

IN QUEST OF CHANGE AND ADVENTURE

BY FRANKLIN CHASE HOYT

Presiding Justice of the Children's Court of New York City: Author of "Citizens in the Making," etc.

"**P**LEASE, mister, how much is it to Palm Beach?"

The ticket-agent at the Pennsylvania Station was somewhat startled by the unexpected inquiry and gazed wonderingly at the youthful figure standing in front of his window. At seven o'clock on a dull November morning travel is apt to be rather slack and a request for transportation to Palm Beach at such a time is liable to excite the curiosity of even the most phlegmatic of ticket-sellers.

"A good deal of money, my son," he replied in a kindly voice. "But it's sort'er early yet to go there. The trains at this time of year only stop at West Palm Beach. Ain't you rather rushing the season?"

"Oh, no," came the agitated answer. "I want to get down there right away. I can pay for it easily."

With that the boy produced a roll of bills which made the ticket-agent gasp. It also made him do something more, for, inviting the boy to step inside the booth upon the pretext of fixing up his ticket, he signalled for the railroad detective whose duty it was to interview travellers of suspicious appearance and behavior.

Upon the arrival of the latter the two officials proceeded to question the boy as to his identity and the reason for his proposed visit to Palm Beach. He answered their inquiries rather nervously and told a somewhat incoherent story which only served to increase the misgivings of his auditors.

His name, he said, was Leonard Kenneth. His father and mother were both dead, and as their only child he had fallen heir to a considerable fortune. His guardian, however, was of a cruel, unsympathetic type and Leonard had found the surroundings of his new home, which was situated in a small suburban town, exceedingly distasteful and confining. So,

after practically dismissing his guardian, he had decided to learn more of the world and to spend some of his leisure time in travel. With that purpose in view he had drawn a fairly large sum of money from his estate and had come to New York, where he had been amusing himself in various ways for the past fortnight. During his stay in the city he had been stopping at one of its best-known and most expensive hotels. His reason for wishing to go to Palm Beach was a very simple one. He had found plenty of amusement, but that was not just what he was looking for. The time had come, he thought, when he should meet people and acquire social polish and distinction. The easiest way to break into society, he had read, was via Palm Beach. Hence his very logical and proper request for a ticket to that training-camp of the social aspirant.

The ticket-agent and the railroad detective looked at each other and shook their heads. They were quite ready to sympathize with Leonard's yearning for high life, but they remained wholly unconvinced by the story of the unsympathetic guardian and the large estate. The detective understood enough law to know that even if Leonard had a right to the money he was using, he had no authority or license to be roaming around the country at his age without some one to look after him. So it was decided to take the young traveller into custody and turn him over to the proper authorities for investigation.

At about the same moment that Leonard was making his abortive attempt to procure transportation to Palm Beach, the Police Department of New York received word from a neighboring city that a general alarm had been sent out for a boy by the name of — (let us say, "Frank Brown") who had run away from his home taking with him several thousand dollars from his father's strong-box. The description of the runaway followed, and

in every detail it tallied with the appearance of the *soi-disant* Leonard Kenneth.

A little later on the same morning the boy was arraigned before me in the Children's Court. Except that there was no eagerness or resolution left in his expression and manner, he stood before me just as he had stood before the ticket-agent a few hours earlier on that day of days in his young life. And looking at him I was not surprised that the ticket-agent had paused and wondered. In one hand the boy held a shiny new tarpaulin bag and in the other clutched a soft hat of vivid green. Both hands were encased in white kid gloves ornamented with black stitching on the backs. The suit which he wore outdid in cut even those "good form" models of the modern advertisement, while a gaudy tie, a striped silk shirt, and patent-leather shoes completed a picture which would have been amusing had it not been so pathetic.

The legal preliminaries in his case were settled swiftly. The boy admitted at once that he was the missing Frank Brown, and that he had stolen the money from his father.

What I wanted to know, however, and what interested me far more deeply than the bald facts of his offense, were the underlying causes for his conduct and the mental reactions which had influenced him to seek pleasure in so strange a way. Had the boy on his arraignment in the Children's Court been harshly treated or laughed at in the beginning, the truth would have been unattainable. A little interest, a little sympathy, and a little understanding were sufficient, however, to win his confidence, and, once the barriers of reserve and shame were broken down, he poured out his young heart and soul in full confession.

Until a few months before he had been quite happy in his modest but comfortable home. His mother and father had always treated him kindly, although apparently there was no particular bond of sympathy between himself and his parents. Once he had asked his father for permission to join a boys' club, but the suggestion had been frowned on.

Suddenly he found his life utterly "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable." Just why he didn't know. But it was.

He wasn't getting any fun, and it was fun that he wanted. He longed to get away from his prosy, dull surroundings and to go out into the world in quest of change and adventure.

As it happened, his father frequently brought home from his shop a considerable sum of money and kept it in a cash-box over night until he could deposit it in the bank the following morning. Knowing of this parental habit, it was an easy matter for the boy to force the box, extract its contents, and steal out of the house without arousing his parents. Taking an early morning train to New York, he was able to reach the city and lose himself before any pursuit could be started.

"How long have you actually been here?" I asked him. "You told the ticket-agent that you had been amusing yourself in New York for a fortnight—was that true?"

"No!" was the sad and rather plaintive reply. "I really haven't seen anything of New York at all. I only left home yesterday morning."

"Now, Frank," I said, "tell me why you took the name of Leonard Kenneth, and what put the idea of Palm Beach into your head. I want very much to understand all about it."

The boy hesitated for a moment and then braced himself as if for an unpleasant ordeal. The thought evidently flashed through his mind that having already told so much, he might as well explain the rest, and get the painful and mortifying business over once and for all.

"Because I wanted to get to know the proper kind of people. I didn't think Frank Brown sounded just right, and thought Leonard Kenneth would help me much better."

For a moment I lost power of utterance, then gathering myself together, in a faint voice I asked him to proceed. "How about Palm Beach?" I inquired.

"Just for the same reason," he answered. "I read that if you wanted to get to know people and break into society the best place to begin is at Palm Beach. You can make a start there and after that the rest is easy."

"What on earth have you been read-

ing?" I exclaimed in wonder. "Did you get this from some book?"

"No! judge," he replied bashfully. "I got it from the society columns!"

At this point some of my readers may conclude that I have departed entirely from a recital of actual facts and that I have evolved a fictitious colloquy for the purpose of pointing a moral or adorning a tale. Let me assure them that this conversation (or, to employ the legal phrase, this examination) actually took place in the Children's Court of the City of New York a short time ago, and that the language used is reproduced practically verbatim.

The boy's explanation of his impulse and motive was illuminating, to say the least. For once the much-abused and much-condemned movies and dime novels were relegated into the background as the contributing causes of juvenile delinquency. A newcomer had asserted itself and, *mirabile dictu*, it turned out to be that staid, respectable, and immaculate friend of the reading public—the society column.

"Tell me, Frank," I said as our interview drew to an end. "How much of your father's money have you spent altogether?"

"About two hundred dollars," he replied.

"And for what did you spend it?" I inquired.

"The ticket to New York, the hotel, a couple of shows and clothes," was his rejoinder.

"Did you really buy a great deal for your campaign at Palm Beach?" I asked with a real feeling of sympathy as I gazed on the serio-comic figure in front of me.

"Oh, yes," he answered. "I bought this suit, this bag, these shoes, and this hat."

"How about that silk shirt and tie?"

"I got those too."

"Collars?"

"One besides the one I have on."

"Any other shirts, underclothes, or socks?"

"No, I didn't think I would need any."

"Not even a bathing suit?"

"Gosh, what do you know about that! I just clean forgot it."

A few hours after Frank's appearance in the court his father arrived to reclaim his erring offspring. To my satisfaction and delight and entirely contrary to my expectations, I found him to be a man of broad sympathy and discernment. At the outset, he sought to take the blame of the whole occurrence upon himself and insisted that his was the fault in permitting his business interests to engross his whole time and attention, with the consequent neglect of his own son. He acknowledged that he had failed to provide the boy with proper amusements and outlets for his activities, but promised that if I would allow him to return home everything would be different in the future. He had already thought out and prepared for submission to me a tentative programme for his son's occupation and training. It embraced a sojourn for the boy at an attractive summer camp, a short return to his own home where he would be given every opportunity to meet and mingle with desirable friends, and then a final placement in an excellent boarding-school.

Frank's joy at his father's forgiveness and their mutual desire to atone for past differences convinced me that the boy's problems had been solved wisely and sanely. In turning him over to his father I felt sure he would be watched over and guided with good judgment and loving sympathy.

So it was that I said good-by to Frank Brown. But in my heart I said good-by to some one else—Leonard Kenneth from the land of make-believe.

Ah, Leonard, you were very young and very foolish and very crude. Yet there are many grown-ups whose reasoning is as primitive as yours. They too seek a place in Vanity Fair, and to gain it they are willing to do things beyond your ken and comprehension. You are forgiven, because of your youth and because your dreams were so ephemeral. But for those who err with deliberation and understanding the final reckoning may not be as easy as yours.

It is not only among the boys that we find this intense yearning for change and adventure. In the pursuit of happiness many a girl will dare much and will take

no end of risks to find diversion from the irksome routine of a monotonous existence.

A certain good woman (whom, for the purpose of this story, we shall call "Mrs. Burns ") was a just mother according to her lights. She was totally devoid of a sense of humor, however, and strangely lacking in tenderness and tact. So it was not to be wondered at that she and her daughter Helen failed to get along and that they had gradually drifted far apart. Had Mrs. Burns only replaced her jeremiads and curtain-lectures with a little kindly common-sense advice, it is doubtful whether Helen ever would have set out on her great adventure, and whether Mrs. Burns ever would have appeared in the Children's Court in the guise of a complainant.

The final break in their domestic relations was brought about by a very trivial thing—very trivial at least in the eyes of Mrs. Burns, but of supreme importance and of vital significance as far as Helen was concerned. For the thing in question was Helen's hair.

As long as she had remained in school Helen had been perfectly satisfied with a coiffure of the plainest style, and had followed her mother's advice in brushing it straight back from her forehead without the slightest attempt to make anything of her "crown of glory." Now that she had graduated from school, however, and was working with salesladies and such, the situation in Helen's opinion was entirely different, and she decided that it was time to make the most of the gifts with which heaven had endowed her. So, one afternoon, with the assistance of some of her new-made friends, she rearranged her locks and tresses in a manner more consistent with the fashion of the present day and then proceeded to her home to dazzle and amaze the unimaginative Mrs. Burns.

The experiment was wholly unsuccessful. There was no question about her mother's amazement, but it was of a different kind than Helen had expected, and it contained no suggestion either of admiration or of pleasure.

"You bad, wicked child!" shrieked Mrs. Burns, almost beside herself as she gazed at her partially transformed and

somewhat modernized offspring. "Whatever do you mean by dolling yourself up like that? You ought to be ashamed of yourself! Go to your room this minute and take out them curls and them frizzes. I won't have no hussy like that in my house. If you won't do things like I like them, you can clear out for good and all."

Her mother's outbreak did not altogether astonish Helen. She had not expected to work this transformation in her appearance without a certain amount of faultfinding and criticism, and so she had looked for something of the kind; but its violence and fury quite staggered her. Without a word she went to her room, and there she sat and thought and thought.

The first conclusion which she arrived at was that her home was an impossible place. True, she had been sometimes at fault herself, but she had never committed any serious wrong and she was not to blame for all the lapses and delinquencies of which her mother continually accused her. If only she could be accorded a little sympathy and a little understanding, everything would be so different! But her mother would never see anything from her point of view, and there would be precious little fun in the future while this state of things continued. Mrs. Burns had told her that if she would not act just as she wanted her to, she could clear out for good and all. Well, it was certain that she couldn't be happy and please her mother at the same time, so undoubtedly the best plan to follow would be to take this advice and leave her uncongenial home forever.

Having settled this much of her programme, the next question was where to go and what to do. As she pondered over this phase of her problem an idea began to formulate in her mind which seemed to offer an attractive solution for all her difficulties. For some time past she had been indulging in an intermittent day-dream, and had pictured herself in fancy as living the life of a girl surrounded by every luxury and comfort. Exactly where she was to obtain the wherewithal to do this her imagination had not precisely figured out, but is it not always understood that wealth incalculable is stored in

every castle in Spain? Why shouldn't she go forth into the great world and live as she had dreamed? Of course, reason and common sense told her that it couldn't last for long, but youth whispered that a day of pleasure was worth a year of drudgery, and that she would find joy and happiness on the rainbow road of adventure.

Unfortunately, Helen lacked the key to the treasure-room of her castle, and as a substitute had only about twenty-five dollars in her little bank—the result of her savings. But twenty-five dollars would permit her to play the game for a day and a night, and after that—well, something would be sure to turn up!

So it was that Helen decided to set out in her quest of adventure. She appeared that evening at the family supper with her hair brushed back in the same old familiar style, and thus quieted the reproaches and fears of the apprehensive Mrs. Burns. The next morning she departed for her work as usual, but had her mother been more suspicious and had she investigated things in Helen's room, she would have discovered one difference, at least, in the customary state of things—the little bank was empty!

After leaving her home Helen went to her place of employment and passed a restless day waiting for the great adventure to begin. She had decided to defer putting her plan into operation until the evening, partly because it suited her purpose better, and partly because she wanted the assistance of her friends in adorning herself for the glorious occasion. She told them all she was going to a party that night, and she wanted them to help her to arrange things. After work was over they again lent their aid in doing up her hair in the most ultra style and in loaning her various additions to her wearing apparel, with the final result that, as one of them put it, she could pass anywhere as a "perfect lady."

At that magic hour when the tired city throws aside its burden of the cares which infest the day and seeks to find surcease from its worries in an evening of enchantment and pleasing relaxation, Helen went out into the great world to turn her day-dream into a living reality.

She proceeded boldly to a large and ex-

pensive hotel and told the clerk at the office a somewhat improbable story. She had just arrived from the West, she said, where she had been engaged as a movie star with a well-known film concern. Her mother had been detained unfortunately in Chicago by some business, but would arrive in a day or two. The reason that she had been compelled to leave her mother and come on to New York in advance was because she had an important engagement with her manager here in the city the next morning. Could she have a room for a day or two until her mother arrived? She would be very glad to pay for it in advance.

Generally it would be impossible for a girl of fifteen to obtain accommodation in a New York hotel of the better sort upon a story of this kind, but in this particular instance the clerk accepted the tale on its face value and assigned her a room.

Her first evening passed off pleasantly enough. A simple meal at a near-by restaurant and a few hours at a moving-picture show were her only indulgences, and she retired to her hotel chamber in an ecstatic frame of mind over the success of her venture. The next morning she treated herself to that height of luxury—a breakfast in bed. Why not?—for every lady of wealth always breakfasts in bed according to the novels which Helen had read. Later on she arose and put in a desultory day wandering around the city, taking in the sights and postponing the disagreeable necessity of finding some employment until fate should have some suggestion to offer.

In the late afternoon, after her return to the hotel from a *matinée* where she had found oblivion from unpleasant reflections on her rather perilous situation, she received some serious news. The manager would like to have her call at the office. Helen wasn't quite sure what it meant. Possibly some one was going to offer her a wonderful job, and thus enable her to continue her little adventure. Possibly it signified something less pleasant. However, the call had to be obeyed, and with a beating heart and a dull premonition of disaster she went in to face the arbiter of her destiny.

It was not so serious after all. The

room clerk whom she found at the desk was kindness itself and merely told her that under the circumstances it would be better for her to go to some woman's hotel and wait there until her mother arrived; that it was against the rules of the hotel to take in a girl as young as she without a relative and that a mistake had been made in admitting her the night before. He handed her the address of an appropriate stopping-place and added that her mother could settle the balance of her bill later on.

The amazing thing about his action was that he didn't seem to question the veracity of the girl's story in the slightest and took no steps to investigate her situation or to consult with any organization or authority concerning her care. He seemed to think that his full duty had been discharged by turning her out of her present lodging and referring her to another hotel of the sort maintained exclusively for women.

Helen received his edict with a feeling of disappointment and depression. The process of disillusionment had begun and already her castles were beginning to dissolve into the thin air. Of course, she could continue to play the game for a little while longer in the hope that something would turn up to stave off the impending crisis. After all, she had a little of her twenty-five dollars left and moving from one hotel to another was not a difficult matter. In any event she decided it would be better to prolong her experiment and give fate the chance to justify itself than to return to her home and her former life of discontent and unhappiness.

As she was about to depart from the hotel, one of the bell-boys who had been standing around the office-desk and who apparently had heard some of her conversation with the clerk came up to her and handed her a card. It bore the name of another hostelry, very different in character from the one she had been stopping at or the one to which she had been recommended by the clerk. The bell-boy assured her that she would find it pleasanter in every way than the place which the room-clerk had spoken of.

Helen was delighted with this little attention and instantly decided to follow the youth's suggestion. On her arrival

at this establishment, which she found far less imposing than the place which she had just left, she was asked no questions whatever, and was only required to sign the register and make a small deposit for her lodging. This made a serious hole in the remnant of her funds and when she retired to her room and took stock of what remained, she realized there must soon come a change in her fortunes either for better or for worse.

Poor little Helen! Plays such as yours cannot go on forever and already inexorable fate is signalling impatiently for the drop of the final curtain. Destiny has no time to lose in amusing itself with day-dreams and every adventure must soon come to an end. A few more hours and you will learn how transitory and unreal were the pleasures and diversions which you had thought to find.

In default of anything else to do that evening, Helen sat herself in the hotel lobby and watched the guests come and go. She had not been there long before a man (the inevitable man!) came up and started to converse with her. He asked if she were not a stranger in the city and if he could be of any service to her. It was pleasant to have some one to talk to after twenty-four hours of loneliness, and Helen found the stranger such an agreeable companion that when he suggested that she should accompany him to a show she accepted his invitation with alacrity.

It was this visit to the theatre, after all, which brought Helen to her senses. Certain things were said and certain things were done which awakened her to a keen sense of her perilous position. Whatever may have been her fondness for amusement and pleasure, she at least had a conscience and a vivid appreciation of the fundamental difference between right and wrong. She flatly declined an invitation from her new-found friend for supper and parted company from him immediately after leaving the theatre. Accosting the first police officer she could find, she told him that she was without a home, and asked where she could find suitable lodging for the night until she could communicate with her relatives. The officer asked her how old she was, and when she told him that she was but

fifteen he took her himself to the Shelter of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

The meeting the next morning in the Children's Court between Mrs. Burns and Helen was not altogether cordial or reassuring. Mrs. Burns was not at all sure that she wanted to have Helen come home and Helen was not at all sure that she wanted to go there. As it was necessary in any event to make a full investigation of the case and to hold Helen until her story could be checked up and verified, it was quite apparent that a week's separation could do no harm and would give them both a chance to think over the situation calmly and dispassionately.

When Helen came again before me a week later, I found both her and her mother in a more conciliating mood. Mrs. Burns said that she would be willing to forgive Helen, provided that she would give up her nonsense and settle down to hard work, while Helen graciously consented to return home on condition that her mother afforded her a trifle more liberty and amusement. She handed me a little note embodying the terms upon which she would sign a treaty of peace:

"DEAR JUDGE:

"I want to be a good girl and I am willing to go home with my mother. But I want you to tell her that I can go out to dances and shows once in a while, and that I can go around with my friends more.

Yours truly,

HELEN BURNS.

"P. S. I think one dance every week will be enough."

All these terms and conditions only added to the complexity of the situation. What we aimed at was a full reconciliation between Mrs. Burns and her daughter, based upon mutual trust and understanding, not a negotiated compromise or an armistice!

Again I put the case over for a week and used the time in trying to make each one of them see the fairness of the other's point of view.

To Mrs. Burns I pointed out that she had been largely responsible herself in bringing on the crisis, and that, in de-

priving Helen of reasonable liberty and amusements, she had forced her to go outside her home to search for pleasure. I assured her that Helen was a good girl at the bottom, and that if she would handle her with a little more tact and intelligence she would find her a loving daughter and a staff of comfort.

To Helen I appealed for greater consideration of her mother's wishes and more respect for her judgment. I told her that I was sure that if she would remain at home her mother would give her every liberty consistent with her own best interests. I talked of her moral obligations and responsibilities, saying that I knew she was no shirker and too fine a character to be swerved from the path of duty by petty irritations and annoyances.

In the end we succeeded in bringing them together, and the broken bond between mother and daughter was welded together again, never, we trust, to be broken in the future.

Into New York and out of New York every twenty-four hours there wend two curious processions moving in opposite directions.

The incoming host includes children from all parts of the country seeking change and adventure. Some come to see the sights of the great city, some to find employment, some to avoid the dull routine and drudgery of unsympathetic homes. They travel by passenger trains, they beg rides in automobiles and trucks over hundreds of miles of road, they stow themselves away in freight-cars and steamers, and sometimes they walk. There are little nomads who have already tramped half the world's width, and there are boys who have left their sheltered homes for the first time because of some foolish resentment or fancied wrong. There are girls who wish to become actresses, and who believe that their mere arrival in New York will suffice to win them a place on the stage or in the films. Some of the children come to find amusement and distraction, while others seriously seek new openings and happier vocations. To all of them the end of the rainbow rests on the streets of New York and there the pot of gold is to be found.

The outgoing throng is, in its way, every bit as queer and extraordinary. Some are prompted to leave the city by a sincere desire to try country life for a change, while others are impelled by a craving for adventure and a spirit of wanderlust which they themselves can scarcely fathom or explain. Big boys and little boys armed to the teeth with revolvers, bowie knives, and even toy pistols, laden down with camp impedimenta of a weird kind and frequently equipped with a few odd sombreros and breeches, strike boldly out for the boundless West, there to hunt buffalo, fight Indians, and mingle in friendship with cowboys. One girl is leaving home at the suggestion of an older friend to tour the country towns with a cheap burlesque show; while another, all unbeknownst to her family, is going off for a little trip with a "gentleman friend" whom she met at a party a few days ago. Sometimes the girls and boys indulge in romantic dreams and travel in pairs, but happily this does not often happen. All these children are following a will-o'-the-wisp and it flickers up and down, leading them out from the dull and dreary streets of the city into the boundless country of illusion and heart's desire which lies beyond.

Every twenty-four hours, within the confines of the city itself, another form of nomadism also manifests itself. Girls and boys leave their homes with no apparent wish to travel far afield, but simply because they seek a change and are restless and unhappy, due either to their own transgressions or to the faults of their parents. Some are actuated by fear, some by resentment, and some by mere love of adventure. This girl has stayed out at a dance too late and fears to face her mother in the early hours of the morning. That boy has played truant from school and fooled around the streets all evening with undesirable companions; no wonder that he is ashamed to return home and prefers to sleep in a vacant hallway. Here are some children who have grown weary of being continually beaten and "hollered at" as they put it; can we blame them for running away from their brutal parents and seeking some more sympathetic refuge elsewhere?

Most of these little wanderers and fugitives do not get very far in their travels or with their plans. They are picked up in the city and out of the city by the authorities and social workers, and the wires between our "missing persons' bureau" and the police departments of other towns are kept hot with messages concerning the "lost and found."

Practically all of them find their way sooner or later into the Children's Court, and there we seek to understand their troubles, fathom their motives, and help to solve their problems. In nine cases out of ten the wisest solution is to return these children to their own homes, to which they usually are glad to go back, repentant of their follies and overjoyed at being forgiven. But in some instances we find that they had more than sufficient cause to leave their unhappy surroundings and to seek refuge in alien places. For such as these new homes must be found and new foundations constructed, so that they may have the chance of living normally, cleanly, and happily.

There is nothing more absorbing and fascinating than to get at the view-point of these children, to listen to their stories, and to discover the underlying reasons for their actions. By the skill with which we diagnose their maladies, by the treatment we accord them, by the confidence and trust with which we inspire them, it lies with us to mar or mend their future lives. It is a heavy responsibility—but a glorious privilege.

Once upon a time there was a wicked fairy who lived in a palace at the bottom of a sea, and whose name was Fata Morgana. One of her chief amusements was to deceive people and lure them on to destruction by various tricks and devices. The chroniclers would have us believe that she came to an evil end many centuries ago, but some mariners aver that she still lives and sends forth upon the face of the waters a strange mirage to bewitch sailors and lead their ships to disaster. Can it be that Fata Morgana has found an incarnation in the New World and is plying once more a variation of her old vocation by luring children into danger by false dreams and illusions? If so, old Fata Morgana must be exor-

cised and driven out. And what agency is stronger and better able to destroy her spell than that of the home? Not the home which is akin to a prison-house, nor even that which merely offers a shelter and provides a refuge, but the good old-fashioned home which binds together each and every member in bonds of loving sympathy and endeavor, which is revered as the temple of all they hold most dear, and which stands out in this dreary, disappointing world of ours as the very foundation of decency and civilization itself, the one thing bright.

THE WINGED SOUL

By Dabney Horton

ON wings I went from earth. On wings
Must I each further year return.
Just at the turning of the Spring,
Shall I flit back to France to learn
If the Cardinals bloom as red for me
Around the Fount of the Medici.

As a hawk I may drop from out the blue,
Diving from distant skies, much higher
Than ever my able war-plane flew;
And rest a moment on some tall spire
Above the steep crannies of Notre Dame,
Where the pigeons murmur their morning psalm.

If some black-froaked raven haunts
Your flowering, boulevard balcony,
Cast him not hence; perchance he wants
The remembered vision again to see;
The distant towers of Sacré Cœur
Agleam in the sun through the leafy blur.

Mayhap, such humble flight I'll take
As sparrow, or bat, whose nervous wing
Divines Night's secrets. For my sake
Cherish each small, late-flying thing,
When the Pont Neuf hangs like an opal chain
Across the dark bosom of the Seine.

Or, if some foolish, wandering bee,
Enticed by the gay roses at your waist,
Hums 'round your head exultantly,
Seek not to crush him in your haste,
Lest it be I, returned to woo,
And know how Paris fares with you.