



THE VILLAGE DOCTOR

AT the first flake I dropped the foolscap prose
And stole outdoors. No staying in for me
When snow comes on! I love a growing storm,
Love to be one with it and lose myself
In the gray sameness of its company,
Obeying my heart as snow obeys the wind
Until my head is full of formless dreams.
“Never you mind,” I make allowance with,
“These sky-born fancies may pack down to poems
The better to recall this trackless joy.”

A snow-shoe trail, crossed and recrossed by a dog's,
Brought me up short — a shadow without the man.
Strange that our doctor's name should spring to mind
Since Fred's the last one to lay by his work,
Even for hunting. As I was pledged nowhere,
I followed them down the slope, then by a swamp
Whose alders had a spite against my face,
Then through some firs that shook their snow on me
And came to the first-growth pine, a high still room
Where even a fool would not dare raise his voice,
And found them sitting silent by a spring.

The doctor was in trouble, I knew at once.
“You here?” I said, “I didn't think there were
Two men in any one county quite so wise!”

“Wise? And me telling Bruce there's no such fool
As a fool hunter humoring his hound.”

“Don't lay it to the dog,” I rallied him,
But seeing he did not smile, went on, “What d' you call
A wool-gatherer mistaking snow for wool?”

Snow's flimsy stuff to keep a writer warm."

"Better than silk," he growled deep from his shell.

I wondered, while we sat, and the snow laid us
Samples of stars to choose from, and then left them.
I don't like chatter, but this unvoiced struggle
The man was having hurt; yet, I am a man, too.
The spring was the most alive of all, you'd say,
With the snow-flakes bringing dimples to its face,
And in its liquid shadowy eye a look,
Startlingly clear, of much you had not seen —
A monstrous forest miniaturized in moss,
The light along the under side of fir-twigs,
The sky; and yet, if you bent close, as I did —
For what man can resist the sight of spring-water! —
You'd see brown silt on a stick, and marvel how
A body could be so thirsty that he'd drink
From a frog's tub where old leaves are slowly rotting.
But balancing on my palms and toes and lips
I sucked so long a draught of winter wine
That my mouth and throat ached. "That's good," I grunted.

His eyes were riveted on the living water.
"Yes, good of springs," he said, "never to freeze.
Did it ever strike you how that it takes winter
With zero nights and ice on every stream
To prove a spring?"
"What made you think of that?"

"I had an offer in the mail this morning."

So that was it! "New York?" I asked. He nodded,
Looking away far through the woods he loved.
Success that cost so much was hard to welcome;
And if hard for him, for us unthinkable.
Our village without Fred! The turkey shoot,
Who'd run that off? Who, by a wink and nod,
Could pass the time of day in such a manner
It meant a vote for forward-looking motions?

And who, by merely stopping by the house
Could resurrect us, body, soul, and smile?
"Of course," said I, quite bitter toward New York,
"The question is where you can do most good."

"The most? Or d'you mean the best good? That's a point."

"Isn't the most the best?"

"That's where I'm stumped.

I could mend up a dozen, two dozen, there
For each one here. There's more of good in that.
But how long would the best of me be in it?
I'd soon need mending myself, as sure as fate,
Soon be one long complaint, one constant ache
For this," — and his hand took in the trees, spring, snow.
"Doctors can't cure when they are sick at heart
More than a spring can water you when it's dried.
We let the patients catch our health, that's all."

"The trick, then, comes from being sound clean through?"

"Sure, like in everything. No man can write
More sensible than he is, can he?"

"Not long.

But tell me, Fred, what does Matilda say?"

"O, Mat's all right. She says she's not too keen
On roughing it in the city, but she'd go
To please me, if I thought that it was right."
He stopped and made a drawing in the snow
Till Bruce yawned in our faces, thinking, I guess
That we had decided to turn to stone, or stumps,
And were waiting for moss.

"Why did *you* come out?"

Fred asked me suddenly, "I thought you were busy
On your new book."

"I'm playing hookey.

On days like this I'm restless for the woods,
Just as on certain days my truant mind
Insists on verse when it should think plain prose.

No money in verse, you know."

"I reckon not.
But, say, it's good just to cut loose and run!"

"It's life, for me. To run as the heart dictates,
Thicket or pasture, to climb and find the view
That sitting forever in a room won't give.
Without a view I'm blind. Truancy pays."

He nodded with new life and growled, "Damn right. . ."

". . . because the truant is loyal to himself,
That deeper self you doctors are sounding for,
The heart no winter, however cold, can freeze,
No bribes, ambition, nor twisted thinking reach
Or muddy up, the very spring of all."

"By God," he said devoutly as a prayer,
"That's it! The spring! The spring that's in a man,
The thing he loves, the thing he's got to love
And let keep on a-welling up inside him,
And never let it dry and disappoint
Country or city folk what come to drink.
I thought it was my selfish ways; but I see.
You can't have springs ranging all over the place;
Let swamps do that. New York can come up here."
He rose, glowing, changed like a broken cloud
The sun casts off. I felt the glorious strength
That keeps him going night and day for weeks,
As he grabbed my hand and said, "Show me your poems.
If they don't beat your prose, I'm a doomed man."

"How's that?"

"Go fetch 'em, Bruce," he cried,
Ignoring me; — and both were off like mad.

Before I left I leaned above the spring
And took one last drink of the living water.

— *T. Morris Longstreth.*

Chimes

A Novel in Six Instalments—IV

ROBERT HERRICK

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

CHIMES is the story of the University of Eureka, a newly created co-educational institution in the Middle West, as it unfolds before the eyes of Beaman Clavercin of Harvard, a cultured, refined young man with literary ambitions who comes to the new university to teach English and general literature. Dr. Alonzo Harris, the first President, with his dream not yet fully realized, is informed that he has only a few months to live. Who will succeed him?

Dr. Edgar Mallory has presidential ambitions; but his wife, the beautiful, enigmatical Jessica Stowe has ambitions of her own which lie in quite another direction. Immersed in her scientific research under Rudolph Sheimer, who has come to Eureka from the University of Zurich, she refuses to take part in the banal social activities and political intrigues which will further her husband's schemes. But not wishing to stand in the way of his legitimate aspirations, either, she suggests a compromise. She will go for a year to Switzerland to work with Jung, and thus leave her husband unhampered by the presence of a wife whose non-coöperation might hurt his chances of advancement. Edgar Mallory accepts the compromise. A few days later Dr. Alonzo Harris dies. As little groups of faculty members trail back from the funeral through the dull gray of a rainsoaked November day, they speculate as to his successor. Will it be Mallory or Sanderson? "It won't be either," Snow laughed. "They'll kill each other off. It will be Dolittle, — the quiet, safe little man."

CHAPTER FOUR

I

THEY called it the Wind Bag. It grew out of those desultory hours spent in the little arbor in the rear of Flesheimer's saloon, where Beckwith, Clavercin, Snow, and occasionally others gathered, — Caxton whose steely mind penetrated every subject, the poet Don Gerland who early wandered away and became almost a great poet. Later they took in Harding, the ponderous, the pompous, the assured, whose solid judgment and wide contact with life blended with the effervescent wine of Snow's Gascon wit, Beckwith's idealism, Clavercin's aestheticism. They talked of everything in their eager fresh minds except shop, which was tacitly barred, — of socialism and trusts, of scholarship and poetry, of that ideal university which existed only in their dreams. Time passed, the group broke up,

merged into other lives, but every now and then when three of them met by accident the desire rose instinctively for talk, the wayward talk of men at the end of the day's work after they have eaten and drunk well, talk far into the morning. "Let us have a Wind Bag," one would say to another. "Good! Where?" "At my place — we've a good cook now."

So having been in abeyance for more than a year, the Wind Bag was dining at Clavercin's one of those first warm spring evenings which came to Eureka as elsewhere with teasing suggestions of green fields and trickling streams. The long windows to the tiny terrace were open, admitting the roar of the enveloping city. The special occasion for this Wind Bag was the chance visit to Eureka of Aleck Harding, who after serving as private secretary to a cabinet officer in the last administration had recently become a vice-president in a New York trust com-