



THE POINT OF VIEW

LONG ago, in London, when neighborly curiosity had taken us prowling over the then deserted, and terribly untidy, house in Chelsea at whose windows Turner had sat to study his beloved Thames, the caretaker, vainly searching for some claim to pride in her down-at-heels charge, said: "It stands on a lot of land at the back." The delightfully roundabout way of expressing the fact that that tiny slice of a house could claim an unusually long, narrow garden in the rear has clung in my mind these many years.

ented Acres

To-day our summer bungalow, in this smiling township of hills and gentle valleys that takes its name from an English duke, "stands on a lot of land" in all directions: on rolling meadows that dip and fold and find their boundaries in hedges of full-grown trees. All ours, for the time being, for the mere sending to their owner of sundry narrow slips of paper that are not without honor in our own home town.

If a grim New England conscience holds us for its very own in ordinary times, it can, from the mere force of contrast, give us mad holiday whenever we are able to convince ourselves that we "are not in the least responsible." We, who have pursued with truly bitter ruthlessness the stray dandelion in our own home lawn, have lived here rejoicing through a riot of gold. Even the round, fuzzy seed-balls, filled with the saucy determination to spread dandelion propaganda far and wide the minute the wind blows, have shown beautiful in mass to our care-free eyes.

At last, to our really shocked minds, came the conviction: "We are going to miss the dandelions when they go." Miss them indeed! Nature rampant allows very little to be missed in her pageant of the months. Remember pleasantly is much more like her motto. The dandelion plants are long since buried beneath waving grasses, and tall reckless weeds, such as have caused endless sorrow in our strawberry-beds of old, wave triumphant, crowned by joyous bobolink or goldfinch.

Some day, we understand, an enterprising neighbor farmer is to cut and gather in our

hay, and we listen speculatively to the rattle and drone of the machines that are cutting other peoples' fields. Were these acres our very own we should have to worry about this particular crop, for it is actually ripening on the stalk. As it is we feast our eyes on the waving, shimmering grasses, marveling that they can take on such wonderful tones of palest yellow, bronze, and mauve, wondering vaguely, too, why we have never seen it so beautiful before, and then coming up short against the chuckling conviction that a conscientious devotion to full barns, and the remorseless routine of times and seasons, have never before permitted us this luxury of overripe meadows.

For luxury it surely is, this sitting for a season with folded hands watching the changing lights with no sharper reminder of the passing days than the gradual dying away of the bobolink's song, no graver anxiety than the safe launching of mother robin's third brood into the wide world.

There is no question but that idle acres make a bird paradise. They are our time-pieces, these feathered friends who so firmly believe themselves to be the true owners of our surrounding fields and woods. Like the church-bells of Europe of old they regulate our days, from the matins of the swallows on the ridge-pole to the vespers of the entire congregation that gathers on tree and bush and telegraph wire to watch the setting sun.

These same birds have taught us many a lesson in careless ease throughout the summer; for the dead trees, that every dictate of thrift and tidiness should have long since gathered into the capacious wood-shed, are their favorite resting-places; and the gaunt frame of the windmill, now dismantled, is their tower of babel. On that lofty vantage-point have assembled successive congresses of starlings and robins shrewdly estimating—and possibly parcelling out—the crop of choke-cherries in our hedge-rows, and planning to return when they shall be ripe.

The berries on the tangled woodbine over the deep piazza do not interest these hardy adventurers. These are reserved for the gentler bluebirds, who watch their slow ripening with an appraising eye. There is

no question but that if any one were searching for an emblem to express the utter calm of an idle summer he need go no farther than the bluebird. No other bunch of feathers seems so capable of dumpish relaxation, no other eye so full of childlike trust, so willing to take fate as it comes, so wholly averse to "stirring things up."

"Bluebirds for happiness." No one can question that, for what can be happier than sheer content? However, for my own present fancy I should like to amplify M. Maeterlinck's taking phrase. To us in the midst of our rented acres the bluebirds this summer have not only stood for happiness, but they have constantly showed us just how to find it for ourselves. Their text has been unchanging, their preaching constant: for this summer, at least, we must be consistently idle, content to sit for hours at a time with our backs against trees just looking at the wonderful rippling line of our surrounding hills, strengthening our eyes with gracious distances, resting them with masses of simple color; or again, lying beneath the shelter of the tree-studded hedges, so close to the ground that the very daisies, and their neighbors the heavy-headed grasses, have formed our near horizon against the blue of an all-enfolding sky.

If we have had moments when the old care-taking instincts have returned, when it has seemed a moral necessity that some hedge-row should be trimmed, some neglected fruit-tree pruned, or some straggling vine trained back to place, there has always come a flash of blue wings, a sudden but complete settling of a bunch of feathers on some near-by branch, and the throaty contralto call of "Cheeri-o, cheer-i-o," which, freely translated, means:

"Sit still a bit,
You have been busy in the past,
You may be very busy in the future,
But for now
Just rest."

Lyra
Sacra

FAR be it from me to become a religious controversialist; indeed, in one respect I resemble King Ahab: he feared Elijah, and therefore "went softly." I fear and honor the church; hence my humility is genuine and profound. But meekly I am going to suggest that something is wrong with our hymnology. Our hymnals are not what we have a right to expect them to be.

No man loves better than I those sacred lyrics which have sung themselves out of and into the yearning great heart of the race. The "Rock of Ages," the "Jesus, Lover of My Soul," the "Lead, Kindly Light," the "In the Cross of Christ I Glory," the "Calm on the Listening Ear of Night"—these and scores of others of the same elevated type are among the precious treasures of our anthology. The service of these to humanity can never be reckoned. They are a credit to man at his best; and, what is far higher commendation, they appear (as far as we can judge) to be not unworthy of the Creator whom they praise. But our hymn-books, with all their revising, contain too many namby-pamby pieces—too many lyrics which, to put the matter mildly, are an insult to the native wild intelligence of the human heart and mind:

"Men build and plan, but the soul of Man,
Coming with haughty eyes to scan,
Feels richer, wilder need."

Let us examine at random a few of these paltry hymns for the purpose of ascertaining whether they are really worthy to be used to worship God. The number, though year by year commendably reduced, is still too great; and there are many which express little more than familiar and offensive adulation. Observe these lines:

"So, within thy palace gate,
We shall praise, on golden strings,
Thee, the only potentate."

This is fulsome praise; not worship, not adoration. Certain hymnners take vast liberties; for example, they sometimes charge God with interfering with those great laws which he himself established:

"Thy hand in autumn richly pours
Through all our coasts redundant stores;
And winters, softened by Thy care,
No more the face of horror wear."

It may be contended that a hymnal is for the use of a variety of people; that in it intellectuals and what Shakespeare (not I) calls "the rabblement" may find expressed their thoughts. But from this opinion I dissent. No man, whatever his birth or station, ought to be told that verses, apparently written by invalids for mental ruins, are hymns for him to sing. Besides, the really great and authentic hymns appeal to all hearts. Hymn-writers should consider that anything that comes from a sound heart goes to most hearts naturally and di-