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THE LONGEST DAY

We can remember a certain midsummer night in Sutherland, when two friends went out together among the bracken and the heather, with the object of paying a kindly visit to an aged woman who lived in a solitary hut, and enjoyed, or rather suffered, the unenviable reputation of being a witch. On their homeward way they were to call at the house of another friend to exchange some of those useful little tokens of neighborliness and good will which are apt to pass among temporary sojourners in out-of-the-way places. There seemed no reason for haste—

"The sun above the mountain's head
A freshening lustre mellow
Through all the long green fields had
spread,
His first sweet evening yellow."

They turned aside to search for dainty fern or rare wild flower, or to pick their way through the bog and gather the wild cotton which always grew so temptingly in the wettest places. They did not tear themselves with any undue haste from the old Highland woman, whose life, passed in awful solitude—with no companion save an idiot son and a black dog—had not quenched the fire of her eyes nor silenced the eloquence of her tongue. And then they sauntered home, talking over many things and lifting up their eyes to the hills, and watching the landscape growing richer rather than darker, and quite unaware of the real progress of time, till the friend, waiting at her gate for their promised coming, greeted them with the bantering welcome, "Well, ladies, do you pay afternoon calls at nearly eleven o'clock at night?" an enquiry which roused them to the true state of things, and sent them hurrying home to read their evening psalm and partake of their evening meal in a sweet twilight which had in it almost as much of dawn as of sunset!

Is not such an evening as that, passing only from beauty to beauty by insensible gradation, a fit and lovely type of a long and blessed life, such as might be far more common than it is, if the world would only set itself into the service of that Master who delights to keep his best things to the last?

The poets have always had an eye for the glory of old age.

Solomon lays the true foundation of its reverence and grace in his declaration—

"The hoary head is a crown of beauty
When it is found in the way of righteousness."

Shakespeare has told us that its rightful accompaniments are, "honor, love, obedience, troops of friends;" while Edmund Waller has sung, in most melodious numbers, which always have a special pathos for us, because we once found them copied in the tremulous handwriting of one who has just realized their truth, before he crossed "the threshold," that

"The seas are quiet when the winds give o'er;
So calm are we when passions are no more;
For then we know how vain it was to boast
Of fleeting things too certain to be lost;
Clouds of affection from our younger eyes
Conceal that emptiness which age desecies.
The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,
Lets in new light through chinks that time has
made

Stronger by weakness, wiser, men become,
As they draw near to their eternal home;
Leaving the old, both worlds at once they view
That stand upon the threshold of the new."

The Hebrew prophets found the figures of "the old men and the old women, with their staves in their hands for very age,"

as prominent in their visions of peace and prosperity as those of "the boys and girls playing in the streets;" and nobody can realize the force and beauty of this touch so well as they can who have dwelt in rough, new communities, whose ways of life are unfit and impossible for any but the hale and strong. In the ideal household there must be a dear grannie knitting beside the fire, as well as a sweet baby sleeping in the cradle.

How interesting and valuable old people often are, and always might be! For

them the past is still living, and they can make it live for us. The writer remembers, in early youth, sitting entranced by the conversation of an aged lady, whose girlhood had passed in the sedan-chair period, who had danced a Highland reel with Lord Clyde when he was a boy, and who had personal reminiscences of the Luddite riots, and of Queen Caroline's trial. A lively old lady she was, retaining a quite uncommon share of the vivacity—almost of the diablerie—of youth, and perhaps a little prone to obey Solomon's injunction "to answer fools according to their folly!" But nobody could grudge her the little weapons of repartee which had perhaps served her many good turns in the long and hard struggle of a woman, gently born and bred, with dire loneliness and poverty. For while she kept up some visiting acquaintance with noble and powerful houses, in which her birth had made her an equal, she secretly lived in one room over a dairy at Kensington, and repelled an ignorant landlady's insolent familiarity by the judicious display of rare old lace and a Turkey rug? Her available means could not have exceeded five-and-twenty pounds a year, and by the days of her old age money was worth little more than it is now. Yet her tiny figure was always presentable, and though there might be scarcely an inch of her lace without a darn, or a yard of her black silk which was not riddled by minute holes, and though the parasol on which she leaned would not bear to be unfurled, yet she looked always as she was—a lady. A brave, pathetic little figure in such a world as this is! And with her lively eyes and snowy hair she would have



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