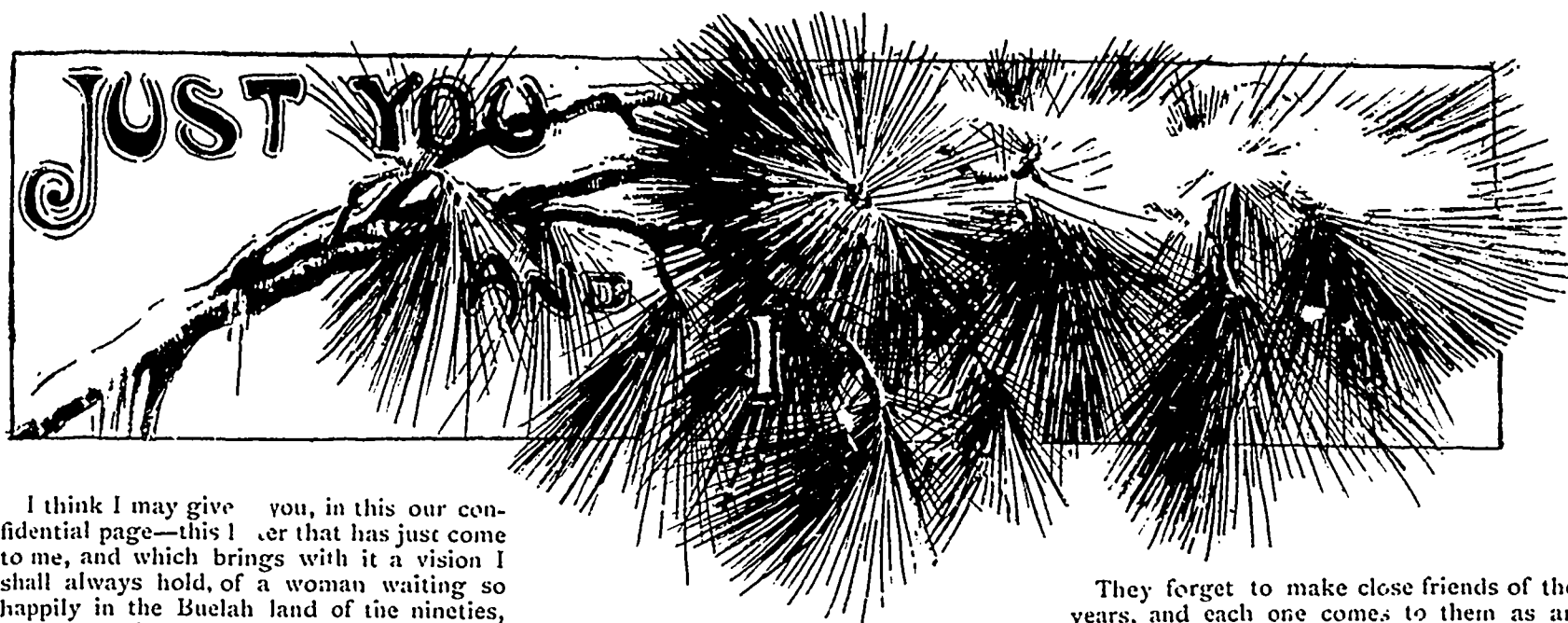




I think I may give you, in this our confidential page—this letter that has just come to me, and which brings with it a vision I shall always hold, of a woman waiting so happily in the Buelah land of the nineties, until the Voice shall call her name.

It is from Mrs. Catharine Parr Traill, whom we sketched, how feebly and uneffectively only the writer knows, in the January number of our JOURNAL.

She will not mind, I am sure; anyway I shall venture the liberty, and ask her pardon afterward, since I know my readers will be interested.

I should like to give it in autograph, so that you might see the even lines and clear lettering that makes it easier to read than many a school girl's handwriting; but since our space will not permit this, I will copy it.

It is dated four days after Mrs. Traill's ninety-fourth birthday.

"WESTOVE," LAKEFIELD, Jan. 13, '96.

DEAR FAITH FENTON,—I have just received a copy of the CANADIAN HOME JOURNAL, and thank you warmly for all that you have written so well and kindly of myself and my writings. The sketch is the best and truest that has yet appeared; the only fault is, it is too full of kindness; and, indeed, I can hardly believe that it is the nonagenarian who sits in the armchair at "Westove" whom you have so pleasantly described, or that the young English bride to whom you refer and this aged authoress, can be one and the same person.

Sixty-three years have come and passed since the English bride came to the Canadian log-house under the pines; and what marvelous changes she has seen since she made her home in the wilderness of this now very dear and beloved country!—a land which has a noble destiny to fulfil, if it be true to it. And to God—and I will add, to Mother England, whose child it verily is.

But I am forgetting myself, as I am apt to do, when on this subject; but you see the old lady is English still at heart, and will so remain until the life-close, which must now be very near.

I have not yet had leisure to read all the contents of the January number of your JOURNAL, but I am sure I shall find much in it to interest me.

Perhaps some day the editor will find a wee bit space for a little bird or butterfly chat with the children, which this old lady is not yet too old to enjoy giving.

My daughter and granddaughters join me in hoping that you will come again to "Westove," or to our island home, "Minnewawa," in the summer season. They unite with me in kind remembrances to one whose visit will not soon be forgotten by them, and will be remembered always by

Faith Fenton's Sincere Friend,

Catharine Parr Traill

That's a dear letter, is it not?—especially when its recipient conjures up the lovely old face of the writer, with its pretty pink cheeks, bright blue eyes, and drift of silky, snowy hair tucked cosily beneath the white cap; when she hears the low, tuneful voice and feels the soft touch of the aged hands.

What a lovely thing it is to grow old so; not fading, but rather ripening; not collapsing suddenly into a witherhood of wrinkles, but mellowing into a full fruition of charm.

And we women may take our choice of the ways,—only we must make it early. We cannot have results without processes; and if we would choose a beautiful old age of content, noble and sweet with life's fulness, we must begin to make it long before the grey hairs come.

And we must begin on the inside.

Cosmetics have their uses;—the cream that keeps soft the skin, the massage that increases circulation, and the early hours that keep eyes bright and hold away the peek-a-boo wrinkles,—all these are good and helpful, but they are not enough:

"What a woman's soul is,
That she is herself."

And if the soul—the spirit nature, if you will—stops growing, the physical will conform to it; and the years shall not ripen, but wither us.

You find them among your acquaintances—women who are not far advanced in years, perhaps hardly beyond the thirties or forties, yet every year is marked upon their faces in sallow discontent or wrinkles of unrest; or what is worse, in the assumption of early youth by means of paint and powder and bleached hair.

What will old age bring to these but all unloveliness? They have not learned what to let go, nor what to reach after.

For there are beautiful things that belong to middle years and old age which young girls have to grow up to; just as there are others which belong to youth alone.

If women would only realize that, what a burden of effort it would lift from their lives.

Was there ever a picture more pitiful than that of *Mrs. Skewton*, in "Dombey and Son," as she chattered and posed and fluttered her fan through the day,—to be taken to pieces and drop into weary fretfulness at night? Could anything be more ghastly than those last dreary days of paralysis, when, with mumbling speech and airy gesture, she yet affected youthful coquettishness and sparkle,—to drop at last into the awful silence of Death?

And yet,—and yet,—this poor Cleopatra was but an extreme type of thousands of our women to-day!

They forget to make close friends of the years, and each one comes to them as an additional terror rather than a joy.

* * *

Youth determines middle age, and middle age elder womanhood, and elder womanhood old age.

There must be the constant spiritual growth into larger life and loving—into deeper quiet and content—or else the real dear old lady can never exist.

It is good that each of us know some instances of lovely old age; the pity is that we do not know many.

I have one such dear friend in my thought. She is far on in the seventies now, and frail and delicate to a degree. Yet the beauty of intellect is upon her face and shines out of the bright dark eyes; while in heart and mind she is young as any of her children.

I have often tried to solve the secret of her attraction for all of us who call her friend.

It lies perhaps partly in the patrician beauty of the dear old face; but certainly not a little is due to the bright interest in the things of to-day, united with the sweet acceptance of the years that rest upon her.

* * *

As I write, the face of another rises before me—a face that is like a benediction in its blending of holiness and calm. I catch glimpses of it across the church on Sunday morning, and, as the light shines down upon it from the high windows, my lips unconsciously murmur, "The peace of God which passeth all understanding."

Yet both of these dear old ladies have lived through years of care and perplexity; they have borne in full measure the day's burdens; yet they have ripened, not withered, beneath the bearing, and now at sunset hour they possess all the charm of a lovely and attractive womanhood.

* * *

Women must choose,—this or that.

They may go down the years with a separate wrinkle for every additional day and a separate agony for every grey hair; with a corresponding inner shrinking—that leaves them at last withered husks of womanhood. Or they may make the path of time not down—but up—a beautiful ascent, with calm faces lit into a real loveliness of sunset glow.

But the choice must be made, not in the fifties or sixties, but in the early days of girlhood of young matronhood. The human soul weaves its garments slowly, and, once woven, we must wear them to the end.

FAITH FENTON.