

# Nature's Paths

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## *The Joyousness of Nature*

### **CHAPTER I**

CAN there be anything joyous about nature in January?

Among the most vivid recollections of my childhood in northern Illinois is the way the rabbits played on the snow on a full-moon-lighted night. A little girl who enjoyed lying awake at night to listen to the waves talking on near-by Lake Michigan, or to watch the dance of leaf shadows cast on her wall by the street light, used also to be thrilled at what she saw on certain January nights.

It seems to her that she will never again see such intensely dazzling moonlight until that time when "the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun" in the new earth. (Isaiah 30:26.) The sparkling brilliance of a January full moon was enhanced, of course, by the snow it shone upon, and it was accented by the corresponding depth of the black tracery of tree silhouettes and shadows. Then it seemed to the watcher at the window that all the rabbits in the world met on the expanse of black-hedged white that was last summer's garden.

Talk about ice frolics! No man-planned performances can equal for spontaneous joy and grace the way those rabbits played. Such races! Such leapfrog! Such intricate games of tag! Such pure joy put to motion! When gradually childhood's absorbed curiosity was overcome by the penetration of 55 degrees of frost (25 degrees below zero) into an unheated bedroom and she returned to her blankets, it would be with an awed wonder if a scene so different from daytime was real or a dream. However a scrutiny of the snow the next day showed that the rabbits had been there, and they had played. Since then she has read of woodsmen's observations of such playfulness written on the snow. It intrigues the imagination—not moonlight and roses, but moonlight and rabbits dancing for joy on the snow!

Since then she has seen the wild rabbits playing in the daytime. Once, feeling the need of music and solitude to feed the soul, she spent a long spring Sabbath afternoon in a little country church house, playing the organ, reading, praying, meditating, and watching. She watched the rabbits playing. In the yard, screened from the little-traveled lane by shrubs, perhaps a dozen rabbits gathered. They seemed oblivious of the figure at the window or the sound of the organ. The same joyous games the rabbits of her childhood had played on the snow these Tennessee rabbits played on the grass. Their lighthearted delight did as much as her music to heal her soul disquietude.

Those who are at peace and in harmony with their Creator are happy—January or June. Nature, even in this age, demonstrates that. Fun, thy name is a fat puppy.

Spontaneous joy, thine abode is in a flock of lambs. Ecstasy? See a colt demonstrate it. A Kipling writes of the elephant dance, and a Rutledge of the antics of deer on a South Carolina beach. All wild creatures play, except when murderous man injects fear into the atmosphere.

All Bible references to nature and wild creatures in the future age, when Jesus has returned and created a new heaven and a new earth, are to their joy and their playing. The trees clap their hands when Jesus comes. (Isaiah 55:12.) The mountains and the hills break forth in song. (Same verse.) The skies rejoice, and there is no longer a minor chord in the ocean's song. (Psalms 96:11-13; 98:4-9.) The forests sing. (Isaiah 14:5-8.) The animals all play (Isaiah 11:6-9), even the reptiles. Who would think that such lowly and hated creatures as snakes would play! But friends have reported watching their cat, in the moonlight outside their door, playing with a snake. It was no such "playing" as cat with mouse, but a joyous gamboling, harmless and mutually agreeable. If such playfulness is experienced here, how much will it be increased when there is no more death, therefore no more fear!

Perhaps if we cultivated greater simplicity of trust in our heavenly Father, we might find joy even in the January of life.

## ***The Greatest River***

### **CHAPTER 2**

WHAT is the greatest river in the world? No, it is not the Amazon or the Father of Waters. There is a stream mightier far than they. Its tributaries are more widespread, its sources more sure, its flow more steady and benign than of any river named on the map. Our daily life depends on it more directly than that of the Egyptians on their sacred stream.

No human being has ever traced all the streamlets of this river system or computed the volume of its flow; yet every one of us daily drinks at its brim, though we see it not. And no wise man yet has completely explained the miracle of a river that flows in opposition to gravitation.

The river of sap is the greatest river on earth. It staggers human comprehension even to think of the multiplied millions of tons of water laden with plant food that daily rise from the hidden springs of earth, against gravitation, to the tip alike of the inch-high desert flower and the two-hundred-foot sequoia. Every plant has its juice, every fruit its wine—all rills of the great river. Noiselessly, without eddy or freshet, flood or cataract, this river of life rises from the fountains of the great deep. Outdoing the river of Eden which was parted into four heads, this beneficent tide parts into as many heads as there are leaves on earth—and who has counted the grass blades? And it is no meager rill that flows into the stout walled reservoir plants of and regions. So overflowing is the sap that in some trees, like the Carolina poplar which sheds its leaves long before frost, when the leaves fall, great drops of sap follow them; and we think it raining under the tree under a clear sky.

But the greatest marvel of this greatest river is not its volume but its timing. Moving without ceasing around the torrid middle of the globe, in the temperate zones it ebbs and flows. Before autumn comes, it is receding into its unknown springs. But come February in Tennessee; and some warm morning we become aware that the black and

gray mass of tree silhouettes on the hillside has turned an elusive yellow and orange and maroon. "The sap is rising," we cry in ecstasy. The divine Timekeeper, whose word is pledged that "cold and heat ....shall not cease," has given His inaudible fiat, and His stream is flowing up.

"Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: Thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water:... and the little hills rejoice on every side." Psalm 65:9, 12.

While we wait for the new earth, watered visibly by the pure river of water of life from the throne of God, let us praise the Creator for His River of Life now and join the little hills in joy as their twigs dress themselves in shimmering sap-fed colors before they burgeon into the foliage of summer.

## ***Winds***

### **CHAPTER 3**

WE LIVE at the bottom of an ocean. Some of us have visited the Marine-land Studios in Florida and stood at the glass sides of the great aquariums and watched the procession of life inside. The medium in which the various aquatic creatures pass is transparent—to a degree; it supports their movement; it provides them life-giving chemicals. Not only do sea animals propel themselves through this medium, but many animals move upon the ground beneath it. The water becomes to them an atmosphere.

So we live at the bottom of an ocean. It is transparent to a greater degree than the sea; yet the air may become so filled with vapors or chemicals in suspension as to become practically opaque. It supports the movements of creatures and contrivances that fly. It presses upon the bodies of the living beings that crawl upon its bottom with a weight we endure only when evenly distributed. Like the water, the air will distort the passage of light rays so as to magnify or alter the appearance of objects seen at an angle.

Like the liquid ocean, the gaseous ocean is in motion. Were it not so, life would cease through concentration of poisons—the air would become a dead sea. "All the rivers run into the sea," wrote an ancient scientist, "yet the sea is not full." Why? Because of a circuit of motion: "Unto the place whence the rivers come, thither they return again." Ecclesiastes 1:7. In that circuit the water becomes purified; in the distillation by the sun's heat the liquid drops its load of impurities and becomes pure vapor, to condense into the purest form of water, the rain.

So the air performs its circuits. "The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits." Ecclesiastes 1:6. Into the ocean of air run all the rivers of air from two billion human lungs, from countless myriads of lungs of lower creatures, from the leaves of every plant on earth, from the very pores of the globe itself in the aeration of the soil. Yet the sea of air is not full, because "it whirleth about continually."

Try to imagine what would happen on earth if all winds stopped blowing everywhere for even a few moments. If we use "winds" in the widest sense of air currents of any degree of speed, it is the constant flowing of the air that ventilates the whole world.

As the messengers of the Creator, they go on merciful errands. Even though, since man sold out his kingdom to the usurper Satan, winds often serve the prince of the

power of the air, yet they still obey the higher Sovereign; and to the child of God it is the Majesty of heaven who rides upon the wings of the wind.

## ***Packages***

### **CHAPTER 4**

I ONCE read a perfect definition: "A seed is a plant packed for transportation.

The Creator has many and diverse methods of packaging, labeling, and advertising. Seeds are variously packed for different kinds of transportation. Buds, on the other hand, He packs for storage, fitting each container to the place and hazards of deposit.

Before ever the cold winds and rains and the explosive frosts of winter came upon His trees, shrubs, and perennial plants, He had this spring's leaves and flowers perfectly packed against dampness, freezing, and wind damage. Before the leaves fell last autumn, each one had its successor cradled at its base.

Talk about streamlining to avoid wind resistance and damage! Buds had it before Fisher bodies. Beech buds spend their winters on the tips of slender twigs, stuck right out into the gales. But the sharp-pointed, wind-resistant slimness of beech buds is a delightful sight. Pussy willow flower buds, made chubby by their furry contents, are ranged along stout, sturdy stems as wide as they are. Dogwood buds, which, because they hold both flowers and their surrounding colored bracts, must be big and fat and yet must be at the ends of twigs, are saved from pounding by winter winds by swinging stems instead of the stiff wands of the pussy willows. Willows, the flower buds of which are less obese than the pussies, hang them on swaying boughs. Packages and storage places planned last autumn have functioned all winter till this spring in fulfilling God's primeval promise: "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest . . . shall not cease."

No parachute packing can excel the folding of tiny leaves into their containers. Examine unfolding buds this month and note how the skeletal veins of the leaf supported the pressure of the bud case, the tender flat surfaces of the baby leaf being safe in the internal space of the bud. A bursting buckeye bud will well repay a thoughtful quarter hour of contemplation of divine mechanics. The first Chinese folding-fan or umbrella makers probably studied buds as their models.

Bud beauty feasts souls with observant eye-windows. No society belles look more regal than colorful hickory buds lifting their curved shoulders from their fur-lined satin winter capes. Oak-leaf buds are warmly clothed in royal crimson velvet in that combination of utilitarian service and aesthetic loveliness that characterizes the ways of God.

Delivery time of God's packages beats human "special delivery." Big, furry flower buds, not easily freezable, open early. Maple buds open early and mature their seeds swiftly, so that even though spring storms beat off multitudes of their winged twins, the tough, parchment-like seed coverings achieve for their contents a minimum of damage from cold and wet. Big-boned walnut and hickory buds, the structures of which require great strength to support immense compound leaves, open very late to escape frost damage.

God's name is written on every bursting bud. The labels on His bud-storage boxes are love of beauty, love of life, and perfect functionalism.

## **Nests**

### **CHAPTER 5**

THIS is the season when every male bird is in his gayest apparel and spirits, and is gallantly and tunefully patrolling the fence along the marches of his domestic domain. The poet's bluebird, "shifting his light load of song from post to post" along the fence, is really warning the world of his homestead. In Ontario the cascades of tinkling bobolink notes are rippling along the edges of the fields as the black-plumed knights warily escort passers-by, flitting ahead of them along the fences until the strangers have moved elsewhere. In Tennessee orioles flute from thick-branched trees. Mockingbirds shout and clown on ridgepoles or telephone poles. Sparrows do it less musically, but far more vociferously and belligerently.

Why all this circling of bits of woodland, meadow, or city lawn with song? Nest-building is in progress, or mother birds are already incubating their eggs. Gorgeous Sir Cardinal, blazing in red and black, whistles from the tulip tree in the yard corner, "Pretty! Pretty! Pretty! It's you! It's you! It's you!" Thus he cheers his hard-working mate. His flaming colors appear in muted tones in her costume, and she flits silently to and from the bridal wreath bush in the porch corner. There's a cardinal castle erecting there. Don't think her old man is a lazy windbag because he sits on the treetop and shouts. He is setting up a vocal "No trespassing" sign.

Each mother bird has chosen her nesting site. Perhaps she approved the one father chose when he returned in the earlier migration. Maybe he put straws in several tempting boxes, holes, or tree crotches, sang hopefully around them, and waited for Her to arrive and approve. Maybe she rewarded him with a caress. Or maybe she said he had no architectural taste and was not supporting her in the style to which her father accustomed her, and chose her own site. Perhaps she accepted his gift of building material. Perhaps she raked it out scornfully. Perhaps he brings her a straw while she works, and tries to weave it in, only to be told that his claws are all big toes, and as a nest weaver he is a better orchestra leader. He cheerfully resumes singing, knowing that soon she will be perfectly willing for him to assume half the job of mouth-cramming when the young ones appear.

Birds are marvelously human. Anyone with keen eyes and patience to watch can catch them in many domestic scenes perfectly understandable in gesture and tone.

All bird life at this season centers about the nest. The nest means life, and life calls forth all the instincts of parenthood. A glimpse of the Creator's own fatherhood is in these tiny, feathered bits of life. They seek homes, just as human hearts seek "a country"- "a better country, that is, an heavenly." As the father bird chooses a nesting site, so our Father is preparing for us "a city." As the birds in David's day flew into the tabernacle courtyard and nested in the hollow corners of the altar (Psalm 84:3), so our hearts will be at rest only in "the house of the Lord," where "the loves and sympathies which God Himself has planted in the soul, shall . . . find truest and sweetest exercise.

## **Camel Worms**

### **CHAPTER 6**

A GROUP of neighborhood boys invaded our back yard one pleasant summer forenoon. They were chattering like starlings and examining the ground like robins. My sister came out to see the excitement.

"We're going fishing," they chorused. "We're looking for camel worms for bait. They beat anything."

"Camel worms? What are they?" Adultly astonished.

"Camel worms! Didn't you ever see camel worms?" Boyishly astonished.

No, she hadn't; so they enlightened her. Camel worms lived in holes in the ground and fish ate them. Seeking for connection between fish in water and camel worms in burrows, she watched the boys. Sure enough! In some parts, the back yard was full of holes about the diameter of the tip of her little finger. We had often noticed them and wondered. The boys were armed with leaves of the ubiquitous wild garlic; they thrust these juicy cylinders down the holes; in a few moments they pulled them out triumphantly, and from the end of each dangled a queer grub about an inch long, with the upward bulge near the hind end that gave them their name. They vanished into the boys' tin cans and the search went merrily on.

Camel worms! What are they? Just fish bait to boys. But she traveled to the dictionary and my "bug book." To her amusement she found that camel worms are baby tiger beetles. Camels turn into tigers by growing up. Tiger beetles, the "bug book" said, are "handsome, mostly swift-running beasts of prey." They frequent the shores of bodies of water or woodland trails, watching for other insects to catch with their powerful hook like mandibles ("jaws"). One kind is a satiny brown with black head and neck; another kind is a bright green, with six white dots spaced around the edges of its wing covers—*Cicindela sexguttata*, the six-spotted tiger beetle. Being active at night, they are not easily seen or captured. Specimens of the brown tiger beetle were formerly considered such rarities as to sell for \$15 to \$20 apiece to collectors.

Our back yard yielded quite a harvest of camel worms that would never become twenty-dollar specimens in some bugologist's cabinet. And all because they mistook those juicy tidbits placed in their burrows to be gifts from heaven, when they were the snares of death. The race of two-legged camel worms is not extinct. They mistake the devil's garlic stems for blessings sent from above, and soon find themselves captives in his power.

"I've got to have some fun," says the young man, and he follows the bright lights to find it. "I've taken all I can stand; I've got to forget," cries a brokenhearted one; and she tries to drown bereavement in booze and drowns only her soul. "I'm unendurably lonely," cries a neglected wife. "I've a right to be happy. Why shouldn't I take my pleasure where I can find it?" And she falls for the strange man who is "so kind, and so understanding, and so sympathetic." But he is Satan's most terrible temptation in human form, and a moments pleasure becomes eternal tragedy.

Camel worms need not be pulled out of their burrows. Their holes are deeper than the garlic stems are long. They can get out of the reach of temptation. And their camel-like humps are really defense organs. They are strong projections armed with claws intended to enable them to hold fast to the burrow walls. Human camel worms can

flee from temptation and cling fast to God. But temptation never yet came in a disagreeable form; the devil's garlic tastes good.

## **Storms**

### **CHAPTER 7**

ABOUT four thousand years ago five men, sitting on a mound outside a north Arabian village, watched a summer thunderstorm gathering over the plains of Uz. One man was talking earnestly, and he wove into his words the details of the grandeur before his eyes. Here is the picture of God's majesty in storms, separated from Elihu's other words:

"Look unto the heavens, and see; and behold the clouds which are higher than thou.... Behold, God ... maketh small the drops of water: they pour down rain according to the vapor thereof: which the clouds do drop and distill upon man abundantly [there was rain off on the horizon]. Also can any understand the spreadings of the clouds [the clouds advance across the sky], or the noise of His tabernacle [distant thunder]? Behold, He spreadeth His light upon it [mounting thunderheads reflect sunlight], and covereth the bottom of the sea. [The gathering clouds changed the appearance of an expanse of water within sight, perhaps the Persian Gulf, so that it looked dull and muddy.] . . . With clouds He covereth the light; and commandeth it not to shine by the cloud that cometh betwixt. . . . At this also my heart trembleth, and leapeth out of his place. Hear attentively the noise of His voice, and the muttering that goeth out of His mouth [the thunder comes nearer and a sudden brilliant flash of lightning crosses the sky]. He directeth it under the whole heaven, and His lightning unto the ends of the earth [the horizon]. After it a voice roareth: He thundereth with the voice of His excellency.... God thundereth marvelously with His voice. . . .

"He saith to the snow, Be thou on the earth; likewise to the small rain and to the great rain of His strength. [A sudden icy blast seems to turn the desert heat into snow, as a mist of fine rain is followed by enormous stinging drops.] . . . Then the beasts go into dens, and remain in their places. Out of the south cometh the whirlwind: and cold out of the north [the wind veers fitfully around the compass; the thermometer is dropping]. Yea, He ladeth the thick cloud with moisture: He scattereth His bright cloud: and it turneth itself round about. [The heavy clouds come lower and are driven wildly about by the varying winds.] . . . Dost thou know the balancings of the clouds, ... how thy garments are warm, when He quieteth the earth by the south wind? [The uproar of nature dies down, and a warm breeze for a moment lifts the icy chill spreading in from the north; but the storm clouds by now fill the whole sky.] Hast thou with Him spread out the sky, which is strong, and as a molten looking glass? . . . We cannot order our speech by reason of darkness. . . . And now men see not the bright light which is in the clouds: but the wind passeth, and cleanseth them. [The churning masses of broken clouds spread completely over the sky; they have the weird greenishyellow light of the approaching tornado. Then they close off the sunlight completely so that even the lightning is screened out, until the bursting whirlwind again tears the clouds apart.]

"Fair weather cometh out of the north [a golden light where the clouds break]: with God is terrible majesty. . . . Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind. . . . Then job answered the Lord, . . . I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now

mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 35-42, with margins.)

Though a storm we watch may not end in an actual vision of God, yet we may see His wondrous working in the weather and be led to repentance.

## **Sound**

### **CHAPTER 8**

THESE words are being penned on Christmas morning, though you may be reading them in the season of the Fourth of July. They are being written early on Christmas morning, before daylight in fact. I wanted to sleep. The family had been up late. First we went caroling for a local charity; then we had a "homely" evening, parting for the night with the anticipation: "We can sleep as long as we want to in the morning—don't have to go to work."

Oh? Could we sleep? Not here in the South where Christmas means fireworks. The rockets and Roman candles were pretty to watch last night; but at 4:00 A.M.—it's another story to be jolted awake by booms and crashes in every direction, spaced far enough apart to allow one to sink back into the border of unconsciousness before the next jar.

So, perforce, I awakened and pondered. What is there about sudden loud noises that so fascinates human beings? It seems a universal instinct. The Chinese, most antiquely philosophical nation, invented fireworks, feeling that their intermittent sounds and colors honored their deities. None are too old to feel the compulsion of sound and light. Returning last night, I passed a group of boys who were placing a "whiz-devil" on the pavement, where it "scooted around" all over the street, weirdly whistling and sparkling. I joined the group, as attracted as they.

Sound, and light, and color! How utterly necessary they are to human consciousness, comprehension, and contentment! All three are the gift of God; and a love for them He planted in the human mind that He created "after His likeness." They are to us the symbols of life, which explains their hold on our minds. Their absence means death: "deathlike stillness," "the darkness of death," "as pale as death"—these are instinctive comparisons.

God Himself lives in a heaven of sound and light and color. The difference between His world and ours is chiefly in measurement and use. His sounds have only loving uses; His light never blasts; His color is never bloody. And His measurement of the power indicated by sound is somewhat in advance of ours. The louder the sound, the more stimulating and satisfactory it is to human children of all ages. And when the sound is accompanied by light and color, it becomes to us the measure of the most tremendous power achieved by man.

But who heard the sunset last night? It was one of the most colorful I ever saw. The carolers walked in awe of it, and they equally marveled at the graceful cloud-attendants of the milder-beaming full moon. But who heard sunset and moonrise? Yet their power shames A-bomb or H-bomb. And by white (which we thoughtlessly call the absence of color) God covers the scarlet of sin. The sounds of earth are mostly cries of pain, sobs of soul agony, drunken curses, or the laughter of fools. But if we listen to the silences of God, we will hear His soundless voice. Let us utter back, audibly or inaudibly, the sound for which His heart longs: "Heavenly Father, I love Thee."

## ***For Love and Life***

### **CHAPTER 9**

MY FRIEND had a big bed of lilies of the valley along the northwest side of her house. One balmy afternoon, as she went out to work among her plants, she noted joyfully that nearly every leaf in the bed had a spire of white bells beside it.

Soon a summer shower began to approach. Over the hills beyond the Cumberland River marched cloud chariots, preceded by wind scouts and a phalanx of rain bowmen, whose first heavy drops stung almost like arrows. Absorbed in watching the majesty of the storm, my friend did not leave her plants till the downpour began.

As she hurried past the lily bed, she was startled. The flowers had vanished. Only leaves remained. A closer look revealed that each leaf stood curled around its flower companion, sheltering it from the storm, preserving its precious pollen till the God-ordained cycle of life could be completed.

Who taught those father leaves to protect their families? How, without ears or eyes, did they know a beating storm was coming? Ah, the love of God is written on every spire of grass, on every leaf and bud and flower. Look in a Canadian garden in early summer, when the universal rhubarb plants are sprouting. Every sturdy stalk comes up wrapped about a smaller stalk, like an older brother protecting a younger. Stand beside a roadside weed and look directly down on its tip. Note how its leaves fan out around the stem with a minimum of overlap and a maximum of sunlight and air to each leaf.

Trace down the stem, then, and see how this unselfish regard for the rights of each leaf is achieved. No leaf grows exactly above another. The placement of leaves on stems is no blind chance. Indeed, complicated systems of spirals involving intricate mathematical principles of progression are to be found. This is the work of the "Wonderful Numberer." (Daniel 8:13, margin.). "This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working." Isaiah 28:29.

This same principle of loving protection is found in every glade and meadow or garden path. In spring the showy tulip lifts an open cup to the sky, and every shower sweeps the pollen from its anthers. But no life is lost, for the stem is busily growing new bulbs below ground. By contrast, the jack-in-the-pulpit prolongs one side of its cup into a pointed canopy and arches it over the flower spathe, to preserve the pollen and so secure the seeds that perpetuate its kind. Solomon's-seals and the trout lilies hang downward their seeding bells, as do the Indian pipes of late summer. Meadow clovers hide their precious life-perpetuating parts under the butterfly wings of their pea-flower-like blossoms. Hepatica's last year's leaves-tough, woolly, and browned by exposure-blanket this spring's buds. Some tree leaves hang on all winter in order that their enlarged and hollowed stem-bases can shelter their budding successors.

When summer's heat silences the birds and browns the meadows, practically all trees and the delicate flowers have passed their blooming time, and their seeds either have already ripened and been shed, or are growing inside protective fruits. Thus, life is sheltered from destructive heat. The flowering plants of midsummer, except ones like the delicate jewelweed of damp spring banks and bogs, are of woody fiber with tough-textured flowers, able to endure heat and drought.

Through everything with which God deals runs the same law of love and life, and His love will encompass us if we but open our eyes and let our hearts expand.

## ***Cirsium Lanceolatum***

### **CHAPTER 10**

MY FATHER was a flower lover with a sense of humor, and our home garden in northern Illinois was a show place. One spring he cultivated three "weeds" in strategic spots, "to see what would come of it." Considerable did. For each one he had learned the scientific name, which he used in the hearing of visitors. The six-foot mullein in the middle of his canna bed puzzled people who tried to figure out what kind of canna it was. A milkweed near the street made a handsome "rubber tree," and passers-by were often exclaiming: "Look at that rubber plant! We didn't know it would grow outdoors in this climate!"

But his chief fun was with his *Cirsium lanceolatum*, which grew near the rose bushes under my mother's bedroom window. About six feet tall, heavily branched, its deeply cleft leaves were dark, sparkling green above and densely woolly white beneath, each angle ending in one of the needlesharp yellow spines from which the plant derives its second name (*lanceolatum*).

By August it was crowned with orchid flowers, the calyxes of which were gracefully vase shaped, formed of many overlapping green scales, each ending in a tiny "lance." The clustered tubular florets in each vase were of a beautiful lavender color, each whole cluster perhaps three inches across. The black-and-gold bumblebees tumbled in crooning intoxication over those purple pastures, imbibing nectar and dodging lances. My father reveled in displaying to us children the plant's graces and lovelinesses, until we regarded it with mingled admiration and respect; and in the years since, its memory has helped me more than once to discover the good in some human weed.

Then one day it served another purpose. The chief "character" of the vicinity was a certain Mr. Bohl, an English-American of German descent, who combined the harshest qualities of all three nationalities. He slapped down the opinions of everyone he met, and was in general the most heartily detested "Mr. Know-it" of the neighborhood. One Sunday afternoon he and his British cane were taking the air in our garden, he as usual talking down everything my father said or did. Suddenly confronted by this large, flower-covered "weed," he aimed it a blow with his cane that would have demolished it, saying scornfully, "What do you mean by having a common thistle in your garden?"

My father swiftly intercepted the blow, replying sternly, "What do you mean by trying to destroy my *Cirsium lanceolatum*?"

Mr. Bohl's deflation was complete. He said apologetically, "Oh, I thought it was just a common thistle." My father did not enlighten him, and Mr. Bohl's manner was much chastened for the remainder of the call. We youngsters, listening inside the window, fell over ourselves in soundless mirth; and the anecdote, discreetly circulated, rocked the immediate community with laughter.

Yes, *Cirsium lanceolatum* was "just a common thistle." Next time you see one, study its marvelous beauty; then go home and read 1 Corinthians 1:27-29.

# ***"As the Apple Tree"***

## ***Chapter 11***

September is a splendid month. The glories of summer are tinged with fires of fall and mitigated by the cooling breath of shortened days. September suggests apples. Somewhere it is apple harvest today, and busy hands are polishing and packing the beauties that will later adorn the grocers' displays, then our sideboards, and lastly our tables-good and beautiful to the last translucent slice in the pie. No wonder the Creator gave the primeval pair "the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat." Genesis 1:29. And it is a satanic slander that the forbidden fruit was an apple.

Apples suggest apple trees, and apple trees give year-round enjoyment. From the peak of September look back to apple blossoms of last spring and ahead to the blossoms of next spring-Eden of the spring of the race and of life, and Eden of the new earth in anticipation, and in between a lifetime of work, service, and fruit bearing.

There is no time in the year when an apple tree is not pleasant. Blessed is any child who grows up near a thicket of wild crab apple trees. Doubtless other flowers are superb, but to my taste few equal and none surpass the colors, grace, and fragrance of wild crab apple buds and blossoms. Even the fruit, like some people, is not nearly so impossible when properly treated with sugar and spice.

All apple blossoms are lovely. Poets write hymns to Mont Blanc and thrill to old ocean's solemn roar. But some people think the most beautiful scene on earth is California's Santa Clara Valley in fruit-tree-blossom time.

The summer joys of an apple orchard are legion. No other trees are more delightful for climbing, for lingering in to watch the birds' housekeeping. No vista of the summer sky is more soul inviting than that seen while lying on the back under an apple tree.

An apple orchard is a homey place. All sorts of flying, furry, feathered folk live there-insects, birds, quadrupeds. From the apple orchard Bobwhite whistles up the farm boy at sunrise, and the whippoorwill lulls him at moonrise.

And an apple orchard can be a sacred place. Happy is that orchard that has a footpath trodden to a secret place of prayer. Thrice blessed is that child that sees a parent tread that path and return with shining face.

September crowns the apple orchard with harvest, but only if the spring of youth has not harbored the insect eggs of sin.

Even in winter the apple tree is beautiful. Its gracious humility of low-spreading growth is not austere like the giant trees, and its fat buds point to a resurrection.

"As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my Beloved among the sons. I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste." Song of Solomon 2:3. The apple tree is a symbol of Jesus Christ, and its year-round pleasantness is a figure of what He is to the soul.

## October

### CHAPTER 12

TWO friends were trying to express the thrill of an early April day in Tennessee, when a fresh, tender, gold-and-silver green mantles the world. "Did you ever see anything more soul satisfying than such a spring day?" asked one.

"Yes," said the other, "an autumn harvest day. It is more soul satisfying, for it is the end for which this day is made." Then she added: "Did you ever think in what season of the year the earth was created?"

"No. What season?"

"Autumn-harvest time. When the grass was created, it was 'yielding seed,' and the tree was 'yielding fruit.' [Genesis 1:12.] The lower creatures were created adult as were Adam and Eve. Creation was not a springtime of germinating seeds, budding leaves, and helpless infant creatures.

What God does is perfect to begin with. 'Everything that He had made . . . was very good' at once. [Verse 31.)"

"That's true," replied the other. "Is that what the Bible means when it says, 'God . . . calleth those things which be not, as though they were'?"

. To God the end He purposes is real now, with no trial-and-error process of development. The Spirit of God brooded-planning, anticipating; and what was brought forth in creation week was perfect. It is the harvest of which our God is Lord. Even though sin has brought imperfection into every phase of nature and human existence, yet God sees a finished salvation as already accomplished. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God." 1 John 3:2. To Abraham God showed a countless multitude of redeemed posterity figured by the starry host. Of Israel in the wilderness He could truthfully say: "He bath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither bath He seen perverseness in Israel: ... according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What bath God wrought!" Numbers 23:21, 23. God saw as real then what Israel would be when their sanctification would be perfected. So God sees us-in Christ. So may we see ourselves by faith;

October need not be to us "fall"—the "falling of the year," a melancholy time. Let us look at the harvest. Let us see next year's dogwoods already with blooms tipping every twig (they are there, if you look). Next year's leaves are already on every bough. Next year's lilies lie in every buried bulb.

The earth was created at the time of what we now call the Autumnal Equinox. That is capable of astronomical proof,\* though we don't need it. The Bible shows it was created in harvest, adult, perfect. So is everyone who is born into the kingdom of God. God visualizes us now as we may be. If we share His faith, it will help us to be content with the discipline of life that seems long.

\*Those interested may see the article by Astronomer Frank Edgar Hinkley in The Watchman Magazine, July, 1926.

## **Wild Geese Honking**

### **CHAPTER 13**

AM writing this at 2:30 A.m. on a late October night. A few moments ago I heard a sound that set my feet on the floor before my mind had fully emerged from the dim halls of sleep. Wild geese honking! I must go call my sister to hear too. The sky is really clear, but there is a low, foggy ceiling. The rhythm of the alternate sounds overhead was like the plashing of canoeists on a smooth gray sea. But how swiftly they passed, and silence muffled the sky!

Yet the sounds keep ringing in my mind's ear till I cannot sleep. Is it just that the sound heard on this inland Tennessee air reminds me vividly of my childhood on the shore of Lake Michigan, where autumn flyways, day and night, were filled with the mutual guide-cries of the migrating flocks? The answering thrill to the geese's cries may be nostalgic when I feel it now, so far removed in time and space. But I felt the same thrill then. No matter how often we heard the flying V's coming, someone shouted, "Geese coming over!" and we ran to watch. They might be sloping down to the lake, black against the reflected pink of sunset, or rising southward against the golden morning sky, or passing overhead without stopping in the blue noonday; but always the sound of geese brought us to some advantageous viewpoint.

The greatest thrill of all came to me one fall night when I had stepped out into a warm, moist evening, with a low, foggy overcast, gently diffused with the brilliance of the brightest moonlight of the year—"the hunter's moon." While I stood in darkness on the ground, the semi-illuminated misty world above me was filled with moving voices. Some were loud and strident, some gently twittering. From every point of the northern sky the voices swiftly approached and flowed over me into the southern distance. Frightened, I cried for the family, who all came out to listen. It seemed as though all the little birds in Canada and northern United States were using that warm, bright night to put as many miles as possible between themselves and pursuing winter. And they all were fluting as they flew—families reassuring one another, tribes keeping trace of tribes. Wondering, awestruck, I asked mother many questions about those voices.

I do not recall her answers; I only know that when later I read Bryant's "To a Waterfowl," I already knew what it meant—mother had told me.

The human heart was never meant to be alone. Its final rest is only in God, and whoever seeks it in other human sources will sooner or later plummet downward to eternal darkness. But keeping ourselves to that unseen goal of the celestial flyways, we still need the companionship of others passing the same way. Whenever since that distant autumn night I have found myself alone in the dark, frightened and bewildered, I have known that above the overcast, moonlight was shining, and when I spoke my Father's name, my brothers and sisters drew near in fellowship.

**Why do geese go honking down the dim night sky?  
Why not pass a-silent? Why that broken cry?  
Ah, they need the aid of knowing others near.  
List each one inquiring, "Brother, are you here?"  
I am wending homeward through impenetrable night,  
Moving, angel-guided, toward a far and unseen light.  
I too need the aid of knowing others near.  
List my heart inquiring, "Brother, are you here?"**

## ***"Thy Riches"***

### **CHAPTER 14**

FOUR months ago I attended a gathering of friends at their home place about thirty miles from Nashville. The first of June was the prime of spring and early summer, and the country reminded me of Moses' description of "the plain of Jordan." Writing nostalgically from the hot desert sheep-walks of the Sinai Peninsula, he recorded the picture of the land of his ancestors in terms he may often have heard his mother quote from her father Levi, who, spending his last days in the treeless pasturelands of Goshen, would recount to his posterity the tales of his youth in Canaan.

From the rim of the Jordan Valley Levi's great-great-uncle Lot had looked out over "all the plain of Jordan." Our English word "plain" here misses the flavor of the word Moses actually used. He said "circle"—"all the circle of Jordan." From sky to sky stretched out the mountains and hills that edged the valley, and over them and the lush lower lands were the green forests and the rolling vineyards and grainfields of that blessed region. "And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, . . . even as the garden of the Lord." Genesis 13:10.

More than forty years later Moses wrote again, with quivering heartache, of that loved and longed for land he was to see only afar: "The land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven: a land which the Lord thy God careth for: the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year." Deuteronomy 11:11, 21.

I thought of those pastoral pearls from Moses' pen when on a brilliant June day I, like Lot, lifted up my eyes and beheld "all the circle" of a middle Tennessee landscape and found it like "the garden of the Lord." Everywhere, everywhere a wealth of greenness, from majestic oaks, maples, and hackberries to the crowding wild shrubbery and honeysuckled banks of the roads! Patterned between were splashes of color from ripening wheat fields, fallows purpled with vetch, or rocky hillsides in the muted magenta pink of carpets of rock-cross. Roadside banks wore ruby necklaces of the bending bunches of sumac berries.

"O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! In wisdom hast Thou made them all: the earth is full of Thy riches." Psalm 104:24. So is it today, if we look about us. The son of my hostess, noting my delight in all I was seeing, told me of the joy his mother and he took in the wild flowers. One day it had been necessary for them to search the wilder land beyond the fields for straying cattle. "We had to walk out anyway," he said, "so we thought we might as well make it as pleasant as possible." So they began to count how many flowering plants they could see. By the time they found the cows, they had also found a few more than thirty kinds of wild flowers. Becoming excited over the search, they continued it through the day and by nightfall had doubled their morning count. God's riches spread out for our happiness, health, and benefit!

That was last June, and God's riches have multiplied in this harvest time. Where there was then one tree, there are now many pounds of rosy fruit. Where there was one color on the hills, the country now fairly blazes with flame colors, with the dark green of the unchanging cedars for contrast. Where last June more birds were singing than we took time to count, now greater multitudes are passing through to their winter resorts. God's riches do not decrease; they multiply into a harvest, whether it be His riches in the natural world or His great and precious promises.

## ***November Woods and Memories***

### **CHAPTER 15**

I WAS delighted when my hostess at Kingfield, Tennessee, suggested a Sabbath afternoon walk. As we passed along the woodsy paths, suddenly I stopped and sniffed the air intently. "What is it?" asked my friend, noting my excitement.

"Nothing yet," I said, "but a memory—the memory of a fragrance, the breath of the November woods, something I haven't smelled since I was a child. There must be witch hazel growing close by."

Soon we found it. Nothing else is like it. Once its fragrance has filled the nostrils of a child who lives in the woods, it is never forgotten. Such an elusive, thin, light sweetness would be lost among the airs of spring or the more robust aromas, of the hot season. But in the autumn woods there are two fragrances that are the soul (the "breath") of the season: the fragrance of falling leaves and the scent of witch-hazel blossoms found in rich abundance.

Let us pay a loving tribute over the graves of the goodly leaves. They are the banners of unselfish service all summer; they are shining and fragrant in their dying; they enrich the world in their death. They are like godly personalities, lovely and pleasant in life, not divided from beauty in death.

But there is nothing dying about the witch hazel. It seems exuberant with life the year around. Too large to be a shrub, it is too small to be a tree. It can't stand still long enough to be a tree. It must send up multiple stems instead of one trunk. And these strong, flexible stems bend vibrantly before storms (but more so when children ride them for "horses"). It must be a little different in everything. Its leaves cannot be folded into equal halves; they are irregular at their bases and sometimes wider than long.

But it is in its flowering and seeding that witch hazel is most alive. When even the leaves lie in sodden graves under fall rains, witch hazel lights its candles. Its long wands are crowded with tiny flowers set three or four to a cluster, each with four strap-shaped petals. The petals are not sedate, but are as curled and wavy as though perpetually dancing in miniature breezes. And lest the eye miss its pale gold sunshine, it sends forth the sweetest flower breath I know to ravish the attention to its loveliness.

Then when its lover bends to enjoy its sweet savor, it may shoot him square on the cheek with a shiny black seed fired with an audible pop from last year's seedpods, ripening beneath this year's flower clusters. No dropping its seeds for witch hazel! No idle waiting for wind or animal to carry them! It fires them off. Witch hazel shots have been measured as much as forty-five feet.

So there is something thrillingly alive about the witch hazel around the calendar. God is a lover of life and beauty, or He would never have set the golden witch hazel blossoms under November's black skies.

# Shadows

## CHAPTER 16

WHAT color are shadows? Oh, black, naturally; everybody knows that. Oh, but is a shadow black? Not always, as this little tale reveals:

My unit of nine-year-old juniors—the Kookaburras they called themselves—on a nature hike at camp, stood on the trail above Lake Woodhaven, and looked at the water through a fringe of trees.

"What color is the water?" I asked.

"White!" they shouted.

"What makes it white?"

"Shadows!" they all cried, and one added, "Shadows of the clouds."

So shadows may be white.

Simkin Street runs west, and the sunsets one sees down it are little foretastes of the New Jerusalem. And half the glories of those sunsets are shadows—shadows that are rich blue and dusty rose and burnt orange and smoky flame colored. And even after the orb is far sunken, and the sunset colors have burned down to ardent coals along the hilltop horizon, the clouds above are transfused with flame. Shadows are sunset colored.

The boarding school where I once taught was surrounded by a maple grove so dense that little grew under the trees, and it was like walking through an arcade to pass beneath them. Surely one was in the black shadows then. But in summer that shade was a delicate green shot through with gold. And in winter, when Minnesota was knee-deep in snow, the rising sun sent long shadows of the leafless maples across the snow; and those shadows were deep, intense purple and crimson. Shadows are royal colors.

A shadow is cast by an object that intercepts some of the passing light rays—not all, for then we would have total darkness and no shadows at all. The intercepting more or less breaks up the light; hence we may have all the colors of the rainbow in shadows. And the colors partake somewhat of the colors of the objects that cast them. Shadows and reflections are almost indistinguishable, and both may be any color, depending on the source.

"For I am sometimes in the sunshine, Sometimes in the shadows, Walking every day with Him."

So sang the juniors around their campfire. Walking every day with Jesus does not insure our walking without shadows. Jesus Himself walked always with the shadow of the cross over Him. Our walk with Him will be through many a shadow. But those shadows need not be black—will not be black for the Christian. They will be reflections of the rainbow around the Father's throne. They will glow with deep shades of rich color reflected from the glory of God and the good angels, whose presence near us is concealed by the shadows. One who has ever walked with God in the shadows understandingly will sincerely say:

"I'd rather walk with Him in the dark

Than walk alone in the light."

## **Grass**

### **CHAPTER 17**

GRASS is an odd subject for December reading. Yet life on the whole globe in December is dependent on it. Grass was the first organic life God created. Thus food was provided before the animals and man were created.

So grass feeds the world. Wheat, corn, oats, barley, rice, and rye are grasses. Another group of grasses furnish sugar and all its by-products. Still other grasses furnish all manner of mechanical products, also medicines, oils, and clothing. Grasses are the source of "... man's bread and meat, Many things good, and most things sweet."

Among all the products of grass I am thinking of bread in December. A friend has just brought me a gift loaf of her homemade bread, warm from the oven; and its fragrance fills the room. The warmth, the gladness, the joy of summer fields are in that aroma. In memory rise the beautiful hills whose ridges God watered abundantly, whose furrows He settled, whose soil He made soft by His showers, whose springing He blessed. The little hills rejoice on every side. "The valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing." Psalm 65:9-13.

This singing of the grass is no figment of the poet's fancy. The rustling of the corn is musical. It is instinct with life. Hardheaded farmers in the "corn belt" insist that on still, hot nights there is a murmur of life in their fields; one can hear the corn grow. What hymns of praise we might hear if our ears now had the range of audition of our sinless first parents!

God's love is written on every springing blade of grass. But through no grasses does He manifest His love more than through the cereal grasses-the source of bread. Man's lawlessness is fast obliterating the image of God in the human soul; modern society is swiftly becoming paganized. Men worship science; but they selfishly and ignorantly destroy the natural resources of the soil until today they are literally destroying the earth, and ultimately God must destroy them. (Revelation 11:18.) But until the day of doom arrives, God still promises grass. "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." Genesis 8:22.

On every hand the omens increase that the day of reckoning is approaching. One of them is modern commercial baking. My fragrant gift would not be so unusual if all men had lived on the land as God planned. And if those who are on the land had managed the soil as God taught ancient Israel, it would not now be so depleted of vitamins that malnutrition is prevalent in the midst of abundant eating. The course of the Israelites, described in Leviticus 26, is symbolic of the course of the world hastening to its end. Verse twenty-six suggests modern commercial baking of devitalized bread: "And when I have broken the staff of your bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall deliver you your bread again by weight: and ye shall eat, and not be satisfied."

Come, Lord Jesus, and bring the new earth.

Ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee. Job 12:7.

## ***A Morning Path to God***

### **CHAPTER 18**

MY NEIGHBOR walked in my yard last night; I found his footprints this morning. It is not the first time he has walked there, but we seldom meet. He works at night and sleeps by day. Our paths cross like this in the dewy dawn after he has gone to bed.

But how can our paths cross when he isn't there? Ah, my neighbor leaves his telltale path behind him. I know exactly where he walked. Here he climbed the sheer walls of the risers of the steps and meandered on the treads. Here is a straightaway of about fifteen feet along the cement walk. I am astounded at the prodigious amount of work involved in these shining trails, comparable to my walking from Nashville to Memphis in one night—building my road as I go and carrying my house on my back.

If I had been here in the cool stillness of the after-sunset glow, or in the moonlight, and I had looked where I stepped, and had been willing to bend and pause, I would have been able to "... watch the tube-eyed snail Creep o'er his long moon-glittering trail."

Marvelous evidences of the Creator's wisdom are in the structure and life habits of the "creeping things.". Nightly the snail, with placid perseverance, goes about his task of cleaning up my dooryard. Mold, decaying vegetation are his to remove. Incomprehensible is the amount of scavenger work done by the lowly snail population of grass-roots jungles and vegetable plots. Let him have his few bites of fresh-lettuce-leaf dessert. A laborious life he leads, contributing to the well-being of lordly man, who would crush him under a brutal, stupid foot if he saw him.

The snail, as the Bible says, "goeth upon the belly." (Leviticus 11:42.) The learned have called him a gastropod—a "stomach-footed" creature. He literally does what the small boy with his sled calls "belly bumping." On his stomach on the ground he creeps by amazing muscles arranged by the Creator in his soft stomach side. It is a "belly bumping" road to which he applies these muscles, for his flesh is so soft it seems almost liquid. That gives him his general surname of "mollusk"—soft.

How can anything so soft and weak pull itself over rough cement, dry ground, and scratchy gravel without being cut to pieces? It is because he builds his own road. From his pores he exudes a viscid substance that lays a smooth roadbed over every rough surface. He carries a friction-reducing pathway with him. His life is part of the great pattern of love that God has woven throughout His creation.

Dear heavenly Father, as I go out today to meet the unknown, let me be as placid and trustful as the snail. Over the frictions of daily life may Thy Holy Spirit in my heart shed forth a soothing sweetness that will make the rough places plain. May I move right forward, no matter what the obstacles. And may I leave a shining path of influence that will lead others' thoughts to Thee, as this lowly snail's track has led my morning meditation to my Creator. Amen.

## ***Sparrows***

### **CHAPTER 19**

I LOVE English sparrows. Over long years of fighting aversion to these pesky pests, I have developed a deep regard for them. They illustrate the plan of salvation better than any other birds.

It was not by accident that Jesus chose sparrows as symbols of the members of the human race, there is much resemblance. They are careless and untidy and selfish and quarrelsome and ungrateful and noisy and impudent and destructive and sparrows! They are not fit to associate with. Spare their nest under the eaves, and they will fill their benefactor's house with vermin. Put out bird food, and they allow no others at the feeding station. They harry the modest bluebirds away from birdhouses they cannot use themselves. Even the jolly and wholesome house wrens vanish before the pugnacious bad manners of sparrows. Dainty orioles and royal cardinals shun the company of filthy sparrows fighting over ordure in the road ruts. Few birds could sink lower.

It is hard to find anything good to say for sparrows. We dislike them so much we seldom stop to look carefully at one and see that it is not entirely without beauty.

Poor sparrows! If they had human thoughts, a lot of their pugnaciousness would be hurt feelings. We cultivate the association of our big human brothers, they might say, and do they love us for it? Not as you could notice. They lavish all their liking on the flashy-colored birds. It's no use trying to be good; nobody loves us. (How many of the mean things done by human beings have grown out of thwarted longings to be loved!)

But Someone loves the sparrows. There is Someone who notes their needs and marks their deaths—Someone who quoted His care for the sparrows as the symbol of His care for me. I wonder if He can see anything more to love in me than I do in sparrows. But Jesus loved sparrows because they needed His love—just why He loves me.

Also Jesus knew that sparrows had not always been so degraded; they were not so unlovely in Eden. And once in a while now a sparrow has a little flash of its former beautiful nature. Once I heard astonishingly sweet bird tones coming very softly from one of my office windows which was hidden by a bookcase. Peeking, I saw on the sill two sparrows loving each other with strokings of wings and kisses of bills and the sweetest bird lovetones I ever heard. And once Fern and I, chatting on my house steps, were startled by a burst of glorious melody, unknown in our bird acquaintance. It came from an English sparrow on the eaves above us. We both saw and heard while he repeatedly sang.

Sparrows are members of the family of weaver finches, to which belong the interesting weaver birds of Asia and Africa. Jesus loved them for what they were in Eden and what they will be when He recreates them in the new earth—just exactly why He loves us.

## ***Sparrows Again***

### **CHAPTER 20**

SITTING beside the craft lodge in Kings Mountain State Park, South Carolina, my flying fingers busy with a project for the coming classtime, I became aware of bird

sounds all around. They were the undertoned remarks of a group of tiny chipping sparrows that took advantage of the opportunity to search the premises for food since all the campers were at the water front. They worked the edges of the volley ball court, then moved on down the slope under the trees around the craft house. One little fellow hopped to within a yard or so of my feet. One or two quick glances in my direction, then he went over every inch of the ground for crumbs or insects.

Watching, I wondered. If I had come into the presence of a living being as diverse in appearance as I was from him, and as much bigger as I was bigger than he, would I have ventured as near to that thing as he came near to giant me? I reckon not. Yet that little bit of feathered vitality, scarcely bigger than my two thumbs, trusted me enough to come within reach of a blow. Or did he? Maybe he knew he had wings, and I could no more have caught him than I could fly myself. Anyway, he came near, and I sat entranced. Later, in my class, Jane Cutter, of Chattanooga, told me of "Tommy" Titmouse whom she taught to eat from her hand, and who scolded vigorously if she did not come to his terms of time and amount of food. He felt himself quite within his rights to ask and seek, expecting to find and receive.

Such trustfulnesses are little glimpses of how it must have been in Eden before the shadow of man's sinning fell on the innocent creatures. No doubt in the new earth these tiny ones will have a confiding trust in the benevolence of the larger creatures. In the meantime we who are not really so big ourselves, except in our own opinions, can follow the example of the little birds and trust the benevolence of our heavenly Father, who opens His bountiful hand and satisfies the desire of every living creature.

Not only the chipping sparrows but their more robustious namesakes teach us lessons of trust. Did you ever see an English sparrow moping because he is not popular? The Creator planted the instincts of life in those little beings; and live they will, whatever the buffetings of adverse circumstances.

Perhaps one reason God chose sparrows as symbols of His own children is that He wants us to go ahead undaunted by the dislike the world may feel for us, or the downright hatred it may express for those who will try to live godly. In the eyes of the world those whom God calls "saints" may appear as "sparrows." We need not fret. God knows; God cares. As my friend, Helene Suche Wollschlaeger, has beautifully written:

"Like the sparrows, God's children should be everywhere. Like the sparrows, we may not always be welcome; but if we are truly like sparrows, we will not worry about that. Ears accustomed to eloquent, flowery sermons may find our constant emphasis on the second coming of Christ and the immutability of God's law as monotonous as the unvarying chirping of the sparrows. But should that stop our song? Fashionably dressed worshipers in imposing edifices may regard our simple houses of worship as void of attraction as the modest brown dress of sparrows, in comparison with the colorful beauty of the bluebird or the striking garb of the scarlet tanager. But as followers of the meek and lowly One, who outwardly had 'no beauty that we should desire Him,' should we not be as simple and unpretentious in our dress, our homes, and our churches?

"The time is soon coming when those who refuse to disobey God's law will be considered even greater pests than sparrows are now. Professed lovers of God will be admonished to destroy them. Governments will make laws to get rid of them. Men esteemed in business, professional, and religious circles will, as Satan's agents, lay traps to ensnare them. In a last futile effort to starve them out, the world will decree that they shall neither buy nor sell, not even to secure their most necessary food. When that

time comes, as come it will, may we like the sparrows be able to 'sing our humble song without a fear,' knowing that we serve a God who notices even sparrows."

## ***"All We like Sheep"***

### **CHAPTER 21**

I WILL never forget my first real encounter with a lamb. From babyhood I had been taught the jingle about my namesake's lamb with snowy fleece. I knew lambs by greeting cards, children's picture books, and sentimental stories. But I had never come face to face with the actuality until, as a college graduate and high school teacher, I was invited to vacation on a farm in southern Minnesota.

At once I was excited over a flock of sheep I could see feeding in a distant pasture, with young lambs sporting near their mothers. I wondered that they did not look as white as the greeting-card darlings, but I laid it to distance.

At first it had not been convenient to go out to the flock. But one day the farmer said they should really get Mary and a lamb together. With considerable difficulty he maneuvered one into a pen near the barn; and I was invited to pet it and be photographed in the act. I still have the snapshot about—not on display. They got it as I made one grab for the beast that was less unsuccessful than my other efforts. Then I was ready for a bath and clean clothes. The brown, smelly lamb with wool matted with mud and filth was anything but friendly and angelic and cuddly, or like the pictures.

So I found out that sheep, as well as sparrows, were well chosen by God as symbols for human beings. Sheep are quite human-likable and unendurable, winsome and intolerable, stupid, irresponsible, wayward, easily led astray, dirty, and malodorous. Yet sheep are capable of improvement. I have since seen orphan lambs carefully raised that were as charming as the storybook lambkins. And I have known of real affection between sheep and shepherd.

But it dawned on me that day in Minnesota that the love begins with the shepherd—the sheep isn't worth loving; it only needs loving. Goats are a lot more attractive than sheep. They are more intelligent for one thing; they bunch before the attack of predators, instead of running in every direction, to let the killer pick out any one he chooses. Human beings will run right out into temptation, instead of staying close to God.

I have found that the very helplessness and defenselessness of sheep appeal to the heart of a born shepherd. The goats—they want none of him. But the sheep repay affection. The discerning shepherd recognizes humanlike traits in sheep personalities, and he finds himself understanding God better. We did not win God's love for any deserving. He loves us because we need His love. All we like sheep have gone our own way, and the wolf has mauled us. We have chosen sordidness and worldliness and worse, and we need cleaning up. The Shepherd provides it.

Then He does the supreme thing: He calls Himself by the name we are that we may begin to be what He is.

# ***The Sheep and the Goats***

## **CHAPTER 22**

WE HAVE considered together the bird symbol Jesus used for humanity—sparrows. We have also considered the animal symbol for our race—sheep. We have found with each that Jesus chose the symbol because the bird or the animal needed His love, not that it deserved His love.

After sparrows and sheep, there is a third nature symbol used for humanity in the Bible—goats. This symbol is used in association with sheep, but in contrast to sheep. The sheep and the goats are together, but God separates them. "Jacob have I loved," He once said, "but Esau have I hated."

We wouldn't have supposed it would have been that way. We would have loved the goats—and Esau. Goats have many superior qualities. They are superior in intelligence. "Silly sheep" is a deserved epithet. A wise herder, in wolf country, is said to run a few goats with his sheep; because when the killers appear, the goats will bunch, the sheep will follow their example and crowd around them, and the wolves do not succeed in scattering the sheep and cutting them down one by one.

As far as this world is concerned, Esau was a far more admirable person than Jacob. He had dash, virility, adventuresomeness, manliness—give him the open field, a fiery mount, a band of kindred spirits to ride behind him, and he'd show a thing or two to that sissified sneak hanging around his mother's kitchen. Anybody with half an eye could see that Esau had far more of the qualities of leadership than Jacob did. And it was a pretty raw deal that life handed out to Esau, so he and his friends thought.

The difference was that God saw him, not with the half eye of human admiration, but with the divine Eye of inward comprehension. Why was it God loved Jacob and turned away from Esau? It was entirely because Jacob needed and wanted God's love. Esau needed it, too, but he wanted it not-till after he had profanely thrown it away. So the silly, helpless sheep need the shepherd's loving care, and they return love for love.

God loved Jacob and Jacob loved God. God loved Esau and Esau loved Esau. So God withdrew His love from Esau; and He said to the goats on His left hand, "Depart!"

## ***Obedience***

## **CHAPTER 23**

IN THE Cumberland Mountains, near Gruetli, Tennessee, two friends and I once saw an instance of supreme obedience. A native of the woods directed us by means of blazed trees to a certain spot where we were to look ahead of us on the ground intently. At the first sign of motion we were to concentrate our gaze on the spot where the motion began. Without this pre-warning we might not have seen the sudden swift shadow that flitted off a rod under the bushes before it became vocal and visible.

A big bird—brown, gray, and white speckled like dead leaves—fell down upon the ground with broken wings, crying in great pain. We scarcely turned our heads to look at this mother whippoorwill but scanned the spot from which she started. As our eyes became accustomed to the sunshine flecked twilight, we found her nest, just a hollow in

a heap of dead leaves, and in it two baby whippoorwills, not so long as my forefinger and covered with a yellowish down hard to distinguish from the leaves among which they lay. Their large eyes were closed, and they lay as inert as lifeless things.

The mother was in terrible distress. In a circle she dragged herself along the ground, flying up a foot or two and falling back, and striving by every gesture possible to entice us to follow; but we looked very little at her. We watched to see how long the babies would lie motionless. In an amazing manner the mother was able to intersperse her loud and constant outcries with very soft, tender-toned chirps and short calls that were intended for the babies' reassurance.

As we did not move away from the nest, she circled clear around us, finally flying up to a tree branch not much higher than our heads about a rod beyond the nest. There she sat facing us and the nest, continuing her piteous cries and tender baby talk. Her eyes were amazingly large and lustrous, and her feathers fluffed out softly, giving her almost a circular effect.

Meantime the babies were absolutely obedient. Seized by the impulse to touch a live wild thing, I bent down and put my finger on the head of one of the fluffballs. It evidently could see me through its translucent eyelids or perceive me by some other acute sense; for as my hand neared it, a heavy shudder passed once over it. Then it endured my touch without moving, and the other did not move at all.

But my motion had terrified the mother into such an excess of grieving cries that we took pity on her and moved away. She continued her protests until we were clear back on the roadway, from which we could not see her. We suppose she darted down to the nest and praised her precious ones for their perfect obedience and self-control under the attack of giants as terrifying as monsters from Mars.

## ***Playing Possum***

### ***CHAPTER 24***

ONE AFTERNOON while vacationing in the Cumberland Mountains, I was startled by a cry that a bird had just flown against the window and killed itself. A few moments later other guests brought me a female ruby-throated hummingbird, which lay perfectly inert when placed on my open hand. Including bill and tail, it was as long as my palm was wide.

"This bird isn't dead," I asserted. "I can feel its heartbeat, and its wings and head are in natural position, even though it is limp. As soon as it gets over its faintness, it will fly away. It is just waiting until we aren't watching, and it can get away. Watch its eye. It's closed now, but I suspect that pretty soon it will peek to see if we are looking."

Before many moments the eyelid fluttered and parted just a crack, but closed again as everyone cried out. Then the others fell into conversation and forgot to watch. The eye opened a bit farther and closed again. Then as even I let my attention wander, the bird knew it and flew like a flash. It stopped short of the windowpane and settled on flowers in a vase. It did not fly as I slowly approached it and cupped my hands gently over it. It fluttered a few seconds when I lifted it off, then it lay as inert as at first. In reply to the question of what I would do with it, I said, "Take it outdoors and let it fly away; it's not injured."

As time passed and the hummer showed no more sign of life than the heartbeat that I could feel, the others tired and went away, leaving me on the cottage steps under the trees with the bird lying limp on my palm. I was considering where I might put it where the family cats would not find it before it entirely revived. In the meantime I was carefully watching to see whether it moved.

No doubt it was perfectly aware that the crowd had left. Several times its eyelid fluttered apart a tiny slit. Then very slowly it righted itself until it lay on its belly on my hand instead of on its side; but its eyes were still closed, and its head lay flat and limp. It arched its back like a cat when I gave it the lightest possible fingertip stroke.

I suppose it could see through its translucent eyelids. I turned my head to look for a safe place to put it and was deciding on a huge dahlia flower on a six-foot plant, when Mrs. Hummingbird settled the question herself by flashing up into the oak tree.

Thus ended one of the greatest thrills of my life. How tiny yet how perfect was this flying jewel of the Creator's! How suddenly trouble befell it! "As the birds . . . are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them." Ecclesiastes 9:12. But with what marvelous self-control it had lain still in the hand of a giant! Its vigilance had outlasted mine. It exemplified Solomon's advice: "Give not sleep to thine eyes. . . . Deliver thyself, . . . as a bird from the hand of the fowler." Proverbs 6:4, 5. We are in that evil time; we are in the grip of gigantic forces. We dare not relax vigilance one second lest we be unprepared for Jesus' coming.

## **Size**

### **CHAPTER 25**

A LARGE DOG was one day walking with great dignity along a street in Battle Creek when a bit of fluff about the size of a Pomeranian flew out of a yard, shrieking to all dogdom that he was going to eat up that big lump of good-for-nothingness that was invading his domain. The big fellow walked on, apparently oblivious of the bouncing hullabaloo that yip-yapped around his feet. The little fellow grew more frantic as he was ignored, and he dashed and feinted at the big one from behind and either side in a frenzy of jumping and squealing.

Still utterly snubbed by Mr. Big, the Pomeranian sprang toward his high-held head: The large dog looked calmly down a moment, then said, "Boo-oof," in a deep bellow. The sound seemed to flatten the little dog against the ground. Then the speed he developed for vanishing elsewhere was amazing. The big dog had hardly missed a step in his majestic march.

At a friend's home I was once asked to walk her pet Pom on a leash around the block. Forgetting the preceding dog drama, I paid no attention when a strange woman and a child approached me, accompanied by a stately Collie. But the next moment the Pom had snatched the light cord from my fingers and had it tangled in and out around the Collie's legs, where the Pom had frantically run in a spasm of yapping. Amid laughter from the humans, we extricated the little Pom and his leash, while the big dog stood perfectly still, scarcely deigning a glance at the diminutive sputterbudget.

One day a neighbor I counted a friend did me a perfectly contemptible bit of two-faced meanness. Discovering it suddenly, I was seized with an inner frantic convulsion

of rage. "If I did what I feel like," I said to an office mate, "I would do so-and-so," naming what seemed like a very neat revenge.

He held up thumb and finger about an inch apart as he replied, "If you did, you would be exactly the same size that he is."

I thought of the two calm big dogs and decided I preferred their magnanimous carriage to being Pom-sized.

Speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee. Job 12:8.

## ***The Dust of the Earth***

### **CHAPTER 26**

PICTURES of weird and awesome beauty have made Sahara Desert scenes famous as wastes of wind-rippled sand. But not so are American deserts, or even all deserts anywhere. To visit a desert, you may recall, was the Lord Jesus' one recommendation for a vacation. A desert, then, must be some thing more than a dead waste; it must be a place that revitalizes, revivifies, refreshes. On the vacation trip aforementioned the disciples found all these requisites in the desert because they had the Master of the desert with them.

He had made a previous trip into the desert alone—no, not alone. He found three classes of companionship: "The Adversary," the wild beasts, and the good angels. He emerged from the desert Master of all three: He had vanquished Satan; He could, and did, vanquish the wild beasts when demon-crazed men played their part; and the good angels were His loving servitors.

So when His excited, overwrought disciples needed a new mastery of the calmness of life, He led them to the desert. But He led them not to sandy vacuity, but to opportunity for companionship and service, to a ceaseless supply of the necessities of life, and to the mastery of all powers of passion external or internal by the effect of the presence of the Master Himself.

So for a variety of spiritual experiences let me recommend our Southwestern deserts. Death, and dread, and the devil stalk the waterless wilderness, haunt the pleasure-mad resorts to be found even in the desert, and dog down the unwary, the unfitted, or the uncomprehending. But go out to the desert with anointed eyes and find God there.

We are not so much conscious of the earth back East as of the products of the earth. The dust of the earth takes organic form in lush vegetation, and earth's anatomy is draped. But in the desert the dust of the earth is dust. It flies in the air, diffusing the sunlight into colors undreamed of elsewhere. It piles up into mountains beyond words awesome. It crystallizes into gems and ore a lifetime cannot catalogue. It organizes into bird and beast and plant unduplicated other where. The desert's most typical bird runs instead of flying. Its quaintest animal insists on an exchange of property. Its piercing plants blossom into the orchids' rivals. The power of God to bring good out of evil, beauty out of desolation, blessing out of trial, replenishes the reverent heart in the desert.

But the dust of the earth takes highest form in the desert, as elsewhere, in God's crowning act of creation-human beings in His likeness. Take Christian friends with you to

the desert; your joy is doubled. Find such a friend in the desert; your joy is multiplied. My friends and I found David, the totally deaf craftsman, fashioning desert woods into satin artistry. His face shown when we wrote of God on his memo pad; and he wrote back: "Deafness is bad, but it could be worse, and it will make us enjoy the sounds of heaven all the more."

## **Sand**

### **CHAPTER 27**

MY EARLY childhood was spent by the shore of Lake Michigan.

The sound of the waves was in my ear all my waking hours and often in my dreams. Or more exactly, that sound filled wakeful times at night, for I loved to lie awake, especially on moonlight nights, and see and hear the mysterious affairs of wild life in the woods about our little house.

But I did not enjoy the lake; it was too awesome. At night the waves talked too loud, and they did not sound loving and happy. They told one another that they wanted to come up on the land and eat up the people. I trembled at the great voices that spoke through the night silences and wondered when the waves would come.

One day I told my mother what the waves said at night and asked her when they would come. With a light on her face that I remember yet, though I was only six, she told me the waves were never, never coming up on the land to devour people. They could not, she said, for they were our heavenly Father's servants, and He had told them to stay in their place. And He had set a wall between us and the waves. I asked what that wall was. She said, "The sand."

Then she took her Bible and read to me how God gathered the waters together and called them seas (or lakes) and commanded them to remain where He put them. Even though the waves were proud of their strength and tossed themselves against the sand, they always rolled back into the lake and came no farther.

Later I listened to the waves with altered ears. They still talked at night, but their tones were different. They told one another that they were not going up on the land. "Here is the sand," they said. "This is the wall of our home. We obey our Father, and we are happy. We are not lonesome, for there are many of us. We clap our hands, because our Father is good."

Our heavenly Father "shut up the sea with doors, . . . and set bars and doors, and said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." Job 38:8-11. He has "compassed the waters with bounds." Job 26:10. He has "placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it." Jeremiah 5:22.

In the various nights of life since then I have often heard the waves talking, and what they said would have crushed me had not my Father set His wall between my soul and them. In the world's night now, "there is sorrow on the sea, it cannot rest," for "the waters thereof roar and be troubled." Yet I am not afraid, for "God is a very present help in trouble." He is a shield (a wall) to them who trust in Him.

## ***More About Sand***

### **CHAPTER 28**

WHEN MOSES was giving his parting blessing to the tribes of Israel, "on this side of Jordan," he promised Zebulon and Issachar that they would rejoice in, and profit by, "treasures hid in the sand." (Deuteronomy 33:18,19.) It is unthinkable that he referred to pirates' caches, to find which many people search the sands; or to gold dust, the search for which has loaded the record books of heaven with countless crimes. For the worshipful mind the Creator has many a spiritual treasure hid in the sand.

The Bible tells us that sand is a barrier to the proud waves of the sea, the power of God being demonstrated by His use of so flimsy and shifting a medium to control the mad sea's raging. But the sand, when thus used, is no longer flimsy and shifting. Held together by the capillary attraction of water, shifting sand becomes a smooth, solid foundation, a barrier to the sea, able to support the weight and wear and tear of the automobile speed tests. Sand gives no flimsy effect to one who walks over the "measured mile" on Daytona Beach where Sir Malcolm Campbell won his racing laurels. Sand bound together by water becomes substantial.

To grasp the spiritual lessons hid in the sand one needs to start from God's simile of sand and the saved. The redeemed, He repeats in the Bible, are like the sand of the sea. "In number," He frequently adds, and we usually take the figure simply for His ecstatic joy over "bringing many sons unto glory." But not every time God likens the saved to sand does He mention mere quantity; quality is involved. The redeemed, He says, are "as the sand"—like it in qualities and characteristics.

That is why the sand of the sea can successfully oppose the fury of the waves. Composed of grains each one of which is utterly powerless in itself, the mass of sand can be held together by an interpenetration of water that coats each grain and holds it tight against its neighbors until the sand becomes this mighty barrier against the sea. The powerful capillary adhesion is exerted by an element we think of as fluid and unstable—"unstable as water." Yet the combination of the two movable constituents, sand grains and water drops, forms this wall against the waves.

Thus it is when the Holy Spirit has His way with human beings. The usual translation that appears in our Bible as "filled with the Spirit" carries in the original the idea of "clothed with the Spirit." The Holy Spirit is the water; we individual children of God are the weak and shifting sand grains. If we allow the Holy Spirit to clothe us, cover us, swallow up our weakness in His power, He will bind us one to another and to Himself until God's true Israel becomes a mighty wall before which all Satan's waves fall back defeated. One sand grain does not do it alone; but God and I will win—bound up with God's true children.

## ***Cleavage***

### **CHAPTER 29**

A NEIGHBOR of mine, busily pounding up limestone from an outcrop in the new lawn, intending to use the pieces in some masonry, suddenly noticed a fragment of a peculiar shape and had a vague feeling of having seen something like it before. A search through his wheelbarrow load soon turned up the other part of a rock that had

broken along a certain line of cleavage. When put back together again, the two parts fitted so perfectly that the joint scarcely showed.

The next day he brought it to his place of employment and laid it on the step outside his office door. Soon I passed by and—enthusiastic "rockhound" that I am—snatched it up to look at. It fell apart in my hands, revealing the secret of its heart.

Due to my neighbor's generosity that stone now lies on my desk. I call visitors' attention to it as one of the choicest in my collection. I get little more than the most languid glance, for the irregular gray stone could not possibly be called beautiful. I encourage them to handle it, extolling its value, but their response is forced politeness. Sometimes one fairly jumps when the rock unexpectedly comes apart. Always interest comes alive at what the heart of the rock reveals—a perfect fossil and a cast of a brachiopod, an antediluvian mollusk.

A fossil of a brachiopod seashell is not especially rare. The beauty of this one is its perfect shape as it lies in one piece of rock and its perfect "cast," or mold, in the other part of the rock, and the perfect symmetry of the line of cleavage. It fits together so closely as hardly to be seen when the sections are replaced.

As I meditate over this curious mass, I can think of a number of "sermons in stones" which entitle this fossil to a page in God's two books. Perhaps the most obvious one is that when a secret sin is hidden in the heart, it weakens the moral fiber and sooner or later the stress of life will cause a cleavage that will reveal the plague spot.

But I prefer a happier thought. "Ointment and perfume," says the Proverb Maker, "rejoice the heart." We have heard of a certain stone casket in which some perfume was once hidden. Whose heart would have rejoiced in that perfume if the stone had not been broken? But the line of cleavage in Mary's alabaster box released the perfume that was the one drop of comfort in the Saviour's bitter cup. Its fragrance has pervaded not merely the Bethany home but the pages of all literature, the tones of all tongues, the realms of all rulers since that day. The precious secret could not be hid. The loving blow of Mary's gentle hand caused a cleavage that released the sweetest aroma ever breathed. The Sabbath question will be the issue in the great conflict in which all the world will act a part—unselfish love.

The well-directed blow of the Divine Artist has caused a cleavage in many a life that He loved, through which has poured forth the ointment that heals the world's wounds. Many an earthborn pebble, no more beautiful outwardly than my gray stone, has a line of cleavage visible only to the Heavenly Workman. The blows of life, under His direction, will reveal undreamed—of treasure in earthly hearts that yield submissively to His hand.

## ***Channels***

### ***CHAPTER 30***

I HAVE been renewing acquaintance with an old friend. Soon after revisiting my brother's home after many years, I asked, "Is the Gage Canal still running where it used to?" When I had lived in California before, I had loved to look at that irrigation canal. Where Date Street and the canal crossed, the canal went under by a tunnel. Had it not been for the cement railings at the edge of the sidewalk on each side of the street, a passer-by might not have noticed that he crossed a stream.

I liked to stand by that railing and watch the canal and think. Coming, it made a great arc around the base of the hill Pachappa. So close by, this young mountain shouldered out a part of the sky and hid the course of the canal. I imagined the canal coming looping among the folded hills from off toward Saddleback.

"Where does the canal come from?" I asked the residents.

"Off yonder"—vaguely—"off in the mountains."

So the source of the stream seemed as mysterious to me as its destination; for, looking in the other direction, I saw it curve behind the bulging boles of the date palms, and I never traced it farther. It came into my sight full sized and passed beyond my ken undiminished.

My imagination was also caught by the canal's smooth, self-contained symmetry. Natural streams sprawl. They fling themselves about across the landscape like lazy men sleeping in the sun. This man-made, cement-walled stream never varied in width, never spread into shallows, never backslid into eddies. As sleek as a slender lady in a satin gown, it curved its measured way across the land. It drew no attention to itself like boisterous schoolgirls. It reminded of the words of an old etiquette book: "A lady is serene; a gentleman makes no noise."

But there was power within those graceful curves and beneath that—silence. That water was deep. Look up it toward the sunset, and its unrippled surface was a mirror. Look straight down over the railing, and one became aware that the whole translucent mass was moving swiftly, irresistibly.

Many a thought of the power of God I have dreamed, looking at that canal. The Holy Spirit's work is as mysterious as the source and destiny of that canal. We are aware only of the part that flows through our own hearts. The Holy Spirit is as silent as that canal. Only occasionally is God's power manifested in noise. As silent as sunlight, as noiseless as gravitation, the Spirit moves among men. God provides the water; man makes the canal. And as the cement-lined canal does nothing for the soil it passes except where opened sluice-gates allow a portion to flow out, so we must open the door if the Holy Spirit is to mold our personalities. As the irrigator hoes out little ditches in every flower bed, and the soil around every tree, and beside every garden row, so we must open the way for the Holy Spirit to permeate our souls. God's power flows through the world; we determine its course and the good it will do by opening the gates and clearing out the channels.

## ***Ruts***

### **CHAPTER 31**

Eloquent was the minister's climax: "Beware of ruts. They're hard to climb out of; and when they get six feet deep, we call them graves." But though heartily agreeing, I found my vagrant fancy running off along some very pleasant and rather exciting ruts I have been in.

One could not truly be called a rut; it was "a cut." We called it "The Old Railroad"—a depression as wide as a single-track railroad that led a half mile or so through the woods near my childhood home. A half century earlier a railroad had run through it to the site of a vanished pioneer town. Once it had been an open gash in the earth, filled with

the whistle and clang of locomotion. Later all that was gone, and the cut was filled with more wild flowers, shrubbery, and birds than any other locality around. A path through it was our favorite Sabbath afternoon walk. "Let's go to the old brickyard," we children always proposed, meaning: "Let's wander along the old railroad cut and see what new flowers have bloomed in a week. Or maybe the blue eggs in the robin's nest have hatched. Or we'll catch some 'prink birds' [towhees, named by us from their call] scratching in the leaves like chickens. Or the haws are ripe [if it was toward fall, we would find several delicious varieties]. Or we'll find the rabbits playing tag and leapfrog." There was never a dull moment in a saunter along that rut. Then we came out on a miniature "badlands," the eroded yellow clay cliffs of a long-disused brickyard, its ditches cutting finally down to the Lake Michigan sands. From that diminutive "Grand Canyon" the shore curved off to a crescent that even "the blue Vesuvian bay" of poetry cannot equal in my memory.

In the nearly half century since I last trod that rut, I have seen some "cuts" in human hearts leading to abandoned homesites and dream enterprises which through God's restoring hand have become lovable places filled with all sweetness and graciousness.

The other rut was a guiding way. Vacationing on the Cumberland Plateau, I wanted to go to the "gulf"—native name in Appalachia for vast, wooded, blue-misted depths where the streams cut their way through the mountains down to the valley of the Cumberland, the Tennessee, or another river. It was to be a three-mile walk each way, through woods so dense as easily to mislead one. "You won't get lost," said my hostess. "Follow the deepest rut in the logging truck trails. It will take you to the old 'highline' cableway for hauling logs up from the bottom of the 'gulf.' You will get your best view there where two 'gulfs' meet. Then just follow that rut back to the highway."

Space forbids even listing what I found of plant, bird, animal, and insect life along that rut, to say nothing of the sounds and fragrances of the wonderful woods. There was so much that was enthralling that when at last I reached "the gulf," my watch told me I dared spend only a few moments enjoying the view if I would return before my friends became uneasy. So back I must hasten, concentrating on following my rut. Such a bewildering array of side trails! I had not been aware of so many until I must choose my way quickly. But always there was that one deeper rut that guided me at every junction. On I pressed toward the mark-home, rest, and refreshment. Fatigue wore me down till I was nearly fainting. But I held my eye to that rut and stumbled on. Then-oh, joy!-my name shouted by a friendly voice, and my hostess's car to take me the rest of the way.

Life is like that. A deep rut lies through every tangle of circumstances, a rut stained red by the Feet that beat it out. Though it is six feet deep in one place, it couldn't hold those Feet. No more can it hold ours, when we follow those Feet. And the greatest thrills this side of heaven lie in and beside that rut in knowledge and service. Youthfully loitering along that rut, or stumbling westward in the fatigue of age, we find at the end the shout of the Archangel and the chariots of God—if we follow always that rut, the one we ought not to climb out of.

## ***The Mail Path***

### **CHAPTER 32**

IT WAS about a half mile from the old house in Crumbie's Holler in the Ozark Mountains to the mailbox out on the country road where the rural carrier passed. Mail could be delivered there, or we could walk three miles each way into town for it—or drive, which was something of an experience over Arkansas roads nearly a half century ago.

So the old mail path began at our back porch and ended at the box beside the road, half a mile away. That was the mail path in short. In long, the mail path was almost a lifetime. It ran a few steps from the back porch across the short grass of the yard, then across a rod of plowed land along the edge of the orchard.

That plowed land stood for victory. My mother had had my brother plow it up as an annex to the regular vegetable garden farther away. At considerable expense, for pennies then were like dollars now, she had sent away for some very fine tomato seeds and had carefully tended the tiny plants till they were big enough to set out. The plants were very promising, and she was anticipating eagerly the unusual kinds she would have.

As it happened a man who desired a country home for his family had rented a tenant house on our farm. He was home on a vacation from his work in St. Louis, when he heard some remark my mother made about being behind in her weeding of the tomatoes. He urged her to let him cultivate them with the single-horse plow. With some misgivings she yielded, and he went to work on the strip of plowed ground beside the orchard.

No one will ever know why he did what he did next; the rows of tomato plants were plainly visible, and there were too few weeds to hide them. But when my mother went out a little later to see his work, there was a deep furrow right down every tomato row, no others anywhere else, and every last one of her precious plants was thoroughly destroyed. To this day I vividly remember my mother's face as she turned back to the house. But a few minutes later she came out of her room to answer his knock and thank him heartily for his helpfulness, when he came to report that he had finished his work. He was obviously so thrilled to have done his day's good deed, that nobody told him he had committed murder. My mother's self-control kept alive a plant of friendship that lasts to this day. And those dead tomato plants have strengthened me many a time since when some friend has forced good on me according to her own idea instead of mine.

The mail path went on between the last row of apple trees and the high north bluff wall of Crumbie's Holler. The bluff was desolate looking, covered thickly with rough "blackjack" oaks, and the ground was hidden beneath the layer of rough, gray, flint stones that proclaimed the Ozarks. At one place a side path turned off among some bushes. I never walked on that path; in fact, I always stepped over the place where it diverged. That was my mother's prayer path, and it seemed too holy for my feet. A wave of awe used to come over me when I would see her go out along the mail path and turn off into the side path. I have tried to walk the prayer path many a time since then, however, remembering the light on her face when she came back.

Along the other side of the orchard were cultivated rows of peanut plants, each plant looking like a clump of sweet clover. The path left the orchard by a gap in the old rail fence and tumbled down a few steps into the bed of a dry creek that cut through the

main bluff of the valley. Here in coolness and damp, rich soil grew many a semi-rare wild flower. The old ravine was so full of plants and long grass and so overshadowed with trees tied with grapevines that the path was in danger of being lost. I've come to that part of life since then, too.

But the mail path hurried out of the undergrowth and turned sharply up the corner of the bluff. To the climber it felt like going up the corner of a house roof; and like Bunyan's Pilgrim one fell from running to going, and from going to creeping; for the path was going up out of the valley along the line of juncture of the valley bluff and the side of the tributary creek valley. A step either way from the path would bring one downhill toward the valley or the creek bed. And the path itself was treacherous, for it was across the rolling stones of the hillside. But there were convenient handles of blueberry bushes to catch. Life walks such paths as that too.

At the top of this hill the path ignominiously scrambled over a rail fence and under a strand of barbed wire which ran from angle to angle of the zigzag fence to ward off marauding cattle and, incidentally, scratch travelers. Beyond that the path seemed lost, indeed; for there were thick woods to pass through, and the ground was covered with infinite numbers of small gray stones, each nearly like every other one. I've thought of that part of the path through many a monotonous year. But an instinctive drawing toward the mailbox led me safely through the woods where, if it was toward evening, the chuck-will's-widow snapped its harsh exclamations overhead. So the most monotonous day has always had some unexpected event to snap one alert.

Then the path wound around the old burned snag with the bird's nest in it, into an abandoned pasture where the sedge grass grew higher than my head and rustled like dead leaves. The path was so narrow there that when the copperhead met me head on and hissed his demand for right of way, I immediately retreated to the woods, where the path was wide enough for two. There have not been too many copperheads in life, and there has always been a "way of escape" provided.

Then over the last rail fence, and there on the grassy roadside was the mailbox, with letters from the far-away world of cities and multitudes of poor people who did not have a mail path to loiter a lifetime of thought along.

## ***Stewardship***

### ***CHAPTER 33***

THERE is plenty of drama in the dictionary. If you don't believe it, try reading the derivations of words given in the "big dictionary"—Webster's Unabridged. Recently I was seeking the exact meaning of "steward" and paused to read the history of the word preceding the definition. Then I laughed. "Steward" comes from the Anglo-Saxon words "sty" and "ward" (guardian). The "steward" is the "sty warden."

In Anglo-Saxon times the "sty" did not mean the domicile of the swine as it does today. The title used today for the gentleman, who is the manager of a great estate or a wealthy menage, or the nobleman who superintends a royal household, anciently meant the warden of a sty. But the word "sty" anciently meant a home, a house, a nobleman's hall, a palace. It is we who have narrowed down the application of the word to the malodorous environs of the pigs.

The whole human race are the guardians of the home the Creator gave them. When man was created, he was endowed with dominion over all the lower life. He was the "sty warden" of God's creation. And it was no sty, in the modern sense, over which he was given the responsibility of care and management. There were no death, no decay, no filth, no defilement, no bad odors, no carrion, no garbage, no stockyards to mis-scent a whole city, no contagion, no poison-secreting fear and hate.

But what a sty (in the modern meaning) man has made of the sty (Anglo-Saxon meaning) that God gave him! "The earth is defiled under the inhabitants thereof." The soil is soaked with blood, the ground littered with corpses. The air has become death laden, the waters so polluted that they destroy their indwellers. In many parts of the earth one smells the cities afar off. Good grain and fruit, God-given to feed earth's billions, man rots into alcohol that turns human beings into sots more filthy than wild beasts, which are naturally clean.

The pigsty itself is a human invention. Wild animals do not live in such filth as do "domesticated" hogs. Only those animals which, as a result of the sin introduced by man, have become carnivorous are filthy and malodorous in their living surroundings. The rookeries of the fish-eating water-birds are sties, but not the nests of the seed-eating and insect-eating songsters. The unpleasant defense mechanism of the peaceable skunk is the adaptation of a harmless creature to the conditions resulting from man's sin.

Man has been a pretty poor sty warden of creation. The Owner is going to disinfect the premises soon and rebuild according to the original blueprint. He is advertising now for sty wardens for His new earth who will not degrade His sty (home) into a sty (a place defiled by sin). Prospective applicants are expected to practice now cleaning up their present sties.

## ***Conservation***

### ***CHAPTER 34***

I HAVE just finished looking over my first issue of a periodical sent me because I am a naturalist. I took up the magazine with delighted anticipation; I laid it down with grief.

Conservation, says Webster, is "preserving, guarding, protecting; a keeping in a safe or entire state; preservation."

This magazine is devoted to "conservation."

So far, so good. But it is preservation in preparation for slaughter. That is bad. What has in the past been devastated and destroyed by the lethal instincts of depraved human nature must now be conserved, preserved, built up, restored. Why? To undo the wrong done to creation? No! To provide enlarged opportunity for more murder. The whole vicious circle is summed up in the one word in display type at the bottom of the front cover-"Sport."

It labels a picture of a beautiful dog sitting in a woodsy spot holding up in its mouth a once-beautiful dead bird. Killing is sport. Death is delightful to the death-dealer. Conservation is the servant of destruction.

In no aspect of existence is the fall of man more vividly illustrated than in his attitude toward the works of the Creator. He must always destroy. Look at the twigs on the sidewalk side of the shrubbery on your lawn. Stripped bare of leaves, no doubt. Infants, from pre-school to adult ages, seem unable to see anything alive without an impulse to kill it. So pull off those leaves as you pass by. Huh! Just leaves! But could you make a leaf to replace the one you destroyed? In that leaf were utilized principles of engineering and manufacture that modern industry is just catching up with, and principles of chemistry still out of our reach, because divine.

But moronic mankind thinks he is growing up when he arrives at an "appreciation of nature." So he rushes out to field and woodland and grabs. Last spring he came back with his car draped with withered dogwood branches. Last fall the roadside maples held out mute and bleeding stubs where their flaming boughs had been splintered from them.

But mankind progresses. He becomes a "sportsman"—the highest form of masculinity. He glories in the science of killing and sets in motion the vast machinery of conservation to provide more opportunity to kill. But listen to God's definition of such "sport": "It is as sport to a fool to do mischief." Proverbs 10:23. Surely it is mischief to terrify, torture, torment, maim, and destroy wild creatures who are made by the same Creator who made you, and who are capable of many of the same emotions with which the human is endowed. It is God, not I, who named the "sportsman" in that verse, the sportsman who destroys for fun what he cannot create.

And the sportsman of Proverbs is further described by the Creator Himself in a famous conversation He once held with a group of men who were plotting destruction. "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning." John 8:44. From the "sport" of destroying the lower creatures it is less than a step to war. And the Creator intends once to leave His constructive role for His "strange work" of destroying "them which destroy the earth." (Revelation 11:18.)

Let us become true conservationists, lest we share that destruction.

## ***Rebirth***

### **CHAPTER 35**

A FRIEND wrote me in a Tennessee March: "I'm not sure that I really believe in a life after death." I looked out at the trees and hills; and then I replied: "One might be tempted to doubt a future life in fall or winter, but not in this season, when the miracle of resurrection is taking place all around us."

But even last fall was a hopeful season, not a despair. Last fall all nature was preparing, not for death, but for rebirth. The sky was filled with feathered migrants winging south before encroaching frost. But why? The better to be prepared to return north this spring, well fed, well dressed, vital in instinct and life force, for the miracle of parenthood. Even the frail butterflies were moved by the instinct of survival, and some of us witnessed that marvel, the migration of the Monarchs. Countless other insects sought shelters in the ground or under multiplied means of covering—in or on or under every crevice, twig, or scrap of loose bark of a tree; in corners of human habitations; in houses they constructed themselves of paper or mud. The larger forms of life entered the mysterious, dim world of hibernation, more similar to death than ordinary sleep, from















