

A SONG OF EASTER.

(From St. Nicholas.)

Sing, children, sing!
Sing that life and joy are waking, and that death no
more is king.
Sing the happy, happy tumult of the slowly brightening
Spring:
Sing, little children, sing!

Sing, children, sing!
Fill the air with the sweet tidings till the frosty echoes
ring!
Along the eaves the icicles no longer glittering cling;
And the crocus in the garden lifts its bright face to the
sun.
And in the meadows softly the brooks begin to run:
And the golden cuckoo—sing
In the warm air of the Spring:
Sing, little children, sing!

Sing, children, sing!
The lilies white you bring
In the joyous Easter morning for howe are blossoming:
And as the earth her shroud of snow from off her breast
doth ding.
So may we cast our fetters off in God's eternal Spring.
So may we find relief at last from sorrow and from pain.
So may we find our childhood's calm, delicious dawn
again.
Sweet are your eyes, oh, little ones, that look with smile
ing grace.
Without a shade of doubt or fear, into the future's face!
Sing, sing in happy chorus, with joyful voices tell
That death is life, and God is good, and all things shall
be well:
That bitter days shall cease
To warmth and light and peace—
That Winter yields to Spring—
Sing, little children, sing!

MY COMEDY.

III.—(Concluded.)

Had Launcelot, the last man I would have had in the world, discovered my secret? Was it because I madly loved the woman, more than anything else, that I had left a career which had promised success? Once—it was a day or so after my ride with her—I had tried to speak to her. A certain icy indifference, an apparent determination to hold me at arm's-length, had chilled me through and through. My self-esteem, my pride, had been hurt. Perhaps the time, the place, were not fitting for my justification. Save some sparse words now and then grudgingly addressed me in regard to the strict business of the play, that pleasing intimacy, that childlike happiness, I knew the woman had welling within her, which had awakened a new life within me, she never again vouchsafed me. Time and work might, I thought, cure me.

To a certain degree, the seclusion of the little farm brought repose. With a care and thrift, if the few acres did not bring profit—I was indifferent to that—at least I could make both ends meet. Literary work I did not, however, neglect. Plans long conceived I deliberately matured. The necessity of writing—writing incessantly in order to live—no longer existed. People seemed glad enough now to take my poor work. An essay would pay for a cow, or a paper would purchase a colt. My sleek-sided Durham represented some bony stuff on the Sanskrit drama, or my frisky Abdallah colt a monstrously dry rignarole on ethics. If the brutes did not exactly come up to the standard, the milk of the one being less by several gallons than the theoretical measure given by the agricultural journal, or the colt was singularly wanting in the salient points of his vaunted lineage, still horse and cow were tangible, and gave me pleasure. I never before had believed that my work really represented something. But what I congratulated myself most about was, that my mother's health improved, for to her came an after-glow of happiness. A country girl helped my mother, and a decent man-servant attended to the rougher details of the minute manor.

Launcelot's letters were frequent, and I found that all my interests were treated by him in the most honourable way. His communications were of the most cheerful character. His business was very good. "If I would not work up for him some new stuff," he wrote, "wouldn't I hush up a French piece for him next year? Or I might take some six or seven French plays, squeeze the seeds out of them, and mash 'em all up into a new thing, and, if I were ashamed of it, he would father it. As a manager, he wanted to have a piece of his own—Launcelot's. Or would I advise him about Jones and Brown, who kept shoving pieces at him? What would I read for him at—as a job? He got twenty letters slung at him a day from fellows who had pieces, and, though managers never did answer fellows who wrote them about pieces, he thought it ought to be done—sometimes. He would send me these fellows' letters and their plays. He didn't want me for his secretary, but his friend. Carter's head was level. Managers were pigs—he knew they were—but he didn't want to be a pig any more."

As an hour would bring me to the city, I went occasionally to New York. Launcelot I saw from time to time, but declined any literary business of a theatrical character. Summer came, and with it a letter from Launcelot. The manager, with his wife and child, was on the eve of a departure for California. He was going to open a house in San Francisco, and he wished me a good-by. With the letter came a final settlement, in which Launcelot had insisted on adding a more than liberal bonus. A fortnight or so afterward came another letter. The child had had diphtheria, and had been barely saved. The boy was convalescent, but he and Mrs. Launcelot would have to remain in New York

until the child was well enough to move. Launcelot expressed his annoyance at the loss of money his absence from San Francisco would cause him. He never did travel without Mrs. Launcelot—he "wasn't afraid to say that his wife kept him straight."

I wrote him at once: "Send your little boy to me. If I am no nurse, my mother is. Tomorrow at twelve I will send my man to your house for the boy. I would come in person, but some stupid business—a meeting about a county fair, of which I am chairman—I can't postpone. Mrs. Launcelot may rest assured (I regret I can not tell her so in person) how happy my mother will be to care for your little fellow."

At a venture I sent my man to the city, and back he came in the afternoon with the invalid—a darling little fellow. Straightway my mother covered him with her arms. An introduction to Pelemic, the colt, and a draught of fresh milk from Sakontola, the cow, seemed to work immediate miracles on the boy. The child's return to health was rapid. I had been unhappy before, now the child seemed to cheer me. I took out those holidays I had been longing for with Rupert. We fished, we went shooting, we got upset in the creek together (it was knee-deep), and altogether had a delightful time. My mother baked cake such as she used to make for me when I was Rupert's age, and we ate it together. My cream was stunted, so that Rupert might have his fill. Even my good clothes were missing one day, to reappear the next in a suit for Rupert. (The boy had fallen in a bed of chemical manure—of bones, lime, and acid—my man had been composting.) Letters full of thanks would come from Mrs. Launcelot, with an occasional word to me from the manager. It was my mother who acted as correspondent, and such long letters as she wrote about that precious child singularly diminished my stock of fair paper. The boy called my mother grandmother, and I was naturally Uncle Dick. God bless my dear mother for the long, sweet homilies she indited, and the honest advice she gave! I think more than once she hinted at the desirability of the Launcelots confiding Rupert entirely to our care. I was to teach him, my mother to tend him.

"We are the last of the Carters, Richard," she said to me, "and what love we have will die out, or become selfish, if not spent on this boy. Perhaps Mr. Launcelot might in time, you know, be made to think over it?"

"And the boy's mother?" I asked.

"Ah, the mother! A good, kind-hearted woman! Such admirable letters as she writes, so full of sound sense and affection! An educated woman, Richard, and no nonsense about her, and so deeply grateful! There runs throughout all her writing a golden gleam of true, sincere piety."

"If, mother, much as I should wish that this boy might stay with us for ever—if you were Mrs. Launcelot, what would you do?"

"I, Richard! You have such a personal way of putting it! If I were that child's mother, I never would give him up save when starvation came—I would die first."

"A judgment of Solomon, dear mother, for I suspect you starved for me once. If, then, we can't have the boy entirely, Mr. Launcelot may let us appropriate the child of summers. We hold him now as a kind of hostage, and may insist on keeping him until our conditions are complied with." Rupert was frolicking around the room with the two dogs, Mat and Flip.

"Wouldn't you like to stay with us next summer? The colt will be full-grown then."

"Indeed! I don't want to leave you, only for a little while—to see mamma, papa, and Miss Claudia. Claudia she promised me lots of things." Then the child ran after the dogs, and the trio raced down the grass-plot.

Claudia! The boy had never mentioned her name before. Had he done so, I should have, however, never asked him a question. All day long, though, I recurred to the incident, and brooded over Miss Aubrey's name, and was unhappy.

It was October when the letter we dreaded came. The Launcelots were homeward bound. They would be in New York within ten days. If perfectly convenient, would I send Rupert to them on a certain day? "No, I would not," was my reply to Mr. Launcelot. "I would not give Rupert up unless his father came and took him." My mother added a few kind lines: "Was not October the most pleasant month in the year for children in the country? The apples were so red, and Rupert had not picked a single one from a certain tree, having made up his mind that a barrellful of pippins of his own gathering was to be his present to his papa and mamma; and then the chestnuts were just ripe, and Rupert's hands, she regretted to say, were all black. Couldn't Mr. Launcelot spare the boy just a few days longer? Rupert had gladdened her heart, and his sweet play and lovable manners had done Mr. Richard Carter so much good. But of course she knew what a mother's yearnings were, and Rupert was ready. She wanted to talk with Mrs. Launcelot about the precious trust that had been confided to her. Perhaps she had, being now almost seventy, such old-fashioned ideas about children. But the fact was, that there were some shirts and such trifles that she had been making for Rupert, and she did not like sewing-machine work, and had stitched them all herself, but her eyes had failed her, or the summer had gone before she knew it. She begged that, when Rupert must leave (and she would have the boy ready at any moment), she might have the pleasure of making Mrs. and Mr. Launcelot's acquaintance.

She was too old, and not strong enough, to take Rupert to town, and, as to Mr. Richard Carter, he had an antipathy for the city, and would not do it, and honestly she thought that Mr. Richard Carter had made up his mind not to part with Rupert until he was forced to. So much did both she and her son love Rupert."

A week elapsed, when a note came, which was as follows, in Mr. Launcelot's handwriting:

"God bless both of you! We never have had a moment's uneasiness about that chick of ours. We knew he was in too good hands. If I wasn't his own father, kidnapping as fine a boy as is my Rupert would be perfectly justifiable. The boy's picture you sent us, Polly cried over. I did my blubbering when I blew my nose. But, dear boy, you can't have him any longer. Polly doesn't pine exactly, but hungers after the child. I send you an Arapahoe scalp, likewise a case of the best California wine, by express. Drink my health and the boy's to-morrow at six exactly. Mrs. Launcelot and I will drink yours in the same genuine tipple. Polly begs Mrs. Carter's acceptance of a shawl, one of those South American llama concerns. I wanted to send that good mother of yours a stunning cashmere, but Polly said that a gift of that kind to a lady of your mother's age would have been vulgar, and Polly knows. Finally, the day after to-morrow my wife will go for that boy. (Got the old house, and refitting, up to my ears in dust and dirt, with painters, decorators, and upholsterers.) Miss Claudia opens for us. Old fellow, it is just with a heart brimful of friendship to you and your mother—only sick to see my child—that I am Reginald Launcelot."

A hearty greeting I gave Mrs. Launcelot. I had Rupert in hand when she arrived at the house. A handsome, motherly woman was she. Off went her bonnet in an instant, and with a cry of joy Rupert sprang into his mother's embrace.

"O my darling!—It is the first time we ever were separated. He has grown six inches almost.—Where is that dear grandmother of yours?—Let me thank her, Mr. Carter. It is with you that I should have first spoken. It doesn't make the least difference that Rupert is standing on my hat"—she had thrown it off—"Kiss me again and again, my pet. Who dressed you so prettily?"

"Grandmother," said the child; "but Uncle Dick helped. Sometimes he curls my hair—when I will let him."

It was touching to see how this honest, sprightly woman met my mother, who was waiting to welcome her. It was a timid approach. Both women seemed subdued. It is true that my dear old mother is still superb, and bears her years with that dignified graciousness which only belongs to the older regime.

"May I, dear lady, thank you—not for now, but for always—for the goodness you have shown to my boy! Let me—please let me kiss you. I have not done any crying yet, but can't you understand that I must want to? I had pictured you as you almost are, only you are the grandest-looking woman I ever met with whiter, more silvery hair. If possible, you look kinder than I ever conceived a woman's, a mother's face could look." Then Mrs. Launcelot diffidently kissed my mother on the cheek; and then, watching a tear course down my mother's face, Mrs. Launcelot's flood-gates were opened, and she sobbed too, but they were tears of happiness.

"I did not know Mr. Richard Carter before, though my husband and your son have had some business relationship together. But it is so good to have friends apart from business. I am a God-fearing woman, Mrs. Carter, and from this time henceforward I shall never forget you nor your dear face; they must hallow my prayers. I know it is hard for you to give up my boy, but how can I help it? I am not a bit jealous because Rupert's love seems now divided. Stay on the lady's knee, my boy, and kiss her. It is not the last time you shall see one another."

"You promise me—promise me that, dear Mrs. Launcelot?" said my mother, with tears in her eyes.

"Promise it! I should be the most ungrateful wretch did I not fulfil my promise. Could I not see long ago, in your letters, that the idea of parting with the child was hurting you?"

"God forgive me for my selfishness!" said my mother, in words of solemn self-accusation.

"Now it is all arranged. As it is a boldness on my part? Won't you let me sometimes—be as a daughter to you? Then the child will always believe that he belongs in part to you."

I had stood motionless outside, and was glad that a tender sympathy had united these two mothers.

The afternoon passed away too rapidly. The child's little trunk, neatly packed—filled with undiscovered treasures—was on the porch. With one last kiss and embrace my mother and the boy parted. Mrs. Launcelot was beside me in my country wagon. Rupert was between us. I had dismissed some half-hour before, without her knowledge, the carriage which Mrs. Launcelot had hired at the village. It was a silent ride. I would have had Rupert's mother say a word about the woman I loved, but I dared not intimate such a desire. I thought Mrs. Launcelot seemed for a moment constrained—as if she divined my wishes. Rupert's chatter was, however, incessant. He had gone over the road so frequently that he knew every stock and stone by the wayside. "O mother! I didn't show you my colt's medal. Uncle Dick laughed at it. It was a thirteenth medal, he says. But the colt won it at the fair, with me on top of him.

Uncle Dick gave me the medal; it's silver.—I say, Uncle Dick, do you remember that rabbit that jumped into a hole in Robbin's wood-pile? There is the hole. Didn't I know that Mat and Flip would miss me? Here they come full tilt. Bet you they stop and scratch at that hole.—Howdy do, Bill? Mother, that's a boy that run me twice, and Uncle Dick bade me stand, and I did—and I licked him; and we like one another first rate now.—I am coming back, Bill, next summer, when the cherries is ripe.—Uncle Dick, don't you think the fish will have growed big, then? I ought to have brought my fish-pole to town.—Mother, see, there is where the hook got into my thumb, and Uncle Dick cut it out with his penknife, and I didn't yell more than I should for the 'casion. Uncle Dick said I didn't, though grandmother most faintly when I come home with my hand tied up.—Good-by, Bobby Small.—He's a first-rate, generous boy, and he gave me all the plums that dropped from his tree.—Uncle Dick, mayn't I give him all the things what I have forgot at the house? This pretty clatter was continued until the village station was reached. We were just in time. Certain palavers of Rupert's on the roadside had delayed us.

"We have but a few moments to spare," I said to Mrs. Launcelot. "I see the passengers are already in the cars. Good-by, Mrs. Launcelot!—Good-by, my boy! Kiss me, and don't forget next summer.—I will have the boy's trunk checked, and he is man enough to see you in the car, he knows all about it."

I secured the check, and waited a moment until I was certain where the two were seated, before getting into the car to bid them a final good-by. I had just the opportunity—the train was about moving—by standing on the platform to hand in the check by the window. I was high enough to see that a lady, not Mrs. Launcelot, held Rupert in her arms, and was kissing him. One glance sufficed. It was Miss Aubrey. Seated on the opposite side of the car, she did not observe me.

I had only time to say, almost resentfully, I am afraid:

"Mrs. Launcelot! O Mrs. Launcelot! why did you not tell me that this lady was with you? Why did she come so far and not accompany you to my mother's poor house?"

"Mr. Carter, it was Mr. Launcelot who insisted that Claudia should come with me on my little journey. But no persuasion of mine could induce her to go to your house. We almost quarreled about it. I had promised not to mention that she was even with me. You sent away my carriage. I did not know you would drive me to the station. Since you have discovered Claudia's presence, what can I do! You ought not to have met, perhaps—but why? But, Mr. Carter, you have not given me the check.—Come this way, Rupert, and kiss Mr. Carter for good-by.—We are moving, Mr. Carter. Do take care! You look so miserably unhappy!"

All of Rupert I saw was a fleeting glimpse of his face, then the cars sped on their way. Through the dark lanes I drove, the reins hanging listlessly in my hands. At home I found that the emotions of the day had brought a headache to my mother. I did not see her. My evening meal I sent away untasted.

I trimmed my lamp, and worked, or tried to work, long into the night. Painfully I struggled, but it was a hopeless task. That most depressing feeling of dissatisfaction at one's own work, a thousand times intensified, seized hold of me. The appreciation of what was artistically good or bad became even vague. I made pitiful mechanical efforts to cause flowers to bloom on dry and sapless stalks. I drifted into the most wretched of all mental phrases, that one of over-refinement, where the simplest sentence is to be turned and re-turned in a hopeless way. I was afraid to dash aside pen and paper; I could not bear to be alone with myself. "The boy—the boy was gone," that I knew; but at last I said it: "The woman I loved—madly—was gone, too!" and with many a bitter pang I cursed my pride, my willfulness.

IV.

It was morning, and misty. The sun loomed up through an October fog. Whether I had slept or not during the night I hardly knew as I strode the little porch before breakfast. The morning broke in a melancholy way. Even the dogs had no greeting for me. Disappointed-like, they were whining, seeking for their little friend who was absent. My mother was not up. Presently I noticed the well-known village messenger walking rapidly toward the house. Far, far off I saw the glaring yellow envelope in his hand. Quickly as he approached the wicket, I had met him. I felt the forebodings of some disaster. In a fever of impatience I tore open the envelope, and read these few lines:

"Don't be worried—accident on the train last evening. Boy and wife all right, save a few scratches. But C. A. hurt. Come and see us at once. Launcelot."

"Quick!" I cried to my man: "put in the horse."

I went to my mother's room and told her all. "The boy is safe, thank God for that! and so is Mrs. Launcelot. But, mother, my heart is broken. The woman I love is hurt, and I am in agony."

"I must go with you, Richard."

"Yes, but follow me later. I have but fifteen minutes to catch the early train. Will you be this poor girl's nurse? It is she who