

The Poetry of Julia Cooley

BY RICHARD LE GALLIENNE

NOT long ago I happened to be spending a few days with some friends who have a pleasant home in one of the green valleys of Connecticut. Among the members of the household was a little girl of eight, a simple, happy child, as childlike as a child could be, even more so than little girls of eight are apt to be in America. No child could possibly have less of the infant phenomenon about her, and I lived in the same house with her for several days without realizing the significance of little Julia Cooley—whose poetry I am about to introduce to the reader.

Julia Cooley is blest with a relative such as too seldom goes with the infant phenomenon—a sensible mother: a mother who in no way spoils her, or allows her to think that she is different from other children, while, of course, she is none the less happily conscious of the remarkable gifts of her little girl, and properly awake to her responsibility for their care and development. It was with great diffidence that Mrs. Cooley brought herself to speak to me about her little daughter's verses, and showed me the quaint little manuscripts—fearing that she might seem the usual fond deluded mother. But I shall be much surprised if the reader does not agree with me in thinking that it is no mere mother's love which sees a remarkable gift in a child who can write such verses at the age of eight. As a matter of fact, most of the poems I shall quote were written at the age of seven.

As one would expect, her poems are usually tiny, seldom more than four or six lines long, usually unrhymed, and it is significant that they are nearly all pictures of nature, for which the child seems to have quite a grown-up passion. I should say that she is a little Chicago girl, and only spends her summer holi-

days in Connecticut. One of her little songs is a quaint farewell to the Connecticut hills, on her going home to Chicago. It is by no means one of her best poems, but I bring it in here as being *à propos*:

FAREWELL.

Farewell, dear hills!
Farewell fore'er.
It really makes me cry.
Just think I must leave you
Forever and ever.
'Tis very sorrowful.
Forever, just think of it. fore'er.
Farewell!
Farewell, dear hills.
Farewell!

It is hardly fair to quote this first among her verses, and I only bring it in because it illustrates with its quaint little pathos of cadence a feeling for nature remarkably poignant in a child of seven. But here is another little poem of four lines which gives a better idea of Julia Cooley's gift of picture-making in words. She calls it "What Nature is like to Me."

The sun is like a golden crown.
The sky is like a blue and white knitted ball.
The grass is like little pieces of silk thread,
And the apple blossoms are like jewels.

In this, as in many others of the verses I shall quote, one is reminded of those tiny Japanese verses Mr. Lafcadio Hearn translates for us so exquisitely, and the imagery has often that naïve concreteness which we find in the old folk-songs.

Take two or three more examples:

The grass is getting green.
The daisies up are springing.
And the hills are woven purple.
While the birds commence their singing.

The pigeons are coming fluttering and twit-
tering out of the pigeon-house,
How green the grass is!
The leaves are fluttering down from the
trees,
How blue the sky is!

The buds have come and gone,
And the leaves are falling,
The floods of rain have not ceased,
The light of morning has gone,
And nightfall is coming on.

Tiny and simple as these three little poems are, do they not show a remarkable power of conveying an impression, painting a picture, a power of selecting the vivid essential and leaving the rest which is all too rare among grown-ups, but which in a child of seven is little short of uncanny?

I will now quote several poems in which the pictorial quality of observation is blent with a sort of baby meditateness. The first is called "Dear Little Blue Grass."

Little purpel blue grass,
Among the grasses I found thee growing,
Dear little lass,
Thee grows where farmers all are mowing.

She has difficulty with her pronouns in this picture of "The Dear Little Buttercup":

You are yellow as the sun,
Thou growest among the tall grasses,
And out of thee I get pleasure and fun,
I findest thou in masses.

Again, this of "The Cheese Flower":

Thou are white and purpel
And shaped like a cup,
Your color is very simpel,
And you are a flower of luck.

Once more, best of all, this of "The Clover":

You dear little downy flower,
I foundest thee by the hill,
I have played with thee by the hour,—
Why art thou so still?

Here is a charming little lyric called "The Joyful Leaves":

You merry little leaves,
How can you be so happy,

Always dancing from morn till night.
While you are happy, I am sorrowful.
You show that you are happy,
Because green is a happy color—
Merry little leaves,
Merry little leaves,
Merry little leaves.

In regard to this the baby artist's comment on the fourth line shouldn't go untold. Coming with the lines to her mother, she said, "You know, mother, I don't really mean that I'm sorrowful. I only say it for the sake of the poetry." There surely spoke the artistic temperament in bud.

Presumably, too, this little poem was written only "for the sake of the poetry," and not from actual experience. It is called "My Lover":

Over the hills and far away,
Where my true lover lives,
O'er the valleys have I searched in vain,
O my heart has sunk in griefs.

As Mrs. Browning has said, young poets are always "sexagenary at sixteen," but a broken heart at seven is surely the height indeed of precocious Wertherism. The really curious thing, however, is that our little eight-year-old poet should be conscious that when she writes so she is sad "on purpose," sad for artistic reasons! Sadness, indeed, is anything but characteristic of her sunny childhood. Rather is she "the Happy One," as she describes herself in this fascinating little poem, which she wrote one day while I was staying in her Connecticut home:

I'm not the silent one,
I'm not the one that sits and reads the
livelong day,
I'm not the stone, the nesting bird, or the
shadow of the stone;
I'm the romping, scampering one.
I'm the one who runs and sings among the
flowering fields.
I'm like the leaves, the grass, the wind, the
happy little butterfly, and the little
scampering clouds.

Here I may fittingly bring in two little prose-poetry pictures—one might almost say—à la Whitman.

See the little children dancing to the merry
music,
See the poor music girl reach for the money,

Look at the clear sunset of crimson, purple, and pink,
See the grass—it looks like embroidery.
Doesn't it make her happy?

Three little girls at play, jumping rope,
The clouds are black above them, but they
do not see,
They are so preoccupied in their play,
The shy squirrel knew that rain was coming on.

I have throughout spoken of Julia Cooley sometimes as an eight-year-old poet, and sometimes as seven, but, as a matter of fact, she was a poet long before she was seven, and before she could either write or spell. In this connection I am privileged to quote from a letter which her mother wrote to her father during one of the Connecticut holidays. The letter is dated October 15, 1899, at which time Julia was six years and three months old. "Sunday is Julia's helpless day," writes Mrs. Cooley to her husband. "On other days she roams from one end of the farm to the other, and asks no odds of any one. Yesterday she came in from the hill, where she had been husking corn with Hall and Henry, rosy and bright-eyed and beautiful. She said she had made up a little song, which she thought I would like to write down in a book! So I got out pencil and paper, and wrote as she sang or chanted in a stirring monotone:

"Walking on the hill I saw five little dandelions with their yellow dresses on.
They thought it was summer!
Six of them had gone to seed and had their white dresses on.
They knew it was fall!
I was helping the farmers with the corn:
the blue sky above, and the sunshine!"

"Later again Julia came in smiling with the ecstasy of composition, and when my pencil and paper were ready, she sang:

"It was an autumn day!
The leaves had turned brown and yellow and red.
And were gently falling.
It was an autumn day!"

In other respects I understand that Julia Cooley was not a specially pre-
cious child. At six years and three months, as we have seen, she could not read, write, or spell; but here again she was presently to demonstrate a remarkable capacity. Within a year from that time she could do all three at least as well as children twice her age. At the present time she can read the most difficult book glibly at sight, and with apparent understanding of its meaning: at all events, with intelligent emphasis and pause.

Here are some of Julia's latest poems, just come to me after I had completed this article. It will be observed that nature is still her favorite subject. The second poem seems to me particularly striking, while the title alone of the first is very imaginative.

MOTHER HILL.

The fleecy clouds, dressed in a soft dress of white,
Are resting in the green velvet lap of a loving lady hill;
Soon 'twill be time for them to slumber.
But, where will the lady leave them?
She will keep the little lambkins in her loving lap at night.

THE LITTLE BROOK.

Little singing brook!
Babbling in and out between the sparkling stones.
And singing in the tone of blithest merriment:
See the rainbow shining from the shadowy nook.
Do you slumber quietly at night,
And sing no more?

THE RAINDROPS.

When at morn I saw the world in a dew-drop dress,
I knew what had happened, the rain had kissed each flower lovingly.
So sweet and so loving was the kiss that it shone like silver.
And the air was filled with fragrance.

A QUIET HOME.

Mamma sits in her chair reading a book,
Papa sits in his arm-chair reading the newspaper.
Sister sits in her little chair with her doll, drawing.
And baby sits on the floor with his picture-book and rag doll:
Such a happy family, all by the quiet fire,
And the great red sun seems just as happy.

Through the Valley of Illusion

BY ARTHUR STRINGER

I
THE kindly old doctor had pounded Sudworth about a good deal, and then, turning grave in the midst of his quiet jocularity, had said, by way of preparation, that a relapse from pneumonia was a more or less serious thing at times. After that he had slowly placed the stethoscope on his desk once more, and looked at his patient with questioning and yet kindly eyes. Then he drummed thoughtfully on the desk-top with his short, strong fingers, and asked the other if there chanced to be any particular part of Mexico he had a liking for.

For a pitiful moment or two the old doctor's quiet laughter and intimate little commonplaces, as he had busily tapped and explored and listened, had all but misled his patient. But from the moment of that ultimate question a veil seemed to fall between Sudworth and the life that lay so close about him. He knew that thereafter he must touch all things with muffled hands, as through a mist.

"It's not—not *that*?" cried Sudworth, poignantly, catching at the old doctor's elbow in a passing moment of darkness.

The old doctor still tried to laugh a little, and then lied stoutly, as doctors often must. The sudden pallor of the patient disturbed him.

"No, no, my dear fellow, of course not!" he said, with an affectionate hand on the other's shoulder. "It's not *quite* that, but it may be, you know, if we don't catch it in time. A year or two in Mexico often—er—does wonders."

"A year or two!" repeated Sudworth, thinly. The fuller meaning of what it all stood for was piercing slowly through his dazed senses. "But I hate the place!"

The old doctor handed him a little tapering glass filled with port-wine. "Young man," and he looked at him almost sternly, "do you ever pull up to think over just how lucky you are to have a good comfortable bank account—to

possess half a million or so to do what you like with? I know men, plenty of 'em, poor devils, tied down here to die, held to the East by poverty! And with wives, too!"

"With wives?" Sudworth repeated, without expression.

"So think a little what *your* luck means. You are able to get away from the city—"

"But what's life—to me—away from the city?" cried Sudworth.

"Life is life," almost wearily answered the other, "the world over!"

"But to me life here in the city means so much!" Sudworth looked up suddenly. "Why couldn't I run up the State somewhere for a few weeks?"

Their eyes met for a silent moment.

"It's too late, my boy; too late for that! I want to get you out West and a good six thousand feet up before I can feel safe. And the sooner the better. Now what do you say to Colorado?"

"Must I leave it?" pleaded Sudworth.

"To-morrow!" was the doctor's answer.

Muffled up in his hansom, Sudworth gazed out through the misty windows at the city. Already it seemed far away, shadowy, insubstantial. It lay before him, a world which he knew he must look upon for the last time; and even as he looked it appeared to take on new aspects. Over it crept a forlorn sense of beauty and romance. It seemed to lie about him glorified by some softening evanescence.

With his glove he wiped the gathering mist from the hansom window, and looked out hungrily, as a prisoner might, upon the life and color and busy movement of the city streets. Turning into Fifth Avenue, he watched for the familiar faces in the line of open carriages that drifted by. It would be, he knew, for the last time. He looked after them wistfully.

The things he had loved! He repeated