairyland!” cried a visitor yesterday to a sympathetic sister.—Such kind people to walk about the garden with! They have themselves a mysterious Oak wood, falling away beneath their lawns, that is now carpeted with Bluebells: a place to sit and dream in. Oaks are trees full of romance, we think. They tell long stories out of the past, and speak of Shakespeare and the glories of England, and their glades are for ever peopled with brave figures of history or fiction.

THE BEECH

Beeches, on the other hand, have a kind of fairy glory about them that does not seem to belong to our land. We drove through a beech forest the other day; the road went up zigzagging to the top of a steep hill, and one looked down upon the Beech glades, all golden green in a fierce sunburst between two showers. And they were still dripping with the rain. It was wonderful, but not English, distinctively English, like that Oak wood. It was a *Märchen-Wald*. Siegfried might have strode through it, blowing his horn: youth incarnate, leaping out of Mime's cave to conquer the world. On the inspiration of such a haunt was the *Wald-Musick* conceived.

MAY AND SEPTEMBER MOODS

If we had a dwelling for every different mood, a log-house at the top of that Beech ravine would suit us very well in a sunny month of May. Between the great smooth boles of the trees we would want to peep out at the flat wide land, with the rich far woods below, misty in the sunshine; and the distant moors as with the bloom of the grape upon them. We would not want flowers; nothing but that heavenly green of the young leaves against the blue; and the whispering and the swaying of the boughs to cradle our souls; and the thrushes and blackbirds to sing the dawn in and the twilight out! How holy and innocent and loving would one's mind become after a week in that log hut—a week alone, or with one's best beloved!

After we came out from that Beech wood we took a wrong turning, and landed ourselves far out on the downs instead of back to our moors. Now, for another mood—say, a warm, still, serene September mood—why not a small stone house in a high hollow of those downs, miles removed from any other human habitation? Just a stone house dumped in the hollow—pale grey, so as not to offend the eye in that stretch of bleached vastness, with a group of Thorns at the back and nothing else, not even a path; only a long way off, the vision of a white ribbon of road, looping and twisting, running to the sea. No flowers but the little wild, stiff, aromatic things that push up through the short turf. Overhead, one or two quite round, white clouds, sailing along the blue, caught by some high current that hardly touches us below—the kind of cloud that you see in an old German print. And all about, as far as the gaze can encompass, nothing but the dip and rise, the scoop and billow of the downs; and the hollows, blue on that wonderful sun-steeped, warm, yet bleached expanse. And the shadows of the clouds, running along across it; and perhaps a lark's song, somewhere not too close, beaten back to earth from an unseen height of joy; and far, far away, the tinkle of a sheep-bell! Would not one's soul expand with the grand silence and the glorious wide spaces? One would not want to hear or behold the sea, only to taste the salt of it in every breath. Now does it not seem that up there, sitting outside that stone house, you would touch the prehistoric past? Or, rather, that the great eternity, the never-dying essences of things, would sink into your little passing bit of humanity? Your soul would mirror all infinity.—A place to turn Buddhist in!

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A TUSCAN VILLINO

There was a pink Villino on the unusual side of Rome. You looked in upon it through high gates into a tangle of garden, where everything seemed to riot. It had an odd, incongruous tower from which you could surely have a vast prospect of the plains of the Campagna and the Alban mountains beyond. There was an archway in one side of it through which one certainly drove into some inner courtyard of delight. That little habitation you might covet with a covetousness that gave you a pain in

your heart. We did.

And outside Florence, too, there was another small house. It had been once a farm. A certain great lady had her spring quarters there, liking the contrast, we suppose, between that and the old Scotch castle where Fate had planted her. We drove to tea with her there ‹early May it was› through the hot, wind-swept, noisy Florentine streets. It was just the time of year when the Iris was flooding the land with its penetrating and yet not sickly sweetness. There never was any scent so perfect. And the small pink roses were flinging themselves over the tops of tall garden walls, as if the prodigal Italian springtide had been at its full and left a foam of bloom behind it. Up, up the mountain road, between uncompromising walls and out into the freer country—and there was the farmhouse! Its garden has left an odd blurred impression on our minds: vaguely—a path bordered by lush grass and gay with Apple trees—there was a storm brewing, and all was black overhead; under the weird sky the delicate blossoms took a curious vividness like minute paintings. 144

One had to go across a red-brick kitchen to get to the stairs that led to the two long, quaint, cool rooms, in the farther of which the hostess sat.

LANDSCAPE ECSTASY

She had kept the charm of simplicity there. Plain white walls and rather empty spaces, with bits of Italian black oak, and a painting or two; a vase of lilac, a dim missal warmth of colour in the Persian carpets that lay on the bricks—that was the picture. A very pleasant impression those rooms made, with the old great lady in her high-backed chair, clad in flowing black satin and with a white lace that framed a face as fresh as the apple blossom without. The storm broke as we sat there. She was nervous, and so were some of her visitors; therefore she had the wooden shutters closed. Perhaps she was not really frightened, for she was as sturdy a Scotchwoman as ever we beheld, and her bright blue eye was stern in spite of her affability. Perhaps she only compassionated the nerves of her guests. Be it as it may, we sat an hour while the thunder rolled bars of sound over our heads and the wind whistled and the rain hissed and roared down the valley, and the lightning kept a perpetual play between the chinks of the shutters. And though Loki’s Grandma generally gibbers during a thunderstorm, she never enjoyed an hour more, so delightful was her hostess and so fascinating the sense of isolation and strangeness, being thus shut away amid the fury of the elements in a little Italian farmhouse! And when the tempest was grumbling itself off in the distance, the shutters were all thrown back and the doors on the square wooden balcony opened. The air rushed in, vivifying, full of the scent of the earth and charged with ozone and perfumes. We went out on the dripping balcony, and never, oh! never can any of us forget the vision! For below the *casa* the land dropped away, and it was all vineyards; and they rose and dipped and rose again, a sight no one has ever beheld out of Italy. And beyond were the mountains; and the whole wide valley was filled with mist and all of it was stained rose and crimson from the sunset. 145

You may not believe it, you who read it, but it is a fact that the valley was carmine up to the balcony, indescribably shot with the fires of the West—a steaming cauldron of glory! That is the kind of vision one carries gratefully to one’s grave.

For a long time we vowed that our old age would see us, like the Scotch Dowager, steeping our being in the joys of Spring in a farmhouse outside Florence.—But now we don’t know. Villino Loki has laid hold of us; it is our real home, the rest

are but dreams.

The Master of the House saw this morning a tiny Golden-crested Wren fluttering from stem to stem of the tall Darwin Tulips to pick at the Forget-me-nots below; and every time it pecked it twittered with joy, so light a thing that it scarcely swayed the slender stalks—a fairy vision. 146

The Hemicycle, where the grass must be allowed to grow lush, because of the bulbs, until the leaves "ripen off," is none the less attractive on that account. There are eight little square beds, each containing a weeping standard —"Dorothy Perkins" or "Stella"—thickly planted below with Forget-me-nots and Bybloemen Tulips. Between the beds there is a large red pot also filled with Forget-me-nots and Bybloemen. The Tulips have a kind of wild grace, coming out of the long grass; and Myosotis, darling little creature, accommodates herself in every surrounding. There is a pretty, stemmed fountain, or rather bird-bath; in its centre, where, in a basin shaped like a spreading lotus flower, a sturdy *putto* astride a dolphin blows soundless blasts. This half-circle of vivid beauty, with the young green grass, the swaying Tulips, the blue of the Forget-me-nots against the moor is good to look upon. 147

Beyond the Hemicycle, the Azalea Glade runs down now in lines of orange-rose and creamy-salmon, bordered too with Forget-me-nots. Up against it the cool silver of a great Service-tree comes just where it makes a perfect background; and beyond that again the rivulets of blue in the Reserve Garden lie deep below.

TRANSIENT COLOUR GLORIES

This is the hour of our garden's glory. No Delphinium muster, no spreading garlands of Roses, can equal the exquisite freshness, the fulness of life of this May world. With the Brooms, white and yellow; with the pink foam of the Floribunda trees, the incomparable gold and green of the Beech and Birch, one wants to put one's arms round the little place and kiss it.

"So much work, so long and great a travail of nature," said a friend to us to-day; "ever since November, preparing for this wonderful revelation of bloom ... and all for so short a span! All this beauty scarce reaches its climax but it is already on the wane!"

Perhaps it is to give us an idea of the permanence of what "eye hath not seen" beyond, that its glories are described in terms of jewels; and yet so perversely is one made that it is the very fragility that endears here below—a sense of the fleeting moment that gives ecstasy its finest edge. No, this limited humanity of ours cannot conceive the infinitude. It is only with those perceptions which transcend the senses that one gets a gleam, a hint, a possibility of once understanding. The restless mind of man for ever demands and creates change, but the soul aspires to immutability. 148

SUMMER

XXI

END OF SPRING, SUMMER PLANS

The last day of May. After the usual "contrariness" of life we have spent the hot span in London, and returned here to find that ungenial nor'west wind blowing in upon us apparently over the same icebergs as a month ago. We think with wails of regret of the long, golden, balmy garden-days we missed; of the full glory of the Azaleas; of those splendours of Rose Tulips which we should have enjoyed, radiant in the sunshine, instead of seeing them yawn their lives away in a hot town drawing-room. And the Florentina Alba Irises, those delicate, fragrant, stately things that look as if they were compounded of cobweb and spun crystal and moonlit snow—it takes but a day to show them in their beauty and another to wilt them—we have missed their lovely hour too, of course. On long, long stems, the Iris Siberica are congregating a little grove of buds in the Blue Border; only two curving purple darlings having outrun the rest. We shall miss them, for the fates have decreed that we are to leave the Earthly Paradise in a day or two once more, and that for the flat horizons of Lancashire. Well, the best of the Spring, early and late, is over, and we do not grudge these intermediary days so much, though we wonder how the bedding out will get on without our stimulating presence. We shall not even have a finger in the "Cherry-Pie." Lengthy plans will have to be made. The "Miss Wilmott" Verbena must replace, by their delicate rose, the blue of the Myosotis carpet as well as the wonders of the many-hued Darwins, in the two centre beds of the Dutch Garden. And in the border beds we project a fine gathering of Antirrhinums shading from crimson, through Firefly and Rose-Dorée, to palest pink.

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The terrace immediately under the house runs, according to our invariable summer programme, to cool colours and sweet scents. Under the dining-room and drawing-room windows, besides the transient prospect of the White Lilies, there are to bloom ‹until the frost lays waste› Heliotrope and Nicotiana, with pale pink Ivy-leaf Geranium to contrast with the mauve and purple, and blue Lobelia to rim the outer border of White Pinks. Against the terrace wall, between the tall Madonna Lilies, which show good promise, and the Polyantha Roses, red and white, with the thick edging of "Mrs. Sinkins," Lobelia and Petunia shall spread. The pots will bear their customary summer burthen of rose Ivy-leaf Geraniums, with Lobelia too, and the Zonals. We like them to flaunt against the moor.

Below, in the Blue Border, the Delphiniums and the Anchusas, the great old-established White Rose bushes, the steel blue Thistle, must make what show they can over the annuals—Nigella, Gypsophila and Nemophila—not forgetting the kind Campanulas, so dear, so faithful, so hardy! In fine contrast, on the other side of the grass walk, the Dorothy Perkins hedge will spread its vivid masses, and fling out its irrepressible garlands over the border of bright blue Nemophila we have had the audacity to sow.

And below, in the Hemicycle, the colours are to grow cool again, with Heliotrope between the Lilies, the Lavenders, and the Monthly Roses, and Fortune's Yellow and Rêve d'Or running up the supporting wall.

The beauty of the ancient woods in that Lancashire home from which we have just returned lingers in our memory. Outside the park walls, the flat fields lie that would have a charm of their own if the encroachment of the peculiarly unlovely brick and mortar prosperity of the district did not catch the eye on almost

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every side; but within there is a sense of wonderful peace and mystery, in the old, old woods with their Rhododendron glades. The astonishing height of the trees seems to keep modernity at bay, and tells stories still of the simple, proud, God-fearing race which has become so associated with the very spot of earth that has borne and nurtured them for many centuries, that, like one or two other families in England, their name in absolute legality is not complete without the territorial appendage.

THE DISAPPEARING SQUIRE

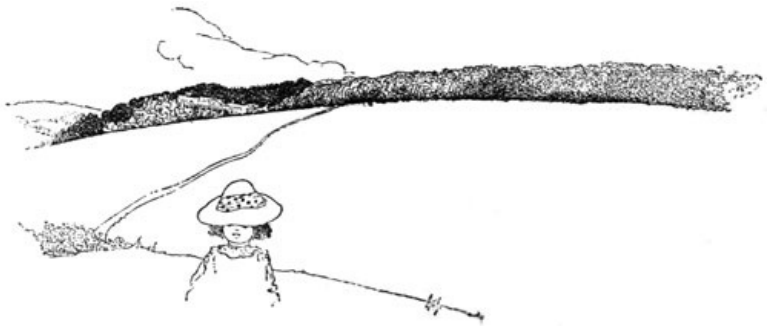
We hear every day that “the Squire” is a being of the past. We know that every effort of present-day legislation is to abolish what was once the strength of England; what might still be its strength, if the restless and destructive spirit of the age would permit it.

The young owner of those old lands ‹who has just been our host› is one who will, we hope, keep up the traditions—so fast dying out, or being stamped out—a little longer. He is, as his grandfather was, the centre of his own people, the shepherd of his flock. Not quite to the same extent, perhaps: we do not suppose, for instance, that he is both maker and depository of their wills, or that he is summoned to every tenant’s deathbed as was that kindly, sturdy old Lancastrian his grandsire. 152

“Hurry, Jimmy, hurry!” the afflicted wife and mother would say. “Run oop to the Hall and tell Squoire to coom along quick, for feyther’s at his last!”

Neither would he undertake to mend the broken leg; or patch up the conjugal quarrel. But the young Squire will still hear such a phrase as this at election time: “What *we* wants to know is which way Squoire’s voting? Squoire’s man is the man for we!”

He will let his cottages at eighteen pence a week; and the larger the family is the smaller will be the rent. And the claims of the tenant will be attended to before his own. He seems as much part of them as they are part of him. Has anyone ever heard of a labourer on a large estate being in destitution? We never have. Our great landowners do more to provide for their own dependents and keep down pauperism than any frantic legislator or wholesale philanthropist. But the system is to go; we have the best authority for it, the authority of those in power. God help England and England’s poor peasants, say we, when they have their way!



We can speak with examples under our eyes. Every time a bit of an estate is sold, hereabouts, the cottages thereon are purchased by the local grocer or butcher: and up goes the rent that had been three and six or four shillings a week to seven and six and ten shillings. Here, where we live, there are practically no important landowners, and what is the result? Not the most miserable cottage to be had under seven and six a week, a rent liable to be raised at a moment’s notice. The butcher, the baker, these are the “landlords,” and the rent they exact is exactly what they know they can extract out of the unfortunate tenant, in the present state of cottage scarcity. We ourselves have spent weeks in striving to secure a roof for a wretched woman 153

with three little children, whose husband had attempted to murder her and after her escape had danced upon all her furniture, and burnt the remnants. We had to engage a cottage three months in advance, and then the rent was eight and six a week! She was a stupid poor goose of a woman, who couldn't do anything for her living except an occasional day's charing or rough washing. Of course we ought to have let her go to the workhouse; but we didn't. We guaranteed the rent instead and took in the eldest boy as an unneeded garden assistant. ‹He is rather like a garden slug, so we thought he ought to be at home in the borders›! The other day a local tradesman raised the rent of a cottage sixpence a week upon the hard-working mother of a large family, who occasionally comes in "to oblige" at Villino Loki; and when she remonstrated he humorously remarked that Mr. Lloyd George was "driving him to it!"

THE REFRESHING FRUIT

There is a proverb that "good wine needs no bush." The Chancellor's efforts to convince his victims of the comfort of the plaster which is blistering them are almost pathetic. But surely it is another proof, if one were needed, of the weakness of his cause. A local laundry owner has been receiving six pounds a week, lecturing, in Devonshire of all places, on the blessedness of the Act as experienced by himself and staff. One of our district nurses, a delightful sturdy North Country woman, was "approached" as to whether she would undertake, for a consideration, to use her persuasiveness with her patients and make them see how much they were benefited by the stamp tax. She declined with a heat that may have astonished the emissary.

It must indeed be a little difficult to make, say, a struggling greengrocer understand the debt of gratitude he owes to the law which constrains him to pay fourpence a week for the assistant he can so ill afford as it is and mulct that discontented youth of threepence! More especially when baker and grocer charge him more to cover their own losses.

The obvious remedy, says Mr. Lloyd George, is for the greengrocer to raise the prices in his town! He does; and somehow it doesn't work. Being in a poor district and all his patrons being poor, they buy less from him, and he buys less from them.

"But look at the comfort in sickness!" It is tiresome, it almost seems like putting bad will into it, that the greengrocer's wife should develop consumption before the first stone of any sanatorium is ready!

Now, that prosperous, contented class, the labourer on the great estate, a man who lives on his lord's lands, if not rent free, very nearly so, with wood and garden produce, potatoes, milk and what not, and steady employment all the year round, he is to be benefited—save the mark! A "minimum wage," cheap housing, the fixed hours, the sacred half-holiday, it sounds so plausible! The propagandist is volubly at work. "No wonder," as the young Squire we have recently visited once ruefully said to us, "my decent, contented, God-fearing villagers were turned in a couple of hours into shrieking, blaspheming lunatics by such a gospel, preached with forcible arguments in the public-house."

Of course they will get their demands. Striking, with "peaceful picketing," generally gets its way, even if not backed up by Government emissaries and the glorious visions flash-lighted by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. But what will be the result? Half the amount of employment on the estates of those who can still afford to keep them, and no all-the-year-round engagements. When the work is slack the over-paid and inimical labourer will naturally be discharged. We say inimical, for how can friendly relations be maintained if the old solidarity is destroyed? This, of course, is what is aimed at; and the quack remedy, the patent pill alluringly held aloft, is—State ownership of land! The land is to be managed like the Workhouse, the Prison, and the Reformatory, of which, we are all aware, the British State

makes such a brilliant success. We know how the poor love the Workhouse, and how happy they are in it; yet one can scarcely take up a police report without finding some desperate pauper sentenced for revolt. Oh, no doubt it will be a Merry England when these disinterested and dashing tinkers get their way.

A HAVEN OF REST

We have known, in parenthesis, a pauper establishment, run by voluntary effort, in which a hundred and fifty old men and ninety old women were kept happy and contented by a handful of soft-voiced nuns. No need to call in the policeman, in Portobello Road; for there old age is reverenced at once and pitied, and the double aspect of the most natural of all the commandments is put into every-day practice, so unobtrusively and simply that no one can guess how heroically.

But the religious question will soon be treated in the same way as the land question; so no invidious comparisons need be drawn. Little boys and little girls are to be taught that the State is henceforth to take the place of God in their infant minds. How comfortable and warm a creed! How it will strengthen their character for living, and ease the thoughts of the dying. There is no God: but there is a Chancellor of the Exchequer and a dashing gentleman at the Home Office. You have not been created or redeemed, little boy! We have no prayers to teach you. There are no divine commandments which you need obey—naturally, since there is no Divine Father. There are no sacraments to sustain and elevate your soul—for little boys and girls have no souls! But cheer ye: you were evolved by a natural process, and the State is here to cradle and instruct you and to make life beautiful for you. Behold, dear children, the Book of the Laws. These laws which you are bound to keep—unless, of course, you go on strike, become a Suffragette, or organize political vote catching. And this is a picture of a Jail for people who are so blind as to refuse Insurance blessings; behold that inspired countenance. That is the head of the Government! And for Sunday amusements there is the Cinema—the Crippen case, dear children; the Houndsditch Burglary and the Train Smash.... And when the new theories have developed and matured, there will be no such thing as private property in anything to constrain the free mind of emancipated man—A house of your own, a wife to yourself!—fie!

“Surely, surely,” said a young Liberal M.P., “no sanely thinking person would continue to advise religious education in the schools. What is the inevitable result—see the case in your own Church” ‹he was speaking to a Catholic› “the law commands one thing, and the Church another! Take divorce, for instance. Surely, surely—”

“Dear me,” said the Catholic. “We had not looked at it in that light. The laws man made are, then, above the laws God made?”

“Surely, surely you would not teach little children to disobey a law of the land made for their benefit?”

We ventured to say that the ten commandments had forestalled—

His pitying smile arrested us; so infinitely was he above the ten commandments.

Yesterday Loki's family motored energetically some fifty miles and back to a garden party near London.

A wonderful house with wonderful lawns and gardens—one feels that the hideous tide of brick and mortar must inevitably sweep over and destroy it before another generation comes and goes, so that there is a kind of pathos in its very beauty.

Out of the unlovely mean streets along which the tram-line runs its abominable way, one turns off into the cool country road. The long avenue is bordered by wide fields where, as we passed yesterday, the new-mown grass was lying in silver furrows. The country is quite flat; but the richness of the green, the incidents of lake and timber, give it a placid English fairness of its own.

The Lady of Villino Loki went with a keen eye to garden hints, and her first thrill was a Honeysuckle screen in the little garden of the second lodge. Such a Honeysuckle screen! It had once, she supposes, been an arch, for it rose to a kind of gable peak in the centre, but it was filled in either by design or natural luxuriance till it was a complete mass of bloom, a solid wall of blossom. Never had she beheld such a thing before. She wants Honeysuckle at the Villino, as she said already, and she is fired with fresh enthusiasm. Why should she not have a hedge of Honeysuckle, not too far from the house itself? It is settled. She will buy fifty in November and try.

The weather, which had been misty, thundery and unpromising, cleared just upon our arrival at the great "Adam" house. The lawns were in their perfection, the shade of the Cedars was cut out on the sun-golden turf, the massed flowers were vivid against their cunningly devised backgrounds. Naturally Villino Loki, even in its wildest dreams, cannot emulate this great and carefully cherished place; but one can find practical suggestions here and there. We cannot mass rare and golden-hued Maples over a broad band of yellow Calceolarias anywhere on our terraced lawns; but it is very instructive to see the management of certain herbaceous borders, where three or four large pillars of Rambler Roses alternate with mauve and silver-leaved Japanese Maples at the back; the foreground being of the usual herbaceous order.

We had no idea that the dwarf bright yellow Evening Primroses would look so well grouped together. And Nemesia, "Heavenly Blue," has become the one annual our souls long for: blue flowers are all too rare.

Everything was most kindly labelled. We do not know if it is possible to obtain any seedlings this time of year; but certainly, next year, this adorable little plant, Nemesia, with its most exquisite turquoise blue colourings and its splendid efflorescence, shall enter largely into our schemes. In between the Nemesia, bushes of Campanula Persicifolia rose with cool restrained tones; the contrast was one to be copied also.

Another not impossible example was a Rose screen, starting with a background of close growing Ramblers, some ten or twelve feet high, supplemented midway by some of the larger Bush Roses and running down to the edge of the turf in front with pegged-down Teas; so that, to the very top, it was one mass of varied bloom. We do not see any reason why such an effect should not be copied, even in a small garden.

The *standard* Scarlet Geraniums we must admire from a respectful distance. They are as much beyond our humble resources as the *standard* Heliotrope we so much admired a year ago in a millionaire's huge grounds not very far from

us. These last rose out of a bed of mauve Violas. The ambitious soul of the mistress of the Villino hungered to copy it; but she knew that hunger would never be assuaged.

PICKING UP WRINKLES

We have had a frightful disappointment in the “Miss Wilmott” Verbenas. For two summers it has been the same story. Last year they came up “all colours,” though purchased from a well-known firm! This year, to make quite sure, we ordered seedlings to be specially grown for us from a local nursery. The wretch has sent a collection of measly little starveling things which cannot be expected to do anything for weeks and weeks. Of course they should not have been accepted; but the deed was done in our absence. We are much inclined to have the beds cleared, and Heliotrope or rose-coloured Ivy-leaf Geraniums put in instead. It is too late for anything else. Gardeners are so tiresome! They are as bad as cooks, who will accept with perfect equanimity, fish ready to illustrate the proverb and game prepared to walk to its own funeral, and then say that “they thought it was ‘a bit high’ perhaps, but they weren’t quite sure!”

We have forced for the house several plants of Canterbury Bells, glorious purple and white, which have grown to an extraordinary size and fill the Compton pots on the landing in very decorative fashion. 161

The front landing and stairs are wondrous pretty in the Villino: and the colour scheme—Tangerine yellow for the curtains and grey for the carpet—somehow suits the little place, with its Roman air. In the round bow window there is a large copy of the Samothraki Nike on a white stand; and in front of her we place flower-pots all the year round—generally Orange trees in the winter, with which we are successful.

Alas! we leave the little Paradise to-morrow! However, we are still in such an intermediary stage that we mind less than when we lost all the glories of the Azaleas. For anyone of an impatient disposition, this time of the first setting out of the bedding plants is a trying ordeal. We are going this afternoon on a surreptitious round with “plantoids” to which Adam objects, but in the virtues of which we are believers.

PITFALLS OF AMBITION

The longer we labour at garden experiences, the more it is borne in upon us that ambitiousness is to be avoided. No amateurs—however splendid their visions may be—should attempt “Wild Gardens,” or “Bog Gardens” on their own unaided efforts. This does not refer to the flinging of wild-flower seeds in woodland glades, but to the digging up of harmless and unobtrusive patches of field and bank for the insertion of seedlings, which apparently will never be at home in that particular aspect and soil. The worst of it is that the energetic workers are so ensnared by the mental vision that they very often fail to perceive the paltriness of the material result. 162

“We had to have the meadow mown and to dig it up, just along there,” said an energetic gardening neighbour to us the other day, pointing out with pride a dreadful stretch of raw and muddy earth that lay meaninglessly along the lush field. “And we *think* the things will do now.”

The things—poor little sprigs of white Violas, and other most unadaptable garden children—were looking very ill and faint at long distances from each other. And in any case, even if they were eventually to flourish, the meadow was quite beautiful enough in itself and needed no such adornment. But we had not the heart to tell her so. We said, “How nice that will be,” but took the lesson to ourselves.

TANTALISING NOVELTIES

A visit to the Horticultural Show at Holland House—even the humblest

gardener can take away lessons from these displays of lavish beauty. We wonder whether it would be possible for us to have a pool anywhere upon our sandy height. And, if so, why should we not build rough rock-work round it on one side; fill it with the cool misty mauve of the Nipeta, the cool pale yellow spires of the Dwarf Mulleins, and the faint pinks of Spiræa; and against this background, walled about by a bank of the mysterious Iris “Morning Mist,” let a little slender lead statue rise out of the water? Coolness and mystery! Shall we ever encompass that delightful effect?... The flat flagged paths on the other side of the water should be bordered by Iris; and they should dip down into the pool itself, where just two or three Water Lilies should rock their gold-centred cups. Oh, dear! If we had sufficient money how beautiful we could make our corner of the earth! 163

Oh, and the Clematis!—It was a shock to find that we had to pay seven and sixpence each to go in, but it was worth it, for we have plunged to the extent of a dozen adorable Clematis from the very fountain head—if one can so strain the poor English language—of Clematis culture itself.

And the Roses! “Coronation,” a new bright scarlet climbing Wichuriana; Tausendschön and Blush Rambler, old favourites, but so beautiful! There were two or three pillars of unnamed seedlings, exquisite apple-blossom beauties, which we longed to purchase, but which were not yet in the market. A firmer, richer apple-blossom best describes the bloom of the new discovery.

Quite beyond our pockets, but most attractive, were the standard Ivies, golden and variegated, fifteen years old ... at the modest charge of six guineas each! Could we ever wait fifteen years to see such developments? After all, why not? The grower assured us they were perfectly hardy, and more they were cut the better. They would look charming on the terrace. Such balls of gold!

Lilies at the top of a rock-garden or at the top of a rough wall have a most charming effect.

We have invested in three and sixpence worth of new fertiliser guaranteed to “produce an appearance like dark green Utrecht velvet in ten days on the roughest lawn.” 164

“Would you like your lawn to look like that, Madam?” asked the red headed youth in charge of squares that didn’t look in the least like real grass, but a kind of artificial compound as above mentioned.

“Very much!” said one of us, who was struck by the unnatural hue and smoothness of the exhibit.—“Do mind the sun on your head!” she added parenthetically to the delicate member of our party, who is always on her mind. “Oh, pray Madam, do not trouble to shade me,” said the red-haired youth modestly. “I am quite all right, I assure you.”

We had a vision of Loki’s Ma-Ma in her quaint Directoire dress, all striped black-and-cream chiffon and dim orange, with her absurd little Directoire tulle hat and its one coquettish rose ‹absurd but not unbecoming› spending the rest of the afternoon in sudden philanthropic frenzy, shading the red-haired youth from the July sunshine, while he volubly touted for orders for patent fertilisers! Innately polite, we explained. He was not in the least abashed.

“I do feel it very hot,” he remarked simply.

Loki is once more Only-dog in London. He is unspeakably grimy, as none of the *famiglia* except Juvenal are ever able or willing to tub him when he most wants it. Juvenal, his special friend, has been away on his holiday—poor little Loki could not understand his absence. He was perpetually rushing out of the rooms and downstairs to see if he had arrived. At last, worn out with suspense, he dashed up to his butler's bedroom and would not be satisfied till he was admitted; when, jumping on the bed, he began to tear up the clothes, believing, we suppose, that Juvenal shared his propensity for curling under the quilt. Odd little dog! He has as many moods as a fine lady, and when really annoyed lies in a strained attitude with his hind paws stuck outward like the embryo legs of a little crocodile. This is the sign that he wants "a powder": what we call in our playful dog-language, "a pow-pow."

FREEMASONRY OF DOG-LOVERS

What a freemasonry the love of dogs creates! Loki's Grandfather, travelling up from our moors the other day, met a family likewise going to London; and these had with them a small Pekinese, who sat very sadly with drooping head and tail. The owner of Loki watched him sympathetically for some time in silence, then unable to repress his feelings, he leant forward and said very solemnly to the Pekinese's lady:

"This little dog wants a pow-wow!"

"Oh! we know," eagerly cried the lady in charge, "we know he does! He should have had it this morning, only we were travelling."

We were pleased with the anecdote when Loki's Grandfather told us. No introductions, no explanations needed: even our own special doggy dialect instantly apprehended! One touch of Peky makes the whole world kin.

A divine discontent seems an unavoidable accompaniment of garden ambition. The Lady of Villino Loki is always furiously disappointed every time she returns home—except in the Spring. She had, this time, wonderful visions of her Madonna Lilies, proudly straight against the upper terrace wall; of her Blue Border foaming blue; of her new turf settling down into greenness. And, behold, the Lilies have got the lily disease, drat them! the Blue Border never will be blue, whatever she does; the Anchusas have gone back to the wild; and not one drop of water has the infant turf received through three weeks of drought since her departure—with the results that can be imagined!

Not one of our precious packets of seed have come up! We once knew a pretty American whose daughter married a rather impoverished young Englishman of very good connexions. He was, however, scarcely important enough himself to attract much attention: and the day before the wedding he was nonplussed by his future mother-in-law, hitherto the most silky and smiling of beings, taking him by the arm and marching him round the displayed wedding presents, pausing at every step to remark: "I do not see the present of your uncle, Lord A.! I do not see the present of your cousin, Lady B.! I do not see the present of your great aunt, the Duchess of C.!"...

We want to take the seedsman in similar fashion round the greenhouse shelves:

"Where are the pots of Mignonette?" we will say. "Where the

serried ranks of Scarlet Verbena? Where are the potted Nicotianas?”...

The Master of the House—he has admitted it himself somewhere in these pages—understands little if anything of gardener's art: that is, of the art of rearing flowers in their proper seasons, in suitable ground and so forth. But he complacently believes that he has an aptitude for what, on a larger theatre of operations than the few acres of Villino Loki, would be called Landscape Gardening! He imagines that, had fate provided him with an "estate," he would have been great at devising vistas, grouping trees, laying out pleasing curves of approach, and all that sort of thing.

At the Villino this imaginary special competency could only find an opening in clearance work. And when we first bought this strip of hill-side, clearance was indeed no small matter.

With the exception of the terraces immediately round the House and of the kitchen yards about the Cottage, the whole place was a congeries of almost impenetrable thickets, interspersed with patches of heather and furze. There were but two paths, running down, in purely utilitarian lines, from the higher level to that of the cottage *potager*.

‹What has been achieved since then in the matter of path-cutting can be made patent by a glance at Mr. Robinson's perspective map of the Villino grounds.›

So thick and strenuous was the growth of underwood—self-sown infant Hollies, adolescent Larches and Pines, young Ashes, Oaks and Chestnuts in their nonage, all interlocked, entwined in Brambles and Honeysuckle, that hardly anywhere could the trunks of the full-grown trees be distinguished.

Now it is obvious that the beauty of wooded grounds depends essentially upon light effects under the foliage and between the boles; upon distant peeps. In no direction ought the view ever to be solidly stopped—unless, of course, where it is desired to hide some unpleasing prospect. It may therefore be erected into a maxim that, if trees are to be enjoyed, underwoods must be sacrificed wholesale.

At first, with that reverence for things which, if they may be laid low at one blow or two of the billhook, require many years for their growth, one feels inclined to hesitate. One's heart rebels at the thought of cutting off in the flower of its youth the sapling that in the spring is of so tender green, the bush of name unknown but engaging enough—if there were not "so many of him." But it soon becomes evident that you must harden your heart and ruthlessly slash away the bulk of undergrowths, for good and all.

And this has been the province of the *padrone*. And although on many an occasion at first the *padrona* bewailed bitterly, almost tearfully, that he was making the place "simply scald," it is now generally admitted that the result has proved a matter for congratulation.

There have been a few mistakes, no doubt. It was not easy, for instance, in the case of Holly, and perhaps also of Rowan, for the beginner to distinguish which clump was likely to bear the decorative winter coral and which not. Seeing what some of our Hollies in a good season can be ‹that which closes the prospect at the north end of our Hemicycle, for example, what a glory of pure scarlet it displays when all

THE PROBLEM OF HOLLY

bright colours have disappeared from the garden!› we regret not to have spared a few more. Nevertheless, it is a wise decision, in grounds overgrown by underwood, that *delendum est Ilex Aquifolium*—that Common Holly must go.

In the first place, nothing will grow under the shade of its dark leathery, spinous leaves, which, even when shed, are more indestructible and noxious to grass than pine needles themselves. And, secondly, Holly is a very bully and brigand among growing trees. Its vitality and pushfulness over-masters everything. Your young Holly will thrust aside the sturdiest neighbouring branches; will conquer its "place under the sun" to the detriment of the equally fair claims of Oak, or Ash, or anything that strives upward. 171

No—the right place of Holly is in the close-set hedge, for which its forbidding, never-failing foliage and its vigorous growth pre-eminently fit it. Or, again, in a dignified isolation where it can, without truculent self-assertion, develop on all sides its regular, shapely growth, look beautiful at all times in its evergreen sheen; and, if of the fruit-bearing sex, relieve with its scarlet the browns of autumn and the white of a winter landscape.

The first spot to be assailed was the area now called the Blue-bell Glade, the interior of which was then *terra incognita*. It had to be tackled like a fortress—by regular sap. Nothing was spared but the full-grown trees. Terrible was the destruction, and gigantic the accumulation of small firewood for future use. But great was the landscape result: it gave us our first far-reaching perspective along our own ground. We had, of course, fine and wide views over the tree-tops from the highest terrace. But now we obtained, in one direction at least, a middle-distance prospect of green fields between the boles under overhanging branches. And the effect was singularly satisfying.

And so the war on undergrowth was carried-on, with system, until the present pleasing condition was reached, when in every direction the eye is able to find, up hill or down, either some far view of moor or valley, or some corner of the grounds themselves, now grass-grown or bright with flower-beds.

Grass—that was what Villino Loki most wanted! And the extirpation of the greatest enemies to grass—Brushwood, Heather, Gorse, and Bracken—has been the hardest achievement of all: one which Grandpa is fond of letting every one know is more especially his own. 172

THE GREAT CLEARANCE

The Great Clearance took place in what may be called the pre-Adamite age of this little Earthly Paradise. Adam ‹in a kind of fateful way› only appeared upon the scene after the rougher work had been dealt with of letting in the air and light of heaven wherever it had hitherto failed. He arrived, of his own initiative, to offer his services in the matter of *gardening*, on the very day when his predecessor—one Grinder, whom on benevolence intent we had allowed to assume the duties of "gardener," save the mark!—had had at last to be dismissed.

The late Grinder, whatever his disqualifications for the honourable title thrust upon him may have been, was undoubtedly a lusty worker. But the Great Clearance was too great a task for one man. It was thus, by the way, that Caliban ‹likewise now "the late"› was introduced as labouring assistant, and, from the nature of his labours, known as the Woodman.

The elimination of underwoods, however, was by no means the most arduous task. Let once the good light of day and the free airs penetrate to the ground hitherto obscured and

choked, and in a given time grass will make its appearance. And it will spread healthily if the lower branches of all standing trees are lopped, up to a suitable height. But we wanted grass not only in the glades, but, if possible, upon every stretch of soil not devoted to flowering beds or ornamental bush. And, to that end, the Heather and the Gorse had likewise to be banished in perpetuity. With miles of Heather and Gorse-clad moors about one, Ericas of any kind, and certainly Ulex, however delightful in themselves and in their native habitat, are distinctly *de trop* in the garden.

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Seen in wide masses, and whether in the brown, green, or purple stage, Heather, as we know, is an ever beautiful cloak to the earth. But except at the height of its flowering richness, when it occurs in scattered patches, its effect is apt to be rusty and unkempt. As for the Gorse—gorgeous as it undoubtedly be at its full golden time when seen in clumps on down or roadside—it has, at close quarters, a ragged, dusty, almost leprous appearance which quite unfits it for cultivation. It would seem as though all its vital beauty were driven out to the flowering tops: its inner and lower portions are always dried up, and scabby as from some withering sickness. Such, at least, is always the case with the full-grown plant; though, when very young, or when springing anew from a shorn stump, it remains for some time pleasingly green all over.

THE PROBLEM OF GRASS

To the uninitiated it may appear simple enough to pluck up the Heather; but how soon will he be brought face to face with the dismal fact that, for grass-growing purposes, this superficial treatment is of no avail whatsoever! The peaty soil, product of untold generations of Heather, spongy to a depth of many inches, matted with the fibrils of roots, is absolutely antagonistic to grass of any description. The roots of the Furze, on their side, deep-reaching, far-spreading and tenacious, are simply rejuvenated and rejoiced by the lopping of the plant above ground. You may think you have done with it: behold! within a very few weeks saucy spriglets of brightest green Gorse will merrily make their appearance and claim the land again as their own!

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Any seed sown on such a bed is merely so much food offered to the fowls of the air. The Master of the House had to learn that lesson practically, and lost a couple of seasons in so doing. ‹As may plainly be seen, he was a thoroughgoing ignoramus in that quarter; and he was not likely to be set right by Mr. Grinder!› It was only when Adam supervened and pointed out the necessity of trenching the ground, ridding it of its centuries-old tangle of fibre, overturning and pressing it, that the desired green result could at length be obtained. But the overturning demanded the combined work of pickaxe, fork, and cutting spade. It produced an incredible amount of underground wood, tough, sappy, and seemingly incombustible; and it kept Caliban occupied for many a long week.

We have now many promising verdant roods, destined in time to be improved into lawns, where hitherto Heath and Whin held their sway. But the spaces lately freed from underwoods, which we so fondly hoped would turn of themselves into grassy glades and dells, provided us with

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new Heraclean labours.

WAR ON BRACKEN

Have I named Bracken?—Bracken! an everlasting problem on such a piece of land as ours, which less than a century back was undoubtedly part of the wild moorland itself. Nothing, it seems, but thorough overturning will really and finally rid the soil of the unconscionable Bracken—the ubiquitous, the imperishable, the exasperating Pteris Aquilina!

This knowledge has been impressed on us by the experience of successive years. Our first inkling of it was when, returning to the Villino after a few months' absence and fondly anticipating to find our precious glades ‹which, after the Great Clearance, had been generously sown with grass› covered with a tender-green, thickly-piled carpet, we were confronted with waving fields of lusty Brake already breast high.

In itself the sight was not displeasing; the young verdure was cool to the eye and did not greatly impede the view. But what we wanted was Grass. Grass which, in course of time and at their proper seasons, Crocus Vernus, Primrose, Blue-bell and Daffodil, Foxglove, and Colchicum Autumnale would star and illumine with colour.

Now, where the Brake thrives, it takes unto itself the whole bounty of the sun, and stifles all plant-life of lesser height than itself.

We disconsolately took advice from presumably competent persons. 176

"Oh," said Everybody, with confidence, "you can get rid of Bracken if you cut it twice in the same year."

"Can you?"—and here the Master of Villino Loki, in a state of inveteracy and resentment foreign to his usually placid character, feels he must again speak in the first person —"Can you?" ‹this is sarcastic› "I tell you, sir, that for the last three years I have cut that infernal Bracken, not twice in the twelvemonth, but four times and more—and look at it!"

You may imagine me pointing, with an indignation difficult to repress, to some corner of the cleared ground that does not happen to have been visited *quite* lately by the spud or the furze-cutter.

"This," I say with emphasis, "I myself purged of all visible Bracken only last month!"

Now, as a matter of fact, the space in question, if not actually covered with the pertinacious fronds, is dotted with scores, nay hundreds, of forceful shoots; some still cosily curled up in their "crosier" stage, others impudently stretching themselves under the sun and persisting, in spite of all edicts, in screening its rays from the hard-struggling grass. What chance has humble grass against a thing that will sprout three inches in one night? And, if you look closer, you perceive a host of baby offshoots cheerfully pushing from some deep-burrowing ancient subterranean body, its innumerable little bald heads between the sorely tried, recently established grass settlements.

Twice cut, forsooth!—Why, to this day, in the very middle of 177
paths made three years ago ‹"Three—years-ago—sir!"›, you will discover here, there, and there again, a healthy shoot, sappy and erect, balancing its bright green plume right in the way, as if in defiance of all extermination.

No—the most that can be claimed as a result of the war which is still being waged upon the Brake is that, perhaps, this pertinacious growth is beginning to betray some signs of discouragement. The ranks of the legions, as they make their periodical reappearance with an obstinacy worthy of a better cause, grow a trifle thinner year by year.

"If you only cut them young," says Adam, consolingly but with cruel imagery, "they say the roots will bleed to death."

This—Corporal Nym would hint—is as may be. As in the case of our wonderful forbears, bloodletting in the Spring, if not

really conducive to better health, seems to interfere little with their thriving. Meanwhile, happily, as no scion of Pteris Aquilina ‹if it cannot really be prevented from cropping up where it chooses› is now allowed ever to reach its baleful maturity, the desired and much-petted grass is gradually establishing itself. And, with that eager optimism in gardening matters which is a characteristic of the family at Villino Loki, we look forward, in a few years, to the prospect of a succession of grassy carpets from crest to foot on our hillside.

But this consummation, much desired, can, we are aware, only be secured by unremitting labour. Sometimes the Master of the House ‹who, having rashly vowed to achieve the task, considers himself bound to see it through himself› is assailed by something very like misdoubt as he rests awhile upon his spud, blunted by some two hours' punching at sporadic croziers, and computes the remaining roods, nay, the acres, still to be dealt with ... 178

If seven men, with seven spuds
Should punch for half a year ...
...?

Rock of Sisyphus!—Cask of the Danaides!—Hydra of Argolis, with the unquenchable heads!—these and others are similes that fatally drift into his meditations.

HAUNTING RHYMES

When engaged upon work of protracted and futile iteration—such as "Bracken-chivvying"—tags of inane rhymes are apt to invade the hypnotized brain: of the kind that sometimes rise in accompaniment to the steady bumping of railway wheels on certain slow journeys. A particularly haunting one—to be conjured off if possible—is the "Nightmare" jingle, Mark Twain's, I believe:

Punch/, conduc/tor, punch/with care,
A green/trip-slip/for a two/cent fare,
A pink/trip-slip/for a three/cent fare,
Punch/, punch/, punch with care ...

and so on relentlessly.

If these are not the exact horrid words, this is the way they come back to me, giving a lilt to vindictive spud work. 179

At another time, the apparent futility of all efforts to come even with the task at hand will evoke some such iterative lines as Cyrano's dying vision of eternally resurging enemies:

Je sais/bien qu'à/la fin/vous me/mettrez/à bas
N'impor/te, je/me bats/, je me/bats, je/me bats!

This sort of absolutely incongruous haunting is an instance of what Hoffmann would have fondly called the *Zusammeverhängniss der Dinge* or "fatally-concatenated-mutual-interdependency" of things! Mythological images rising vaguely from the clouds of school memories; the lilt of that Walrus and Carpenter verse parodied a thousand times; an American jingle never recalled since it was first casually read and dismissed on a railway journey; and the magniloquent *panache* lines of Rostand—all dropping in irrelevantly from some distant and forgotten corner of the past into this garden, all à propos of spud work and linking itself with it!

For instance, to-day ‹one of the three longest in the year, for, in the coming morn, about five o'clock, our summer solstice will have taken place›, as I spudded away at the fern, thirstily and perspiringly, my haunting iteration was alternately of images wide as the poles asunder. One was of those puzzling lines, in Boileau's heroicomic poem *Le Lutrin*, anent the barber who

... d'une main legère
Tient un verre de vin qui rit dans la fougère.

FERN SEED

The other was of Gadshill boast: "We steal as in a castle, cock-sure: we have the receipt of fern-seed"—which irresistibly, by concatenation, brought in the image of my dear if disreputable old friend Falstaff and how he would have "larded the lean earth" as he spudded along. Now it occurs to me that if the receipt of fern-seed as handed down by tradition is in any way correct, this is the last day when this fern massacre can be of any use, as far as Villino Loki is concerned, to prevent its propagation for this year. Is not to-morrow St. John's Eve; and is not that the date upon which the invisible seed—which once successfully gathered will confer upon the gatherer the power of invisibility—drops upon the soil?

The harvest, it seems, must be made "in the dark of the moon," at the exact turning of midnight, and received in a pewter plate; without regard to the beguiling pranks of fairy or goblin, who, naturally enough, are jealous of the acquisition by mere mortals of this essential attribute of their order. The receipt does not state how the pewter-harvested seed, being invisible, is to be bottled up or otherwise preserved for use when required.

This, by the way, is a fairly typical instance of the manner in which our mediæval superstitions were shrouded in cryptic conditions, the failure of any one of which in the smallest particular would plausibly explain away the failure of the whole charm.—We can easily understand the paucity of invisible mortals at all times.

Well, I for one have no desire for such a charm. The temptation to use it would be distracting. And conceive the endless trouble, picture to yourself the misconceptions, you would raise into your own mind if you possessed the power at any moment of prying, invisible, into the innermost life of your best friends, or your enemies ... and of hearing what they might happen to say about you!

No. Yet I would some power gave me the gift to gather all the invisible seed at Villino Loki: I would burn it once and for all.

CROSSES DE FOUGERE, A LA JAPONAISE

One cannot help wondering that so little use should be made of all this vegetable wealth. There it is, covering square leagues of common land, to be harvested by whosoever list. In former days, indeed, it was gathered in and burnt for "potashes"—chiefly for glass-making. And therein lies the explanation of the wine "laughing in the *fougère*"; ash of *fougère*, or Bracken, had in the "grand Roy's" days become synonymous with glass itself. Again, in its dry condition, Brake was once extensively used for thatching and for litter; in some parts of the country the young plant was given as fodder to cattle and horses. Now, however, county councils forbid the building of thatch, our up-to-date cattle and horses are too fastidious as to litter and fodder, and we import our potashes. Meanwhile, Bracken threatens everywhere to stifle the Heather on our moors.

If I remember right, in some parts of France the poorer people make use of young Brake as food. And this reminds me that, some years ago, I heard the last Japanese Ambassador remark at dinner—à propos of the Asparagus that was just going round—that he wondered we should not make use in the kitchen of the Bracken he had noticed growing in such enormous and neglected quantities in England. In his country, he assured us, they eat the young

shoots, when still in their folded “crozier” stage, precisely as we over here eat Asparagus, and consider them not only as delicacies, but as particularly wholesome and nutritious.

The recipe for cooking them is simple. The croziers, cut just short of the roots, are to be parboiled in strongly salted water; the first water, which extracts some unpleasantly bitter principle, is to be quickly poured off; then the shoots, thoroughly drained of this first water, are boiled in a large quantity of fresh water, drained again carefully and served with oil or butter, very much like our Sprue.

I must some day make the experiment. I wonder if the joy, now, of eating tender young Bracken would be like that of the savage devouring his declared enemy?

Meanwhile, for the sake of the desired grass, the hecatomb must be repeated daily.

MORE BLACK SHEEP

This July, not remarkable for anything but rain and dark skies, has produced a perfect outbreak of wickedness in the village. Our black sheep have turned into tigers without even the excuse of torrid weather to inflame their passions. But, indeed, the public house is always ready to supply the stimulant necessary for driving average humanity into brutal and insane crime.

Caliban, whom the reader may remember as having once worked in our Fortunate Island, and always looking as if he had just risen from all-fours, has, in our recent absence, thrown away all pretence at humanity once and for all. Though, indeed, why should the poor beasts, who generally make excellent fathers and husbands, be compared to the type of man that deliberately ruins his home? To batter your wife, terrorize your children, to squander your substance for an indulgence which ultimately destroys your health, is a mystery of perversity reserved for the superior being.

Anyway, Caliban, having drifted from place to place, and lost his last chance of employment in this district by killing a whole hot-house full of Tomatoes through drunken neglect “on” the local market gardener, as we should say in Ireland, finally locked his wife and children out of the little cottage, and shut himself in with his drunkenness in company with his aged but not less drunken parent. The power of thought having returned in the morning, the precious pair put their boosy heads together and sold the furniture, possessed themselves of every available valuable, even of Mrs. Caliban’s solitary trinket, and decamped together from the district!

Mrs. Caliban, with an infant in arms and two little girls at her skirts, has now set to work to earn enough for all. She is a valiant woman; and no doubt when she has succeeded fairly well, Caliban will return to repeat the process. She is very anxious for a separation, but cannot accomplish this, as the whereabouts of her lord and master are unknown.

She is less fortunate than the wife of Black Sheep No. 2. Last Saturday we were peacefully entertaining a couple of week-end visitors, when poor Mrs. Mutton crawled into our garden to “see the young lady.” The water-butt myth was cast to the winds. She had a black eye and a dislocated thumb, and informed us that Mutton had threatened to “do for her,” and that she was going in fear of her life. “When not drunk,” she remarked with the apathy of despair, “I think he’s mad!”

Mutton is well known in the district for his playful ways, and no one would consent to house his wife but an enterprising barber: on the condition, however, that Mutton did not come after her. The poor thing shivered and shook, and avowed that she could not return and pass another hour in such terrors. When she heard his step, she told us, a trembling would seize her.

“You ladies,” she said, rolling her hopeless eyes from one sympathetic listener to another, “can have no idea of the kind of life poor women like us lead!”

COUNTY POLICE METHODS

Little Jimmy Mutton and she had spent the previous night out under fear of a gun, which Black Sheep *père* had taken to bed with him,

with threats of instant use. The first idea of the owners of Villino Loki was that the woman should have protection; and here the drama took a Gilbertian form with a dash of nightmare. Her cottage being on the borders of another county, no policeman nearer than nine miles off had the right to intervene. In vain did “the young lady,” attended by the two week-end visitors, start off for the nearest magistrate and lay the case before him. Mrs. Mutton must betake herself to that far county town, by what means she best might; and if she and her poor lambs were “done for” between this and then, it would all be within the strict limits of the law as far as the magistrate was concerned. With fruitless eloquence were the perils of the situation painted in their blackest colours. Mutton, as we have said, was famous, and like Habacuc in Voltaire’s estimation, might be *capable de tout*.

Could not the local policeman take possession of the gun?

Impossible. No policeman nearer than Paddockstown could lay a finger on it.

Could not at least the village Bobby keep an eye on the house where the enterprising barber had taken in the refugees? 186

The Magistrate smiled at such ignorance of the law. All orders must come from Paddockstown.

“That,” remarked one of the week-end visitors as the discomfited party shook the Magistrate’s dust off their feet, “that seems a futile old gentleman!”

This week-end visitor had an emphatic manner of speech, which afforded the only relief in the exasperation of the atmosphere.

However, the affair managed to straighten itself out on, again, true Gilbertian lines. Mrs. Mutton duly found a motor-bus to convey her to Paddockstown; and there, with all the proper formality, interviewed the Magistrate and a lawyer, with the help of whom she was separated from her obstreperous Mutton. Little Jimmy gave evidence, Mutton was advised by his lawyer not to defend the case. She has now appropriately joined forces with Mrs. Caliban and is enjoying a time of peace which we trust may not be merely an interlude.

“Oh, Miss!” she cried, describing these unwonted sensations, “I’m that overjoiced, I’m afraid it’s hardly right!”

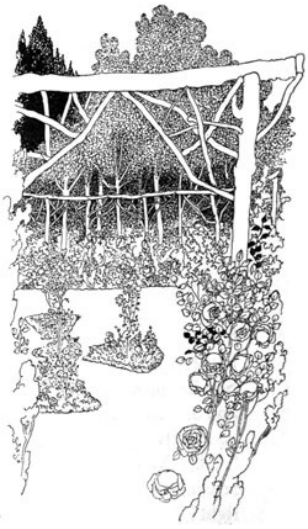
As the husband is hovering about the roads, waylaying all concerned with alarming politeness, we are a little anxious. We know that he is still *mouton enragé* at heart; and we do not know if in spite of the mandate from Paddockstown the local police would be allowed to interfere were gun or table knife to be put into requisition.

The Dorothy Perkins are coming out, showing a most glorious kind of fire rose, which hitherto they only displayed in the autumn after a touch of frost. Combined with the delicate sprays of the Ceanothus Gloire de Versailles, they make in a tall glass vase as pretty a harmony as we know. 187

The new Rose Garden promises complete success. Caroline Testout is coming out, fat and pink and smiling in her usual good-humoured profusion. We have a great bed in the shape of a Maltese cross in the middle of a stretch of turf in this new Rose Garden, and the other three beds are filled respectively with Madame Abel Châtenay; mixed yellow roses, among which are Betty, Lady Hillingdon, and Juliet, are specially successful; and another deep pink charmer named Madame Jules Groles. She has not yet come out. The centre bed is devoted to General MacArthur, with a Crimson Rambler pillar.

The Climbing Roses against the arches that bound this rose-lawn north and south are growing bravely; and we have lost our hearts to May Queen with its mass of bright pink flowers, which, combined with the fainter, creamier pinks of Paul Transon, make such a delicious bouquet of bloom, all on the same pillar. 188

THE NEW ROSARY



The hedge of Penzance Briars, though only a couple of feet above the ground as yet, has thrown out long lines of starry blossoms, shading from faint primrose to deepest crimson, with intermediate constellations of pinks and carmines that out-do both Dorothy Perkins and Zephyrine Drouhin.

The new Rose Garden is shut off on the west by a fir-tree avenue, and we are trying to coax white and red Wichurianas up the stems, in spite of all expert pessimism. Marquise de Sinety is a delicate, warmly tinted, pinky cream Rose. Catalogues, no doubt, would call her “salmon”; but it is such a horrid word that we prefer to present the picture under another aspect.

Do not let anyone subject to the watery caprices of an English climate place their trust in Maman Cochet! Her heavy bud becomes hopelessly sodden after anything like a shower. One can conceive that this dowager would be a handsome enough object in a southern garden, or that she would be a good greenhouse rose; but, like many another, she does not bear adversity.

Handsome, bland Caroline Testout keeps up her self-contained smile unimpaired in fair and foul weather; “fat-faced Puss” that she is, a very Gioconda among roses, even to the close folding of her plump leaves, which remind one of that overrated charmer’s compact hands. It would take a good deal to shake her equanimity; scentless, soulless beauty!

The Lyons Rose has burst on us this year in all its splendour, a most successful combination of pink and gold. The sunset glow seems to shine through the petals.

These efforts at producing new effects are not always successful, some having a very patchy appearance, to our mind. As for the Austrian Briar, Soleil d’Or, it is more like a blood-orange cut in two than anything else, in colour, shape, and pulpy texture. From a distance the bright circles look attractive, but we should recommend it to no one who values delicacy in their blooms.

A great success are the Weeping Standards Stella. Though it is their first year, the branches are covered with lovely tinted blossoms; and what is more, these are lasting. Single carmine stars are they, with golden centres and a scent of musk.

FLOWERING TIMES AND PLANS

The mistress of the Villino, a foolish and impetuous person, has three times made the same mistake and omitted to ascertain the blooming season of plants which she wished to be in beauty together. So the four Weeping Standards Stella, are considerably in advance of the four Dorothys which alternate with them; and the standards Soleil d’Or were quite over before the Conrad Meyers appeared in the Lily Walk; and the contrast of pink and yellow was what had been aimed at!

In the same manner she had intended the Garland Roses to foam up in two splendid white pillars at each end of the long length of Dorothy Perkins at the opposite side of the Blue Border terrace. Of course the Garland is becoming unsightly before the fire-pink of the Dorothy begins to show in any profusion.

The garden—except on the upper terrace, which with

Heliotrope, Lobelia, and the climbing Ceanothus keeps to the faint cool blues, untroubled by the efflorescence of the White Pet ‹which, by the way, has completely eaten out Perle des Rouges› and the very faint pink of the Ivy-Leaf Geraniums—except for the upper terrace, the garden, we say, is growing pink. What with the Verbenas and the Red Roses and the cheery coloured Ivy-Leaf Geranium called Jersey Beauty, in the Dutch garden, and the general ramp of Dorothy everywhere, it is a mass of pink.

Another year we must have more Penstemons. They are charming things, and as good as they are beautiful. In a garden nothing is beautiful that is not good, which is another facet of its likeness to Paradise.

We caress the idea of a border where perennial Gypsophila, large bushes of Monarda, Penstemons and Lavender should group and contrast and delight and rest the eye.

There is a walk in a wonderful garden not far from here—a garden which brings a kind of fainting, despairing envy to the soul of Loki’s Grandmother—where Lavender and Penstemons make the happiest possible effect. The walk itself is a thing of beauty; through woodland on one side, the border in question runs quite a long way against a low parapet on the other. Below this parapet the ground slopes down, and at the end of the walk there is so abrupt a fall that it seems almost to end in mid-air with a vast panorama far beneath. And on the side of the flowery border a shelving precipice falls away out of which giant stone pines hang against the distant horizon. The Lavender has grown to a hedge, and the varying soft pinks of the Penstemons run vividly against its mistiness.

Would that walk, and that border, and that view, were ours!

We nearly had a garden tragedy yesterday afternoon. The sounds of a little dog in great distress broke the peace of the drowsy day. Loki's Ma-Ma dashed out of the house thinking it was Loki—caught in a trap! Certainly the little dog—whichever it was—was in desperate straits.

"That's the voice of my Betty," cried Juvenal, galloping to the rescue in his shirt-sleeves. "My treasure, my little girl! I'm coming!"

It was well indeed that he did hurry, for Betty had fallen into the deep water-butt in the Rose Garden; and if she had not had the sense to scream for help, and to hold on to the rim of the barrel with all her little claws, she would have been a drowned Betty, and nobody the wiser, perhaps, for days and days.

We think it would have broken Juvenal's heart.

Both Arabella and Loki were standing staring stiffly instead of doing what was expected of dogs of such intellect: which was running to fetch human help.

PERSIANS AND A WICKED WORLD

On a former occasion however, when Kitty-Wee had a fit, poor little darling, Loki acted up to our opinion of him. We had gone for a walk on the moor, and the Persian Princess, still half in her kittenhood, had accompanied us, with that touching display of pleasure at being in our company which makes the Fur Children so endearing. She had to roll on the grass in front of us, sharpen her claws on every tree, and rub her pretty head against our skirts in the endeavour to show her feelings. We suppose these feelings were too much for her. We had halted in the greenhouse when Loki dashed in upon us, whimpering in a frightful state of agitation. He drew his Grandmother out of the greenhouse, and rushed up to stand over his little fur sister, crying out loud in sympathy and distress.

She was a small convulsed heap upon the ground. Fortunately the tap, which ran into one of those delectable barrels of odoriferous water so precious to the garden, was quite close, and we were able to administer first aid with promptitude.

For all who do not know it: cold water to the head gives immediate relief to any little creature in such a seizure.

She quite grew out of them. But, alas! our thistledown Princess, our dear pretty silver lady! We have delayed to write her sad fate into the pages of the chronicle of the happy Fur Family. She was stolen! We often lie awake thinking of her. Pampered as she was; so accustomed to be thought of, and cherished, and made much of; to have her pearly robe brushed and combed to the last point of perfection, her dainty appetite catered for; to find a caress and a cuddle whenever she was in the mood for it! A lurid mystery ‹accompanied by a great deal of hard swearing› envelops her loss. She was lost on a half-hour's motor-trip which her family, struck with momentary idiocy, was allowing her to undertake alone. She was, in fact, about to contract another matrimonial alliance with a prince of her own race, and was so securely packed in her luxurious travelling basket, so unmistakably labelled, so solemnly handed over to the care of the conductor of the motor 'bus, that it did not seem as if she could come to harm.

But Blue Persians, as well as pink pearls, are over-precious chattels to confide to a dishonest world! The conductor of the next 'bus to that by which she was expected, handed an empty basket to the envoy from the other side; and when this was refused, declared the cat had escaped on the way. As the basket was hermetically closed, this lie had not even the merit of being plausible. But puzzle succeeded puzzle when the waiter from the Golf Club House, a reliable witness, deposed having picked up the same basket still

securely fastened at every corner—but minus the cat—on the first round of the ’bus. “It could have gone to Siberia in that basket,” he declared, “it was that strong and solid!”

The local police, a most intelligent and valuable body of men, declared that nothing could be done, “as no man could be taken up for telling a lie.” And the railway company, after punching a large hole in the basket, announced that as the cat was not insured, we might sue them for five shillings! We advertised and beat the countryside in vain—Kitty-Wee has gone out of our lives. If we only knew that she was happy, the ache at our hearts would be less.

We must fill the gap, and are deliberating whether a pair of Blue Persians, or an orange couple, would afford us the greater joy. We think to decide on the latter would be less callous to the memory of Kitty-Wee, and provide perhaps a better match in the little Villino that runs so much to orange and yellow.

Never could there be anything more beautiful than the St. John’s Wort along the moorland roads. It has been a day of golden heat, the distant woods have shimmering purple vapours in their hollows, and the hills are misty blue. There had been a fire last year in a great flat stretch of pinewood that runs into heather and moor, high above where the road begins to fall into the first of the little country towns between us and London. The wood had been cleared of the dead trees and we suppose it is this which has given encouragement to the great yellow weed. However it may be, it is a field of cloth of gold now. Pines rise up at intervals in their dark solemnity. Royal purple of the heather runs into the gold. It is a meeting of colour that ought to be immortalized.

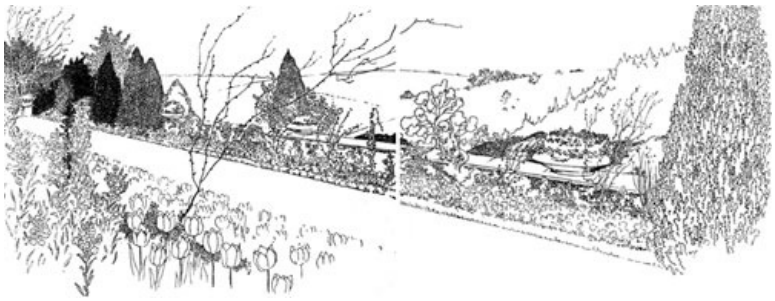
Time has run away with us, and the garden chronicle has been silent. The Ramblers have blazed in the garden, more especially the indefatigable “Dorothy,” till one has grown almost tired of such a repetition of vivid pink.

The Mistress of the Villino has been planning “toning-down effects” for next year and means to run a border of Catmint or Dwarf Lavender against the “Dorothy” hedge.

The Lily Walk, which we shall have to call by another name, since, with a few exceptions, the Lilies decline to have anything to say to it, is, should the scheme contemplated be successful, to show a cool vista of greys, lavender blues, and “rose mourante” behind the arch where the same irrepressible Perkins flaunts herself in such splendour. The Delphiniums, which have done so well there, will have spent their hour of glorious life before the arch enters upon its triumph.

What a mausoleum that Lily Walk has proved itself! It has been one of our tragedies! Adam is quite dispassionate, and says “it’s the Lily disease; and there’s a deal of it about.”

By one of those freakish accidents that will occur in the best regulated gardens, a batch of Fairy Lilies was planted *behind* the ramping Alstrumerias. This was discovered too late, when these bold Peruvians were succumbing.



TONING DOWN EFFECTS

But besides the amount of sickly, straggling “Candidums,” “Auratums,” and “Tigers” that have disgraced the border, there is the unaccountable number of bulbs that have been swallowed up in it! The whole thing must be dug out this autumn. And the scheme is now to grow Ceanothus “Gloire de Versailles” up the wooden trellis at the back between the Roses the foliage of which is always blighted, and to have a pillar of Blush Rambler at the end, by the side of the Wellingtonia which closes the border. Bushes of Ceanothus Azureas, as well as the successful “Gloire de Versailles”; a drift of Achillea, shading from the palest pink to deep carmine; bushes of Catmint; the new pale pink Spirea, perennial Gypsophila; mauve Galiga ‹Salvia, Miss Jekyll recommends›; Sea Lavender and a couple of clumps of Eringium will complete the effect. Perhaps there shall be Moon Daisies, pale pink and mauve Penstemons, and one or two groups of “Cottage Maid” Antirrhinums to fill up the gaps. But what we feel is needed is the grey, mauve, silver, and lavender-blue tinting against which Dorothy Perkins may be as flaming as she likes.

It is rare to find Rose Achilleas anywhere. Yet they are as pretty a thing as we have ever seen in a border; the blossoms seeming to drift on their slender stems, one above the other like little sunset clouds. 199

What has been for once a complete pleasure is the wide bed under the drawing-room window. The Ceanothus—which loves us—has been a treasure of delicate bloom; and, against it, the great old bushes of lavender have thrust their spikes in profusion. Just the right tone to harmonize. Then the Longiflorum Lilies—excellent, sturdy, conscientious darlings!—have lifted their satin shining trumpets above the Heliotrope that loves us too; and Lobelia, the one vivid line of colour, has rimmed the thick cushion of "Mrs. Sinkins'" foliage most artistically. The grey-green gives the finishing touch to a really reposeful combination. There are also two or three clumps of Nicotiana Affinis, softly mauve, and faded purple crimson. To gaze at that corner against the amethyst of the moor is a never-ending delight.

A CHAPTER OF DISASTERS

But another garden disaster has been the annihilation of all the seedlings which we sowed in the open border! It is laughable now, but sad too, to turn back the pages and read the vainglorious project of running a dazzling ribbon of Nemophila against the Dorothy Perkins hedge. ‹It might have been frightful; so perhaps Providence kindly intervened!› But that Nigella "Miss Jekyll" should have refused her mysterious and pretty presence in the Blue Border is a deep disappointment.

We are again gnashing our teeth over the Blue Border. The fact is, we suppose, it is too much to expect beauty all the year round, no matter how boastfully garden writers inform you of their artifices in that direction: how cleverly, for instance, the annual Gypsophila will bury the unsightly decay of the Iris leaves, or how you can pull branches of "Miss Mellish" down over the Delphiniums. 200

Why do not our Delphiniums bloom twice? Every garden book and every catalogue cheers your heart by promising a handsome second bloom to the industrious clipper-off of seed-pods. But never a Delphinium has responded to our kind attentions in that direction. Perhaps our soil does not give them strength enough for such exertion. But it is idle speculating. One must learn what one's garden will do and what it won't do—and make the best of it.

The greatest of all the tragedies that have befallen us lately is indubitably the passing away of poor old Tom. We are now catless!

Poor little friend! Where has that quaint, faithful, dutiful identity gone to? Juvenal says Heaven would not be Heaven to him if he were not to meet his own dogs there—a sentiment which we have, we believe, ourselves set down elsewhere. St. Francis the Poverello saw God in all His lesser creatures. It is not possible to think that we shall lose anything in a completer world.

Tom was the most conscientious of cats. He now lies beside Susan. We are going to get two little tombstones made for us by the Watts Settlement at Compton. Susan's epitaph has already been mentioned. Nothing more to the point could be imagined:

"Here lies Susan, a good dog." "Here lies Thomas, for eighteen years our faithful cat-comrade."

So shall it stand recorded over the new grave.

XXVIII

Mid-August and the lists beginning to come in! Mr. Eden Phillpotts, in his delightful garden book, says that no one is a true garden lover who is not instantly lost in every nurseryman's list, who does not immediately draw out orders far beyond his means, and spend his time in plans and combinations that shall transcend Kew as well as Babylon. What garden lovers are we in this respect! It is only when the orders are written out and the prices totted up that sober reason obtrudes its forbidding countenance—and then the painful process of "knocking off" begins. Nevertheless we are becoming adepts in combining lavishness with economy. There are delightful firms whose plants are literally to be had at a quarter of the price of others, with results quite as happy.

There is the Dutchman who sends us our bulbs. He has grown to be a friend, and his English letters are charming, "Dear Mrs.," he wrote when Gladioli, "The Bride," arrived in a state no Bride should be in, really without a wedding garment—"Dear Mrs., She is a flower the most agreeable in the garden, but she is very unpleasant to travel."

His catalogue makes equally fascinating reading. The quaint spelling and phraseology are more than attractive. Who, for instance, would not wish to invest in Narcissus, thus described:

"Astrardente, white and apricot orange, edged fiery scarlet magnificent and nice flowers."

"Nothing," says another grower, "can equal, much less excel, early single Tulips."

"Pottebakke White," cries a third, "is a very large pure white flower, and not to surpass better."

"Of snow-like variety and delicious fragrance a most beloved flower," thus our special Hollander labels Lilium Longiflorum Takesima, in words that have a certain charm of poetic simplicity which would not have misbecome the artistic Japanese himself.

DUTCH BULBS

However tempted by other nationalities, we choose to be Dutch in our bulbs. This is the list we have just dispatched to Haarlem:

"600 China blue single Hyacinths.
1 dozen Cavaignac pink Hyacinths.
1 dozen Fabiola blush Hyacinths.
50 Roman Hyacinths.
100 Scarlet Duc van Thol Tulips.
50 Rose Duc van Thol Tulips.
300 Thomas Moore Tulips.
1000 Darwin Tulips, best mixed.
500 Parrot Tulips, in the finest mixture, bright colours.
100 Gladiolus Brenchlyensis.
100 Gladiolus Hollandia.
1000 mixed striped Crocus.
1000 Scilla Siberica praecox.
1000 blue Grape Hyacinths.
1000 Snowdrops Elweseii.
1000 Poeticus recurvus Narcissus.
100 Hyacinthus Candicans.
1000 Single Trumpet Daffodils mixed.
500 Double Daffodils mixed."

Of these some of the scarlet and rose "Duc van Thol" Tulips, and all the "Cavaignac" and "Fabiola" Hyacinths are for forcing; and, of course, the Roman Hyacinths also. The other bulbs are destined for the open ground.

Gladiolus Hollandia is described as the "Pink Brenchlyensis," and is much recommended. We have never grown her yet, but her scarlet cousin is a great success in our garden. We find our Gladioli do so much better when planted in the spring, that we are asking the firm not to send them to us for another seven months. But they are included in the autumn

list so that he may reserve us good sound tubers.

It is evidently against garden decorum to mention the name of a horticulturist, for some garden writers make a point of assuring the reader that they will never be guilty of such an indiscretion; but we see no harm at all in paying, by the way of this discursive pen, a tribute to the perfect satisfaction hitherto afforded us by our chosen bulb grower, Mr. Thoolen, of Haarlem. His Tulips, Hyacinths, and Narcissi have stood the test for three years. Of course, in our soil we cannot expect more than one good season out of anything except Crocus, Scilla, and Narcissi.

Daffodils, which up till now have been unaccountably absent from our garden plans, are to be heavily indulged in this year. Besides what appears in the above list we are venturing on another thousand from a certain Mr. Telkamp, likewise in the land of windmills.

MORE DUTCH BULBS

The following is the order which we have just dispatched to him:

"1000 Daffodils for naturalization.
100 Retroflexa Tulips, soft yellow.
100 Bouton d'Or Tulips, deep golden yellow.
100 Caledonia Tulips, orange, dark stems.
100 Golden Eagle Tulips, fine yellow.
200 Count of Leicester, yellow orange tinted."

He advertises a thousand Daffodils for ten shillings—two and a half dollars! Miraculous, if true! It is worth the plunge. 204

We have decided to take a slice off the kitchen garden to be kept entirely for bulbs and tubers for cutting. There a hundred "Madonna" Lilies, three dozen Auratum, a hundred Tigrinum, and a few hundreds of other kinds shall be given all the chances that completely fresh soil and good exposure can afford. Five hundred Parrot Tulips, three hundred "Thomas Moore," and a hundred "Bizarres" are to make a field of glory for the harvest. The hundred Gladiolus Brenchlyensis and the hundred Hollandia will rear their scarlet and pink spears; and Iris shall stand in ranks.

The Mistress of the Villino has still an hour of bliss before her in picking out Iris for her list. The "Florentina" shall certainly be largely of the company, and preference is to be given generally to the misty blue and purple kinds. Then the speculation in cheap bulbs provides a thousand mixed May flowering Tulips.... Adam's face will be a study when he finds how much of his cherished potato and cabbage land will be required. But what a span of beauty it will make; and what sheaves of delight for ourselves and our friends!

FOND DREAMS, AND MISDOUBTS

Every year the extravagant woman above mentioned, who has got the vice of garden-gambling into her very system, extends her ambitions. But how much is there not still to be accomplished before she is satisfied, if ever a garden-lover is satisfied!

For a long time she has dreamt of a shady pool—somewhere. 205
And, after beholding the adorable vision before described in Messrs. Wallace's exhibit at Holland House this summer, she had been quite sure that it would be difficult to exist another year without a nook with Irises about it and a sunk basin, and a little statue mysteriously contrived in the green. Coming across an advertisement in *Country Life*, where an artistic firm of garden-decorators offers just what she wants, a small round stone pond with a Faun sitting cross-legged on the brim of it, it becomes quite clear to her that there are cravings which must be satisfied. She is willing to give up the vision of a new Azalea dell ‹for this year only, of course› and of a paved walk with Cypresses on each side, ending in a *rondpoint* hedged about with more Cypresses, with a stone bench in the middle, for the more immediately alluring claim. But, O, ye gods and little fishes, how insatiable are still the needs of the Villino on the hill!

There is the orchard for the slope above the sunk tennis

court; to be a glory some Spring with Apple and Pear blossom, while Daffodils, Narcissi and Scilla riot underneath. And there is the round Autumn Garden to be dug out and levelled in the wood, where Sunflowers, Michaelmas Daisies, “Fire King” Antirrhinums, Nasturtiums and flaunting orange and saffron Dahlias are to make a rim of splendour against a cropped green hedge. The centre of this blazing circle is to be flagged and consecrated to “Herbs.” That will be something to live for; to see accomplished some golden autumn of the future!

So much has already been done in what was, most of it, a mere sodden tangle, impenetrable not only to human beings but even to the light of heaven, that it gives one heart for what may be achieved in the future. Yet never does the Grandmother of Loki feel the uncertainty of life more keenly than when she is in the midst of her garden dreams. Every winter indeed, when the bulbs are planted, she wonders, with a pang, if she will see them come up in the Spring; how much more does she now ask herself whether the hidden Autumn Garden, or the Italian walk, or the Bowery Orchard, or even the Sunk Fountain, are ever destined to rejoice her.

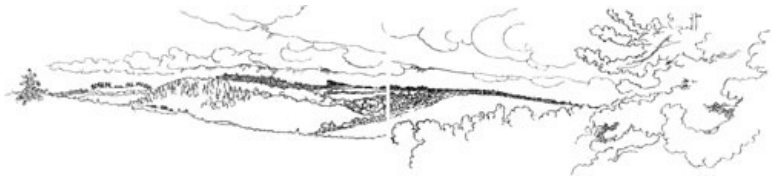
Well, after all, she gets an extraordinary amount of pleasure out of the mere mental picture, and who can say if the very uncertainty of all things here below does not add to their zest?

THE MOOR

XXIX

DAWN OVER THE MOOR

This morning, waking at dawn, the Padrona was impelled to roll out of bed, and look out of both her windows. The one over her balcony gives down the valley and the one opposite her bed affords her vision of the moor rolling away beyond the Dutch Garden and the terrace corner. If she had been but a woman of moderate vigour, she would not have gone to bed again till the whole pageant of mysterious glory had fulfilled itself before her eyes. For what a sight it was! First of all, the whole garden, woodland and heather hills were steeped in a translucence for which there is no name. It is a virgin hour, and its purity no words can describe. The Ling, in full bloom, was silver and amethyst on the rise, misty purple and blue in the hollows. Behind the shouldering hills a rift of sky was a radiant lemon-yellow, a kind of honey sea of light. And above that, again, little drifts of cloud had caught a wonderful orange-rose glow like the wings of cherubim about the Throne. Down the valley there were silver mists against the most tender, clear horizon; and all along the Lily Walk the clumps of Tiger Lilies seemed to be like little Fra Angelico angels, holding their breath in adoration!



Everything lies, after all, in the point of view. The dawn was decidedly too pink for safety, and the clumps of Lilies that looked so pious and recollected have got “the disease” badly in their stalks. Yet realism can never blight that exquisite hour of breaking day in her thoughts! 208

The only time we degenerates ever really see the dawn is coming home from some London ball; or again, travelling. The dawn in London often gives an impression of extraordinary blue in atmosphere and heaven, we suppose because it is seen contrasted with artificial illuminations. But that sapphire blue, when it permeates park and streets, when the sky seems to hold unplumbed depths beyond depths of the same wonderful colour, is a thing to dwell in the memory likewise, though travellers have the better part. Dawn in the Alps! A night not to be depicted! Such vastness of tinted heights; such black chasms where the pines hang; spume of waterfalls all golden crimson, and deep rivers, green and terrible and beautiful with a glint on them as they rush!

One of us ‹the fourth in the lucky clover leaf at Villino Loki; one who is poet and musician besides many other things, and sometimes poet and musician together› has defined the indefinable. It is not the dawn of the day she hymns, but the dawn of the young Spring.

Though the poem is printed in a recently published volume, it seems to fit naturally into this page. 209

THE ST. GOTHARD

April and I—
Each with each greeting amid tumbled ice,
Travel these wastes of frozen purity.
Here the wild air above the precipice
E'en tasteth sweet, and hath a delicate scent
As of faint flowers unseen—the flower of snows
Massed peak on peak in slumber yet unspent,
But dreaming of the Rose.

Here the great hills wear silence as a seal—
April and I,
Listening can hear the loosened snowflake steal
Down from the burdened bough that slips awry;
Here the long cry of water-nymphs at play
Freezes upon the iced lips of fountains,
And their sweet limbs' arrested holiday
In crystal carved engarlandeth the mountains.

Through such vast fields of sleep how dare we roam,
April and I,
And from its eyrie bid the torrent foam,
And virgin meads grow starrier than the sky
With scattered cowslip and with drifted bell?
Or where austerely looms an Alpine giant
Set a young almond rosily defiant
To be our sentinel?

Whence are we victors, chanting as we go, 210
April and I.
"Be free, ye tumbling streams, awake O snow—
Ye silver blooms increase and multiply?"
What is our spell?—The singing heart we bring,
And lo! that song that is the core of earth
Leaps in reply, and children of the Spring
Into the light come forth.

THE DAWN OF YOUNG SPRING

Then there was a dawn over the Campagna, seen from the train that was speeding us towards Rome. A ball of red fire hung over the horizon. The sea lay silver and grey; and misty silver the Campagna.... "God made himself an awful rose of dawn," as Tennyson sings. He did that morning: awful, yet full of a glorious comfort. The sea just caught the great reflection on its bosom.

A little later, when we came to the first ruins that precede the aqueducts, there were the white cattle, stepping about among the broken pillars, with their huge spreading horns all gilded. These had not changed since the days when the sun gleamed on the grandeurs of classic Rome. Only then yonder building—temple, or tomb, or villa—fronted the morning with a forgotten stateliness, a lost grace.

Is anything comparable to the scene that meets the traveller on his entry into Rome? Alas! St. John Lateran no longer stands like some titanic splendid ship about to slip her moorings and sail away into the wild, lonely sea of the Campagna. New walls have sprung up without the noble ancient walls; sordid disjointed lengths of streets, mean houses with blistered, leprous plaster; and evil-looking little wine-shops. Nevertheless, nothing can spoil the moment 211
when the Lateran Church first gathers shape against the sky. All those statues with tossing gesture against the faint blue of the new day, heroic figures with outstretched arms seeming to gather pilgrims into the city; and in the midst of them the Saviour uplifting the Cross of Salvation! To the believer what a welcome! And it is Rome herself at a glance, too; for if the Church stands here beckoning between earth and sky, she is jostled below and round about by the still speaking wonders of old Pagan Rome.

One of the advantages of being “little people in a little place” is the pleasure small things can give one. The Duke of Devonshire has seventy men in his garden. Is it possible to imagine taking an interest in anything conducted on so enormous a scale? It is not gardening, it is horticultural government! There can be no individual knowledge of any “beloved flower,” as our Dutch friend has it. Outside a millionaire’s greenhouse we once beheld regiment after regiment of Begonia pots. It made one’s brain reel. How insupportable anything so repeated would become!

Even in small gardens there is too much of a tendency nowadays to overdo garden effects. The flagged-path effect can certainly be overdone. We were tempted to visit a farmhouse the other day, adorably placed on a high Sussex down just where a stretch of table-land dominates an immense panorama of undulating country, and a vast half-circle of horizon. With a few more trees no situation could have been more beautiful.

“It was a party of the name of Mosensohn” who had taken the old farmhouse, we are told, and they were transmogrifying it according to the most modern principles of how the plutocrat’s farmhouse should look.

In some ways it was very well done. The fine old lines of wall and roof were carefully preserved; the high brick wall with its arched doorway and door with the grille in it, were quite in keeping, and gave one a sense of comfortable seclusion as one stepped in off the high road.

But the square court, once the farmyard, divided by two different levels, was completely flagged. Only a few beds against the wall, and a strip of turf on the lower level under the house, afforded any relief to the eye. There was a sunk garden beyond which was turfed, and the sense of rest it instantly afforded made one realize what the incoming family will suffer on a scorching August day from the glare and refractions of the flags in a space so hemmed in. In the right spirit of garden mania, we were not above taking what hints we could. And some were very good. All the beds on that first level were planted with cool-looking blue and purple flowers—a happy thought where there was so much hot stone. And the old cow stables had been very cleverly converted into a most Italian-looking brick pergola which ran the length of the sunk Rose Garden, and ended in a round summer-house with a window. From there, as well as from the Rose Garden, the wide view over the Downs met the gaze. Vividly coloured herbaceous borders ran along the side nearest to the sudden slope of the hill. There is something very pleasing to the senses when the glance passes from such an ordered kaleidoscope of colour to the misty vastness of a far-reaching view.

In the middle of the Rose Garden was a sunk fountain in a long narrow basin.

A batch of pinewood, dark and shady, would have saved the situation; one sought everywhere for the comfort of real shadows.

We went into the house, which was in the act of being papered and painted for the millionaires. Delightful in theory as such old buildings are, we were seized with doubt from the moment of crossing the threshold whether any sense of quaint antiquity would compensate one for beams on top of one’s head, for bedrooms the size of a bath-towel, and a general feeling of having one foot on the hearth and another in the passage. We thought the newcomers had shown more taste outside, and came to the conclusion that some one else’s taste ruled in the garden, but that they had allowed their own ideas free scope indoors. These ideas were monotonous. The parlour that gave on the little orchard had a paper all over green parrots; the best bedroom upstairs had a paper all over blue parrots; and the second best bedroom was adorned with terra-cotta parrots. The only

chance for a conglomeration of rooms so hopelessly low and contracted, would have been a plain distemper of no tint deeper than cream, or at the outside butter colour. Then the old beams would have had a chance, and one might have felt able to draw one's breath.

‹Fancy waking in the morning to the dance of all the little parrots on top of one's eyelids!›

Then, out of a small space, the shapes of trees and flower-beds beyond come upon the vision with no sense of effect if the space within is tormented. Neither can anyone have any proper appreciation of the joy of a bunch of flowers, or a vase of spreading boughs, who has not set them against plain walls where their shadows have play.

CONVERTING A COTTAGE

Another little house near here—set down in the valley this, on the edge of a hamlet, overlooking a wide pond—has been to our thinking more successfully dealt with. Three very old cottages have been knocked into one, and the whole little rambling up-and-down dwelling-place thus produced has been boldly distempered white within from roof to kitchen. The round black oak beams are delightful in these little white rooms, and the pretty, blue-eyed, still youthful spinster who owns them has been content with a short pair of clear white muslin curtains in every window; not, be it understood, the London bedroom kind that cuts across the pane ‹an abomination difficult to avoid in towns›, but proper curtains hanging over the recess. Nothing more suitable could be devised, and it took a "real lady," in the sense of Hans Andersen's "Real Princess," to be content with such fresh simplicity. But attractive as her furnishing is, and full of genuinely beautiful things, there our tastes slightly diverged. 215

COTTAGE FURNITURE

The largest sitting-room has a set of black lacquer furniture inlaid with vivid mother-of-pearl; it is deliciously gay in this gay cottage parlour, and certainly no one who possessed these early Victorian treasures could bear to put them on one side. We think if we had been the lucky owner, however, we would have eschewed coupling them with velvet—or, indeed, brought velvet at all under those weather beaten tiles. The mistress of the Villino had a vision—a daring vision—of printed linen with scarlet cherries and impossible birds pecking at them; something with a true Jacobean angularity in it, to link the centuries together, and an uncompromising vividness of tint. That for cushions and sofa-covers. On the floor then, no bright carpet would be admitted. We should have enamelled that floor white, and cast a few rugs down on it, with no more colours in them than faint lemons and greys or creams.

To complete this discursion on cottages, some of us visited the other day a tiny house, where all the downstairs rooms, except the kitchen, had been thrown together, making a charming, long, low living-room with one great black beam across the ceiling. On the walls was a perfect cottage paper, with isolated pink rose-buds well-distanced from each other: a pink rosebud chintz and black carpet dotted with faint stiff roses, made quaint and unusual but very satisfying arrangement. The windows looked out on a pine wood across a hedge of rampant pink Dorothy Roses. Gazing out on the dim, dark green grey aisles of the fir trees one would want the gay note within; and the little Rose-strewn paper was perfection. 216

Yesterday the Grandfather of Loki dragged the Grandmother in her bath-chair out into the heart of the moors. It's a sporting bath-chair this. It has been over as much rough

ground as a horse artillery gun-carriage, and nothing in the matter of obstacles stops it unless it is barbed wire; it was chosen as light in make as possible, and now it has a rakish, weather-beaten appearance, like an old mountain mule.

The rare strangers we meet on our wild career regard us with varied sentiments. Some are obviously filled with compassion over the joggling the occupant of the bath-chair must be enduring. “What can that fool of a man be about to expose that wretchedly delicate woman to such suffering?” their expression says to us as they pass. Others, on the other hand, are horror-stricken at the spectacle of the wifely brutality that condemns this weakly, good-natured man to the task of lugging her about. There is a good deal of uphill work, of course, about us, and he goes a good pace. “You ought to get a donkey, Madam,” is their conclusion.

On two or three occasions good Samaritans have rushed to assist him, with glances of scathing rebuke at this new embodiment of woman’s tyranny.

But they are some of our best days, in spite of outside disapproval. And, to go back to yesterday, we started off with all the dogs in a state of “high cockalorum”—Arabella in her most obsequious mood ‹having been scolded the day before for running away›; Loki, the Chinaman, trotting on in determined and splendid isolation as usual, it being quite against Chinese etiquette to speak to any fur-brother *outside* the garden gates; Betty, and her father Laddie, secretly determined to go hunting, no matter what execrations should be hurled after them. Laddie comes from a neighbouring house, and insists on adopting us as his family. It is very hard to be brutal and say that we won’t be adopted when a pair of the most beautiful cairngorm eyes in all the world are looking up at us out of the dear long, wise, pathetic dog face. In fact, we are not brutal; and Laddie comes and goes as he likes. Only he is occasionally carried back to his cook ‹who, it seems, duly loves him› by Juvenal the tender-hearted.

It is very difficult to reach the moors, with this discursiveness! But, in a sunshine as blazing as that which ever fell from any Italian sky, we did get into the hollow of the heather hills, and there spend an afternoon of perfect dreaminess and pleasure.

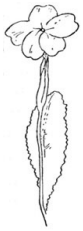
BATH CHAIR AND HEATHER

Loki’s Grandfather took off his coat and marched up the slippery paths, the bath-chair bumping merrily after him. It is one of his male prerogatives to scorn the idea of sunstroke, and Loki’s Grandmother is filled with apprehensions half the time. But when she saw him stretched on a rug over the heather, smoking his pipe, and the four dogs cast themselves down in attitudes expressive of their different natures, the mental horizon became cloudless. The material skies—if such an adjective can be used in such connexion—the unplumbed dome of mystery above us, were by no means cloudless, and that was part of their wonderful beauty. Huge lazy white clouds, so luminous as to be dazzling, sailed over the rim of the moor and cast shadows of indescribable mauve and purple into the hollows. A day of such intense light it was that every tree in the thick of the woods flung its patch of shadow, purple-dark against the vivid green. And, oh, the colour of the Ling, mixed with Hill Heather, set with islands of Bracken—Bracken in its proper place—silver under the sun rays, against the blue! And the scent of the Heath and the Whin!

One doesn’t know if it is exactly one’s soul that the beauty touches, the appeal is so strongly to the senses. But the soul is of it; for no mere physical joy can give such a serenity, such an airiness as of wings to the spirit. Mr. A. C. Benson says, in some early book of his, that one of the great proofs to him of the existence of God is the feeling which comes at the sight of a very beautiful prospect. We want to give ourselves to it—he says—to be absorbed into it; and that is a movement of the soul, for everything earthly is possessive.

Arabella, who is a very affectionate dog, flung herself down beside her master, taking up a large share of the rug, and pensively chewed gorse half the time, the other half being absorbed in extracting its prickles from her chest. Laddie, of course, slipped off to the chase. The two little dogs, russet brother and little white sister, whiled away a period of inaction: Betty, by circling round the bath-chair, jumping in to assure its occupant that she loved her very much and out again to show that she was a dog of tact; and Loki, panting in his great fur coat ‹in which condition he grins like a Chinese dragon with his roseleaf tongue bent back in the oddest little loop between his white teeth› by seeking cool spots wherein to repose—preferably under the very wheel of the chair, to his Grandmother’s distraction.

An afternoon to remember, when nothing happened but the greatest happenings of all: God’s good gifts of sun and wild moor and balmy air!



The really artistic member of the *famiglia* is Juvenal. He settles all the flowers; and for that alone—for the pleasure he gets from it and the pleasure he gives—he is worth his weight in gold. The little gold and mother-of-pearl tinted Italian drawing-room is always a bower. Yesterday, on the silver table which stands beneath a silver and gold Ikon, he set a vase of white and yellow Roses. It was a touch of genius! We are quite sick of reading how beautiful Primroses look in Benares brass bowls. Personally, we dislike brass bowls for flowers. Glass! Glass! There is nothing as good as glass, especially when you have the luck to possess, as we did, a case of old Dutch moulded bottles. They were made in all kinds of delicious angles—three-cornered, square, hexagonal—with Tulips stamped in the glass: in such as these a couple of long-stemmed Roses or Irises, and especially Tulips and Daffodils, are at their very best.

We have said “they were.” Alas for those Dutch bottles, and for our folly, improvident wretches as we are, in setting them about for our own pleasure, instead of shutting them up in a cabinet! Of what were once eleven perfect irreplaceable treasures ‹the twelfth had a large chip off its neck from the beginning›, there are only five left! Tittums, the splendid savage “smoke Persian,” swept the biggest and best off a chimney-piece with taps of a deliberately evil paw…. And the rest have gone the way of vases!

“Very sorry, Miss” ‹it’s generally to the Signorina they come: she takes the edge off the Padrona’s fury›. “I don’t know how it happened, I’m sure. It came to pieces——”

‹Oh, let us stay our pen! Every owner of precious bric-à-brac knows the awful sound of those words, and the futility of resentment.›

The Master of the Villino had a teapot. Of yellow Cantagalli pottery it was, with quaint adornments like caterpillars all over it; it had a snake handle and a long curving spout. He loved it. He never wanted to have his tea out of any other vessel. One morning a stranger sat in its place. He rang the bell severely. One of the nomad footmen, who appear, and camp, and go away, answered it.

“My teapot.”

‹Yes, it was broken.›

“It came to pieces in your hand, I suppose?” said the master sarcastically.

The injured expression of the misjudged became painted on John’s face:

“No, sir,” he said with much dignity, “it shut itself in the door!”

MORE PEKINESE WAYS

Loki has had a bath, out of due season, because his own artist has come down from London to limn his imperial splendours for his own book. We tried to make him understand that it is only smug *nouveaux riches* who imagine they can patronize art; that, on the contrary, it is Art which condescends to us. He put on his most Chinese face and became a crocodile on the spot. On such occasions his Grandpa calls him a “Crocowog.” ‹This page is only for the pet dog-lover: superior people, please pass on!› He is very nice to kiss after his bath, a process attended on his side by subterranean growls of protest and an alarming curling of the lip. But—dear little gentle creature as he is at heart—it is not in him to bite even the most persistent tormentor.

When his Grandfather amuses himself by what he calls “Squeezing the growls out” every morning, Loki tries vainly

to keep up a show of displeasure, but always ends on his back with a windmill waving of pretty prayerful paws.

Loki has his own very marked ideas on the subject of jokes; at least he has one—in fact, an only joke! It took his Grandfather some time to apprehend it; but constant repetition of the incident ‹after the consecrated fashion of the British farce› is beginning to make him see the point of it. The joke is this: at the top, or the bottom, of the garden, as the case may be, coming in from, or going out for, a walk, Loki stands stock still, generally unperceived till you are midway. No coaxing, whistling, or screaming will budge him. He will stand there a quarter of an hour, it may be. And the point of the joke is that you must get behind him and stamp your feet, and say “Naughty Dog!” Then Loki careers up or down in paroxysms of merriment. This may not appeal to some people’s special bump of hilarity; and as it is useless to try to explain a jest, we will leave those to enjoy the spinach story.

England is so seldom visited by hot weather such as we now have, that, especially in our little place with its foreign stamp within and without, one keeps thinking of other lands. There was the one hot summer we went visiting in country houses in Italy—two country houses, to be precise, and both of them were "*castelli*."

A CASTELLO IN PIEDMONT

The first ‹which we preferred vastly› was on a high plateau in the middle of the Piedmontese plain, not far from Turin. From that entrancing spot the view lay over wide undulating stretches of maize fields and vineyards; and the eye could not turn North, West, East or South without resting on a distant panorama of Alps or Apennines.

That was a hot summer with a vengeance! We were met in the dusk of the evening—the soft warm dusk of such days in Italy, when the caress of the air is like the touch of velvet—by a gay little equipage drawn by three mountain horses abreast, each with a collar of bells and a red hussar plume erect on its forehead. It was the most merry vehicle we have ever driven in. How those horses went! How they tossed their heads and how their bells jangled!

A beautiful old French style castello it was, by no means spoilt in our eyes by having been left with rough brick. Now we hear that its ambitious owners have faced it with stone and are themselves charmed with the result. No doubt its original picturesqueness had its disadvantages, for innumerable birds built under the eaves amid those rough bricks. At the approach of any vehicle the air was full of flying wings. The flutter and the sound of them! We thought the place all delightful and characteristic; wonderfully more attractive than the pompous banality of the now renewed mansion, photographs of which we have since had mendaciously to admire.

Inside it was cool and charming; full of old French furniture and irreplaceable family relics. Some of these have recently been sold, to defray, no doubt, part of the cost of the new exterior.

The sedan chair of *Madame la Maréchale* in pre-Revolution days remains in my memory as a regret; it was a wonder of old Vernis-Martin. We hope they have kept the great flags that used to hang in the hall. The reigning châtelaine did not really care for any of these old things. Her heart was set on the joys of a Roman *appartement*, and its concomitant social gaieties.

GRANDCHILDREN

There was a spacious white hall with impossible paintings of a boar hunt on its walls, opening upon an endless series of reception rooms. And through these lofty chambers three little children were running about in little white linen tunics, and nothing on underneath, because of the heat of the weather. Their hair was cut in mediæval fashion, straight across the forehead and straight again across the shoulders. There was also a most adorable baby of eleven months carried about by a soft-eyed *Balia*. Out of the mountains she had come, this creature, to cherish another's child! And a series of misfortunes had fallen upon her little home since her departure: the death of her own nursling followed by the death of the cow! "*Cara moglie*," her husband wrote on each occasion, "do not grieve. It is the will of God!"

There were no doubt other very simple reasons for these catastrophes: the pitiable poverty of the family which had made it necessary for the poor woman to sell her mother-rights, and possibly the tainted milk of the sick cow which had poisoned the little mountaineer. But call it fate, or the intolerable economic system of modern Italy, it came round in the end to the same thing. "Do not grieve, *cara moglie*. It is the will of God!"

She had done her best to help her own, and this was her comfort in her sorrow. It was not such a bad comfort; and the most advanced thinker cannot prove after all that it was not the will of God.

It was difficult, too, for the foster-mother to weep long when Baby Maddalena danced on the stone of the terrace with little bare brown feet. She had the bluest eyes and the brownest face that ever we beheld, and laughed and gurgled as she danced, with very high action, upheld by the ends of her sash by the adoring *Balia*, whose own face and neck above her string of gold beads were the colour of a ripe apricot.

It would be difficult to have devised a fortnight of greater interest, amusement, and quaintness than that of this Piedmontese visit. It was a thoroughly foreign household. The handsome white-bearded athletic father of the Chatelaine, tied to his chair by an attack of gout, had his apartments downstairs. And on an upper floor the mother of the Marchese had her own complete establishment, including a wonderful library, all tawny gold. There was a baroque Chapel; and one of our most vivid recollections was our pulling the children down by their sashes as they swung themselves over the tops of the benches, doubled up like golden fleeces till their curly heads and their little shoes touched. 226

One thing never to be omitted was to watch Monte Rosa at sunset. The night before our departure there was a thunderstorm far, far away in those Alps where Monte Rosa rises in beauty. At every flash, peak beyond peak shone out in distances hitherto wrapped away even from the imagination.

“Why does the sky do like that?” asked the second boy, vigorously blinking his great eyes. With straight black hair and an odd, serious little countenance, square-jawed and long upper-lipped like a Medici out of Benozzo Gozzoli’s frescoes, he was the most mediæval-looking of all the children. We loved that four-year-old.... He has grown up, we hear, “impossible” and a burden to his family. We cannot help feeling it must be the family’s fault. The elder boy, much handsomer though he was, did not then promise so well. A terribly nervous child; the cry “*Ho paura*,” was always on his lips. It hurt his grandfather’s pride that any son of his race should show such degenerate timidity.

One typical scene we were witness of. The little fellow, in great awe of the peremptory, loud-voiced old sportsman, approached him to say good-night; and, hanging his head after the manner of the frightened child, stammered the requisite “*Bonsoir, Bonpapa*,” almost inaudibly.

Instantly wrath broke out over him. ‹Bonpapa’s temper had not improved with the gout.› “That was not the manner in which to say good-night.”—“A man was to look up: to speak straight.” “What does one say?” he ended, shouting.

“*Pardon!*” cried the poor, terrified imp, with a wail. 227

This child, over whom were so many head-shakings, doubts and laments, has grown up so brave and fine a boy that it would have rejoiced the heart of the old Vicomte to see him now. His was a stormy heart that wanted much of life, and therefore, of course, knew much bitterness. It is stilled now, alas! this many a year.

A CASTELLO IN LOMBARDY

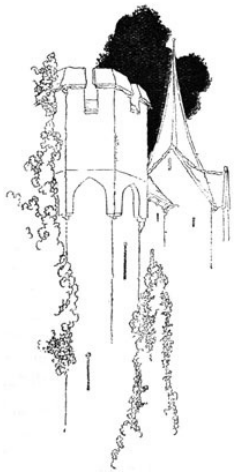
From this comparatively modern mansion in the Piedmont we went to an old, old castle in the plains of Lombardy. The chronicles have it that Barbarossa besieged it. It was approached through a considerable village—one of great antiquity, and still retaining the lines of the Roman *castrum*, with all its streets parallel or at right-angles. At the top of the main of these the great machicolated entrance of the Castello, with its faded frescoes across the arch, was very impressive in mediæval strength. The church shouldered one corner of the immense pile of outer wall; and each side of the moat,

between the towers, inside and out, peasant houses had crept.

The Castello itself, of extreme antiquity, as has been said, formed two sides of a square, round, and flagged courtyard. The garden ran sheer up the hill, within the tower-flanked walls of the outer bailey. There were vineyards inside; and outside, where the ground fell away, the whole land was likewise covered with vines. They ran up and down long ridges, like petrified waves, as far as the eye could see. And in the far, far distance, almost lost in the horizon, were the Alps.

What a view that was from the loopholes of those half-ruined towers—especially at sunset, when there gathered a rosy mist over that curious, wild-tossing expanse! 228

Could we go back now to that unique spot, what a vast amount of æsthetic pleasure should we not draw from it? But it must be admitted that we were gross-minded enough at the time to allow material discomfort to overcome all other impressions.



To lodge in a genuine old Lombard Castle, with stone floors and stairs hewn in the immense thickness of the stone; to look out upon one side into the moat, and to see the peasant houses clinging to the massive foundations far below like barnacles to a rock; to look out on the other side upon the odd rise of sunburnt garden up to the vineyard and the towers; to imagine oneself back into the very heart of the Middle Ages may be very inspiring, in theory. But mediæval sensibilities were undoubtedly more blunted than ours. The smell of that moat running with the refuse of the crowded Italian village!... For additional pungency, all the water in the place came from sulphur springs! The reek of it was in one's nostrils all day from merely washing in it.

The household was composed of peasant women out of the village. The wife of the barber, the mother of the shoemaker, and others, clattered about the stone passages in their *mules* —a style of foot-gear which leaves the foot free from the instep. It was perhaps as well that the heels were high, for 229
their idea of housemaiding ‹a method which appertains in most Italian households to this day› was first to walk about with a pail and to slop water out of it over the flags of the floor; then to sweep the resulting wet mess into a puddle where the stone was worn most hollow or under the carpet!

Some attempts at a housemaid's sink had been excavated in the stone at the head of the stairs outside our set of rooms; but there was generally a small cataract of soapy water dripping down the steps, for the simple practice of the *donna* that attended on our apartment was to stand on the landing outside our doors and to shy the contents of her bucket upwards.

The delightful friend with whom we stayed, though not born of the country, had fallen quite resignedly into its ways. And, indeed, the castle was chiefly ruled by the *Princesse Mère*, a châtelaine of the old school, who used to arise in the grey dawn and pull the iron chain of the great bell that hung outside her windows, to call the vassals to their daily work.

"Come, come!" she was frequently heard addressing some dependent or other whose movements were more indolent than she approved of. "Are you here for your comfort or for mine?"

The table was served, copiously, with singular Italian dishes. There was a favourite soup with stewed quails in it: the 230
whole animal, bones and beak and all! It is an unspeakable dish to have set before you on a hot day. Patties filled with

cocks' combs might follow. Even the *Risotto* was intermingled with such strange mincings of liver and cutlet trimmings that one hesitated before venturing. The *Fritura*, needless to say, was in full force. A lucky dip, that! You may come across yesterday's cauliflower, a bit of forgotten sweetbread, a slice of sausage, a frizzled artichoke, and half the quail you couldn't eat the night before—all in one spoonful!

Besides the fierce matutinal summons of the domestic bell, one's sleep was constantly disturbed by a jangle of chimes from the church: a perfect frenzy of joy-bells it was, so prolonged and insistent that sleep was beaten out of one's brain as with hammers.

THE ANGELS' MASS

"What," we asked our younger hostess, the third day of this infliction, "what are these carillons, morning after morning?"

"Oh, that?—That is for the Angels' Mass," she answered us indifferently.

"The Angels' Mass?"

"Yes. A child dead in the village."

"But every morning?"

"There have been several deaths lately. It is the fever from the rice fields."

Pleasant hearing for a woman with an only little daughter just recovering from a rather serious illness! Every smell that greeted her nostrils afterwards—and they were of a diversified and poignant description—seemed laden with the germs of death. But the young *Principessa* had absorbed a good deal of the indolent indifference of her adopted country towards hygiene.

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"You, with your English notions!" was all the comfort her visitor got, offered in tones of good-humour not unmixed with contempt. Or else: "What you smell, my dear, is only carbolic; and that is very healthy."

A few dabs of disinfectant had indeed been distributed about the moat, on much the same principle, and with the same effect, as the red pepper which is served with wild duck, just to heighten the flavour of the dish.

ENTOMOLOGICAL MYSTERIES

Perhaps the most lasting impression of that Lombardy sojourn was the morning discovery in a glass of drinking-water which had been placed beside the bed the previous night, of the most extraordinary creature any of us had ever seen. It was like a very large shrimp, perfectly transparent, with such gigantic antennæ and legs that they protruded over the top of the tumbler!

No one else in the castle had ever beheld anything like it either, it appeared; except one old woman, who described it vaguely as "*una bestia del acqua*." But as it most certainly had not been in the tumbler when the water was put into it, its origin remains for ever a mystery.

A few nights later the little girl of the party of travellers found one of these zoological mysteries in a quite empty tumbler! We might have thought it a practical joke played on the *forestieri*, only that no one could have come into the room without the knowledge of its occupants.

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This, and the sudden departure of the "chef" who had been responsible for the little quails in the soup, did upset the equanimity of the pretty hostess.

"To think," she cried, "that I should invite my best friend here, to starve or poison her!... And that unknown beasts should get into her drinking-water! I—I have been here every summer for eleven years and I have never seen a beast like that!"

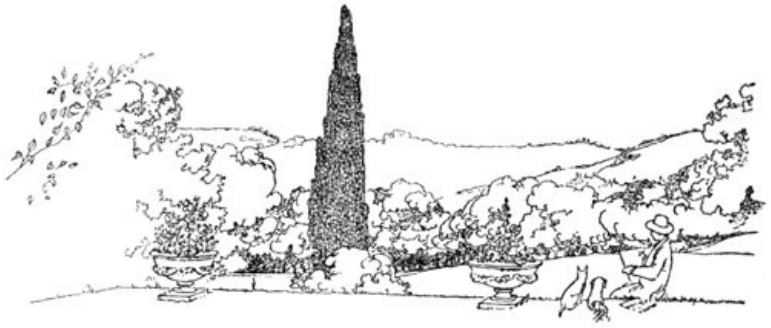
She thought we had dreamt the first monster. The second was carried in to her, with its horrible transparent legs bristling over the tumbler. She surveyed it hopelessly.

"*Il ne manquait plus que cela!*"

Yet one looks back on it all with a kind of tenderness. It was all so picturesque! What a dwelling might have been made of that antique castle by anyone who had the money and the art to spend it!

But, alas!... In the great stone bedchambers where we lodged there were blinds with Swiss scenes depicted in the most vivid colours: a mountain maiden and a Mont Blanc, and a torrent upon each.... Incongruity could go no farther—except perhaps in the billiard-room, which had been done up by the *Principe* and was always shown off with great pomp. It was a splendid vaulted apartment, dating from the Barbarossa period; there were four deep niches hewn out of the stone: well, in two of these were placed large Chinese Mandarins, with heads that nodded if anyone could reach high enough to set them going; and, in the other two were plaster statues of the worst garden description: Flora with a basket, Ceres with a lumpy sheaf!

AUTUMN



XXXIII

SOME GARDEN GHOSTS

There is no ghost in the garden of the Villino. Neither the meek spirit of Susan nor Tom's saturnine spectre haunts the peaceful glade where they lie. ‹Juvenal has planted a "Tree of Heaven" at the head of his ever-mourned darling and covered the grave with Forget-me-nots!›

My youth ‹these reminiscences are contributed by Loki's grandmother› was spent in a large country place in Ireland, and to us children—we were six then—certain walks, certain dells in the woods, were assuredly haunted.

The property had long ago belonged to one Lady Tidd, who so adored it that she had herself buried on a hill overlooking it, her coffin upright in its tall square tomb. It was Lady Tidd who was popularly supposed to haunt the fair wooded lands that had come to us. This Dysart Hill, on the top of which the ruined chapel and the deserted graveyard lay, was a favourite walk of our childish days. When our short legs had mastered the difficulties of the slope—and a very stony slope it was, covered towards the summit with a fine mountain grass, than which no footing is more slippery—we never failed to wander round to that singular monument, through 234
the massive granite door of which she who stood in the upright coffin was supposed to be gazing down upon the distant prospect of our own home. It was never without an awful sense of horror and mystery that I pictured those dead eyes, endowed with miraculous vision, piercing through wood and stone to stare out upon what she still loved. Some apprehension of the horror and tragedy of bodily death and of the dread power of the spirit seized hold of my small soul as I contemplated that grave of human folly and of poor human aspiration. There it was, perhaps, that an overpowering dislike of graveyards began in me.

Lady Tidd was seen by a gardener of ours, between two Yew trees, in a dark corner outside the garden wall.

"She riz up out of the ground at me," he told my mother. And he added, as a convincing detail, that his hat stood up on his equally rising hair. "Sure, wasn't me hat lifted an inch off me head, ma'm?"

My mother, strong-souled creature as she was, laughed with a fine scepticism. Another kind of spirit had done the mischief, she declared. But we who heard could not so easily dismiss the agonizingly fascinating tale. We knew that spot outside the garden wall, in the shadow of the black Yew trees; and the fear and the darkness that always fell upon us when we passed it.

Another dreaded place was a certain Primrose dell, beautifully starred with blossoms, beautifully green, 235
beautifully shaded; the very place for happy children, it would seem, and for long hours of flower-picking gipsy teas and endless games. It was quite lost in the woods that banded the property, away from intrusions of nurse or governess—and yet, how haunted! Never shall I forget—I feel it now as I write—the profound misery that would seize upon me at the very entrance to the laughing glade.

I am not sure, however, that there was not a tangible reason for this depression, connected with the disappearance of a fondly-loved four-footed playfellow. A darling dog he was: one of the jocose, high-spirited kind; his open mouth and hanging tongue seemed to show him a partaker in human mirth, with a waggish humour all his own. ‹No pun is intended!› He had a rough tangled coat, black and white, a flag of a tail, flopping ears. He was the swiftest, gayest, most romping creature that has ever shared the play of children. We adored him. His name was Carlo. I don't know of what breed he was, if of any.... Alas! he hunted the sheep! He disappeared! No one knew what had become of him. We

children never ascertained anything, but there was a rumour —a dark, untraceable, yet most convincing rumour—that somebody had seen the small, rough corpse hanging from a tree-trunk, not far from the Primrose dell. Was it not that, perhaps, which haunted the dell for me?

THE LOATHELY HERD

We suspected the herd. A large, fat, round-faced, smiling man, this; with an unctuous, creeping voice that seemed to gurgle up like a slow oil-bubble from inner recesses of obesity. A man who at intervals would remark, seeing us grouped about our mother, “You’ve a lovely lot of ladies, ma’m, God bless them!”—as if we were little pigs or calves. 236

He had a sinister reputation with us already on account of his periodical dealings with sheep, which we, tender-hearted and impressionable children, scarcely as much as hinted to each other; and certainly never really associated with the roast mutton that appeared twice a week.

No, we did not like Green, the herd; and I, the smallest of the “lovely lot,” would cling to my mother’s skirts when his little twinkling eye turned in my direction.

For a long time he was associated in my mind with the horror of a conversation which passed between him and my mother. How well I remember that day! We were walking through one of the upper fields towards a village called Hop Hall, which also belonged to the estate. It was a lovely meadow with a curious little wood in the middle of it, ringed like a moat by a streamlet in which the cattle drank. This wood was full of wild Crab-apples; the blossom of it hung over the water and was mirrored therein. The field caught the sweep of wind that blew from the top of the hill with the breath of the Pine-trees. It was a carpet of Cowslips in the right season.

Well, as we walked, my mother and four little girls and one little boy, the herd stumping along with a stick—he had a lame leg—his ragged dog behind him, there came the following interchange of remarks, which set a seal of terror on my young mind. My mother mentioned her intention of visiting Hop Hall, and then inquired how a certain old woman might be who dwelt there. She had been long bedridden. 237

“Troth, and she’s the same as ever!”

“My goodness,” exclaimed my mother, “why, she must be nearly a hundred!”

“She must be that, me lady.—Begorra, she’ll have to be shot!”

My mother laughed, and so did the herd. The anguish of the small listener passes description; and there ensued a veritable haunting. The herd she could understand, she knew him to be a criminal of the deepest dye. But her mother!…

It was months before a benevolent governess discovered the hidden sore, and explained and consoled. It was only a joke! It left a rankling tenderness. I could see no humour in it.

It is no wonder that Irish children should be fanciful, surrounded as they are, or were in my day, with the quaint, superstitious beliefs of servants and peasantry. Our chief nursery comfort and most beloved companion was the old housekeeper, who had begun her life in the service of our mother’s grandmother. That takes one back! Whenever we had a free moment we trotted into her sitting-room for pleasant conversation and, maybe, a biscuit, a bit of chocolate or candy. She had the key of the stores.

“I declare if I was made of sugar, you’d have me eaten!” she would say; a cannibalistic possibility I made it a point of earnestly disclaiming.

THE THREE KINGS AND THE

The linen room was where she sat, in a quaint, painted, high-backed armchair 238

STAR

by the window. She gazed straight out across a yard to a shrubbery dominated by three large Fir trees over which the evening star would peep, a tremulous yellow. She called those Fir trees her Three Kings, and never failed to lift her hands in wonder and gratitude over the beauty of the star. Poetry goes deep into the hearts of the Irish.

I can see that room now. The whole of one side was filled with cupboards—presses, we called them—where, behind buff wire gratings and beautifully fluted bright pink calico, the linen was stored. A few nursery groceries, biscuit and dessert oddments were kept in a cupboard just at the entrance; and there was always a faint fragrance of raisins and spice in the atmosphere. I can see the dear occupant of the room too; the picture of beautiful old age, with banded silver hair beneath the snow-white cap which was tied with muslin strings under her chin. I can see her apple-blossom cheeks and her blue eyes, clear and innocent as a child's, yet so wise! She had a white starched kerchief folded across her black bodice, and her black skirt was gathered with a great many pleats round the comfortable rotundity of her figure. We used to find her sitting by the casement in the twilight, gazing out. If the mood took me, I would sit on her knee and stare out too. Every few minutes or so she would sigh, not with sadness, but gently, as the woods sigh, with scarcely perceptible movement on a still night. But though I knew it to be no sigh of distress, it nevertheless troubled me. I would ask anxiously:

"Why do you sigh, Mobie?"

Her answer was always the same: 239

"Old age, Alanna!"

Her name was Mrs. O'Brien, which was interpreted Mobie by our baby lips.

In same fashion the first nurse, whom I only vaguely remember, erect, small, severe, and kind, had degenerated from Mrs. Hughes into Shuzzie; and the queer, tiny head housemaid, baptized Bridget, was Dadgie. A unique personage this, minute as she was active, with bobbing bunches of grey curls on each side of her grey net cap with purple ribbons which were tied under her chin. Upon the rare occasions when some damage occurred to the china or glass under her hands, she would trot into my mother with the announcement:

"Oh, ma'am, I've made a '*foo pas*!'"

No one knew where she had picked up this inappropriate bit of French.

Dear, quaint, pathetic, busy little creature, buzzing about the house with a flapping duster! I have a vision of her too, as I write: her huge poke bonnet overshadowing the small, important face; her bobbing curls as she fluttered in to confession in the oratory on those monthly occasions when the old parish priest—another figure out of long past times, he too, with his white head, his black stockings and buckle shoes, his full-skirted coat—came out from the little country town to "hear" the household.

THE FAIRIES

My mother used to call the three old women servants her three duchesses. Alas! two of these dignitaries passed away very early in my recollection. Fortunately, Mobie, the best beloved, was left to us till later years. It is to her that my thoughts most readily return. 240

She was a store-house of anecdotes and legends. Never would she speak, nor allow anyone to speak before her, of the fairies otherwise than as "the good people"; and then it was with bated breath. It was established as a fact among us that in her girlhood she had had communication with them. Certainly, we believed, she had seen them one evening dancing in a ring; but never could she be got to tell us in

detail anything about these experiences. The very mystery of her silence confirmed our theory.

What a delightful volume one could have made out of the tales that fell from her lips upon our small listening ears by the nursery fire; or in the linen room with its uncurtained window and its vision of the Three Kings and the Star.

From many memories one floats back to me. It made a great impression:

"... And when Tim Brenahan was on his way home that evening, wasn't it round by the wall he went, and didn't he see two great cats sitting on the top of it with their tails hanging over? And didn't one cat say to the other, as plain as can be, and didn't he hear it, just as you do be hearing me:

"Says one, 'And what's the news this evening?' And says the other, 'No news at all,' says he. 'Only that the widdie Moloney's old tabby's gone at last,' says he, 'and it's the great funeral will be to-night,' says he.

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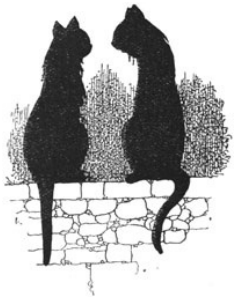
"And when Tim Brenahan came home to his wife, says she to him, 'And what's the news this evening, Tim, asthore?'



"And says he to her, 'Faith, no news at all,' says he, 'save as I was coming home by the long wall beyont, there was two great fellers of cats sitting on the top of it. And says one to the other, "The widdie Moloney's tabb's goney at last," says he, "and it's the grand burying on her there'll be to-night."'

"And no sooner were the words out of his mouth when his own tom-cat ups with him and shakes himself where he was sittin' starin' at the turf, and says he 'Then it's time for me to be off,' says he, 'or I'll be late for the funeral.' And out of the door with him, with his tail all of a bristle...."

I was rather awed by that story, which, to my infant mind, bore the stamp of unmistakable veracity; but nothing that proceeded from the linen room ever really distressed me. Its ruling spirit was too benign and too perfectly in harmony with us.

AN OLD IRISH NURSE

The terror of those days to me was the fragile-looking, soft-voiced, mincing widow who became our nurse after the death of the fine old martinet by whom we had been ruled before. It was not surprising that our mother should have imagined she was passing us over to a much gentler authority; but as a matter of fact—indolent, ignorant, peevish—the new nursery autocrat was given to enforcing her orders by threats of a ghastly and impossible description.

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"I'll cut your tongue out," was a favourite menace, which, if defied, would be supplemented by—"Wait, now, till I run and get my scissors."

Stronger of body, more enlightened in mind, my co-nurseryites treated these remarks with the scorn they deserved. But I cannot describe the agony with which they pressed upon me. It is peculiar to all children that these terrors are never communicated to others. Not even to my brothers and sisters would I breathe one word of my apprehensions. But the misery took shape in horrible dreams and sleepless nights. And when matters became too intolerable, I would creep out of my little bed, and patter across the bare boards into the adjoining room where the housekeeper slept. On no single occasion did she show the smallest severity or even annoyance at being disturbed.

"Mobie," I would pipe, "I'm afraid!... May I get into your bed?"

"Come in, Alanna," was the invariable response.

Oh! the comfort of snuggling against her!

Whether she promptly fell asleep again, or whether she watched and talked loving nonsense one felt equally safe, equally blessedly happy. If she slept, it was lightly enough, like all old people; and each time she turned or moved in the bed, the small bed-fellow would hear her murmur:

“The Lord have mercy on me!”

It was not a deliberate prayer, scarcely even a conscious thought, but the natural movement of the soul.

Little wonder that, being what she was, she who had lain down every night, as it were, in the very arms of Providence, should pass to her last sleep as simply and fearlessly.

“Are you frightened, mother?” cried her daughter, bending over her at the very end. She opened her eyes and smiled.

“Frightened? How could I be frightened? Am I not going to my best friend?”

Looking back now, it seems to me that the whole of my childhood was pursued by one phantom or another. The smell of the woods through the open nursery window on a hot summer's night turned me sick with an unspeakable apprehension. Believers in reincarnation would attribute this peculiarity to some sylvan tragedy in a previous existence. No doubt there must have been a physical explanation. I have come to the conclusion that most things in life are capable of a double interpretation; which is the same thing as saying that there are two aspects to every question!

Is it usual for children, I wonder, to see such marvellous colours, shapes, and appearances in the dark as both I and a sister did, between the ages of five and eight? Kaleidoscopic colours running one into the other, and an odd, very frequently recurrent vision of a cushion covered with gold pieces which poured down on the bed.

My husband, as a small child, would behold complete scenes in the corner of his nursery, and would pull his nurse on one side impatiently when she impeded his view. And let me here note a curious incident connected with his juvenile imaginings. All his life, as far back as he could remember, he had a recurrent dream of terror—at fairly rare intervals—of an immense wave rising up before him like a mountain and curling over at the top, about to overwhelm the land. He told me of this dream after we were married, adding that though it was so distinct that he could draw it, he knew it for a purely fantastic nightmare; knew that no such tall and steep wave as he beheld in his sleep could exist in nature. A few years ago—we were at Brighton, I remember—he brought up to me from the hotel room an illustrated paper, and, laying it on the table before me, said: "Look—there is my dream!"

I looked. It was an illustration that held the whole page. I saw a huge wall of water, rising sheer black, with a toppling crest of white—an awful, threatening vision! I read underneath: "Photograph of the recent tidal wave in Japan."

Who can explain the mystery? He had had that dream first as a baby boy in Paris, some forty-five years before. No such sight, no such picture had ever come across his waking consciousness.

A tidal wave in Japan ... so far has my discursive mind led me from garden ghosts!

We know a haunted garden belonging to an old Manor House in Dorsetshire which was our abode one summer, five or six years ago. The house had once been Catherine Parr's. It was full of ghosts too, but I am none too sure that they were mellow sixteenth-century spectres; rather I believe were they the objectionable offspring of a table-rapping spiritualistic owner.

THE FORGOTTEN NUN

The garden ghost was, to our thinking, neither Tudor nor modern, but that of a sad little eighteenth-century nun. For, passing through many hands, the place had for a time been a convent. A gentle community, turned out by the French Revolution, had been offered a refuge in this far corner of England by the then papist possessor of "The Court." The place had its previous story of faith and persecution: its parish church, which had long clung to the old dispensation, and its priest martyr still lying in the little churchyard. All this is forgotten now. We knew nothing of it, nor of the nuns; but oddly enough, when we came into the house, one of us said to the other: "I am sure there was a chapel here."

Well, when the nuns packed up their goods and returned to France, they took away with them too ‹so tradition says› the coffins of some sisters who had been buried in the garden. Surely they had forgotten one! What else could account for the dreadful melancholy which fell upon us at a particular

turn of the walk that ran round that sunny, bowery enclosure? There was nothing whatsoever suggestive about the spot. The high, warm wall with the spreading fruit trees rose on one side; an Apple tree and a clump of Hazels held the other—yet so sure as one came to this place the heart was gripped, the spirit seized. We each of us felt it; visitors felt it. That dear, departed cat, Tom, of venerable memory—he was a great ghost-seer—he felt it—nay, he saw it! His tail would bristle, his fur stare, he would stand and then flee as if pursued for his life.

The poor little nun, lying in a foreign land, away from the rest of her sisters, forgotten!—Ghosts have walked for much less. In fact, it is curious to note that the restlessness of most authenticated ghosts seems due to an objection to their place of burial. 247
And on this score—if the anecdote takes me away from gardens, it brings me back to them in the end—I have in my mind another tale. It is a true story, as the children say, connected with a house which we have often visited in Ireland: an old monastery, full of that curious depression in its stateliness which so many confiscated church properties retain. It was haunted in many ways.

Personally, beyond unpleasant sensations in traversing some particular corridor and landing, we never met any ghost in the Abbey. But then we were not placed in *the* ghost-room.

A STRONG MIND CONVINCED

An old friend of our hostess, an elderly lady, was not so kindly treated. She was a spinster of robust constitution and strong mind; a type of the particular generation which comes between the nervous gentility of the Early Victorian sisterhood and the present day "suffrage" community. No doubt the mistress of the Abbey believed her ghost-proof. But she was mistaken. After the first night in the Lavender Bedroom, the visitor's appearance at breakfast pointed so conclusively to the fatigue of sleeplessness that, with some misgiving, her friend drew her on one side to question her in private:

"Were you disturbed, Lucy?"

"I was, Mary." The maiden lady was not a person of many words.

"Did you—did you ... see any thing, Lucy?" exclaimed the hostess. The family had but lately come into possession; and the idea of haunters and haunted annoyed rather than frightened her.

"I did," said the friend firmly.

Some persuasion was necessary before she would relate her 248
experience. At last it was extracted from her in some such shape as this:

"I couldn't sleep. Towards two in the morning I heard a noise. I thought it was rats. I sat up in bed to feel for the matches: couldn't find them. There came a light, on the opposite wall. I stared. I saw a monk in it. He began to move. He didn't look alive: he looked like a magic lantern. He went out of the room through the closed door. I got up, opened the door, looked out into the passage. Yes, Mary, the light was there, and the figure in it, too. It moved along the wall. I followed it. It disappeared before the cross doors. I went back to bed. No, I'm not frightened, but I haven't slept. I'd like another room, please. No, I wasn't asleep—it wasn't a dream. I can't explain it. Nor you either, I suppose."

The hostess pondered. It was true she couldn't explain. She had heard of that apparition before—perhaps had seen it. It was certainly very annoying. She promised her friend to give instant orders for the preparation of another room; and then made a request that the matter should not be mentioned to her daughter—an impressionable, imaginative girl of

eighteen.

The maiden lady snorted. It wasn't likely.

Rosamund, the daughter, had of course known all about it long ago; while, after the fashion of her kind, keeping her counsel demurely before her elders, she had discussed freely the thrilling appanage of her new home with all the companions of her own age who came to stay at the Abbey.

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It was she who was destined to lay the ghost. One rainy afternoon later in the same summer, the young members of the house-party found themselves stranded together in the great hall, and Rosamund cheerfully suggested table-turning and spirit-rapping to while away the time till tea. It is a never-failing amusement.

Having produced a satisfactory condition of lurching, and elicited several quite distinct raps from the round mahogany table, she cried out:

"Let us call up the ghost."

Responsive knocks came, loud and marked. A system of communication was promptly established. Two raps for yes, one for no. Then the questioning began.

With much laughter and some agreeable tremors, it was ascertained that the monk-ghost belonged to the community which had dwelt so long at the Abbey; that he was dissatisfied with his present place of burial, which was outside the old monks' burying-ground, now a part of the actual garden.

It is always safe, as I have said, to question a ghost on this point. Now, however, some difficulty ensued when, through the limited medium, the rapping spirit endeavoured to specify the spot of its present abode, and the field was too wide for exactness—until a young sailor cousin intervened. He had been playing, in mere idleness and utter scepticism, the rather gruesome game. But at this point he roused himself, interested to put the matter to the proof. He fetched pencil and paper, and drew up a scheme of latitude and longitude with reference to the garden walls; and finally determined the position where the discontented ghost announced that his bones were actually reposing.

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With professional neatness he made a plan of the shrubbery, marked the grave thereon, and the whole party resolved to sally forth with spades "to see if the old ghost spoke the truth." The sailor cousin was particularly jocose in unbelief.

LAID AT LAST

Yet truly, the next day, in the very place designated, they came upon bones—to be exact, upon a skeleton complete save for the skull. The sailor was the first to rush back to the Abbey and collect a circle for a fresh séance. And once more the phantom monk rapped out latitude and longitude in connexion with his skull; once more he was found to be a ghost of the most complete veracity. And the end of this true story is that the skeleton, complete with its cranium, was laid duly and reverently in the old consecrated ground in the garden. And the monk appeared no more in the Lavender Room.

I promised to return to gardens, and here I am. What a garden that was! Not a bit uncomfortable in spite of its company of departed friars. The monk's old Yew Walk was there; such a one as has not its match in the kingdom, I believe. There too were fields of "Malmaison" Carnations. Never have I beheld such lavishness before or since. The scent of the things! It was our hostess's rather extravagant fancy. I don't know that I exactly envy it. It was almost too much, but yet it was a wonder!

I think it was a dream of very childish days that started my haunting dread of graveyards; that, and the peculiar desolation of the little burial-place through which we passed every Sunday morning to go to the Chapel near our country home. It was what is called in Ireland a "station," that is a Chapel of Ease, which was only attended on Sundays and shut up on week-days. Deprived of the flicker of the Sanctuary lamp, the place seemed, except for that brief Sunday service, as deserted within as it was forlorn without.

GREEN GRAVES

I dreamt that all those poor neglected green graves—there was hardly one with even a black painted cross to mark it—had become endued with ghastly life and started in pursuit of me down the familiar country road. In a frightful, stealthy silence they wallowed and leaped, gaining on me as I ran, in my dream, in a panic that I can hardly even now bear to think back on.

For years afterwards I never walked away from that little churchyard, even in the large and cheerful company of my sisters, clutching the solid hand of governess or nurse, without the nightmare terror coming on me again. Not a word did I breathe of it, of course; but I would look back over my shoulder, at every turn of the road, horribly expecting to see those uncanny green hounds on the trace of my miserable little heels.

It was only in my walks I feared, however. When driving backwards and forwards to Mass I felt I could defy the graves. We always drove to the Sunday Mass. How vivid are the impressions of those early days! As I write I have before me the whole scene. Just before the cracked bell ceased ringing, we would file up the little front aisle and enter the pew reserved for us; my mother very solemn, with what we called her church face; our two governesses and we children. In summer each of the four little girls wore a new starched, very full-skirted print frock; and the one little boy of the party a white duck suit equally stiff from the wash. Our wooden pew ran on the right side of the Sanctuary rails and was shut off by a little door from the rest of the chapel. It had long bright red rep cushions, and the wood-work was painted a peculiarly pale yellow, handsomely and wormily grained! Just opposite to us, the better class farmers' families were installed; and every new fashion that appeared in our bench was promptly copied by the bouncing Miss Condrens and Miss Mahons opposite.

There was, I recollect, one personage who inspired me with great admiration. She was a Mrs. Condren and her Christian name was Eliza. The daughter of what is called a "warm farmer," she had been forbidden all thoughts of matrimony by him, who held the holy estate in as much disfavour as did Mrs. Browning's father.

Well on in years, and presumably bored by her maiden state, she had at length eloped with an elderly admirer; and though she had "done very well for herself" and her spouse

was quite as “warm” as her papa, the latter maintained towards them both an undying resentment. No wonder Mrs. Condren moved in a halo of romance in our eyes. Added to this she was always very handsomely attired in a shining purple silk, which filled the chapel with its rustle. She also sported a yellow bonnet with bunches of wax grapes and—last touch of elegance—dependent from its brim, a lace veil embroidered also with grapes, a cluster of which completely covered one eye and part of her cheek.

Quite another type was old Judy in her little brown shawl and lilac sun-bonnet, who knelt ostentatiously just in front of the altar rails, apart from the rest of the congregation; and who punctuated the service and sermon with loud clacks of her tongue, groans from and thumps upon her attenuated chest. My mother was once highly amused by Judy’s pantomime during a particular discourse.

BLESSED ARE THE POOR

“Blessed are the poor,” announced the young curate with his rolling Irish emphasis.

Here was a statement quite to Judy’s taste. Loud were her groans of approval. She turned up her eyes with great piety, and the gusto with which she beat her breast indicated that she took the benediction entirely to herself. “But don’t think, me brethren,” went on the ecclesiastic warningly, “that this means that because you’re poor in purse you’re pleasing to God. It’s the poor in spirit that I do be meaning. There’s many a poor body with a proud heart.” 254

Now poor old Judy must have been conscious of the possession of this spiritual drawback; for even as she had taken the text as a direct compliment, so she now took the corollary to it as a personal insult. She drew herself up with a jerk and threw a glance of furious reproach at the speaker. No more groans should His Riverence have out of her! No—nor tongue clacking, nor chest thumpings either!

For the rest of his sermon she remained rigid, fixing her gaze upon him with an unwavering glare of disapproval.

As the priest had to come from a considerable distance, he was generally late; and as the congregation itself straggled in from over the hills, sometimes much before the hour, it was the pious custom at Rathenisha for the two model damsels of the congregation each to read aloud out of a different book of sermons for the edification of the assembly in the delay before Mass. They had fine loud voices and read simultaneously; the effect can be better imagined than described. One ear would be struck by genteel accents proclaiming, “Admoire the obedience of Joseph, me brethren. Did he repoine, did he hesitate?”—the while the other ear was assailed by a rich brogue announcing, “The sentence is already past. Thou must doi. How many have gone to bed at noight in apparent good health—” 255

It was some such threat as this, intermittently caught from the side of the deepest brogue, which would terrify my small mind. The whole churchyard, with its horror of green graves, would seem to close about me. And how much worse it was should there chance to be a new, raw mound without!

One of the Mahon girls did indeed illustrate the gloomy treatise in a manner appalling to my secret state of apprehension. She died quite suddenly while dancing at some rural festivity. Rumour had it it was tight-lacing which had produced the tragedy.

“Wasn’t she black all down one side, the crathur?”

“Ah, maybe—but she was always a yaller girl,” opined a wise matron.

Dimly I can recall that she had the pallor that goes with swarthy hair and eyes. A handsome creature, but not of the type admired by her class. The poor girl’s sudden end formed a stirring illustration for the second curate’s sermon the Sunday after the funeral.

A PERSUASIVE TONGUE

"What did I say, me brethren, last time I stood preaching here at you? Didn't I say who could tell who would be missing before the year was out? And look now at the wan that has been taken—a foin, sthrapping young girl, one of the foinest, I might say, in this parish.... Not an ail on her a few days ago, and where is she now?" 256

He jerked his thumb terribly through the little glass window at the side. The congregation enjoyed it enormously. There was a sucking of breaths, a clacking of tongues and subdued groans of approbation; and a good deal of rocking backwards and forwards on the part of Judy, who as usual squatted on her heels at the edge of the altar rails. But, poor little wretch that I was, how I quaked!

The second curate was an excellent young man, of the sturdy type familiar to many Irish districts in those days. The people called him "rale wicked," and loved him proportionately—"wicked," in their terminology, having a very different significance from the word used in its English sense. "Wicked" to them refers but to the flame of the fire of zeal; and they like to feel it scorch them.

When from the altar steps he threatened by name certain recalcitrant black sheep of his congregation who were neglecting their Easter duty, to be "afther them with a horsewhip if they didn't present themselves 'at the box' so soon as he had his breakfast swallowed," there was a thrill of admiration through the chapel. That was being "wicked" after a fashion they all appreciated. And when, after his breakfast had been gulped down, he duly appeared with a horsewhip, the results were immediate and excellent. His morning meal, in parenthesis, got ready for him by a neighbouring farmer's wife and served to him in the little damp sacristy, invariably consisted of three boiled eggs, besides the usual pot of poisonous strong tea. Three eggs is the number consecrated to the cleric in Ireland.

At a certain Connemara hotel a curious visitor, hearing the orders shouted out: "Bacon and eggs for a lady," "Bacon and eggs for a gentleman," "Bacon and eggs for a priest," ventured to inquire the differentiation. The answer was prompt and simple. 257

"Wan egg for a lady; two for a gentleman; and three for a priest!"

XXXVI

NECROPOLIS

I have solemnly sworn my family that when I die I am not to be buried in a "Necropolis." Horrible thought, a "city" of the dead! To hate the herd when living, and to be forcibly associated with it till the Day of Judgment, if not evicted to make room for fresh tenants!

In the very early months of my marriage we were obliged to take up our abode in a large northern town, for Loki's future grandfather had to study certain aspects of newspaper management. Never was anything more difficult to find than a roof for our heads in that place of teeming activities. Worn out with a long and fruitless search we were at last landed in a higher quarter of the town at the house of a dentist! The dentist was going away for a holiday, and was ready to put at our disposal, for a consideration, the whole of the clean, fresh, quite unobjectionable little abode, reserving only one room—his chamber of horrors!

I interviewed an elderly thin-faced lady, with, as became a dentist's mother, a very handsome smile. She brought me to the window. We looked down on waving tree-tops and a wide space of green in the gathering dusk of the September evening.

"You see," she said, "we have a most pleasant view."

I gazed. That stretch of green silence and restfulness, after all those sordid roaring streets, decided me.

"We will take the house!" I cried, in a hurry lest we should miss such a chance.

"I always think," said the dentist's mother, smiling still more broadly, "that it is a great advantage to be opposite the Necropolis."

Poor innocent as I was, and country bred, I had no idea of the meaning of the word.

I was soon to discover. Funerals are of more than daily occurrence in a mighty city. Oh! the processions that I stared down upon from the drawing-room window, through the fog and the rain—gloom generally enveloped that centre of manufactures! I was left long hours alone; no one but an impertinent French maid with whom I could exchange my ideas. The proceedings in the Necropolis had a hypnotic attraction for me. I began to feel quite certain that it was gaping for my poor little bones, and that they must inevitably rest there. Finally, I extracted a solemn oath that, whatever happened, this should not be the case—a promise momentarily soothing, but far from lifting the weight of depression that pressed upon me.

To add a touch of revolting comedy to my experiences, the owner of the house returned abruptly from his holiday and took possession of the locked-up room for an afternoon, for the purpose of extracting all the teeth of a special friend. I fled from the house in terror, when Elise ‹who hated me› informed me with much gusto of the impending excitement. Needless to say, however, she regaled me with every groan on my return, and all the details she had been able to pick up from the parlourmaid—left by the dentist, *en parenthèse* —who had counted the teeth.

The nightmare shrinking from death and its dreadful appanages is one that is mercifully passing from me. But I envy those who can take the great tragic facts of existence, not only with simplicity, but with a kind of enjoyable interest.

A Hungarian friend of ours derived much solace in the loss of an adored mother by the choosing of a coffin—"Louis XV, with little Watteau bows of ormolu." She smiled with real joy, through her tears as she described the casket to us, adding:

"And I have chosen just such another for myself for ven I die!"

She stared in amazement when I remarked that I should not care what my coffin was like.

“Vat?” she exclaimed, “not like to be buried in a Vatteau coffin? But it is so pretty!”

Alas! she lies in her pretty coffin, and our world is much the poorer. But we are sure that during the long months of her last illness, when she shut herself away from every one in the solitude of her great Hungarian property, to face death alone, the thought of those Watteau bows was a distinct satisfaction.

Never was there a creature so instinct with life as she! It was little wonder she could not imagine herself as past caring for the small pleasures for which she had always had so keen a taste. She never lost the heart of a child. Though when last we saw her she must have been, as years go, almost an old woman, there was no touch of age about her: only a snowier white of her hair made her more like an adorable little Marquise than ever. Her pretty picturesque ways were unchanged, her eager sympathy, the delicious freshness of her mind, the lightness, the charm, the simplicity.

She had a soft oval face; rich southern tints; the bluest eyes between black lashes that it is possible to imagine; her small nose like a falcon’s beak—which gave a character of decision, an untamed, spirited look to the whole countenance. The word savage could not apply to anything so exquisitely dainty in manner and appearance; and yet one felt the long line of savage ancestry at the back of her, a wildness no other European nation would show in such a flower of its race. And, to finish the description, no one had ever so pretty a mouth with the smile of a child and a thousand fascinating expressions.

Life had dealt very hardly with her, as is sometimes the case with such buoyant souls. She lost all she loved, and was left in the end with half a province in land, and no creature nearer than the son of a second cousin to whom to bequeath the vast inheritance.

JOHNNIE’S SOUL

Wedded to an English officer in the Austrian service, while still in her teens, one might have thought she would have had a better chance of domestic bliss than if her choice had fallen upon one of her own countrymen; since, above all in those middle Victorian days, the English home and the English virtues are so proverbial. But he was all that a husband ought not to be. And her only child died in babyhood. For thirty years she devoted herself in an alien land to what she conceived to be her duty. A fervent believer in the higher destinies of man and the necessity of repentance, she would say, “I will not give up Johnnie’s soul.”

The dashing Chevau-leger became an old curmudgeon of the crankiest description. To a less courageous spirit life would really have been intolerable beside him. Nevertheless the small London house near the Park, every window of which was bright with flower-boxes, was as gay within as it was without, and friends flocked to those Sunday tea-parties—the only entertainments she was permitted to give.

Well, she had the reward she craved. Johnnie “made his soul,” in Irish parlance, quite sufficiently long before softening of the brain became too marked to preclude intelligent action. And after three years more she was able to send that telegram to her intimates: “Released!” It was the cry of one who had been enslaved and in prison for all her youth and all her bright womanhood.

But, characteristically, “Johnnie’s” funeral was a matter of great importance. He had been very fond of driving four-in-hand, and so there were four horses to the hearse that conveyed all that was left of the Tyrant to Kensal Green. It was as splendid as lavish instructions could make it; and the little widow would pop her head out of the window at every turning to watch the noble appearance of the hearse with its nodding plumes and murmur contentedly:

“Poor Johnnie, he vas so fond of driving behind four horses: I vas determined he should have it for de last time!”

We were not a little startled to receive a postcard a few weeks later, containing the cryptic phrase:

“Just re-buried Johnnie!”

Johnnie had always been a trial of a unique description. Was it possible that he had put the laws of nature at defiance and returned to torment his long-suffering spouse? But the explanation was simple. She thought it so simple herself as to admit of its expression, as we have said, on a postcard.

When she had left him among all those ranks of dead, the thought came to her that he was dissatisfied with his resting-place and would prefer to be laid with his ancestors. And so Johnnie was promptly dug up from where he had been deposited with so much pomp, removed across half England, and “reburied.”

If it was true that, like so many ghosts, he was particular about his tomb, I can quite understand his displeasure in this instance. As I have said, I share it.

He lies now just outside the park where he played as a child, under the lee of the little church where he said his first innocent prayers, and his dust will mingle with the dust of his grandsires.

Such a quiet, peaceful spot! Immense cornfields skirt it on the one hand and on the other the great woods.

May I lie in some such hallowed, uncrowded acre!

Irish born as I am, there is something in the breath of Ireland that makes my heart rise. The sound of the soft Irish voices is music to my ear. I forgive the slipshod ways because of the general delightfulness. Distressful country as it is—more than ever, now, alas! the battle-ground of factions—from the moment of our landing joyfully on its shores, to the sad hour of parting, our too rare visits to Ireland have been punctuated by kindly and innocent laughter. Impossible, beloved people! They break the heart of the politician and of the reformer; but how enchanting they are to just a foolish person such as I am, who likes to go and live among them and enjoy them without political bias; who can laugh at and with them, and love them as they are!

Our last journey to Ireland began in mirth, and ended in the agonies of a bad passage which accentuated all our regrets. The traject thither had been accomplished with no such drawbacks.

The Master of the Villino is remarkably indifferent to anything the sea can do; but I like to have a comfortable cabin to myself, and a large port-hole for the sea-wind to blow through. I cannot say I'm fond of feeling like the German lover:

Himmel-hoch jauchzend, zu Tode betrübt

between wave and hollow. But it is the woes of other people that really undo me. On this particular passage—a bright fresh day it was, with what's called, I suppose, "a choppy sea"—I was quite ready to defy the elements, when suddenly there arose, from the next-door cabin, sounds.... No—even in recollection these things are not to be dwelt upon!

"My dear," said I to my companion, "let us talk and drown the outcries of this shameless and abandoned woman."

Fortunately I had a companion with whom conversation is always as easy as it is interesting. We began to enjoy our own pleasant humour very much, and did not allow a moment's silence to fall between us, lest—

We were travelling by North Wall; and when the placidity of the Liffey odoriferously enfolded us, we emerged cheerfully on deck to join some friends, for the sake of whose agreeable company we had chosen this particular route.

The dear little lady who was about to be our hostess we found charitably administering dry biscuits to a very dilapidated-looking, green-faced young woman with the unmistakable appearance of—but again, no!

"Poor Mrs. Saunders has been feeling so faint," said our friend, with the cheerful sympathy of the good sailor.

We were introduced to the languid one.

"Poor thing," we said, "you do look bad! Have you been ill?"

One is very crude in one's questions on board ship.

"Oh, no; not ill!" She flung the suggestion from her with an acid titter. Then rolling a jaundiced eye upon us:

"Were you ill?"

"Oh, no," we said; "we quite enjoyed the passage."

The sufferer turned her glance from our brutality to the sympathetic neighbour.

"If I could have slept," she said plaintively. Then she looked back darkly at us. "There were some horrible people in the cabin next me, who would talk, and talk, and talk."

"Well," we exclaimed, and it was indeed in all innocence, "you were at least better off than we were. For there was a creature in the cabin next to us—the most disgusting—the most unbridled—"

It was not till we saw the dreadful rage in her eyes that we

realized! It is a horrible little anecdote, but it started us laughing even before we set foot on the quays.

IRISH VIGNETTES

The next incident partakes of the tragi-comedy in which every Irish problem is set. All Ireland stands like one of those figures of mimes on an old drop-curtain; a laughing face behind a tragic mask—or indeed the reverse. We laughed while our hearts grew sad at the sight of a stalwart devil-may-care individual in a frieze coat who strolled up to a group of jarvies while we sat in the cab waiting for our luggage to be loaded. The whole business was conducted with a fine artful carelessness. Now one, now another of the standing group of cab-drivers would lurch up against him of the frieze coat or clasp him jovially by the hand, and there would ensue a passage of coppers from one grimy palm to another. Then out of a deep side-pocket of the frieze coat a black bottle would be drawn, with all the *désinvolture* of the conjuring trick. No doubt some four yards away on either side stood a policeman; the illicit traffic was conducted, so to speak, under his nose. But, splendid fellow as he is, is he not, too, an Irishman? He knows when to sniff in another direction.

‹And here we may parenthetically remember a charming and typical spectacle which once met our eyes in the County Wicklow: a local police station, a large placard commanding that all dogs shall be muzzled, and five or six curs of different low degrees snapping untrammelled in the sunshine at the feet of two smiling members of the constabulary. 267

Some brutish Saxon member of our party stops to point out the discrepancy.

“Unmuzzled, is it?” says the elder policeman genially. “And, begorra, so it is, ma’am. But, sure, isn’t that Tim Connolly’s little dog? Sure, what ’ud we be muzzling him for? Thim orders is only for stray dogs!”›

DRIVEN IN STYLE

We drove away across the cobbled Dublin streets at a hand gallop. Whether the poor animal that drew us had to be kept at this unnatural speed lest it should collapse altogether, or whether our “jarvey” had had more than one pull at the black bottle I know not; certainly we went in peril of our lives. Shaving off corners, striking the edge of the curb, oscillating violently from side to side, the antique vehicle threatened at every leap and bound to break into fragments like a pantomime joke. The Dublin cab is a thing apart. From the musty straw upon which your feet rest, to the dilapidated blue velveteen cushion upon which you leap, to its wooden walls and rattling windows, you would not find its like upon any other point of the globe. It searches you to your least bone socket; and the noise of its career deafens your wails on the principle of the “painless extractor” at the fair, who blows a trumpet for every wrench.

It was useless for us to thrust our heads out of the window, like “Bunny come to town”; the frightful clatter of an arrest, a grunt, and a start at fresh speed were the only result. We trembled in every limb and so did the poor horse, as we were at last flung out in front of our hotel with a jerk that nearly broke the bottom of the cab in two. 268

We tendered what we knew to be considerably more than the fare. The driver surveyed it and looked at us, then rolled a disgusted glance back to the coins, and dropped them into his pocket.

“Is that all? And me afther dhriving you in such style!”

Humours pursued us during our brief sojourn in the hotel. We are very fond of that hotel. It is associated with the repeated charm of its hospitable reception on each of our visits. We were glad to see we were given the same set of rooms as on a previous occasion; and when we found the same broken lock on the door, we felt indeed that we were among old friends.

When our tea was brought—we were lying down to rest—we had however to ring and protest.

“Look at this spoon!” we exclaimed dramatically.

The soft-voiced maid looked at it quizzically.

“What is it?” Then she smiled. “It’s apt to have been in the honey, by the look of it,” she observed dispassionately.

“Please take it away,” we said, “and bring another.”

She thought us strange and dull of wit. There was a clean napkin on every plate. But—no doubt with a mental “Ah, God help us. Travellers is queer folk!”—she departed, we feel sure, no farther than the passage, there to wipe the honey off on the inside of her apron.

A GARDEN IN MEATH

The next day saw us landed at a small wayside station in the rich flat land of Meath, where we were met by a charming old-fashioned “turn out,” a handsome waggonette and a sturdy pair of carriage horses. At least we thought the waggonette old-fashioned and delightful, in these motor times; but it seems it was on the contrary new and wonderful.

The coachman surveyed us tentatively two or three times while our divers small goods were being collected, magisterially directing the footman with the butt end of his whip. Presently he broke into speech:

“Will you be noticing the carriage, sir?” he remarked, addressing the head of the party. “Her Ladyship’s just bought it. I chose it for her meself, so I did. It’s a grand contrivance. You can have it the way it is now, and it’s real comfortable, isn’t it, sir? But sure, you can turn it into an omnibus. And you’d never believe now, how many it would hold. I drove six ladies to a ball in it the other night, and not one of them crushed on me—And fine large ladies they were,” he observed admiringly.

“We do wish he would not tell every one that,” observed one of the “large ladies” a little later. “Every time he’s gone to the station in the new waggonette this summer he’s told that story.”

But she was quite good-humoured and amused. Indeed, her largeness was of the beautiful order. It was no wonder the coachman was proud of conveying it uncrushed.

The gardens where these hostesses dwelt were pleasantly green and flowery. There was the usual high-walled garden. Villino Loki, with its absurd terraces, can never dream of attaining to such an enclosure of antique charm. For if we walled in the Kitchen and Reserve Garden at the foot of our hill we should wall out the moor from below, and obstruct our sweeping vision from above. But my heart yearns to an old walled garden. A place quite apart, with its mingled odours of herb and flower and ripening fruit; with its perpetual murmur of bees, its tangled walks, its old bushes of Rosemary and Lavender, its mossy Apple-trees, its crisp Parsley beds, its tumble-down greenhouses.

CURBED AMBITIONS

This particular walled garden was a very good specimen of its kind. It was here that our ignorance first made acquaintance with the invaluable Cosmia; that treasure of the herbaceous border that keeps on blooming in the face of adversity from June till November. There was also a huge bed of Salvias, one sheet of gentian blue. ‹Why cannot we grow Salvias like that?› It ran at the foot of an overgrown, very old rose plot, the trees of which had developed into fairy-tale luxuriance. And opposite, across the gravelled path, which from old associations we prefer to any other species of walk, was a field of Snap-dragon against the high wall where the leaves of the plum branches were reddening as they clung. Duly mossed was this old wall, and richly lichened; overtopped by the great trees without. These swayed to the mild Irish wind, with long, pleasant, choiring sounds, the rooks cawing as they circled in them. It was small wonder that I should have felt content and at peace as I stood there—if only my heart had not swelled with envy over those Salvias! But one can't be the owner of an Italian Villino on a Surrey Highland and encompass the antique peace of a centuries-old Irish home. One must be reasonable—as a French governess of our youth used to say to us when she began her most lengthy harangues. "*Voyons—de deux choses l'une ...*"

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The park was typically Irish, and possessed some wonderful trees. Amongst others a chestnut, four or five immense branches of which, sweeping to the ground, had taken root again and started fresh trees, forming a singular tropical-looking grove. How children would have delighted in such a leafy palace, roofed in and pillared of its own stateliness!

Memories of laughter pursue us at every stage of those weeks. There was the visit to a neighbouring castle; a genuine old castle this, but irretrievably "restored" in that bygone period of history when Pugin reigned supreme.

AN IRISH CHATELAINE

It was Sunday, and we found the Châtelaine—a little lady renowned for her vivacity and charm—out in the field with her children and her lord, energetically teaching hockey to the young men and women of the village. Her little boy was running up and down after her, wringing his hands and ejaculating, "Mamma, ye'll be kilt! Mamma, ye'll be kilt!" to perfectly regardless ears.

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In a whirl of energy we were rushed into tea; and, while drawing off her loose gloves and flinging them at random into a corner, our hostess's tongue, which was as nimble as her little feet, never ceased wagging:

"I hope you don't mind the smell! Oh, it's a terrible smell. But it's only the dogs, ye know. We've been washing them. They're sick, poor things. Not infectious, ye needn't be a bit afraid. Only mange, or something. It's the sulphur in the soap, ye know. Come in, come in!—Oh, I do hope we have got something fit to eat! Katie, Katie! ‹Katie's me eldest daughter› Katie, what have we got? Ah, it's horrid!—Ah, I don't know what's the matter with them.—Yes, it's a fine big room. We were dancing here last week. You wouldn't think it to look at it now, would you? 'Pon my word! I was thinking to meself that night, 'It's a queer world we live in, with all those saints looking down at us with their bare legs, and we with our bare backs!' Oh, yes, they're very grand old paintings, I dare say! But there is a deal of bare legs about

them.—Will you have any more? Ah, no, ye can't eat it!—I don't wonder, I can't meself.—Will you come into the garden? I'd like to be showing you the garden. Where's me gloves?—Where's me yellow gloves? Katie, did ye see me yellow gloves? Ah, never mind! This way.—I've been making a new herbaceous border. Ah, 'pon me word, if they've not gone and locked the garden door! Sunday's the mischief! Never mind, I'll ring the bell. Green! Green, Johnny Green, are ye there? Is Mrs. Green there? Is Patsy there? Where's young Condren? Ah, they're all out! But I'll not be beaten.—Maybe I'll get it open. Will ye push, now? I'll turn the handle. Give a good shove. It's an old lock. Ah, devil a bit of it! Will ye give me your stick.—No, thank ye. I'd rather hit it meself."

Even to her it was impossible to continue talking, while she was, as she herself would have expressed it, "laying on to the garden door." Scarlet, panting, dishevelled, but still completely fascinating, she desisted at last and handed back the stick with a smile and gasp, and a resigned: "Ah, I clean forgot, I see how it is now. They're all off to the funeral of the priest's brother's sister."

THE HOLLY TREE

XXXIX

From the rich plains of Meath to the barren lands of Galway, it is a far cry and an unforgettable journey. The country grows more and more desolate, and grand in desolation, as one approaches the Atlantic. There was an orange sunset that evening, over an illimitable stretch of bog, a vision of savage, haunting beauty that went with us into the darkness of the fast closing day like a strain of wild music.

Ireland has always been as a living creature to her children. She has taken, in their fanciful minds, a distinct personality. To get such a glimpse of her as that, is to understand the passionate ardour of fealty which she has had the power to inspire; to understand how she has come to be “Kathleen na Hoolihan,” and “My dark Rosaleen,” to those poet hearts. We were speeding now to that very corner of land from which her younger lovers have chiefly sprung.

It was pitch dark when we alighted at a town which had once been large and prosperous and was now forlornly sunk in decay; mute witness, like so many others, to that act of tyranny—blunder and crime—the effects of which England can never wipe away.

Our kind friends had ordered “a carriage from the hotel” to meet us. We had a long cross-country drive before us. Looking doubtfully by the light of the station lamp at the two emaciated animals that were to draw us, we wondered, in our tired brains, if two bad horses are not worse than one. It had begun to drizzle rain, a fine soft rain that is like a caress in the air.

A TYPICAL JARVEY

If anything could beat the Dublin cab, it was that Galway carriage. We set off lurching and rattling; and soon, the wind catching us from over the fields, the rain began to strike in across the open windows. To have a window up seemed the simple remedy; but things simple elsewhere are not so in the West of Ireland. One window was as impossible to lift out of its socket as the oyster out of its closed shells, for it was strapless. We fell upon the other strap and instantly the window shot outwards at right angles, with the evident intention of casting itself on the road, had we not held it despairingly by its shabby appendage. If you have ever tried to hold a window in that position by its strap you will know how agonizing is the process. The driver was hailed.

“Look here! Your window’s loose!—You’d better stop and put it back.”

The slogging trot of the horses slackened, and over his shoulder the man of Galway demanded:

“Is it the windy on the left, or the wan to the right of ye?”

“The left, the left! Oh, do be quick!”

“The left, is it? Sure, isn’t that the wan with the sthrap?” He jerked his reins and clucked at his horses. What more could we want? Wasn’t that the one with the “sthrap?”

With great difficulty, with imminent risk to the life of the window and our own safety, we got the recalcitrant pane back into its socket, and discovered that by dint of judicious manipulation, and a tight hold of the “sthrap,” it was possible to shelter the most neuralgic of the party.

A ten Irish miles’ drive along the stoniest of roads, through complete darkness—for there was only a partial glimmer from one carriage-lamp half the way, which then became extinct altogether—it is something of an enterprise! But it was worth it to find such a welcome at the end!

A GALWAY DEMESNE

A “Gothic” mansion, dating from the early part of last century, Kilcoultra is outwardly a very grand pile and stands nobly in the midst of a rolling park, reclaimed from the wild stony land of Galway. And inside, the first impression is like stepping in to the glories of a missal page. The whole house is homogeneous and entirely successful in its mediæval colouring. On the

walls are gorgeous enamel blues, peacock greens or yet carmine crimsons appropriately set with fleurs-de-lis, maltese cross or some other conventional device in gold; ceiling and cornices are richly illuminated to correspond. To find this glow of colour in the midst of the melancholy greys and greens of the western landscape, under the low drifting cloud-ridden skies, has a great charm; it has a poetic Maeterlinckian atmosphere.

There is something too of the delicate sadness of an old romance in the lives of these kindly ladies who rule so wisely over the lands left to them by their brother—the last of his name. He was a man round whom justly centred unusual hopes and ambitions. Now he, who had so great a heart and so splendid a mind, lies in the ruined chapel in the park, alone. The chapel is roofless. It is a nobly solitary and fit resting-place for one who was nobly apart from the petty aims of his contemporaries; who lived and died true to his ideals; whose work still prospers in the freed lands of his people. He gave up much for Ireland, and Ireland gave him nothing at all in return … except that wonderful sleeping-place with the changing sky overhead.

They say there is no such word in the Irish language as gratitude, and yet— 278

My Kilcoultra hostess drove me round the property on the day after my arrival, and drew the pony to the standstill on a height that finely dominated the park and house. When I had duly admired the view she pointed with her whip to a little white cottage that stood a few yards away and began a kindly tale of the old woman who had long lived there and had but recently passed away.

“When I’d come round to see her, I used to find her, times out of number, leaning over the wall, gazing down at Kilcoultra. Always she’d be leaning over the wall, staring down at the house. And one day I said to her, ‘Mary, what in the world makes you stand there like that?’ And she answered me, ‘I’m looking down on the roof that shelters me lovely master!’”

“My lovely master!” A fragrant thing to have become to the poor that live on your soil! When we reach a sphere where things are judged by different standards and higher measures than we can now conceive, how far will not such a title outweigh any paltry worldly honour!

Yet if the memory of its lost master dominates and haunts all Kilcoultra house and lands, there is nothing to sadden one in the thoughts it inspires; and our stay there is altogether full of charm and pleasure.

Not only are the ladies a fund of anecdote, racy of the soil; not only do they live delightfully in touch with their peasantry, with eye and ear ever ready to catch the humour and the pathos about them; but they are cultured, far-travelled beings. Not much in the outer world escapes their knowledge and shrewd apprehension.

Home topics, however, are what appeals to their visitors most. 279

IRISH WITS

“Carrie,” the younger sister will say to the elder, “I heard Whalen the guard, and Tim Rooney the porter, at Athenmore Station, talking together. And Tim is thinking of making up to a young lady, you know, and I suppose he’s always talking about it, for Whalen was saying to him just as I came up: ‘’Pon me word, I wish you were married, and had your family rared on me!’ They had a great jollification at our station the other night,” she goes on, turning to us. “And they brewed the punch in the station bell! Whalen’s a very humorous man,” she proceeds. “They used to stop the express from Galway at Athenmore when required; but there were complaints of the delay and orders came from Dublin it wasn’t to be done on any account. But it’s a recent regulation and everybody doesn’t know about it. And the other day there was terrible work, for there was Father Blake and the Doctor both counting on it for an urgent sick call—dying, they said the

poor man was.

"'You'll have to stop the train for this once, Whalen,' says Father Blake.

"'I'll maybe save him yet,' says the doctor.

"'I couldn't, yer riverence,' says Whalen; 'it's as much as me place is worth. Don't you be askin' me, doctor. It 'ud be me ruin. The company's very strict.'

"'Think of his poor soul,' says the priest.

"'I'll hold ye responsible for his life,' says the doctor.

"'Wirra, I can't,' says poor Whalen, and calls up Tim. 'Tell his riverence, Tim,' says he, 'tell his riverence and the doctor that I can't be disobeying orders.... And begorra, she's due this minute! Up into the signal-box with you. And down with that signal, so the express can get by,' says he. And as Tim starts off at a great pace, Whalen shouts after him, 'And I'm sure I hope ye'll get it to work, Tim, for it's terrible stiff it is, that same signal, and it at danger!'

"Well, whether he had winked at Tim, or what, but Tim worked and worked.

"'I can't get it to move,' he says. 'Will you come up yourself, Mr. Whalen, sir, and have a try?'

"And, oh," says Miss Margaret, in fits of laughter, "the way the two of them went on in that signal-box, and the way Whalen pumped and pulled, and at last he cries, 'There's no help for it, it's stuck! And sure the company can't blame me, if the machinery's out of order,' says he. 'Well, there's wan good thing, your riverence, the thrain 'ull have to stop now, anyhow.'"

We laugh a good deal during those pleasant meals at Kilcoultra. Not one dull moment does the house hold for us, and we don't want any better company than that of the two dear ladies.

"We've got," Miss Caroline, the elder, explains to me carefully, "a very careful coachman, a very steady man, so you needn't be the least nervous driving out with us. He was selected, indeed, because he could be trusted. It wouldn't do for us unprotected women, you know," she says in all seriousness, "to be risking our necks with a tipsy coachman."

Two days we are driven by this paragon. The third day there sits a stranger on the box.

"I hope," says Miss Carrie apologetically, "that you don't mind his being out of livery."

"The fact is, Regan had an accident last night," explains Miss Margaret. "He fell into the old gravel pit going back home and cut his head open, and——"

"It was my fault entirely," interrupts Miss Caroline in distressed accents. "I had to send him in to Galway town, and to tell him to wait and bring back Captain Blake. And that meant loitering an hour."

"Dear, dear!" Miss Margaret clacks her tongue. "That was very unfortunate! He—such a steady man! But an hour in Galway town...!"

"It's only what might have been expected," Miss Caroline concludes. "I blame myself entirely.—I generally," she adds, turning to me, "avoid leaving him any time in the town, you know."

A STEADY MAN

And the best of it is that Regan remains in their minds "the steady man." How impossible it is for the stranger to understand Ireland and Ireland's ways! How much humour must you have—and what unlimited patience! There is nothing, of course, that so conduces to patience as a pleasant sense of humour.

The ladies are the Providence of the district. There is a room at the back of the great gallery filled nearly to the ceiling with rolls of homespun made by the peasant women in the villages. Whenever a cottage mother is in want of money she

runs up to Miss Margaret or Miss Caroline, bringing or promising the product of her loom. A good deal of money is advanced; a good deal paid in this manner, chiefly out of the ladies' generous pockets.

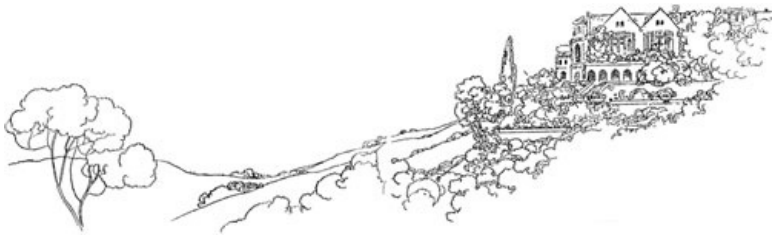
"Of course, poor things, you must know the way to take them," says Miss Caroline in her Irish way. "One of them will come up and declare they'll all be 'lost entirely, ruined out and out' for the want of five pounds. 'Are you sure you couldn't do with thirty shillings, now?' I say to them. 'Oh, Miss Caroline'—it will be then—'as thrue as I'm a living woman, I couldn't do with less than two pound ten!' ... I get at the truth that way," she adds.

It is Miss Margaret who undertakes the sale of goods which have already cost Kilcoultra so dear, and no one can say that she shows a commercial spirit.

"Let me see now," she will say, fingering the stuff—and splendid stuff it is—with tentative finger and thumb. "I think we paid three-and-tenpence a yard for this, or maybe it was four shillings, but"—with a delighted smile—"I'll let you have it for one-and-six, if you're sure—really sure—you want it."

THE COLOUR OF THE WEST

The country all about Kilcoultra is typically wild and melancholy. The fields stretch, barren and yellowing, strewn with giant stones. Except where sombre belts of woodland mark the great estates, there is scarcely a tree to break the monotony; a monotony intensified by the low, unending lines of rough grey walls that border every road. But there is a kind of poetry even in this desolation, and a satisfaction to all who love the freedom of unbounded horizons. Then the mountains of Clare stretch their incomparable plum and grape colours against the sky. The colour of Ireland is a thing scarcely realized over here, where, somehow, hues seem washed out. “In England everything has got grey in it,” an artist friend of ours discontentedly avers.



We are taken across the county to a castle standing by a lake, which is a place of wonder. It is a castle no older, in its mediæval sturdiness, than the Gothic mansion we are staying in, but quite as convincingly built. Loughcool is a realm of beauty. At the end of the long approach the road rises very steeply through a stern grove of pines. All at once, as you approach the summit of this dark woodland, the ground breaks away abruptly on the right, and, between the pines, far, far below, lies the lake smiling, and on its banks what is called “the hidden garden”—a stretch of fairy beauty. Words are poor things to describe the vision which breaks so unexpectedly upon the eye. Everything that gardening art can do has been accomplished at Loughcool. You have terraces and a glory of roses overhanging the water even this late September; and there are “Auratum” Lilies rising in splendid groups on each side of a grass walk that runs grandly into the woods between stately trees. The lady of Loughcool is fighting a hard fight to make Azaleas and Rhododendrons grow in the limy soil; but it is a question whether the struggle is worth while.

“We have given it up,” says the sensible châtelaine of Kilcoultra.

We smiled privately. Villino Loki has at least some points of superiority.

We made another expedition, over the border into County Clare. A white plastered pillared house this, dating from the terrible neo-Italian period of the end of the last century. There dwells an eccentric gentleman, one of the chief instigators of the Young Ireland movement; but he was unfortunately away. We visited the house, and were entertained by his housekeeper. This lady’s name was Mrs. Quinlan, and she was an old friend of our hostesses. We think we enjoyed that afternoon as well as any of our excursions; and certainly we laughed as much as ever.

Mrs. Quinlan came creaking down in a flowing black silk, which brought me instantly back to the Sundays of my childhood and the genteel appearance of my mother’s maid. We sat in the early Victorian drawing-room and had tea and Albert biscuits, listening with unremitting amusement to the conversation between Miss Caroline and Mrs. Quinlan. Be it mentioned that the owner of Curriestown has long been a widower and that the question of his remarriage has never ceased to agitate the bosoms of his neighbours since the event, so many years ago, which qualified him once again for

the matrimonial market.

Mrs. Quinlan stood, her perfectly unwashed hands crossed on the last button of her black silk bodice; her faded face all over lines, querulous, good-humoured, quizzical, under the untidy wisps of her yellow-grey hair; and, while we ate and drank, she flowed continuously on, stimulated by a question here and there, or an appropriate comment.

SPEAKING THE IRISH

"And indeed, Miss Caroline, it's very busy I am. For sure, didn't the master wire there'd be twelve of them here the day after to-morrow? It's getting all the rooms ready I am, and the Professor here and all. Not that he's much trouble, the crathur. Them's his shoes, in the hall beyant. I'm sorry he's out, then, for it's the queer-looking body he is. He's wearing the kilt, ye know, Miss Carrie. And not a word out of him but Irish! Musha, I don't know what he'd be saying!—It's a deal of store they do be setting on speaking the Irish now, Miss."

Here Mrs. Quinlan, seized with a paroxysm of silent laughter, claps one of the grimy hands over her mouth and doubles herself in two. 286

"The master's wild about it, God help him!" she proceeds presently. "But sure, I do be tellin' him, I'm too old to be thinkin' about that kind of thing at my time of life. Troth, and it's queer times we do be having! Isn't the master bringing back a black lady on us!"

"A black lady?" ejaculated Miss Carrie, startled out of her placidity. "Good gracious, Mrs. Quinlan!"

"Indeed, and it's true. A rale black lady I hear she is, and it's in Paris he met her."

"In Paris!"

It seemed a strange place from which to bring a black lady. We were all full of the liveliest interest.

"I suppose," says Miss Caroline, "you mean a very dark lady, Mrs. Quinlan—a brunette?"

"I do not, then—rale black she is, I'm told. Out of the Indies, or Africa, or some of them places."

"Dear me!" Our hostess is much puzzled. "Is he thinking of marrying her, Mrs. Quinlan?"

"I wouldn't put it past him. I wouldn't put anything past him, Miss Carrie!"

A black lady! Was this to be the end of twenty-five years' expectation?

"Well, now, and is he bringing her with him to-morrow night?"

"Och, maybe he is! He's coming by the midnight train, Miss Carrie, and the Lord knows what time in the world they'll be up here."

"Oh, he must mean to marry her!" says Miss Carrie, and Mrs. Quinlan laughs again exhaustedly with an undercurrent of plaintiveness, and remarks once more that she wouldn't put it past him. 287

We go through the house in Mrs. Quinlan's wake. There is something that looks like a kitchen rubber laid over one corner of the mahogany table in the great red-papered dining-room; and on it a crusty loaf flanks a dim glass and a cracked plate. Mrs. Quinlan casts a phrase of explanation as she trails us around.

"He do be looking for his bit of dinner early." We presume "he" to be the "crathur that gives no trouble."

We pass through a bewildering series of bedrooms. The damp has been coming in very copiously at Curriestown. Mrs. Quinlan points out the worst places in each apartment as we go along:

"Look athere, now! Just cast your eye on that, Miss Carrie, and sure it's nothing to what's behind the bed. If ye could see the way it is at the back of that press, Miss Carrie, you'd

be hard set to believe it. Och, the house is in a tirrible state! Me heart's broke pulling the furniture about, thrying to get them bad bits covered."

Some one suggests that perhaps the owner will have it painted for the black lady. But Honoria Quinlan is still of opinion that you couldn't tell what he'd be at.

On the way back we burst a tyre, not far from one of those hamlets which are typical of the western coast. Set in surroundings of the wildest beauty, it is practically deserted. The four walls of the ruined chapel gaping to the sky, and the long row of empty broken-down cottages testify still to the ruthless policy that laid the country waste in far 288
Cromwellian times. Perhaps there are no more than fifteen smoking hearths left, beaten by passionate seas, guarded by the tremendous black cliffs. Life here, it would seem, must be hard won indeed from stony fields and treacherous waters.

Very soon, while the chauffeur worked at the wheel, a small knot of onlookers gathers about us; children with a tangled thatch of bleached hair, and eyes that look half-fiercely, half-appealingly out from under it. Black eyes they seem at first sight, set as they are with raven lashes. It is only on examination that you find them to be richly violet. There is an old man fantastically attired in a blanket laced with twine down to his knees. Such a creature of savage primitiveness he seems that one of the party is moved to ask him humorously if he has ever driven in a motor-car. He surveys us with his mild blue eyes that are as innocent as the child's beside him, and shakes his shaggy white head.

"Bedad, I have," he then says unexpectedly. "And sure it never touched the ground at all but an odd time between here and Connemara."

CLARE ROADS

Yet motor-cars must be very rare apparitions along these Clare roads; for at their approach the people fling themselves sideways into the ditches and against the walls, when they cannot escape through a gap into the fields. Even the dogs will flee. One poor Collie flattened himself on a bank in a paroxysm of terror that we cannot forget. When I remember how along the English roads my heart is for ever in my mouth over the callous indifference of the British cur, I realize that canine folk are very much like human beings when all is said and done.

The Irish of the west have curious habits and customs which 289
seem to link them with their forgotten eastern ancestral race. The women will draw their garments over their heads at the approach of a stranger, so closely that you may not get even a glimpse of their faces. Their husband is still "the master" to them, and they walk two steps behind him when they go abroad. But it is the old Catholic spirit that leads them to expect the greeting "God save all here!" when you enter their cottage, and "God bless the work!" when you pass them in the field.

AN IRISH STRIKE

We hurry away, much against our will, from these attractive scenes because of the breaking out of the railway strike. The newspapers are all very alarming, and we are threatened with being flung for an indefinite period upon the hospitality of our most hospitable friends. We do not fear for a minute that that would fail us, but we are due in England at appointed dates, and so we bustle off, "against the heart" as the French say.

But when you make acquaintance with a strike from an Irish point of view, it seems one huge joke. Never did we make a journey to the sound of so much laughter as that day. Every station was crowded with soldiers, and all the inhabitants mustered on the platforms to exchange sallies with them. An eager, curious, good-humoured gathering greets and speeds the train which is supposed to be kept running at imminent risk of riot and peril.

A very splendid looking police-inspector came into our

carriage and had an animated conversation on the prospects with an elderly gentleman whom he addressed as “Judge.” Both seemed inspired with glee.

When we arrived in Dublin there was indeed a slight drawback in finding no porters available for our many boxes. But the stalwart man of the party made “no bones,” as they would say, about shouldering them himself, and this was accomplished amid the unstinted enthusiasm of the “jarvies.” He was aided ‹save the mark› by the only faithful porter, as old as Pantaloon, who quivered and quavered behind him. A further occasion for cheers.

“Ah, will ye look at the gintleman! To think of the likes of him now, being put to carry the thrunks! Isn’t it ashamed of themselves they ought to be! Well done, Larry, it is a grand old boy ye are! Let me get a hould of the box, yer honour. Oh, begorra, isn’t it the stringth of ten ye do be having....”

“And how do ye like Dublin now, Mr. Smith?” we heard a pretty Irish girl saying to a stalwart young British soldier on the platform.

He was grinning down at her in stolid admiration. She herself had dove-like eyes and a dove-like cooing voice.

We think he liked Dublin very much indeed.

It was the laughing face behind the mask of tragedy.

XLI

THE FALL OF THE LEAF

Once more has the Equinox come and dropped into the past. Autumn—the Fall, as our older and more poetic term had it to balance the image of Spring, and as America still prefers to call it—is about us.

We disagree radically with Chateaubriand's estimate of the "russet and silver days."

"A moral character" ‹thus does the Father of *Romantisme* meditate, in his usual melancholy mood, upon the season of shortening days and long-drawing nights› "is attached to autumnal scenes.... The leaves falling like our years, the flowers withdrawing like our hours, the colours of the clouds fading like our illusions, the light waning like our intelligence, the sun growing colder like our affections, the rivers becoming frozen like our lives—everything about Autumn bears secret relations to our destinies...."

Yes, we disagree with every one of these similes. Rather should Autumn be considered as the happy season of the task accomplished. The wine is pressed and stored, the fruit is garnered.... In the garden it is the time of eager preparation against new delights, another year; of solicitude for the treasures of beauty which are to brighten another Spring, another Summer. The seed of the dying Annuals has been saved; the more tender of the Perennials are timely withdrawn into shelter, while the hardier are cosily tucked in their own bed for the coming long winter sleep. It is the time of the tidying down and of the confident "good night—till next year!"

"Colder, like our affections," indeed! What will not love of rhetoric perpetrate?—and Christmastide drawing on apace!

The Master of the House has an old-fashioned weakness—what may be called a "Dickensy" weakness—for things Christmassy. And his family have all childlike tastes and are quite ready to minister to his picturesque fancy.

We have a Christmas tree—a Spruce sapling, selected yearly for sacrifice in the territory called the Wilderness. It must be said that the wide library, with the capacious hearth and the beamed ceiling, lends a suitable scenery to this homelike ‹but, we fear, obsolescent› entertainment. The tree is lit up on the first night for ourselves; on the second for the household; and a third time for the children. For the true pleasures of Yule would be incomplete without a "foregathering-and-rejoicing-together" ‹as only a tough German compound word could express it› of all grades of age and station. The children, in this case, are those of the Catechism class and of our *employés*—which pompous term must be understood to refer to the gardener, the chauffeur, the under-gardener, and the "occasional help." This last has five of them—so it mounts up satisfactorily.

THINGS CHRISTMASSY

The beloved "furry ones" are not forgotten. Loki, who is always in a state of violent excitement on Christmas Tree nights, has a toy animal to make acquaintance with, tease, and finally worry. Some one ‹it must have been Juvenal› suggested tying up nice clean bones in red ribbons; but out of regard for Grandma's carpet, the succulent thought has never been "materialized."

The Master of the House, and Juvenal, are also full of solicitude for the feathery things in Winter. The bird-baths

are carefully thawed—it seems, by the way, to be in the coldest days of the year that they appear to prefer to bathe; sand baths are generally found sufficient in the Summer, one wonders why. In cold weather generally, cocoanuts filled with fat are disposed in various parts of the garden, around which tits and finches of every shade dispute noisily all day. But on Christmas day the terraces, the balustrades and steps round the house are further disfigured with such an abundance of crumbs and other tempting morsels, that, even with the help of all the black birds from neighbouring copses, they cannot come even with the whole of the feast.

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We give each other enchanting presents. The lovely little carved-wood Joan of Arc, on a bracket in Grandpa's library; the Madonna of Cluny "prayer-stick" in one corner of the chimney-piece; the Medici copy of Filippino Lippi's wonderful angel in the National Gallery, in the grey and yellow bedroom; the cut-glass goblets painted with purple plums and red cherries and blue grapes in the drawing-room —all these were this year's Christmas gifts, cunningly chosen, we think, and a constant delight to our eyes.

Loki's Grandma, after the fashion of a lady in a recent celebrated lawsuit, likes to choose her own presents. But she is not so indelicate as to demand money and buy it herself—No, she drops an absent hint, as Christmastide draws near. If this is not satisfactory, she abandons diplomacy for an engaging frankness.... But she is always overwhelmed with surprise and delight when "the very thing she wanted" duly appears about the Tree. The Master of the Villino, on his side, has had all the pleasure of purchasing; and, being of a guileless nature, is often quite persuaded that the choice was his own.

In fact we all become like children again at Christmas; and this, after all, cannot be displeasing to the Christ Child. It is a time of hectic preparation, of pleasurable brain-racking over the suitability of gifts; of endless tying up of parcels for foreign and home dispatch. We decorate the Villino with round compact Holly-wreaths, which Adam makes with rare raste and adroitness. Never was such a year as the last for Hollies; and some of the trees were still scarlet with them in the late Spring.

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HUES OF WINTER

As for Juvenal, he shows a recrudescence of genius in the devising of table decoration with unthought-of evergreens; with rich-toned leaves in the sear and the brown and purpling hues of Winter, brightened with an astonishing variety of haws, hips, and berries.

In the little Chapel a crib is built up in a stone manger brought from Rome. Therein lies the Italian *Bambino*, purchased two generations ago by a dear one who has now gone from us. It is the quaintest little wax figure imaginable, with its painted red curls and one wax foot uplifted in the act of kicking.—The story goes that the original much venerated image in a certain Roman church, the object of yearly pilgrimages, was purloined, or for some reason moved to another Church, to the woe and indignation of the faithful of the district. But on the first Christmas night after this translation, a loud knocking was heard at the door of the original Church, and the small figure was discovered, kicking with all its might for re-admittance. Captured and carried in with devotion and joy, it was re-established with much pomp in its old quarters, but ever after remained with

a little kicking leg in the air!

Our Crib, surrounded with Roman Hyacinths and White Narcissus and Primulas, is fragrant and poetic; but we do not attempt to show anything more than the one image. Want of space prevents it. Our ambition, however, finds larger scope in the village Chapel. There Juvenal has built a very noble stable, thatched with heather; and all the figures of those first scenes of the Greatest Story in the World will take their place this year.

Last year the tragedy happened that the St. Joseph and Our Lady; the Ox and the Ass; the Kings and Shepherds, which had been ordered in secret to surprise every one, remained on the high seas detained by December gales, until too late. —But our coming Noel will be the richer for the enforced postponement of the Holy Picture.

At the last Yuletide the Mistress of Villino was unable, after a long year's illness, to join the family party at Midnight Mass in the village below the hill. ‹Midnight Mass, be it noted in parenthesis, has an extraordinary charm for the household and indeed for the neighbourhood. And, when all is said and done, it certainly is as picturesque and touching a ceremony as ever men of goodwill are happy to join in. It seems to bring one in direct touch with the simplicity of the shepherds of those far-off hills.› But as the excluded *padrona* was lying quietly in bed waiting for the sounds of departure, she was touched and charmed to hear the strains of a carol rising softly from the terrace beneath her windows:

See amid the winter's snow,
Born for us on earth below,
See, the tender Lamb appears,
Promised from eternal years!

Hail, thou ever blessed morn!
Hail, Redemption's happy dawn!
Sing, through all Jerusalem,
Christ is born in Bethlehem!

Lo, within a manger lies
He Who built the starry skies;
He, Who throned in heights sublime
Sits amid the Cherubim!

All the household had gathered there to give her this pleasure and make her feel that she was not altogether shut out from the Christmas privileges! Wrapped in their thick cloaks, with Juvenal swinging a lantern, they stood in a long row and chanted to her. It was one of those small sweetnesses in life that leave a lasting memory.

There is a picture in a garden paper of Japanese single Asters growing wild in grass: the seeds had been mixed by mistake, but the result, according to the illustration, was singularly attractive. When we saw it we said that the experiment should be made at Villino Loki!—Many indeed are the experiments, many the improvements to be made within our small acres.

But what a difference lies between conception and execution. Of late ‹for an instance› we had revolved round the agreeable thought of a Pool and a wet place generally, for Iris Kæmpheri, Spiræa and other moisture-loving darlings. We had indeed intended something altogether choice in the shape of a large sunken basin with a piping faun on the edge of it. Oh, something quite delightful.... But an inconvenient attack of "conscience"—in other words the heavy memory of garden bills, already incurred over the Autumn lists, rose up and barred the way. We felt something like Scrooge when the ghost with the bony finger ‹horrible vision of our youth› pointed to the tomb. Only, on our tablet what was written was the ghastly total of our bulbous liabilities! Like Scrooge, we covered our faces with our hands. No wonder the faun took fright and leaped into next

year.

THE TURN OF THE YEAR

Well, now, another year has come; and it is passing, taking us upon yet another round of garden pleasures, of old hopes and ambitions renewed—with many new delights and new disappointments, as of old; with also fresh openings on the bright horizon. New interests too. Of these, some of the smaller are not the least engrossing. To Villino Loki this year, for example, has come a new Pekinese. It is a Princess, very small, very sleek; chestnut-hued, with a face like a pansy. She has got a little jutting under-jaw, an extremely flat nose; and, in moments of excitement, her eyes display an amazing amount of white rim. But they are becoming very beautiful eyes for all that. They were the brightest of "boot-buttons" when she came first.

Loki was, naturally, very angry. He did his best to kill her; which was ungrateful, as she was really procured, at great cost and difficulty, to be his Imperial Bride! She, on her side, liked him awfully, and told him so. On her first motor drive down here from London, as she waggled and smirked at him from an opposite lap, he sat on his Ma-Ma's knee and pulled a series of grimaces in return, the like of which you can only find painted on Chinese screens or cast in Chinese bronze.

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THE NEW PEKY

The ways of the new Peky are an endless source of amusement and joy. We tried to call her Mimosa; but, as usual with the youngest of the family, she remains "Baby."

She has a coat the colour of a ripe chestnut, which will, we think, almost rival Loki's in luxuriance. Her eyes have the same proportion to her face as those of a Dicky Doyle fairy. She has the oddest tastes, loving among many other unexpected things the flavour of tobacco. If she can get hold of a pipe or a cigarette she will sit and suck it, sniffing with enchantment, till one would swear she was smoking.

All the dogs, of course, have their coffee after lunch and dinner in orthodox fashion, so there is nothing astounding in her having taken to it with gusto from the very first—but, for her, the stronger the better!

Like most Pekies, she begs and "prays" without ever having had to be taught the art. She has furthermore a talent quite her own—that of elaborately waltzing in front of you when she wants anything very particularly.

One of the dearest peculiarities of the breed is, as we have said, the rapture of their welcome on the return of any member of the family. The Master of the House is sensitive to this attention, and is quite hurt if he misses Loki's clamorous greeting. The other day "the Baby" was sent into the Hall to meet him on his home-coming. No sooner did he appear than she solemnly began her dance and preceded him as he advanced, conscientiously executing her finest *pas de fascination*. This consists of leaping into the air, turning round upon herself, and coming down on to her front paws. Little Eastern as she is, she knew no better way of expressing her feelings towards "the Master."

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From what far ancestress, bred in the secret sinister splendours of a Manchu Palace, did she inherit this accomplishment?

WINTER

It is the dream of the owners of Villino Loki to build on another wing; but, so far, funds do not run to this. The Villino is sadly short of guest chambers; that is because one room has been for ever allotted to the little Oratory.

This little Chapel is a haven of peace. One's thoughts turn to it when one has the misfortune to be away from home. Over the altar there hangs a large, wonderfully beautiful crucifix. The figure, white majolica, was bought in a villainous den of a curiosity shop on the Tiber. We remember how it shone out of the darkness at us, and we felt it *had* to be ours! It is now affixed to a large gilt carved wood cross made for us by the *doratore* in *Piazza Nicosia*.... Excellent ruffian! The cross has one arm much longer than the other, though no one would know it who did not measure; and it has the inimitable stamp of the artistic hand bound by no slavish measure or hideous time-saving mechanism.

The Chapel is chiefly white and gold. Two large Donatello angels, warm ivory-coloured, from the *Manifattura di Signa*, carry the red Sanctuary lamps. One is certainly the real Donatello—the other, we fear, a poor foundling. But they both look very well.

There is a great window over the moor.

The few small statues are, we think, attractive; chiefly decorated with bronzy golds and deep colours. There is St. Louis, King of France, specially carved by a Bavarian artist; a slender noble figure with a face of grave asceticism, holding up the Crown of Thorns. And there is a sternly warlike St. Michael, all golden, resting on his sword. And a St. Anthony ‹a real discovery this› lifting a pale countenance that seems on fire with ardour towards the Divine Infant who stands on his book—St. Anthony is "in glory"; his habit golden over the brown. St. George, a fine splash of colour, charges the dragon over the fireplace. It is a most satisfying dragon with red jaws open and a green claw tearing at the lance that has conquered him. St. George's iron-grey horse, with flowing crimson trappings, starts aside and rolls a distraught eye—as well he might. It is all in plaster and in rather deep relief. Two tall golden wood-carved Roman church candlesticks flank it on either side, fitted with electric light.

We have placed square Compton pots with Italian wreaths, filled with palms and flowering plants, one on each side of the altar step. 303

At night, when there is no light in the Oratory, except that of the Sanctuary lamps, the shadows of the palms look like angels' wings, crossing and re-crossing....

But, just as to a Garden there is no end—no end to its wants or to our desires for it; to its phases, its transmutation surprises; to our joys and disappointments in it—so there is no end to a Garden and Country House gossip. We might go on for ever—like Tennyson's Brook! And meanwhile the year is passing on, in its stately pomp.

SUMMER ONCE MORE ... AND AFTER

Full Summer is once more upon the Garden. The Delphiniums are rampant. We are in the centre of a heat wave, and our dry hill-side pants in the sun. At the fall of eve our souls rejoice in the sound of the refreshing showers when the watering begins; for one thirsts sympathetically with the cherished borders.... 304

The moor is deepening to purple. The trees wear the deep green that precedes the turn. Life is rushing by with us so quickly that it seems but the "blink of an eye," as the Germans say, since we were peering for the first bulb shoot.... In a little while the Ramblers and Wichurianas will be one blaze of glory; and in a little while again the Autumn winds will be shouting up the valley and the Bracken turning gold over the rolling hills; and again in a little while again it will be the Winter and the snow and we shall be watching for the Spring.

And it will be all even as before and yet all quite different. And so year by year.... And one day our garden will bloom for other eyes than ours.

Nunc tibi—mox aliis, the Book-Lover's motto has it. How true also of the beloved Garden!... Another "eye-blink."

1. *This was written long before anyone here dreamed of the near possibility of another German war.*

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