

Autumn Dreams

BY BAYARD TAYLOR.

When the maple turns to crimson,
And the sassafras to gold;
When the gentians in the meadow
And the aster on the wold;
When the linn is lapped in vapour,
And the night is frosty cold;

When the chestnut burrs are opened,
And the acorns drop like hail,
And the drowsy air is startled
With the thumping of the fall—
With the drumming of the partridge,
And the whistle of the quail;

Through the rustling woods I wander,
Through the jewels of the year,
From the yellow uplands calling,
Seeking her who is still so dear;
She is near me in the autumn,
She, the beautiful, is near.

Through the smoke of burning summer,
When the weary wings are still,
I can see her in the valley,
I can hear her on the hill,
In the splendor of the woodlands,
In the whisper of the rill.

For the shores of earth and heaven
Meet and mingle in the blue;
She can wander down the glory
To the places that she knew,
Where the happy lovers wandered
In the days when life was true.

So I think, when days are sweetest,
And the world is wholly fair,
She may sometimes steal upon me,
Through the dimness of the air,
With the cross upon her bosom,
And the amaranth in hair.

Once to meet her, ah! to meet her,
And to hold her greatly fast
Till I blessed her, till she blessed me—
That were happiness at last.
That were bliss beyond our meetings
In the autumn of the past.

ASA'S BLESSING.

BY H. B. GREY, AUTHOR OF "THE BLUE WIDOWS," ETC.

II.

But our Asa was blessed, for the Lord caused him to grow up a strong and comely youth, with a fine intellect and a noble heart. And when, at the age of eighteen years, a certain learned Pharisee, of Bethsaida, offered to take him into his household as private scribe, my husband willingly gave his leave. For Asa showed more aptitude for the study of the law than for the farm. He went, therefore, from us, and I was left very lonely.

After awhile this Rabbi Simeon took up his abode in the Holy City—for he held some post connected with the Sanhedrin—and Asa went with him.

How I longed for the times of the Great Feasts, for then we should go up to the Holy City and see, if only for a short space, our beloved child.

But when we did meet, Asa appeared changed; and I knew there was some secret care oppressing him. I was all the more troubled because, when I asked him to open his heart to me, he begged me not to question him, saying we should hear all in good time, when his thoughts had ripened, and he was ready for action. Even these words he implored me to hide from his father. So we were obliged to content ourselves with the praises bestowed on him by Rabbi Simeon for his diligence and perseverance in study.

All was explained when, about a year after Asa had gone to dwell at Jerusalem, a letter was delivered to my husband from Rabbi Simeon saying he was bitterly deceived in our son, and that, without doubt, the day he was about to convey to us would bring our gray hairs in sorrow to the grave. Asa had, in fact, cast off the religion of his father, and had joined himself to that despised sect, the Nazarenes.

Benjamin was so wroth at the news that he left the faith (although it was near wheat harvest) and journeyed to Jerusalem. I begged to accompany him, but he refused. I knew he did well for robbers so infest our roads that, except when a woman can travel with an armed escort, or, as at the Feasts, with the caravan of pilgrims, it is not safe for her to venture. I had, therefore, to remain at home, praying and mourning for my boy.

And in my heart I said, "This, then, is the blessing that Jesus of Nazareth promised. Woe, thrice woe, to those who seek a blessing from him!"

When Benjamin returned, he looked so sad and weary, that I dare not question him; but after awhile he told me that neither his threats nor his pleadings had been of any avail with Asa. The lad vowed that nothing in heaven or earth could shake his allegiance to his new-found Master. He had consecrated himself forever to the brotherhood; he should spend his whole life henceforth in teaching the new Faith, and, if need be, die for it.

"Die!" I cried, "die! Will they kill my son as they killed that young man Stephen, and as they killed James the son of Zebedee not a year ago?"

"Yes, they will kill him, and rightly too," said Benjamin sternly. "If he deny the God of Abraham and our fathers to run after strange gods, and blaspheme his holy name by proclaiming a carpenter to be the Son of God, he deserves to die."

Though my heart was breaking, I could not gainsay this. I could but spend my days and nights in weeping and fasting, and beseech the Lord that he would lead my son and guide him into all truth.

Yet, strange as it may seem, often in the stillness of the night, as I prayed for my apostate son, I saw the face—that face—those eyes I had seen but once thirteen years ago by the lake-side of Capernaum; I saw those hands raised to bless the children crowding round his knee, and I could not, no, I could not blame him or hate him, though he was now bringing me cursing for the promised blessing.

But I understood not the meaning of this.

We went not up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles that year, for Benjamin said his heart was too full of sorrow and repining for him to be able to give thanks and rejoice. So we remained at home, sad and despondent. From time to time news reached us that Asa, who at the first had been thrust out of the synagogue, had not been received back into the congregation. We heard he was making himself a name as a seditious person and a teacher of blasphemy.

As for my beloved husband, he became like one possessed of a demon. He wandered about on the hills half the night, and neglected his farm in the day. In consequence the cattle died, the crops failed, and the hand of God seemed against us.

As the months went by, news of our son became more alarming, till we had fears for his life. Our own affairs at home ever grew worse, till Benjamin at last resolved to sell the land and the goods and to go with me to Jerusalem to see what could be done for our son. Benjamin hoped we might persuade him to leave the land of his fathers, and to take up his abode in some Gentile country, where his religion might pass unheeded by those who know not God, and where, therefore, his life at least might be more secure. For, through all his zeal for the faith and his horror of our son's apostasy, the love for his darling child was ever uppermost in Benjamin's heart.

I knew this well enough, being a woman. So we left our beloved home, bidding farewell to the fields, the house, the cattle, and started on our journey south, travelling with a caravan of merchants. And it seemed as we went that we left all the beauty and sunshine, all the laughter and flowers behind us in Galilee, and that naught but gloom and desolation reigned in Judea.

With sad hearts we two, aged, broken, travel-worn, approached the north gate of the Holy City towards the setting of the sun. And, as we drew nearer, suddenly we espied, coming out of the city, a concourse of people. They were jostling and crowding forward, hooting and jeering. A great disturbance prevailed.

"What is the cause of this turmoil, thinkest thou?" asked my husband of one of our company.

"Oh, doubtless some malefactor brought out to be crucified—and yet stay, there seems no soldiery amongst them—perchance it is one of that vile sect of Nazarenes brought out to the city gate to be stoned for blasphemy!"

At these words my old knees quaked, but I found strength to hurry on with Benjamin, longing yet fearing, to see what was taking place.

Suddenly, above the cries and the jeers of the multitude, there broke on our ears the sound of singing. Ah me! we knew that voice! It was the voice of him who had been our darling for nigh on twenty years.

"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want," sang the voice, and even in that moment of anguish my mind rushed back to the scene by the Galilean Lake, and I saw once more Jesus with the children.

In another instant I caught sight of my boy, walking bound, amidst the crowd. He was walking to his death, with a smile on his face and a song in his mouth.

My aged limbs gained strength; I ran forward, and throwing myself on the ground at my boy's feet, I clung to him. For a short space the crowd stood still, astonished at my behaviour.

"Here is another of these Galilean vipers!" they cried. "Let us stone the old witch along with the man!"

But I cared not, nor heeded. I only saw my darling.

And at sight of me—his mother, bowed and broken, and kneeling in the dust at his feet—his courage failed. His song was hushed; he broke into sobs, while the tears rolled down his face. He could not embrace me, for ropes bound those dear arms, and savage men held him back. But he stooped over me, and for an instant our tears and kisses mingled.

Then they dragged him on, and I was only saved from being trodden beneath their feet by the hand of Benjamin. On we went, we two, Benjamin and I, holding fast to each other. We had almost to run to keep up with the throng, who were now hurrying excitedly forward. We had turned our backs on the Holy City, and were making our way towards a desolate field strewn with the ashes and refuse of Jerusalem.

Again the song began—

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me!" and presently above the jeers and scoffs came these words:—"Weep not, but rejoice that I am counted worthy to suffer for his name's sake. Rejoice that I have been found faithful, even unto death!"

Then he broke into a chant—

"I believe in God the Father of Heaven and Earth, and in Jesus Christ, his Son, Saviour of mankind; I believe—"

But here his voice was stopped, stopped by the stones—ah! how can I tell of it? The stones! The stones! Now he was kneeling down, with hands uplifted! Now I could see naught, hear naught, but the stones!

One more loud cry amid the stones, and then a hush—

"Lord, lay not this sin to their charge!"

Benjamin and I stood by. We could not move, we could not turn away. Our eyes were riveted on those stones. Each stone as it flew through the air, as it fell with a thud, was watched, through its flight and to its fall, by our eyes.

And now as I gazed—behold! standing unharmed in the midst of the stones stood Jesus—Jesus the Nazarene. He stood there, raising his hands in the act of blessing (even in my agony I perceived that those hands were scarred). Then he turned his eyes, and looking on me said:

"Daughter, be of good cheer! Weep not! for I am in the midst, blessing thy son, and verily, he is blessed indeed!"

We went forward, Benjamin and I, to claim our dead. I knelt down, and took my son's head in my arms.

And through the bruises, and through the blood-stains, we gazed on a face whereon shone beauty that was unearthly and joy unspeakable.

And I knew, as I gazed on its loveliness, that it was but the reflection of the glory of God, from the face of Jesus Christ. In this manner, therefore, did Asa receive the promised blessing from Jesus the Nazarene.

FINGERS AND FORKS.

Did you know that Queen Elizabeth ate with her fingers? You may have known that she loved show and style, that she was so fond of fine clothes that when she died she left three thousand dresses and any quantity of jewels; but did you ever imagine that such a great lady could be so inelegant as to eat with her fingers? But she did, and so did Shakespeare, and Chaucer, and William the Conqueror, and King

Alfred, and everybody else who lived before her time. These last were more excusable than she—they had no forks; but even she was not without excuse, for though she had several, they had been given her as curiosities, which, I suppose nobody expected her to use. There was one of crystal garnished with gold and sparks of garnet, another of gold with two little rubies and two pendant pearls, and still another of coral.

Why didn't she use them? you ask. Well, because she had never seen or known anybody that used one, and they were something new; and besides, there was a prejudice against this invention just from Italy. But you must not think because there were no forks that the old-fashioned dinner made no pretension to elegance or refinement.

The guests had knives and they had fingers, and with the two implements they managed nicely. From their old books of etiquette we learn how they did it. In the first place, the fingers must be publicly washed before beginning the meal; even if this had just been done privately, it must be repeated at the table, that no one might feel uneasy in eating after his neighbours' fingers had been in the dish. To aid further, the meat was prepared as far as possible before it was brought to the table. If in a stew, as was usually the case, it was in bits; if roasted it was cut by a carver, and passed in large plates with a knife.

As to the way of helping himself, each guest must choose and keep a particular part of the dish for his own. He must help himself daintily from this place, using only three fingers; afterward, in carrying the food to the mouth, which of course was done with the hand, these same three fingers must be used, taking care however not to touch the nose with them, to do which was extremely inelegant, and showed a lack of good breeding.

Of course, all this soiled the hands, and in refined households, at various intervals bowls of perfumed water and different napkins were passed, and no one must refuse to wash. This old fashion of hand-irrigation around a silver bowl or dish of rose-water is still sometimes seen in Europe.

After awhile man found out that he needed forks, or rather, woman did, for it was she who first used them. Great dames kept them in their rooms to eat comfits with and toast bread; and in course of time they brought them to the table.

As I have said there was a prejudice against them; and the first few persons who were brave enough to use them were laughed at and called effeminate; a preacher even went so far as to say that any one who refused to touch his meat with his hands was an insult to Providence.

Nevertheless they spread; in England slowly, even after Italy, the home of their birth, was full of them. Those who knew their value, however found them so convenient that up to 150 years ago—since which time it has been no longer necessary—gentlemen travelling from place to place, and knowing how poorly supplied were the inns, carried one with them in a case with a knife. Since that time the old two-pronged fork, or fourchette (little pitchfork) as the French call it—and really they were only tiny pitchforks—has given way to the more convenient three- and four-pronged forks in use in our homes.—Harper's Young People.

THE WILDEST BOY IN THE GLASS.

MR. GREENSHIELDS' school was in a "wee" country village, hid among the hills of a Scottish shire. But the boys that he taught grew up to be men that went far and wide over the world; for there was no trade to keep them at home after school-days were over. So they were sent off to the big towns after they had passed "standard fifth," except one or two who were required to help the farmers, or herd the cattle down by the river-side, or work on the roads with their fathers. They were far better taught than city boys so far as good English reading, writing, and arithmetic went; so they often got to the "top of the tree" long before the better dressed youths, who rather despised the "country-bred duns." So that Mr. Greenshields, as he grew older, could visit his pupils in many a comfortable home, and talk over the bricks of their childhood with mutual delight.