

The Inglenook.

The Fascination of Remembered Things.

"Nor mourning for the things that disappear
In the dim past, nor holding back in fear
From what the future veils, but with a whole
And happy heart, that pays its toll
To youth and age, and travels on with cheer."

No housewife who has through lapsing years garnered here and there little things grown precious by the usage which love considers akin to sanctification but stands aghast when they are brought to light. With the moving van at the door and armed with valiant determination to minimize the appalling amount to be transported, she gazes at the developments which follow a search into hidden corners, with discouragement and wonder.

All those boxes! All those daintily fastened parcels! What can they contain? Where have they come from? One thing certain: half of them shall then and there be destroyed or given away; never again shall sentiment and grasping memory, clutching and holding fast to all within their reach, be so masterful. "It is senseless folly to amass such a store of useless things, which are not seen once in a year. Some reasonable choice must be made, and the larger share of those things gotten rid of."

So does the mother emphatically declare her intention and seat herself to examine and destroy. The helping handmaid begins to hand down the dusty contents of upper shelves. "Begin with that brown box on the left hand," says the weary voice of the nervous woman, honestly dismayed at the vastness of her unseen possessions.

But the hand of the maid pauses as she looks with astonishment at the transfigured face of her mistress, when she uncovers the common pasteboard receptacle. Is she crying or laughing? The smile is full of joy; the eyes are moist with tears. What has she found?

A little shoe worn at the toe from vigorous creeping after dancing sunbeams on a nursery floor; a broken toy, a torn book, a tiny cup and saucer, a battered ball. In an instant she sees that first nursery just as it stood—the little cheery room in the early country home and the idolized first-born, he with the matted flaxen curls and shining eyes, at play. Forgotten is the van—the waiting figure on the stepladder, the dust and grime of a dismantled house. An hour would be but scant time in which to handle and think of what that box contains. This is one thing which shall go where she goes, while she lives.

From this beginning follows an unfolding length of continuous surprises; things not thought of for so long and yet as vividly charged with vitalizing force as if they could speak. All those schoolboy letters, wild with enthusiasm and overflowing with healthful jollity and merriment; save these of course; his children will enjoy them hugely. That broken fan and the faded ribbon wound about it; surely they are as potent as a conjurer's wand. There is the great room nearly deserted, the fading flowers, the musicians packing up their instruments; there, far away in the east, is the first streak of coming day; the "Junior Ball" is over, and the sturdy arm of the famous "halfback" is offered to guide the enchanted girl to her chaperon, whose patience is exhausted.

She feels it all again, the strange thrill of seeing a summer dawn for the first time, and the sense of her own childish prettiness, as her small hand rests on that great arm. No smiles now; no, nor tears; this memory draws a veil across its vision; she who had carried that fan so easily broken by the big muscular hand, wears now a widow's cap, and the invincible power of death had been triumphant over the strength on which she had leaned so long since that brilliant night in old Princeton. She says nothing, but holds out her hand for yet another parcel. Small chance that the fierce resolution to destroy and give away will bring much fruit!

Nothing new, nothing artistically perfect or filled with the grace and beauty of poetic inspiration can rank with what now comes to her from these commonplace receptacles. Here are torn books, actually worn out, coverless and "dogeared," over which her boys had laughed and cried; here are the last things which comforted and pleased the aged as they loosened their grasp upon terrestrial things. Here the bits of work, unfinished as skill and desire failed; here the lovely, old, faded daguerreotypes and the quaint yet characteristic silhouettes which in sombre black gave dear outlines of faces old and young. Droll yet very dear those ebony reminders of little heads, with an inky roll of curls adorning them, and set in oval frames made of gilded wood. Grandfather, born A. D. 1789, aged fifteen months! What price should purchase this funny, solemn, black head?

Slowly and tenderly, as one stirs the moss upon a grave, the head, but lately counted rubbish foolishly retained, is laid reverently in safest packing boxes. Care and thought centre on these far more than upon the ornaments professional hands are handling in the drawing room, and that which was to have disappeared never again to be seen or thought of is cautiously protected, and on the covering lid the matron herself writes: "Family relics. Handle with great care." Let what else be dispensed with, these can never be given up. What a delight had been those few minutes in the old nursery and that glimpse of that happiest ball!

There are those to whom such retrospects bring gloom and discontent; for such hearts and minds memory has no healing. Old treasures are truly precious only to those who can "with a happy heart pay toll to youth and age" and travel on with cheer. As well at sunset weep that it is not still the dawn of day as to find bitterness and grief in these tokens and proofs of joy once ours. "They are not only our guarantees that we did not dream of things so lovely, times so replete with light, but they are like oxygen to a fading life, they bring back the power to hear and see and restore to us, those blessed hours and experiences, which the pressure of hurrying lives make dim and uncertain in our minds.

I speak of the magic which is inherent in these lifeless fragments of things which once stood for us as the realities of life. If with shrinking touch and vision dimmed with weeping, we handle and look, they remain poor rags and refuse, but if with grateful souls we recall what they represent to us, a flood of light pours in and we are made glad with recollections of great mature joy.

That bit of glowing golden stuff is like

the trifle from which the man of magic flings forth roses. She who wore a gown of that sunny fabric stood beautiful, indeed among her friends and children, far lovelier than the youngest of them. It is but a scanty bit, just large enough to show its richness and the art of its silken damask, but she who wore it again stands before remembering eyes with all the dignity of her reposeful grace, her soft eyes full of mute welcome to arriving wedding guests, and her dark hair shining like soft satin as it crowned her beautifully modelled head, bowing so graciously.

How can we blot out the radiance of remembrances by mourning and regrets, as vain as they are ungrateful? We surely could not wish that the children should forever remain on the threshold of life, when infancy is but the entrance gate to that road whose "last turn will be the best." Nor would we be so senseless and cruel as to require of heaven that for our happiness the weary and the old should stand waiting in weakness for the new birth and the renewal of their strength.

We, reaching some arid spot on "the way which winds up the hill and down, through rough and smooth," may take up these trifling tokens gathered by the way and lighten their spirits by their influences. Even if on some of these shall rest keen remembrances of last partings, and the ceasing of the breath which seemed to give us life, yet ought they to bring us to a place where we are glad. This sweet soul, this noblest nature was ours to cherish and enjoy, and we saw the door open to a higher glory. Let us not fail to grasp the blessedness of having had such possession and of knowing it has passed beyond harm's reach.

Such revivals of past years as these deeply stirred memories bestow, give not only a richness to our present life, but keep us in mind of the wonderful things which have made glad the things that are gone. Pain or mischance or loss may often lead us to full belief that we have not had our fair share of sunshine; opening some hiding-place, behold a contradiction proved without a word! "What an interval of peaceful growth and deep happiness that was when this little gift came to me! I had forgotten!"

If we might, with him who wrote the lines which head this inadequate attempt to claim memory as a joy giver, say:

I shall grow old, but never lose life's zest.

we should soon catch the significance of all we have garnered as youth and middle age led us on to further stations on our journey.

No wonder that to so many the remembered past fails to give either strength or energy, when they have let go their hold on the continuity of life's activity. We are reluctant to give up the things we have outgrown or outlived, but this is because we are unwilling to take up the new forms of influence and power which belong to us. When we determinately, even obstinately, resist indifference and coldness and neglect of our resources, and take our full share of the zest of the great things which move us and the world at the same time, we have gone a long way towards realizing that memory's chief mission is to make us glad and content.

What we have not now, we once had—do not let us forget that. If the room seems vacant and the house still, we have but to recall the hours when we cried an impatient "Hush, be still!" to voices of too noisy children. And lo, just when we are outliving the age when any joyous sound is