The Acton Free Press

THURSDAY,—AUGUST 5, 1920

THE THREE HOUSES

There's a highway that winds from the gates of the dawn
O'er the hills towards the high-piled noon,
That leads on adown the long slopes to the west,
To the land of the crescent moon.
By this mystical trail of the highway of life
Dim destiny writes her grim scrolls
As, in the vast pageant of laughter and toils,
We stage the great drama of souls.

Three houses there stand by this far-winding way,
By this road that runs on through the years,
And they're builded of memories, labors and dreams,
Of sorrows and songs and of fears.
Three houses—and each is a treasury fair,
And each is a tomb with its loss,
For they shelter the joys that are pulsing with life,
And the hopes that are nailed to the cross.

The House of the Past, with its sobs and its songs,
Lies wrapped in the haze of the dawn;
But a golden trail runs back through the years
To the house of the things that are gone.
And memory, swifter than magical steed,
And stranger than wizardry's hand,
Takes us back to the sunshine and shadows that fell
On that house of the far-away land.

The House of the Present is lifting its dome
As daily we falter or climb,
And its strength or its weakness, its beauty or shame,
We forge in the furnace of time.
We fashion its uplifting towers and walls
As, like shuttles, we ply here and there,
For our thoughts and our deeds become timbers and stones
To make that house faulty or fair.

The House of the Future stands golden with hope,
Or perhaps it lies darkling with gloom,
And its portals lead on to the conqueror's crown,
Or perchance to our self-made doom.
Its substance and form? Ah well, we shall see.
In the soft light of life's fading day,
That the present and past, slipping on through the years,
Make that house at the end of the way.

—Rev. Robert E. Roodrich.

The Girl of the North Woods

Frances Margaret Fox

ONE September afternoon in a year not long ago, a girl, perhaps nineteen years of age, stepped from a train in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and looked around. The train didn't wait long enough to give the brakeman a chance to see what sort of a first impression the little unpainted settlement made upon his passenger, so quickly came the warning from the locomotive that it was moving on through the green forest and that he could do nothing but go with it, and perchance forget that a new teacher had arrived to teach a Northwoods school. Anyway, the brakeman raised his cap with a slight bow and genial smile when he handed the girl her suit case, because he had a sister in a Normal School farther south.

The girl stood on the platform for a moment, uncertain which way to turn, and instinctively seeking one attractive feature in that dreary clearing in the woods, dominated by board shanties. As she wondered which way to turn, a girl came swiftly toward her from the long frame building that she was soon to call her home; the building was the lumber company's boarding-house.

"Are you the new teacher, and is your name 'Miss Austin?' asked the one girl of the other. Then, without waiting for a reply, she went on, "Of course you must be. When mother saw you get off the train and there was no one to meet you, she called to me and I ran over to tell you that you are to come to our house. My name is Polly Thorne Thompkins and my mother has charge of the boarding-house."

"I certainly thank you, and my name is Molly Austin," answered the new teacher. Then both girls laughed.

"We are twins," agreed Miss Thompkins, taking the stranger's suit case and leading the way between logs and slab-piles to her home.

The interior of the house was more inviting than the outside, and Mrs. Thompkins was a motherly woman who took time for a friendly greeting even though she was, as she said, "Up to her ears in work."

"I hope you will not mind sharing my room," Polly suggested, as she led the way up the narrow stairs to a tiny box of an apartment near the landing. "My brothers have the rooms each side of us and we are the only ones who use this flight of stairs. Father built them in on purpose to keep our family close together and separate from the boarders," she further explained. "The cot by the low window is yours, and the one under the high window is mine. We shall have to take turns dressing, the room is so tiny, but I have to get up before daylight anyway every morning to help mother get breakfast for fifty men besides our family."

The girl spoke cheerfully, as if getting up to help serve breakfast for fifty men in such an out-of-the-world place was nothing at all uncommon. Molly Austin wondered at the girl, and the longer she knew her the more she wondered. To begin with, she had felt sorry for herself when the train went speeding away leaving her in that forlorn clearing; then she was sorry for Polly Thompkins, before a week was over, though, she was sorry neither for herself nor for the other girl, because of the absorbing interest she soon felt in the life about her.

"Dear Mother"—began one of her letters home, "Do box up all the good new magazines you can gather up around the house and neighborhood and send them here soon as possible. This is a regular reading-matter Desert of Sahara; the men actually wear the magazines out that Mrs. Thompkins gets hold of and puts on the table in the room she calls the 'office.' And mother, this daughter Polly is an adopted child; Mrs. Thompkins took her when she was a week old; her father was killed one day in the woods, and the mother died when they told her. They say that the father had a college education, but came to the woods for his health. No one knows who they were except that the man's name was Richard Thorne, and no one has ever been able to find out. This girl is wonderful, though; instead of being unhappy because she doesn't naturally belong to this family, she is a regular sunbeam; she says that she loves Mrs. Thompkins just as much and maybe more than her own sons do, because Mrs. Thompkins brought her home and cared for her when she was a helpless baby. The only way Polly is different so far as I can see, is because she is determined to go to college and make the boys go with her; she says she can't let those dear boys grow up into rough, ignorant men.

"This lovely girl has accordingly started what she calls a college fund; she has fifty-seven dollars in it now, earned by picking huckleberries. The boys laugh at her, but say that they will add money to the fund regularly, as soon as she proves that she can do it by getting a start of one hundred dollars; they try to tease her by saying that she must go to college first because she is the oldest. They are bright boys, but feel too old to go to my school, and had rather work in the woods. No wonder, only the smaller children go to school, five and six and seven and eight years old and only seven of them in the school at that. The schoolhouse is some distance from the mill and boarding-house because it is in the centre of the district, so far there are not many inhabitants in the district except those of us who live by the saw mill.

"Another interesting and amazing thing about this place is that the mill owners are interested in the young folks. When Mrs. Carton, the wife of the owner of this forest and general equipment, heard about what Polly is trying to do, she organized a club for the boys and girls; they have named it the 'Wide-Awake Circle.' Mrs. Carton was up here during the summer. She required every member of the circle to write a paper on some subject or other, every month, and send it to her. She reads the papers, corrects the mistakes and sends them back. The returned papers are read in the club meetings and discussed. I wish you could hear the club sing; listening to their music is a trying experience, let me warn you.

"Of course the school-teacher attends the club meetings and honestly, mother, they are interesting. Mrs. Carton has sent the club a respectable library of books on natural history, biography and histories of our country and the world. Now I am coming to an amazing announcement. Mrs. Carton has offered a prize of one hundred dollars to be presented in April to the member of the Wide Awake Club; boy or girl, who writes the best paper on some deed of heroism during the year. Now I am sure she wishes to give Polly one hundred dollars for that college fund and took this way of doing it. Polly must win it of course, but I do not see how it can be done because competition is not her strongest point, there are other girls in the Wide Awake Circle who do better work and I am sorry because I long to see Polly get her start.

"Your in a hurry,

"Molly."

Molly Austin did not wait long to see Polly get her start, she longed to help her, and together they talked over the heroes and heroines of history to choose the one for Polly's theme whose deeds seemed to the girls most brilliant and thrilling. But Polly's best efforts discouraged Molly. She wished that Mrs. Carton had offered a prize for a problem in mathematics or even for the best pancake maker—anything but written work. It seemed as if Polly could not get enough interested in the heroic achievements of George Washington to repeat the tale on paper successfully, yet Molly Austin insisted that Polly should and must win the prize.

Meantime the "twins," as the called themselves, became great friends. Every evening Molly helped Polly peel huge pans full of potatoes for breakfast, and Mrs. Thompkins' honest face was wreathed in smiles as she listened to talk on all sorts of subjects, and listened to girlish laughter in the big kitchen. Polly taught Molly all she could of the ways of the wilderness and Molly, in her turn tried to recall all the lessons she had ever learned in school, for Polly's instruction.

It would be a long story to tell of the doings of that winter in the woods, when Molly did her best not to let the kind family see that she was often homesick, or to tell of the merry-makings in the big office, of the sings, and sleighrides, and of dinners at the logging-camp, of the happy days with the little ones in the log schoolhouse in the woods.

Then, without warning, came the terrible storm, when events too sad to repeat transpired in that North country.

It was a little after the noon hour when the young teacher, glancing through the schoolroom window, noticed that the falling snow was beginning to drift. She knew afterwards that she should have hastened home with the little children that minute, instead, she put on her wraps and went out to bring in more wood and more wood. She told the children to sit quietly for a little while as she worked, telling them in a matter of fact way that she feared the woodpile might be snowed under before the next morning; it seemed wise to bring in all the wood possible. It seemed colder than it had been out-of-doors, but even then the girl didn't dream of danger; she piled the wood high against the back wall in response to an instinct.

Then came the blizzard to beat in fury against the little log house. A little girl began to cry. The teacher closed the door and replenished the fire. She spoke cheerfully, but fear was in the faces of her pupils; there were only four at school that day. The world was white outside, the whirling snow left no clear air anywhere and cold began creeping in—bitter cold. Remembering the stories Polly had told of winter storms in the North, Molly knew better than to venture into that blinding wilderness of snow with her flock. Alone, she would certainly have done so, but not with the children. She gathered her scholars close around the stove and told them stories; she said one of the fathers would surely come with a sleigh to take them home, not realizing that neither man nor beast could follow the trail even at that hour. Wind shook the door, wind roared down the chimney. Time crept slowly on, and on and no one came to the rescue.

They couldn't know that men were trying, but failing, to reach the schoolhouse. At four in the afternoon the schoolroom would have been in darkness but for the box of candles left from the Christmas celebration.

The school teacher cut a loaf of bread into slices and toasted them over the coals for the hungry children whose dinner-pails were empty. That bread had been intended for winter birds; now it fed her frightened flock. Story after story the brave girl told while the cold grew more intense and the gale increased in fury. When the little ones grew sleepy, Molly put them to bed on benches moved close beside the stove and covered them with bear-skin rugs they had brought before Christmas to spread on the rough floor of the schoolroom.

Thus Molly Austin began her lonely vigil. She dared not give way to drowsiness lest the children should freeze. Molly never liked to talk about that terrible night, before the dawn she had broken the desks and her table into pices to keep the fire burning, but when the wind ceased and the men came to the rescue at break of day, the children were warm and safe.

Mrs. Thompkins tucked the brave but worn-out teacher in bed, and grateful mothers called many times that day to be sure that the brave teacher was indeed all right and simply needed rest.

But this story has to do with that prize paper. When Mrs. Carton with the daily newspapers spread open before her, telling of the heroism of a girl teacher of the North woods who kept her little flock from freezing the night of the terrible storm, she felt more than interested. When she opened her mail soon after and read a paper written by Polly Thorne Thompkins, and headed, "A Modest Heroine," Mrs. Carton's eyes shone with joy.

Her pen guided by love, this girl of the woods had written a thrilling tale of a lovely girl, pretty, talented, tenderly reared, who had gone like a princess in disguise to live a beautiful daily life in a rough lumber camp. Not one of the reporters told that tale of the young school teacher's fight against the blizzard with the perfectly chosen words of Polly Thompkins.

It was that paper that won the prize and the Wide Awake Circle rejoiced.

"I knew you would do it," said Molly.

"You did it," was Polly's reply. "I told of what you did—and who knows what lovely days are ahead for us all, thanks to you?"

AN OLD LADIES' RACE

On a bracing day this year a little group of sprightly, white-haired ladies were seen walking along an avenue of Cleveland, with a considerable company of friends, showing the keenest interest in their stroll. The event is described in Outing. There were eleven ladies of this walking party, the youngest of them seventy-five years old, and no less than three of them numbering fourscore years. They were bent on showing a generation which scoffs at the activities of old age that the twilight of life need not mean being put on the shelf.

The walking party was the result of an informal discussion among a few old ladies over the teacups. They decided that they could show their grandchildren, and even their great-grandchildren, a thing or two yet, and at the same time preach the gospel of walking as an exercise for those who wish to live long and prosper.

The proposed walk of four and a quarter miles was caught up by other cheerful and aged ones, until eleven starters had volunteered.

Early in the pilgrimage several of the venerable walkers had to be held in check. Two miles were covered as cheerfully as if this were a pic-nic party, and there were no laggards.

At the half-way point a "control" had been established by friends of the party. Here they rested and had a cup of tea, after covering the first two miles in forty minutes, "flat."

Eleven old ladies had started, eleven old ladies finished. Their cheeks were flushed a bit, but there were few signs of fatigue.

A few blocks from the goal Mrs. Maria Mueller, aged eighty, who was one of the impetuous ones who had to be held back in the earlier stretches, began to do a skipping step along the pavement as if she were coming "down the middle" in an old-fashioned Virginia reel.

She had an able partner in Mrs. Susan Deckhart, also carrying the burden of eighty years, and between these two the ardor of competition flamed so high that they started off together on a lively little trot for the finish. It was a "dead heat" between the two, and first honors were thus divided. The others came in after them in the best of spirits, all vowing that they were by no means exhausted.

They attributed their vigor in old age to having worked hard in their homes all their lives, to having never "bothered their heads about dieting," and to having adopted early in life the rule, "early to bed and early to rise." The average age of these eleven "matriarchs" was seventy-eight years.

VANCOUVER ISLAND'S FAMOUS GARDENS

A VIEW OF PART OF THE FAMOUS BOUCHARD GARDENS, 12 MILES FROM VICTORIA, B. C.

Some few years ago at the head of Tod Inlet on Southern Vancouver Island there yawned an enormous excavation like a gigantic wound on the face of nature. The cement works nearby had removed from this spot thousands of tons of sand and shale for utilization in the manufacture of cement, and it would be hard to conceive of a more desolate spot than those dry, grey acres which looked dead beyond resuscitation. Not a blade of grass grew there, not a trickle of water laved the gaping thirstiness of it, not a bird sent its note across its waste, even the unfastidious crows disdainfully ignored it. A hundred feet above it the woods were green enough, and forest flowers thrived in fragrant profusion, but no wind-wafted seeds could take root in the dry sand and clay of the monstrous grave; they withered and died for want of sustenance, and because of the charm of the wooded glades above, the excavation looked all the more incongruous and unsightly.

To-day that same incongruity has become one of the most lovely garden spots in the whole length and breadth of America, not excluding the famous gardens of southern California. It is the Mecca of thousands of tourists every year, and as there is no real winter weather on favoured south Vancouver Island, the garden blooms practically the whole year round.

How was this miracle accomplished? Man's ingenuity aided by ever-gracious Nature, is the answer. Black loam by tons was carried into the excavation, packed up against the clay-banks, and around the rocks, placed in thick layers all over the levels, and in the very heart of the huge hole, water was fed from a lake. Far above the banks in the woods themselves, a stream was diverted to toss down over the side of the thirsty clay in a clean, bright fall that splashed into the lake. A huge pinnacle of rock—that stood in the centre of the barren acres was banked with rich soil, while the same soil was placed in all of its holes and crannies. Rock stairways were built from the rim of the excavation down into the place itself, a hundred walks and bypaths and stretches of lawn were mapped out and great beds made. Rustic bridges were built across the lake, and the stream itself, and then the seeding and the planting began. Scores of men were employed in the first stages of the work, and expert landscape gardeners, for not only the great sunken garden, but the ground above, which had been cleared, was to be laid out in lawns, a rose-garden, a tea-garden, and a combination of Japanese and fairy garden. More little streams from the woods were moved in to this upper garden and nourished from underground pipes to send up rainbow fountains here and there. Avenues of hawthorns and other ornamental trees were planted and a thousand feet or more of pergolas built. A large tea-house and a half a score of other little summer-houses, all of the most artistically rustic design, were scattered throughout the different gardens, and every flower and shrub that grows found its home there. The pergolas were hung with climbing roses, the tea-house graced in clematis and wistaria, and each little summer-house had its own individual garment of colour.

This upper garden is the first one to be traversed by the visitor, and having seen all of its loveliness, the curious charms of the Japanese gardens, with their dwarf trees and shrubs their iris-crowned banks, their flower-hung pagodas, the elves, the dragons, the tiny fairy forests of elf-land, and the bewildering beauty of the rose-gardens, one's senses seem almost satiated, until by a secret path one emerges suddenly upon the rim of the sunken gardens. Then indeed, one marvels at one's own sensate resources, for one's whole being is stirred to unimagined ecstacy at what lies before one! Colour!—Every colour and tint from the glowing gorgeousness of the poppy, rhododendron, and larkspur, to palest pastel shades of the old-fashioned lavender, forget-me-nots and sweet peas are there! Perfumes!—Lilacs, lilies-of-the-valley, wall-flower, honey-suckle, and every known blossom, except those which thrive only in tropical climes, lend their quota to the splendid argosy which floats on the placid air! Music! Surely the little birds must think they have reached their heaven for never are their songs sweeter than here. Fountains send their rainbow sprays among the flowers, water-falls tinkle down the cliffside where ferns and vines of every hue riot in gay profusion; and the great gaunt rock which once marked the place like a tombstone, is crowned with rock plants, shrubs, masses of delphinium, lupin, foxglove, and every sort of new and old-fashioned flower till it resembles nothing so much as a gigantic nosegay. The lake is stocked with trout that come in crowds for the crumbs you may drop them, velvety cat-tails rise out of the shallows, and water-lilies bask on the bosom of the water, while butterflies of every size and variety weave a loom of colour from flower to flower.—N. de B. L.

THE LITTLE MORE

Reba had walked out to the kitchen without waiting for an invitation. That was how she happened to see Ellen's tarts, the big one beautifully criss-crossed and sprinkled with cinnamon and powdered sugar, and the little ones even more exquisitely criss-crossed and much more thickly covered with sugar.

"Ellen Fergus, who is having a birthday?" she demanded. "It makes me wish that I was. I'd have been mad with delight when I was a child."

Ellen looked up in surprise. "Birthday? Oh, those tarts! Well, you see, I had a little dough left over. One is going to little Daisy Ennis because she was so plucky over having her tooth pulled."

"Lucky Daisy! The tooth memory will vanish, but the glory of that tart will last all the rest of her life. Ellen Fergus!"

"What have I done?" Ellen asked, startled.

"You well may ask. How many years have you been having a "little left over"—of everything? Don't you realize that it means very poor calculation upon your part?"

Ellen blushed. "Well, Aunt Tilly's family who said 'the used to' make life a joy to all the children of the village with her tiny pies and cakes and cookies. She always seemed to know when a child had come out 'on top' in some childish battle, or when one needed a bit of comforting for something hard. All the mothers appreciated it; few of them had time to make the special little things. But Aunt Tilly used to say, 'It's always just as easy to make a little more.' I suppose it was poor political economy, but I am sure that it was magnificent spiritual economy. We worked in the hope of rewards sometimes. It is true, but the rewards so inevitably recognized struggle—real honest struggle—that cowardice and falsehood and laziness grew to be scorned among us. As long as I live I'll never forget one cherry pie that came to me when I had struggled for a whole week over a certain terrible 'example.'"

"I should say that that cherry pie had paid wonderful dividends to the world," Reba remarked.

"Oh, but it's so easy to do a little more!" Ellen protested.

"That depends upon the person," Reba retorted.

The talk swung to other topics then.

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OPPORTUNITIES AT HAND

The face of opportunity is not, as a rule, strange and mysterious. She comes in such familiar guise that, more often than not we see her come and go without realizing what her nearness means to us. When we have learned to look for opportunity on our own doorstep, in the schoolroom or workshop where our daily lot is cast, instead of straining our eyes to the stars, seeking for some winged figure outlined against the sky, then we shall have made a long stride toward success.

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He next entered business, failed, and spent seventeen years of his life paying up the debts for a worthless partner.

He was in love with a beautiful woman to whom he become engaged—then she died.

Later he married a woman who was a constant burden on him.

He then tried to get an appointment to the United States Land Office, but failed.

He became candidate for the United States Senate, and was badly defeated.

In 1856 he became candidate for the Vice-Presidency and was again defeated.

One failure after another—bad failures—great setbacks. In the face of all this he eventually became one of the country's greatest men, if not the greatest.

When you think of a series of setbacks like these, doesn't it make you feel kind of small to become discouraged, just because you think you are having a hard time in life?—Practorian Guard.

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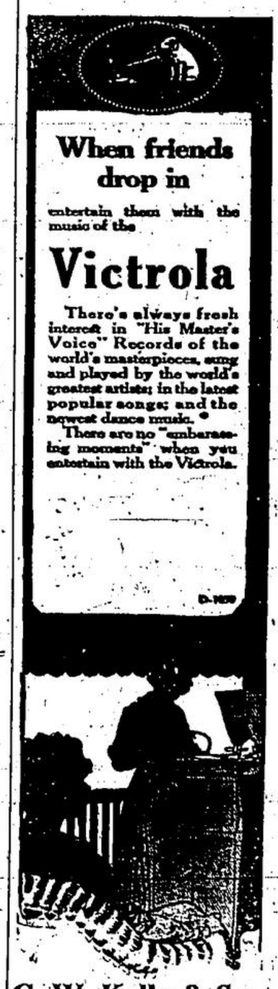

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