

Our Painter

BY LOUISE CLOSSER HALE

HE had not begun life as such. It was his early ambition to become a railroad superintendent, and as a young clerk in the employ of a Western road he seemed headed in the right direction. He had perspicacity, application, and the disinclination to "give up," which is the formula, I have noticed, for a successful business career in America.

Then he fell into the toils of a woman. She was Katie Merritt, seventeen to his twenty, yet he was as nothing to her. She read novels, did not care for clerks, and business life held no appeal for her—Katie loved artists. When he came to sit on her front steps in the summer, she wondered how he happened to be in an office when his big brother, Hudson, was an architect, and while I, who am his older sister, painted dinner-cards.

At last, stung by this sneer, he retorted that he had taken the prize in high school for crayon cubes, and once did a jar of tulips in colors. She doubted this, and he spent a Sunday away from his figuring on how to become rich, in snooping about in the attic for proof. Unfortunately, he found more than his own efforts: he found the dusty canvases of three generations of Dawsons who had thought they could paint, and who couldn't.

He was rather dreamy, for a hustling person, when he came down-stairs. "It's in the blood, isn't it?" he asked, referring to the streak of paint.

I touched up the ballet-skirt of the cardboard lady I was finishing with splashes of satanic red. "Yes, it's in the blood," I answered, grimly, "but it doesn't come out except in dinner-cards and the designing of hen-coops."

I looked up at him as he remained silent. He was very nice and long and brown, and his black eyes were softer than usual. More than that, he was my little orphan brother. "Leave the flesh-pots, which are the paint-pots in our family, alone, Johnny," I advised.

But Johnny arose impatiently to go see

Katie Merritt. "Every family has to have a genius some time or other," he warned, as he made his exit. And then I really trembled, for I recognized the divine ego of artists, which is their first and their poorest attribute, and sometimes their only one.

The disintegration was rapid. A week later he was wearing a soft tie, not a real Windsor, for he was still in the office, but at least a blue-and-white polka-dot with ends that flew a little as he sold tickets to Buffalo and points farther East. It was Hudson who discovered that he was alternating his Katie evenings with evenings at the Art League.

And shortly afterward came the cataclysm. It was nothing less serious than a legacy from a far-away aunt who had painted in her youth also. But the small fortune to be divided among us was not the result of her labors. It had come from a husband who had been a plumber.

Hudson and I, with our small hoard, flew to London for a holiday; and Johnny, having reached his majority, flew after us, which was contrary to agreement. We had thought that the charms of Katie would have kept him in his Venusberg and his ticket-office until his estimate of himself grew normal. But the inheritance was too much for him, and Miss Merritt enjoyed heroic partings.

"Come back with a laurel wreath upon your brow," she had urged him. And he had assured her that he would do so.

Well, that was the beginning of our fledgling. After some Whistlerian studies of the Thames, he found Art too poor in London to remain, and he went into the ateliers of Paris.

I shall always feel that it was the stamina which would have made him a good business man which caused him to stick to this new work. He became a slave to it, and, following along these lines, he imbibed — through strength rather than weakness—all of the mad-nesses of his confrères. He grew as



"LEAVE THE PAINT-POTS ALONE, JOHNNY," I ADVISED

naïve as a child, as sentimental as a school-girl, and as unreliable as—well, as a painter. His will was like a piece of putty, and he was so vacillating that he couldn't make up his mind when he entered a room whether to sit down or stand up. When he did sit down it was generally on his hat or somebody else's; and when I sat down—in his studio—it was on a tube of paint or a shaving-brush.

We saw him yearly, for, by conserving our small estate, Hudson and I managed trips across to darn his socks and set him right financially. Hudson looked after his dwindling board, and gave forth hollow warnings now and then, which were not listened to. But it was real agony for us two failures in life to see Johnny magnificently devouring his principal, unmindful that the last meal was almost in sight.

The fifth summer we missed Europe, and spent our holiday money in establishing ourselves in New York, for the architect had gone on from chicken-coops to mantelpieces for a big Eastern

firm, and as there are one million more dinners daily in New York than there are in Omaha, I argued that there would be a proportionate swelling in the demand for dinner-cards.

If we lost a glimpse of Johnny that season, we had one of Katie instead; it was my first since the breaking up of our respectable family triangle, for my enthusiasm over her had not increased with Johnny's departure. But we ran across her and her mother in New York on the day before their sailing, and took them home to tea.

Katie was Katherine now, and, to my surprise, was justly so. She was a pretty girl of twenty-two, who had found Liberty frocks unpractical, and had returned to shirt-waist suits with renewed vigor. That she was still romantic showed in the flutter of her eyelids when she spoke of seeing Johnny (John, she called him) after all these years; yet back of the flutter there was an intelligent look in her blue eyes which would suggest that what John had lost in common sense Katherine had gained.



WHEN I SAT DOWN—IN HIS STUDIO—IT WAS ON A TUBE OF PAINT

As an entirety she was a young woman impressionable, adaptable, and brimming over with joyful anticipation of Paris—the Rue de la Paix and the Quartier Latin. John was to show her this last special feature, and, from brief postals during the summer, John did.

She told me more when she passed through again to Omaha in September. She had seen Europe, and John, and was glad she had done both. I made further subtle inquiries, and received subtler replies. Yes, he had changed—it seemed all right at the time, though—he fitted in there—oh, he was part of the perfect picture—she was proud to be seen with him—over there, but somehow (she grew cloudy)—somehow she couldn't see him over here any more—no, no, he wasn't like our men.

A feeling of resentment stirred within me. I longed to cry, "You shaped him so," yet I hesitated, mindful of the blot in the Dawson escutcheon.

New York has a way of smothering events out of one's mind that would continue fiercely flaming in Omaha. I had

almost forgotten Katie, and had small time to fret over the terseness of John's rare letters. To be sure he kept himself green in our memory by a steady demand for funds. At this point we received a cable. Strictly speaking, it was not for us, but was addressed to John Dawson. However, it was in my care, and, after the smallest pretense at hesitation, I opened it to see if the contents should be wired back to him. To my added perplexity I found that the despatch had been sent from the *arrondissement* in Paris where he lived, and the message was the potent but inexpensive word "No."

One of the most powerful matrons in society sat down to dinner the next night before a cardboard girl who had but four toes to the well-directed foot that was pointing airily to her august name. The fifth toe I forgot to do, for I was excitedly 'phoning Hudson, that I might catch him at his workshop before he started on a business trip West. Hudson agreed with me.

"He's on the water now, that's what he is. It's one of his infernal surprises."

I was tremulous with the thought of seeing him again, yet we were both exasperated beyond polite utterance at the thought of his popping in on us without a word. Johnny had no plans, and couldn't understand how any one else could be bothered with them. In Paris this had seemed rather amusing, but as I looked over my full calendar, for it was near Christmas-time and orders were sandwiched in with social airings on my own account, my heart went out in understanding of Katherine Merritt.

Six days after the cable I heard a thumping up the narrow hall that divided

our and our neighbor's apartments, the faint thrill of their bell, an exasperated slamming of their door by the maid who had opened it, and then so soft a prodding against ours that it could be likened to nothing at all. And this caused me to rise hastily, for the mode of procedure was more like the coming of Johnny than any conventional arrival; and, true to my surmising, I opened it upon a stooping figure, made gnome-like by his endeavor to read the card beneath the bell. Numerous impedimenta were in either hand, and strapped to his back were half a hundred rolls of canvas, which protuberances had been battling against our oak.

By the time he had his coat off—which was a cape—there was no room to step. The unframed rolls of pictures which I had lifted from his shoulders rollicked about the floor, and the baggage was on every chair but one. On this one, however, he had put his hat, and promptly sat. Unfortunately it was a derby, quite new; and, to my amazement, Johnny was even more concerned than I as the resounding crack foretold its destruction.

He examined it hastily. "And I'll have to wear it all the time I'm out there," he moaned.

"Out where?"

He did not reply directly, which was in line with his usual vacillation of thought. Although he answered one question with another: "But then, perhaps, I sha'n't go. Did I receive a cable?"

"You did."

"What was in it?" It was uncomfortable the way Johnny took it for granted that the despatch would be opened.

"Nothing—that is, just 'No.'"

For the smallest part of an instant he was staggered, but he cheered up immediately. "Well, 'no' doesn't mean anything. You could take it a dozen ways," was his comment. I looked at him inquiring-

ly. "I'd like to tell you, sis, but it's really a great secret"; then, after waving about uncertainly, "and yet—yes—no—well, perhaps I'd better."

With some finesse I towed him into the dining-room before he began, while I continued my work at the only north window in the flat. So far, following the custom of our family, I had not displayed any emotion over my boy's coming. There was little time for that, as the cards had to go out at seven. But as I painted joyous holly wreaths I was taking stock of Johnny out of the corner of my eye with something akin to pity.

Beyond his hat, he was not looking prosperous. His clothes were those of the atelier, and were ragged, his hair was longer than it ought to be, and his shoes were the pointed ones of the French school, although American boots were to be had in Paris—for a consideration. Plainly, Johnny was recognizing the end



THE MESSAGE WAS THE POTENT BUT INEXPENSIVE WORD "NO"

of the rope, and was making a late effort to save. And yet there was nothing despairing about him as he ate the raw eggs which his doctor had ordered at five every day, and he was brimming over with importance.

"I suppose it's only fair to tell you my great secret," he continued, after I had explained that Hudson was in the West. He was not as interested in his brother as he should have been, considering there would have been no bedroom for one who came as a surprise had Hudson remained at home.

"I can't make out the cable," I admitted, "unless you didn't get into the Salon again; but with all those pictures, I presume you're over here to exhibit."

"No, I'm not," he retorted, somewhat nettled; "but you don't suppose I'd go anywhere without my canvases, do you? Besides, I'm going to use them for purposes of education. What I'm over here for is"—he lingered on it blissfully—"to get married."

I went on stippling holly berries like

a machine, but my heart was sick. "Whom are you going to marry, dear?" I asked, smoothly.

"That's what the cable is about," was his answer.

"The one that said 'no'?"

Johnny was not annoyed. "That doesn't mean anything, as I've told you. It was this way: after they went home—"

"Katherine and her mother?"

"Of course; who else? I realized that I should have made some definite arrangement with them."

"Then there's been nothing definite?"

"Not what *you* would call definite, but it's plain enough to Katie and me. Only, of course, there's the mother. I thought I'd go crazy in November thinking I might lose her—Katie, I mean—and at last I wrote to Mrs. Merritt asking if I might cross over and formally propose for her daughter's hand. That's where the cable comes in."

I was bewildered. "Did she send it from France?"

"Not at all. Roberts, my pal, sent it.

After I'd written, I couldn't wait, and then Roberts sold a picture, so I borrowed the money and started over to find out for myself. The understanding was that he should open and read any letter from Omaha not in Katie's handwriting, and cable me the answer. Of course he's messed it all up. 'No' is just as apt to mean, 'No, don't stay in Paris,' or, 'No, you *are* worthy' (because I said I wasn't), as it would, 'No, don't come over.'"

I put down my brush. It was hideous enough, when understood, to keep me up till morning; and indeed it was almost that before I had stowed all the canvases into corners, entirely unpacked Johnny's sad little trunk, and decided upon my plan of assistance.

It was as plain to me as the nose on my plain



"I'LL HAVE TO WEAR IT ALL THE TIME I'M OUT THERE," HE MOANED

face that the simple young man had mistaken the effervescence of a girl's first flirtation with a real student in the Quarter for the stable quality that makes for an enduring love. But any argument that I could advance he would nullify with some Quartier Latin sentimentality that wouldn't last through one wash-day.

"Ah yes," he would patiently explain, "but Katie loves Paris studio life—she said so—she doesn't mind stairs—poverty is nothing to her—of course, she hasn't had any—neither have I, yet—can't I sell pictures?—I haven't, because I'm not married—men never accomplish anything until they marry—why, she wouldn't *want* silk petticoats—she was perfectly happy with a sou nosegay daily— Can't wear a nosegay— Oh, that's flippant!"

The dangling of her family before him held no terrors. "Yes, Mr. Merritt's a business man—so was I, once—one is never too old to improve—you saw those pictures? I'm going to show every one of them to him, and go over them and over them, and tell him all about what I do until he's just alive with enthusiasm—what are you laughing at?"

"I'm not," for surely there were tears also, and my bursting head was between my hands. "But the mother? Mrs. Merritt's very ambitious—" I could get no further.

"She's a very wise woman. In fact, she has given me more encouragement than Katie. Once she said to me, and once she said to Roberts while looking at me, that it was her great aim in life to have Katherine marry some capable young man."

Fortunately, the trunk had arrived at this moment. "It will be fifty cents," I told him, wishful to meet every obligation, but trying to be stern.

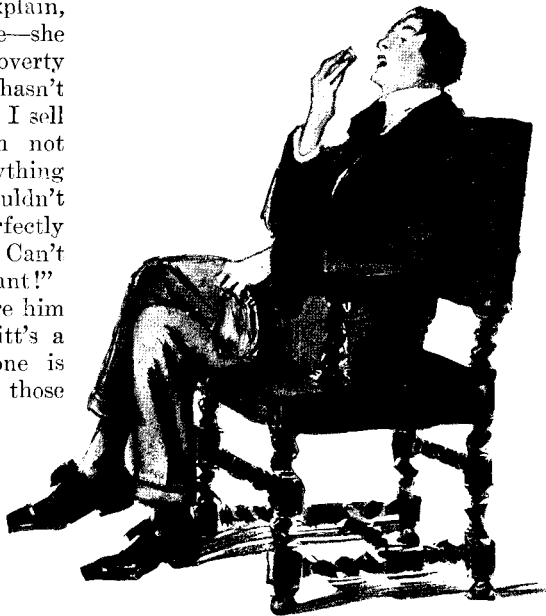
"Too much," said the foreign resident. "I'll give him forty, *deux francs*; that's enough."

"But you don't bargain with them over here!" I cried.

"He'll only get forty," advancing to meet the transfer gait.

I waited shudderingly for the sound of blows, but there was a short parley, a paralyzed "all right," then a departure.

And it came to me, as I stood in the canvas-strewn parlor, that Johnny, by a happy blending of his rainbow streaks, would some day, some way, win out; and that, to be loyal, I must help him with what few colors the dull palette of my life boasted. This resolution I ap-



EATING THE RAW EGGS WHICH HIS DOCTOR HAD ORDERED

plied to the fond lover's plans to rush on the next day and "surprise" Katherine.

"She will be delighted," he insisted.

"She will be nothing of the sort," I answered. "Even though her heart may go out to you, her time cannot. The season is at its full swing, she will have to meet her engagements; and you will be left alone because it is too late to include you, feeling out of it, and not wanted."

"She always wanted me in Paris."

"You bet she did," I snarled, vulgarly; "she had nothing else to do. Oh, my child, don't you see—" but I managed to arrest myself. There are some things one must find out by the bludgeonings of one's own experience. However, there was one agony in store for him that could be lessened.

I had found several pairs of velvet trousers in his trunk, more canvases, a chafing-dish "to fill out a corner," boxes

of paints, and a dinner-coat bearing the name of Roberts in the sleeve. I was not too old to remember my own snobbish contempt for the incorrectly habited of my younger days, and with a sob of something like despair I prepared to fit out Johnny with the requisites for his attack.

It was not as easy as I had thought, and Johnny combated me at every step. "Katie always liked me in my painting things," he would argue, as dressy young clerks were dangling evening-trousers before us, bedecked with silk braid, and I couldn't remember to save my life what a well-bred man really did wear.

But the purchasing went on, and, when I could squeeze in the time, he went to tea with me in some of the big hotels to meet our friends. I never rose from the table without renewed faith in him. He was as independent as a millionaire, and much less ostentatious about it. He ordered raw eggs of the waiter in place of tea, and ate them horribly as they swam over the toast or around fat jam-tarts; but his simple assurance was such that he received the most ecstatic attention from the servitors; and when he told one gold-buttoned hireling that he had found better eggs at Giles', that worthy believed himself before nothing less than a nobleman, and begged his pardon humbly.

For a week this went on, and then Johnny rebelled utterly and began pitching his new clothes into his trunk with the cry of "Westward Ho!"

I learned some things while he was packing up, for he grew confidential as his heart waxed light. One was that he had not yet notified Katherine that he was coming.

My mouth writhed with bitter smiles. "And what's your plan when you get there?"

"Something simple: I shall go to a modest hotel, and send her flowers without a card to let her know I'm in town. You see," he continued, kindly with one so dense, "I never put a card in the flowers I sent her in Paris, so she will *know* they come from me."

I arose and endeavored to put my arms around Johnny, although he shook me off. "You dear goose," I said to him, "every moment there is some man sending posies to some girl without his name

attached, and the pretty girls like Katherine often have two men who think they are the only ones in the world who are buying flowers. Don't let the wrong man get the credit for your expensive roses."

At this he madly renewed his efforts to wrap the dinner-coat of Roberts around his paint-box. And he got away after a fearful wrangle with me over his big canvases, which he still wanted to carry on his back, and which I agreed to box.

He departed hopefully by the cheapest route, quite ready to sit up all the way, with his new pockets stuffed with sandwiches to save expense. Hudson had written him that there was but seven hundred dollars remaining of his store, and "There's the ring, and the steamer tickets back, and the price of an exhibit before I begin to sell," Johnny told off, with a great air of being executive.

"Johnny," I said, when it came time to make polite farewell speeches, "remember this: whatever happens to you in your life of joy—or sorrow—you can put it all in your work. Remember this—if things don't go just as you would like to have them."

And when he said he would remember, I shut the door and had a good cry. Later I sent a night message to Katherine telling her of his coming, for I knew that she had grown sensible, like me, and would hate surprises.

I didn't spend a very "Merry Christmas," after all, with Hudson away and a long letter from our painter as my only companion. He had changed his plan of attack upon arriving in Omaha, and on his way up from the station had purchased some flowers and gone straight to the house. So, in spite of my efforts, she had seen him travel-stained and awry, without his laurel wreath, but with a few sandwich-papers probably sticking out of his pockets.

She had welcomed him charmingly, however, he wrote—which I can thank myself for; and then he went on, at length, in a broken fashion. They were all against him—mother, father, and daughter; and my heart hardened toward them as I read of the very arguments that I had advocated myself.

"But I'm not through yet," he announced, toward the end of his letter. "The old man says it isn't that he wants

me to *have* money, but to prove that I am capable of getting it—and that's simple enough. I shall show him shortly that I can make money as easily as any one if I want to. I haven't decided just how to go about it, but something will turn up.

"And I'm not entirely discouraged in Katie's direction, although I am confused. She says Paris is Paris, and Omaha is Omaha, which is perfectly obvious. She doesn't say she can't ever love me, but she absurdly wants something more than love when she marries. Not money, she insists, but a man that she can 'hold onto,' whatever that means.

"This both enrages and hurts me. I think for hours of the perfect days we spent in the Luxembourg gardens, eating waffles and talking about my pictures, and now I find her so changed! Yet again — and this is the strangest part of it all—out here I don't think I should want her any different. There's more to her—out here. But what she doesn't seem to recognize, and what those fat parents of hers can't grasp, is that there is more to *me*. And, as I tell you, I'm going to show them."

Hudson, upon his return, sorrowfully agreed with me that our brother lacked balance. Toward the first of February Johnny wired for all of his few remaining hundreds, and upon complying to this demand, with a stern letter of reproof, Hudson received a brief note of thanks, in which we were termed "short sports."

It seems that Johnny, after five years in Paris to render him thoroughly unfit, had decided to enter the speculative market. More than that, he was buying on a margin, buying stock of which Hudson heard the poorest opinion expressed, and he was buying beyond his remaining fortune.

One day Hudson telephoned me, his voice very shaky, that our painter's stock

had gone up ten points, and, after all, Johnny must have pulled out a neat little sum. Nothing takes away the curse of gambling like success. I was about to congratulate the boy when Hudson received a letter, in answer to the telegram he had sent, assuring us that



"I'LL GIVE HIM FORTY, DEUX FRANCS; THAT'S ENOUGH"

Johnny had no thought of selling the stock, as he was sure it would gain thirty points in the next few days.

I wept, and Hudson tore his hair, and we suffered on until, one sweeping, soaring, high-winded day in March, Wall Street boosted that stock to the high-water mark of thirty, and our financier sent word that he had sold out.

He did not hasten to wire, and it was only the scratch of a pen mailed as he was going out to dinner. He spoke of his *coup* mildly, but he was in a rush to reach his host, for Katherine's father was to be there; and as the old man had disposed of his stock at only five points profit, he wished to let him know that he had controlled a small portion of that same "plum" with a less nervous hand.

"It was the daring play of a fool boy,"



HIS WORK IS GREATLY VALUED, SINCE HE IS THE RICH, ECCENTRIC MR. DAWSON WHO WILL NOT SELL

Mr. Merritt wrote us, "but it did show courage, and a keener estimate of the market than I myself possessed. I don't believe in flyers, though, and I don't approve of them in young men. I'm going to make him promise to leave speculating alone; but, anyhow, that youngster is all right."

Then Mr. Merritt went on to make a prophecy that was so amazingly acute for a stodgy person that we demi-artists gave no heed to it. Yet Mr. Merritt was right in his prediction; with this first encouragement Johnny, who had been jarred out of line by the estheticism of a school-girl, was now jarred into his old place again. The charm of smelly offices fought for mastery with the traces of turpentine; opportunities unrolled themselves before his eyes with something of the beauty of old canvases; success, which his pictures had never brought him, gave elasticity to his step, purpose to his direction; and his old business instincts, enriched, softened, returned to him, not mean now, or provincial, but with the promise of wide horizons to tempt him back.

And he went back. Katherine prob-

ably put it down as the second feather in her cap; Mr. Merritt may believe that the opportunity of sitting at a mahogany desk in his office was the allurements too alluring to refuse; but Hudson and I know that he returned because there was but one streak of paint in his cosmos against all the other streaks that go to make a business man.

I had some wailing letters from the girl before he discovered, in his simplicity, that hanging his hat on an office peg was making him dear to her. I endured her confidence—but, wickedly glad, made none—and she took the step of informing Johnny herself.

As for the pictures, the disposal of them rendered old Mr. Merritt an unconscious diplomatist. "Don't paint for the market, my boy," he warned. "For every stroke of the brush we'll lose a customer. Just paint to give away."

So Johnny paints on Sunday, although not all day Sunday, and some months not on any Sunday. But he and Katherine entertain their friends at tea in the studio, and his work is greatly valued, since he is the rich, eccentric Mr. Dawson who will not sell.

The Agriculture of the Future

BY J. RUSSELL SMITH

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THE age of chance and chance discoveries is drawing to a close, and its successor, the age of science and of deliberately sought scientific discoveries, has already begun in many fields of human endeavor. This is a great change, and one in which the fresh beginnings often require a new field for their operations. Such must be the case in agriculture. It, too, must take a fresh beginning and travel along new paths. In the days of chance we made small discoveries upon which we yet depend, although the possibilities of a new agriculture are now before us.

Agriculture to-day depends chiefly upon the work of the primeval woman. We are indebted to the nomad's wife for the greatest of all economic services. She tamed the young of the more tamable animals, gave them to her savage husband, and made of him the more civil herdsman who for ages followed his flocks after the manner of Jacob and Lot and Job. This fertile wife of the nomad became the wife of farmers, and she made a farmer of her son by placing in his hand the precious seed of the grains, the present basis of agriculture, the bread of man, and the concentrated food of all our domestic animals.

Where did this ancient mother get these precious seeds? In many cases we do not know, and cannot even guess. She found some plant with one or two rich seeds, planted them, and then generation after generation her descendants picked over their little grain patches, selecting seeds to be precious preserved from the harvest festival to the next spring-planting festival, which we now call Easter. By this process running on through unknown generations of men, the plants became so changed by the artificial application of Darwin's law of selection that now no botanist dares suggest what plant or plants were the wild forebears of some

of the present grains from which the world to-day obtains its bread.

We are indebted to this cave or tent-dwelling woman. But shall we accept her work as final? Can science do no better than follow along the path she laid out? The fact that agricultural science is to-day doing little more than this is one of the pathetic illustrations of the smallness of our view.

When the nomad's wife began picking and storing seeds to raise a little vegetable food to vary the monotony of the meat diet, did she scientifically examine the resources of the plant world and pick out and develop the stocks that would prove ultimately to be the best and most productive for the human race? Not at all. The poor creature was hungry for a mess of starch and herbs to vary the monotony of broiled joint. She lived from hand to mouth, and as she gradually evolved a garden with her own back-tiring labor, she inevitably moved along the lines of least resistance. That is what ails agricultural science now when it is still following in her footsteps.

While the primeval Asiatic was off hunting or tending flocks, his wife gathered wild crops in the woods and glades at the valley's edge, picking berries, cherries, wild apples, and mulberries. For eons they had gone into winter quarters with a store of wild almonds, walnuts, filberts, or acorns. These were and are the free product of nature, but when she wanted to raise a crop herself, she wanted quick returns—we all do. Think of a savage planting a walnut and expecting to wait ten years for the harvest. Our first gardener very naturally began with quick-growing plants, annuals, which had the tremendous advantage of quick returns—plant in the spring and eat in the fall. Quickness of return, not ultimate greatness of return, was the basis of selection.