

THE SUMMER SUN.

By CLOTILDA MARSON.

"To please the child, to paint the rose, the gardener of the world he goes."
R. L. Stevenson.



THE year's primal burst of bloom is o'er," the spring is gone and the summer is come. Is the present better than the past? It is hard to answer. Many would choose the summer at once, forgetting all the freshness in each leaf and flower, and the most scent of the earth which made the rare accompaniment to the main music of

spring. Many do not hesitate to agree with the fine lines of King James the First's ambassador to Venice, in which he sought the utmost image of loveliness for his mistress, the Queen of Bohemia.

"Ye violets that first appear,
By your pure purple mantles known;
Like the proud virgins of the year,
As if the spring were all your own—
What are you, when the rose is blown?"

To him the summer alone could picture her who was "by virtue first, then choice, a queen," the summer, as he had seen it, perhaps in all its glory in

"The waveless plain of Lombardy,
Bounded by the vaporous air,
Islanded by cities fair."

In Italy the natural mood of the country seems to be summer. The stone-pines stand in monumental calm against the intense blue sky, the frescoes crumble in the cool houses, and the green of the olives never spoils with dust and saves our eyes from glare. But, if Sir Henry Wotton had spent more time in his English home of "Boccon Malherbe, in the fruitful county of Kent," or by the green lawns of Eton, where he ended his life, perhaps he would have found it harder to take away the palm from the season when the leaves burst and the ash-buds look black in March, when the ferns uncrumble and the hedges are white with may. Yet however much we may long to be in England when April's here, there is one joy of summer that spring lacks. Only in summer can we lie outstretched upon the lawn the live-long day and delight in that indescribable sense of warmth and blessing in the brooding air and the distant haze, which suits so well with the down on the peach and the velvet petals of the rose. For the sake of that we can forgive the dusty, windy days, when the hedges look ragged, and even the trees are monotonous against the dull sky in their deepened green.

Come out with me into the garden this 22nd of June, when all the growing things seem holding jubilee. The spreading branches of that gum cistus on the lawn have looked green for long, and have oozed a gummy resin that was fragrant in the sun. To-day it is covered for the first time with large shy white flowers, with a deep carnation heart, that have opened their crumpled white frail blossoms to fall to-night and scatter the lawn before they have

time to fade. To-morrow and to-morrow a fresh troop will appear from the pretty bag-like buds with their long pouting lips, and bloom and fall in a day.

We have been bemoaning the breakage of the mowing-machine, but we are not sorry this morning as we look at that holiday carpet of bright yellow bird's-foot trefoil with the little red buds, and the sweet heads of the pink clover in among dark purple patches of self-heal, all flecked with the sunlight. The air hangs heavy as we sit under the walnut-tree and keep jubilee with strawberries and cream, but when evening falls the air is cool and fresh, off we start in the donkey-cart across the straight marsh road between the streams to watch beacon-fires from the hill with its one strong oak, which is the highest point in our home-landscape. The night air is sweet with "the beaflower's boon," and the new-mown hay lies piled in heaps on either side of the road, away behind the willows—

"Deserted is the half-mown plain,
Silent the swaths, the ringing wain,
The mower's cry, the dog's alarms,
All housed within the sleeping farms.
The business of the day is done,
The last-left haymaker is gone,
And, on the pure horizon far,
See pulsing with the first-born star
The liquid sky above the hill,
The evening comes, the field is still."

On we jog, past the weird silver shine of the willows, so like those amongst which the child in the ballad saw Erköning's daughter crouching in the dim shadow. As we pass the village at the foot of the hill we find the aged, and the babies who are too young to climb and watch the sparks, assembled to see the distant glow and feel to the full this bit of history that has come so near to their own tiny village. It is hard to recognise faces under the tree at the summit, for they are all distorted into queer Alpine outlines in the lurid glow. We turn to look at the wide prospect dotted everywhere with bonfires and beacons, seventy-five in all, though it is not everyone who has patience to count them through. We watch them leaping up in the darkness and think of the hearts all over the English world warm with love of their country. One man takes a trumpet and plays the well-known tune, and all of us are glad of the friendly dusk as we shout out our enthusiasm for the Queen with voices, some of them unmelodious, but all of them in earnest. The bonfire is nearly out now, and the great eager flowers of sparks that flamed and died and flamed again, more briefly even than our cestus of the morning, are all scattered on the night air. It is time to clamber down the hill and go home to bed.

Many bright summer pictures pass before my mind as I sit here in the first chill days of September. How pleasant is the unusual sound of the scythe in the early morning as the grass falls in lines on the lawn among the beds of great pink and red peonies, and the scent of syringa and rose makes the air sweet around. The big purple feather hyacinths are toppling over with the weight of their soft rich plumes and touch the leaves of that luxurious York and Lancaster rose. The sweet-williams, with their "homely cottage smell," are very handsome this year, and make a gay hedge of every shade of fretted pink and freckled carnation in that long bed, whose pride is the bush covered with Etruscan damask roses.

Out in the lanes the summer fashions have begun. One day we take a long drive to the borders of Dorset to see the old farm among

the hills, where Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy lived just a hundred years ago, and where they first knew Coleridge. The country changes after we leave Crewkerne, and the hedges are taller and wilder and the lanes deeper than at home. The dogwood, with its delicate white heads of flower, is out in crisp freshness, and every now and again the far lovelier water-elder glorifies the hedge with its snow-white flowers; each cluster looks up to the sun with the little blossoms in the middle and the large separate ones round the edge. The tall foxgloves are not all over, and they grow wild here and nod from the great hedges as we drive past Blackdown Church and near our journey's end. We seem breathing "an ampler ether, a diviner air," as we look round on the rare beauty of the great circle of hills—Lewesden, Pillesden, Golden Cap, Lambart's Castle and Greggry—among which lies the old farm with its quiet, unaltered rooms and the delicate plaster-work of its last century ceilings.

After our kind hosts had given us tea out of the old buff-coloured granite china, we climb the hill and try to catch a glimpse of the distant sea in a break of the hills. A peewit circles over our heads with its pathetic human cry, as we hold in our hand its downy baby with large frightened eyes, whom it had left a moment on the bare ground. We soon restore it to the mother and wander on over the thymy ground trying to learn by heart the great picture of this amphitheatre of the hills.

No wonder this year's crop of corn has been so unique, when we remember the lavish gift of sun that has shone upon us. In no other June for many a year have the roadsides been so gay. There is a hillside between Clevedon and Failand where the flowers seemed to be having a party of their own as we plodded up the hill one bright June day. Climbing everywhere are the bright yellow blossoms of the yellow bedstraw, making a sweet gossamer web of little yellow spots, like the hundreds and thousands that children love. The scabious is rich with soft lilac pin-cushions full of fairies' pins; the blue chicory is all over that bank in front of the old farm-house, and makes room in between for the feathery heads of greater knap-weed in gay pink, and the wide soft silky mallows who are the most richly dressed, perhaps, of all in this gay garden-party of the flowers.

July passes by and we wander in the heat by the canal where you can hardly see the water for the great flowering rush that nearly fills the bed and looks so green and cool with its huge pink sentinel head of flowers. It is very rarely indeed that that pink "houtomos"—as Homer called it, because the sharp spikes cut the tongues of the oxen—grows in such lavish profusion. Soon the villagers will cut it down, but now we can still bring home sheaves of the large pink blossoms with their touch of dark brown in the centre, and fill with it our tallest, clearest vases. In early records of these parts, in the days of the Edwards, rush-beds are enumerated among the possessions of the early owners. These late descendants take kindly to their ready bed by whose side the bank is waving with high grass rich with "blond meadowsweet," and purple loose strife interspersed with saffron spikes of agri-mony. The luxuriant white flowers of the wild carrot with their dark red centres and lovely green branching setting climb up the high bank and add to the dreamy wealth of nodding grasses and blossoms, over which the butterflies flit and the clouds move slowly in the deep blue.

The month wanes, and a windy day comes with hurried masses of bright-edged blue-grey