

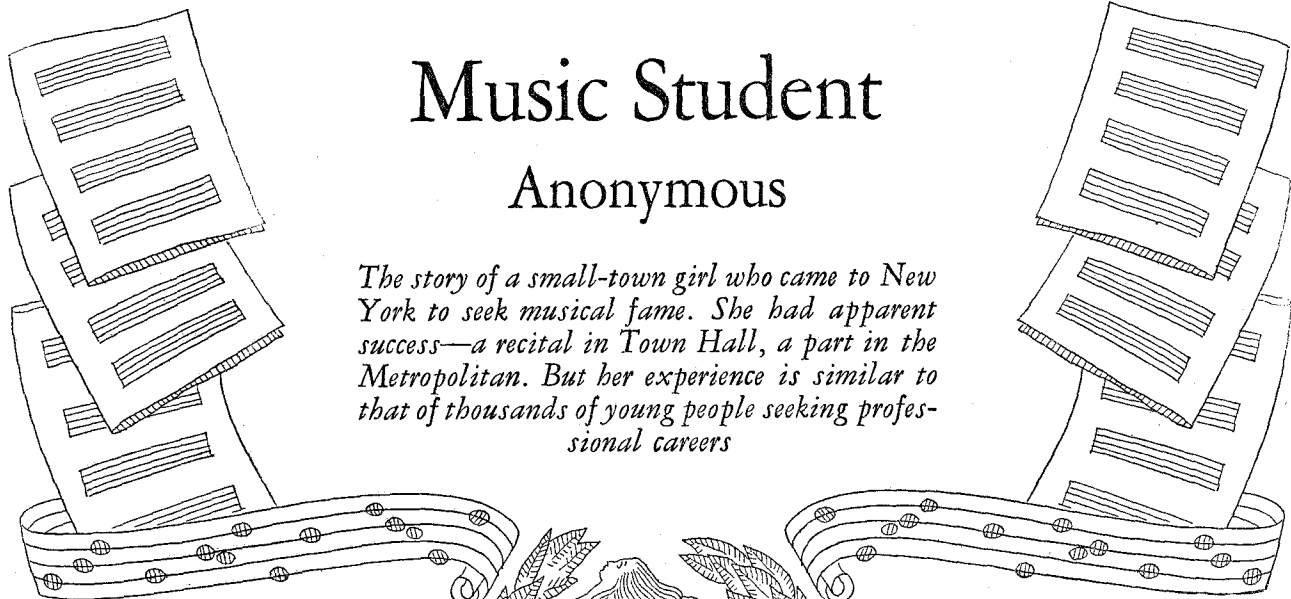
# LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES



TRUE TALES OF  
LIFE AROUND US

## Music Student Anonymous

*The story of a small-town girl who came to New York to seek musical fame. She had apparent success—a recital in Town Hall, a part in the Metropolitan. But her experience is similar to that of thousands of young people seeking professional careers*




I AM a music student in New York City—one of several thousand who have come here from all parts of the United States, attracted by this glamorous city.

Here are renowned teachers, great singers, innumerable concerts, and opera. *Opera*: the Metropolitan. That is the golden lure that haunts the waking dreams of every young singer in the country.

I have been here for five years—years of agitated hopes, wasting ambitions, heart-breaking delays, corroding disillusionment, and moral disorganization.

My story is not an exceptional one. It is the story of almost any one of the army of music students which supports expensive studios, and clutters the offices of managers in Manhattan. It is an exceptional story only in that I am more gifted, more musical than most. I have given a recital at Town Hall, my picture has been in the rotogravures, and I have sung at the Metropolitan Opera House. Told in simple outlines this sounds like success. To the people at home it is a story of glittering arrival. My home town of Waverly in a mid-west State is proud of me.

It is precisely the sort of experience which, told in a publicity story in a music journal, is read by more thousands of music students, and serves to



swell that number of aspirants who annually besiege America's capital of art.

Five years! Study with famous teachers, member of three opera companies, one of them the Metropolitan itself, a New York recital. But—I am still a music-student, haunting singing studios, annoying managers and producers. I live in an eight-dollar room and eat in cafeterias. Sometimes, though not often, I have been hungry.

What went wrong? Why was I not a success? It is a simple enough story, and, as I said, not an exceptional one.

I was reared in Waverly, a small college town. My home was the comfortable, moderately prosperous one of the average American family. My mother was ambitious for me. She often spoke of having "given up her music" in favor of early marriage. She always

sounded a bit regretful, and there was the implication that I would be prevented from making a similar mistake. My father was indulgent.

I studied piano from the age of six and "graduated" at the Waverly Women's College with a degree of Bachelor of Music. During the last two years in college it was discovered that I "had a voice." The teacher of singing at the college was a good one. He had common sense. He never encouraged me to undertake a singing career. My mother and father did that, and my well-meaning friends.

I sang in the Presbyterian choir, I shone at music clubs, and my recital at school had all the trappings of a major musical event.

My voice was a clear, rather fragile coloratura. I was really musical, and intelligent. Every one said I should go far . . . "why, look at Marion Talley." I did look at Marion Talley. At that time every young singer in America was looking at Marion Talley.

The spring of my graduation, Madame Sabrini, a world-famous singer, appeared at Fall City, twenty-five miles away. I heard her and was enchanted. My teacher arranged for me to sing for Sabrini the morning after her concert.

Sabrini was sweet and amiable. It was her business in life to please every-

body. She was agreeably complimentary, praised my accuracy of pitch and my phrasing. "Of course, you are very young. You must study."

"Could I ever sing in opera?" I asked breathlessly.

Madame Sabrini spread her hands. "Why not? Who can say? It is a pretty voice and you are musical. You are also a pretty girl. Many singers have made great successes on less."

I think that settled it.

In September I left for New York. My departure had the air of a triumphant march upon an already capitulated stronghold.

Madame Sabrini had told me to come and see her if I came to New York. I wrote her at once on arrival. By extraordinary chance she was in town. She was less genial, more matter-of-fact than when I had seen her in Fall City.

"Where are you going to live? With whom will you study? Have you money enough to study here?" She bombarded me with questions. I had no definite plans. I had a list of teachers who advertised in music journals. She swept it aside contemptuously. "Why don't you go to the American Endowment?"

"What is that?" It sounded like charity.

"It is a new endowed school, with some very fine teachers. You will sing for them, if they like you, they will undertake your education, and it costs you nothing. I will give you a letter to the chief examiner."

I went to see Mr. Roger Forsyth, the "chief examiner" as Sabrini called him. That interview should have been a decisive turning point in my life, but it was not.

The American Endowment was housed in a magnificent building. I had never seen anything so sumptuous, even in the movies. I was assailed with a burning desire to be accepted by the American Endowment.

Mr. Forsyth received me at once, and settled back in his chair to talk. He seemed to have all the time in the world. He asked me what I wished to do, and why. I explained. He listened gravely. Not by a flicker of an eye-lash did he betray the least amusement. He heard me sing several songs.

"Now," he said, "let's talk it over."

It didn't sound too encouraging, and I turned cold inside. I felt that I could-

n't bear to be refused entrance to this magnificent place. Mr. Forsyth looked at me for a long moment before he spoke. He was a curiously impersonal man.

"You have a nice voice," he said. I breathed again, though not for long. "But not an important one."

He looked out of the window and I had the feeling that he was repeating something he had said many times before. There was just that hint of weariness in his tone.

"As I said, you have a pretty voice, but, it is not an important voice. You've had a good teacher, and heaven knows that's rare enough. I'm sure every one in—" he glanced at my letter on his desk—"in Waverly likes you and likes to hear you sing. And I can assure you, my child, that you'll never have any pleasanter success than just that. Now, why don't you stay in New York this winter, have some lessons with a good teacher, hear concerts, go to the opera, and then—"

"Go back home?" I broke in.

"Exactly. You'll be happy there. You can sing for your friends, and—"

"Am I no better than that?" I asked bitterly.

Again he studied me before answering, and I saw that his eyes were kind.

"No," he said, "you are really no better than that."

"Are you a singing teacher, Mr. Forsyth?"

He laughed. "I follow your reasoning—perfectly. No: Heaven forbid. I'm simply a musician."

"But Madame Sabrini said—"

"Yes. I know. Do you know how many girls she has sent in here? At least forty from her last tour. Sabrini! What that woman doesn't know about singing! She is always off pitch, and doesn't know it. She has no taste—she's a circus performer. And she goes about encouraging all sorts of silly people to study for opera. I beg your pardon, I don't mean you. You've some legitimate reason for singing."

"Well, have I no chance here?"

He must have seen my hideous disappointment for he hesitated. "I'm afraid you haven't much, but I'll tell you what we'll do. If you want to sing for the jury, you may do so, but I can't encourage it. They're all rather hard-boiled. They're looking for big talent. We're under orders to find geniuses. There's an idea abroad in this

Endowment that the woods are full of geniuses. I haven't seen any yet, but doubtless they exist. The women's clubs say so. But you're not a genius. However, come along and sing. It won't do any harm. Will you promise to come in and see me afterward?"

I promised.

I need not relate details of that examination. Hundreds and hundreds of music students are familiar with them. From the waiting-room I heard a number of candidates sing before I did. My heart sank. They sounded like great singers to me. When I faced the jury my knees shook a little but I was calm. Mr. Forsyth was at the table with the jury.

"What will you sing?" he asked.

I named the *aria*.

"Very well."

I had sung through only three lines when a pencil tapped sharply on the table.

"Try something else."

I gave the accompanist another *aria*. This time I finished a page, and the pencil tapped again.

"Thank you very much."

And I was outside the American Endowment.

The next day I went to see Mr. Forsyth.

"What are you going to do now?" he asked.

"Stay here and study, if you'll recommend a teacher."

"I can't suggest a teacher for you."

"I thought maybe some of our friends in the musical world—"

"I'm an official of the American Endowment; I have no friends in the musical world." His tone was dry, but amused.

"I don't know where to go, Mr. Forsyth."

"Of course you don't. No student does. They pick out the biggest advertisers, usually."

"Is that best?"

"It is not. Look here. This is breaking all rules. This organization doesn't recommend teachers. But here's a name and address. You never heard of the man. He has a studio uptown—unfashionable street. He's a good teacher and won't over-charge you. Now be sensible and don't let New York go to your head."

I thanked him and went away, but not to the teacher he recommended. I

met a number of students at the club where I was staying. They hooted at an unknown name. In the end I followed their advice and went to Madame Cecil.

Madame Marie Cecil carried full-page advertisements in all music journals. She listed among her pupils many of the biggest opera stars. Her beautifully appointed studio was crowded with signed photographs of musical celebrities. She had had a brilliant operatic career. Her lesson prices were forty dollars per hour. I sang for her.

"You have a very fine voice. Not a big voice, yet, but big enough. The quality is very fine, very fine indeed. You should make an important career. I shall be happy to teach you."

"But I don't know, Madame, if I can afford—"

"You will have to talk that over with my secretary." Her voice, as she said this, was gentle, but her eyes were icy.

I arranged finally to have two ten-minute lessons each week, at a slight advance on the regular rate. I felt that I could not but profit from the teacher of so many great stars. Later I discovered that most of them did not actually study with her. They perhaps went over this or that rôle or concert program with her (for Cecil was a good musician) paying with enthusiastically autographed photographs and permission to use their names.

I studied with Madame Cecil for a year and a half. It cost me much more than I had anticipated. I was constantly being sent to coaches and assistants for special work. Madame Cecil received half of all such fees. I did not know this until much later when I worked part-time as Madame's secretary.

My father cheerfully paid for my study but I knew it was pressing him hard.

It took a year and a half for me to discover that Madame Cecil was not a good teacher. She was a good musician, but she handled voices carelessly and unskilfully. Being a born showman she could create something quickly that looked like a result, but it was unsound, and it damaged voices beyond repair.

By this time I knew my way about. I decided to try for musical comedy. I went to the offices of Messrs. Barth and Barth, theatrical producers. After much waiting I sang for Donald Frey, the casting director. Frey was a curious man, known to every singer and

chorus girl in New York. He really knew about singing. And he was courteous, the only courteous individual I ever met in show business. He allowed me to sing through an entire song.

"Um. Not much as a singer. Whose pupil? Cecil's? Yes, of course. Could tell that. I think we can use you for 'A Morning in June.' Ensemble, of course."

"The—the chorus?"

"Yes. See Mr. Day in Room 601. Leave your name and address."

Mr. Day sat with his feet on his desk, his hat on, and a cigar in his mouth. He maintained this attitude.

"'Mornin' in Joon' you say? Good God, how many more? Let's see your legs."

"What?"

"Lift up your dress. Higher . . . higher—you'll do. Barth Theatre Monday morning, nine o'clock."

We rehearsed "A Morning in June" for four weeks without pay. It opened in Newark, but never came to New York. I received sixty dollars for two weeks' performance. My expenses exceeded that sum.

I began on long rounds of producers' offices. I was too big for the Scandals, and too small for the Follies. I visited many studios. In every case I was encouraged. They said I had a fine voice. That with my equipment of musicality and good looks I should go far. Most of them advised daily lessons, which I could not afford. Several of these studios boasted the same comprehensive collection of autographed photographs that so impressively decorated Madame Cecil's house.

Then I went to Mr. Forsyth and told him my story.

"You are the usual type of idiot," he said cheerfully. "So idiotic that maybe you'll be a singer after all. Let's hear you."

I sang.

"It's terrible. Cecil's ruined your quality. Could have told you that. Well, what do you want to do now?"

"I'm thinking of going to Robbins Thayer. He gets jobs for his students."

"H'm. He's good enough, if he tries. But he concentrates on a few good pupils and lets the others slide. Watch your step in his studio. It hasn't the best reputation in town."

"I can take care of myself."

"I hope so. But you don't look as if you could. You look ten years older. Why don't you go home?"

"I can't. I've got to do something first. They'd be so disappointed."

"Well, let me know how you get on with Thayer."

I promised that I would, but I never saw Mr. Forsyth again.

I began work with Robbins Thayer. He was a good teacher. The atmosphere of his establishment was wholly commercial, but he produced fair singers. Most of his efforts were concentrated on a few promising students. I was sophisticated enough by this time to understand the diamond bracelets that many of these girls wore. Two or three had limousines and lived in the fashionable East Sixties. They had daily lessons and worked with coaches. A number of them paid as much as five or six hundred dollars a week to Thayer and his assistants. I believe I am not overstating the case when I say that Mr. Thayer, like a number of other teachers, made it convenient for his better-looking pupils to meet wealthy men who were ready enough to back a career, for a consideration that is too often paid. Sometimes these careers succeed; oftener there are only diamond bracelets.

I knew that Thayer took some pupils on contract. This was a signed agreement covering a period of five years. The contract stipulated "all the lessons the pupil required during this period" and in return Thayer was to be paid 10 per cent of all earnings the second year; 20 the third, 30 the fourth, and 40 per cent of the fifth. Several successful pupils brought suit to break these contracts. I asked for one and was refused.

Thayer worked conscientiously with me. I paid exorbitant prices which meant long intervals between lessons. I sang in the choruses of various shows, and in between studied languages at the Berlitz school.

Then came my first operatic opportunity. A small opera company was to have a season in Montreal. Thayer had me sing for Minotti, manager of the Minotti Grand Opera Company. I was accepted and I was to be paid one hundred dollars each for three performances.

The Waverly papers head-lined my entrance into opera!

I sang one performance in Montreal—the rôle of Siebel in *Faust*, a rôle totally unsuited to my voice. The company failed after one week and I was

never paid. My operatic début cost me the extra lessons, my fare to Montreal, and a week's hotel bill. I had to wire home for money to get back to New York.

Then I was engaged for the Italian Grand Opera Company of New York, this time to sing Lucia and Violetta. Thayer said since it was a New York appearance and the rôles were good I should be willing to sing for nothing. I agreed. A week before the opening my rôles were bought by Glorietta Ysette, the French mistress of a stock broker. Her "protector" bought several thousand dollars' worth of tickets for her performances. It must be said that she sang pretty well.

By this time I could no longer afford Thayer's prices. I stopped lessons and hunted for work. I sang a few times in picture theaters. Twice I got these jobs, not because I sang well, but because my figure was good enough to appear in, or out of, an almost invisible bathing suit. I was engaged for a night club, but I would not "mingle" with the patrons as the manager euphoniously expressed it, and I was dismissed.

The money I received from home was not enough to support me but they did not know that. I discovered the cheapest places to eat. I had a room, four floors up, no elevator. (The bath was on the floor below.) I bought clothes in a downtown outlet shop until I learned the error of this.

I was now the typical professional student. I looked up the teacher Mr. Forsyth had recommended. I found a shabby studio and a shabby, elderly man. He heard me sing and then he said, "What do you want to know?"

"Why—er—" I was a bit confused. "About my voice—and possibilities."

"The truth?"

"Certainly."

"Well, you probably had a nice voice to begin with, but it is hard and brittle now. It has too much 'edge.' It has been forced far beyond what it can do."

"Could you fix it up?"

"Maybe, in a couple of years, but frankly, I'm not sure that it's worth your while—or mine."

"Oh—I don't believe it's that bad."

"In one way it isn't. Careful work and you could make it commercially usable for a while. You are musical and you have personality. But artistically—"

I went back to job hunting. I skimped on food and bought better clothes. I looked prosperous, but sometimes I had to walk fast past a baker's window.

Finally I went back to Thayer for fortnightly lessons.

It was late in June of that year that Thayer called me on the telephone one night.

"Do you know the Zerbinetta aria?"

"Yes—that is, I did. I haven't sung it for some time."

"How's your high E?"

"OK, I think."

"Come to the studio at nine tomorrow."

Two days later I had an audition at the Metropolitan Opera. I was heard by the Manager, a member of the Board, and two conductors. I understood that the Met. found it needed one or two singers for minor rôles, and Thayer tried me out. To my utter astonishment, and his, I was engaged.

It was not clear what I was to sing, although I was told to prepare several rôles. The salary was barely enough to insure my expenses for the following year. But I was a member of the Metropolitan Opera Company!

Thayer was feverish with plans. He worked furiously all summer and fall. He splurged with his own advertising and I saw my pictures in all the music journals. "Thayer Pupil Engaged for Metropolitan."

Waverly papers had convulsions, and letters from home were keyed high. Waverly was looking at Marion Talley again. So was I.

Then Thayer decided that I should have a Town Hall recital just preceding the Met. season.

"It will give you a dignified start, and when the critics hear you at the Met. they'll remember that you're a good musician and you'll get better treatment."

The Town Hall recital cost six hundred dollars. My father mortgaged his house.

The critics were mild enough. Only one took my work to pieces and lamented the "ill advised and premature appearance."

I awaited with trepidation my first appearance at the Met. It came in February—a part that lasted a trifle less than two minutes.

It was with difficulty that I persuaded my family to suppress a threatened delegation from Waverly. Marion Tal-

ley had had her Kansas City; I should have my Waverly. But I prevented the demonstration.

I was mentioned in only three of the papers and dismissed with a single line in each case. "... must wait to be heard more advantageously." But I was not heard more advantageously. I was not heard at all. It was the only bit assigned me that season, and my contract was not renewed.

Thayer lost interest and I drifted out of the studio.

I am thinking of going this fall to a teacher who advertises "remedial treatment for injured voices."

I said my story is not exceptional. It is not. Only in this—few of the many thousands of students have so much luck. Most of them never get so far as an audition at the Metropolitan. Most of them never have even the outward seeming—the husk—of success.

Perhaps I can say now what was wrong. Students of singing essay a career through personal vanity, through parental pride, and, most of all, through dishonest urging from teachers.

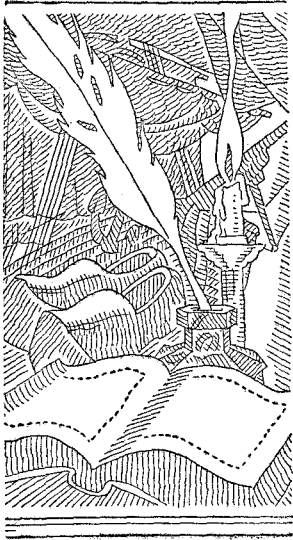
Sabrini's silly encouragement began my course. Roger Forsyth told me the truth. He was the only person, except the obscure teacher he recommended, who ever did. I had every assurance, and reassurance—as long as my lesson fees were forthcoming.

I am only twenty-five today, but I look seven or eight years older, and I feel forty. I hate singing, because I have never had a chance to sing for fun. I haven't enough clothes, and not always enough food. I am too proud to go home and confess failure, though I shall have to do that eventually.

Unless I marry soon, my chances in that direction will diminish rapidly. I do not meet marriageable men in New York, and I'm not sure that I'd be content with the Waverly kind.

—And I am one of many thousands like me. Most of us have alibis. We never "got the breaks." I did, but I wasn't good enough. Only one in tens of thousands is good enough to make a professional career, but all are encouraged, led on and on by ignorant or unscrupulous advisers.

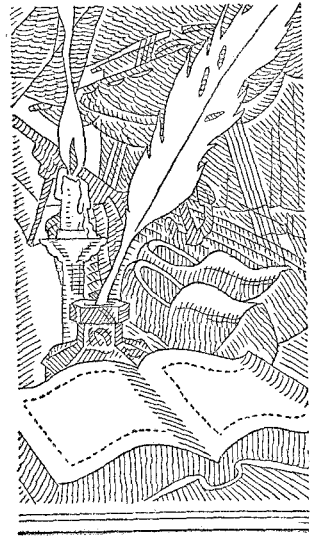
The incoming trains from the North and South and West are this very month bringing a fresh flock of us to New York City.



# AS I LIKE IT

## By William Lyon Phelps

Of Flying and Writing . . . The Wisdom  
of the East . . . Notes on New Novels and  
Murder Stories . . . Readers' Reactions  
. . . Sib, Art, Coffee.



I do not know of any better way to realize and appreciate the age of miracles in which we live, than to read the new book by Anne Morrow Lindbergh, called *North to the Orient*. In comparison with the daily experiences so modestly yet dramatically described in these pages, the events set forth in the Arabian Nights seem crude. When I heard more than fifty years ago Mark Twain tell the small boys and girls who were graduating from the West Middle District School in Hartford that they would see more wonders in the next fifty years than Methuselah saw in his entire 969, he spoke conservatively. For not only do we use inventions that men of medieval and ancient times never dreamed of, we have made such improvements on their own inventions that in smoothness of execution and perfection of technic there is no comparison at all. As I remember it, there was only one magic carpet; and unless you were personally acquainted with the owner and received an invitation, you could no more take advantage of this acceleration in speed than a pauper can circumnavigate the world in a steam yacht. Now the air is full of flying carpets.

When I was a schoolboy studying geography, the entire central portion of Africa was labeled on the maps

### UNEXPLORED

Now there is no portion of the globe inaccessible. Not long ago Mr. and Mrs. Charles Lindbergh left their home in New Jersey, spent some time in Greenland, in central Russia, in equatorial Africa, at the head-waters of the

Amazon in South America, scrutinized the vast jungle between that remoteness and the Caribbean Sea, visited the Islands of the Spanish Main, and returned to their home in New Jersey, and all within the space of a few weeks.

In *North to the Orient*, Anne Morrow Lindbergh gives a day by day account of an aerial journey to Maine, to Hudson Bay, to the Arctic Ocean, to Nome, across the Behring Strait to Siberia, to Japan, to Nanking in China, where both these aviators came nearer losing their lives than at any moment in the entire hazardous enterprise. Having come safely through all the dangers of land and water and ice and fog and air, they were in mortal peril from their fellow creatures. When they were in the thick of threatening humanity near Nanking, how safe at that moment must have seemed the air! They must have been as homesick as wild birds in a cage.

Stevenson used to complain that the people who had adventures did not know how to write; while the art of writing was most fully commanded by those who had nothing to say. We knew that Anne Lindbergh knew how to fly; we knew that she could keep accurately scientific records of flights; we knew she was courageous. But this book reveals for the first time to the public that she can write as well as she can fly. She seems to have an infallible sense of what will be most significant, most interesting in the remembrance of this astounding journey; it is a small book on a vast subject, of which everything relatively unimportant has been omitted. Her literary style is as vivid

as it is unpretentious; she knows how to convey both her observations and her reflections to the reader. We share her experiences with such clarity that it is as if we were passengers.

And I admire her ability to look on the world with eyes of wonder. I rejoice that the continuance of amazing sights has not dimmed her appreciation or caused her to take anything for granted. She herself is the realization of Walt Whitman's dream—a dream that at the time seemed more impossible than most dreams—which he expressed in his poem

### TO THE MAN-OF-WAR BIRD

Far, far at sea,  
After the night's fierce drifts have strewn the  
shore with wrecks,  
With re-appearing day as now so happy and  
serene,  
The rosy and elastic dawn, the flashing sun,  
The limpid spread of air cerulean,  
Thou also re-appearest.

Thou born to match the gale (thou art all  
wings),  
To cope with heaven and earth and sea and  
hurricane,  
Thou ship of air that never furl'st thy sails,  
Days, even weeks untired and onward,  
through spaces, realms gyrating,  
At dusk that look'st on Senegal, at morn  
America,  
That sport'st amid the lightning-flash and  
thunder-cloud,  
In them, in thy experiences, had'st thou my  
soul,  
What joys! what joys were thine!

Even as man has sought out many inventions to make the present age of miracles, even as learning is ever new, —so wisdom is old. We do not go to the book of Genesis for the latest discoveries of modern science; but the book of Proverbs contains more truth