



The Road to Yesterday

Down the long, broad road as it leads away
To the pleasant scenes of a yesterday—
To the orchard wide where the laden trees
Swing to and fro in the balmy breeze;
By the old well-sweep with its creaking pole
And the big white rock by the swimming hole—
Ah, the scent that comes from the new mown hay
Whose long drifts lay
Where the sunbeams play
On the long, wide road to yesterday!

The milestones stand with their tinge of gray
As the mind harks back to a yesterday.
And the road grows smooth as the eyes behold
The long lost scenes of the days of old—
Faces bright of the old school crowd
Long since wrapped in the sheet and shroud;
Welcome shouts from the chums so gay
Who romp and play
In the old-time way
By the long, wide road to yesterday!

The evening lamp through the window shines,
And we see once more the stumbling lines
Of the old textbooks, and each puzzling rule
That caused us grief in the hours of school.
And a sweet old face 'gainst the windowpane
Looks down the reach of the shady lane;
And the welcome gleams in her bright eyes play
As on we stray
Through the evening gray
Down the old, old road to yesterday!

Down the long, wide road as it leads away
To the old-time scenes of that yesterday
When the heart was light as the thistle's down,
And we little knew of the hard world's frown;
Where the friends we knew were the girls and boys
To divide our woes and to share our joys—
Where life was sweet and the hours were gay
With love and play
In our childhood way
At the end of the road to yesterday!

Vagrant Thoughts About a Variety of Things

A good friend named J. L. Power, who resides in the booming city of Joplin, Mo., takes the author of this department to task for a paragraph appearing in "Brain Leaks" several weeks ago. The paragraph in question concluded with the query: "Who ever heard a robin sing?" Begging pardon for reproducing a letter that contains complimentary reference to the gray-haired boy who grinds out this weekly stint of matter, the communication is given in its entirety. We yield gracefully to the mild criticism of Brother Power. A man who writes as feelingly as he certainly knows what he is talking about when he comes to the defense of Robin Redbreast:

"Joplin, Mo., May 31.—Dear Sir: 'Whether Common or Not' is a favor-

ite page with me as literature of the day, and on but one occasion have I read a paragraph that left a sadness. It was a sentence that failed to give due credit to a good colleague of yours as an entertainer of humanity. Your heart is gentle and I know no unkindness was meant, but it evinces an estrangement that to me amounts almost to a calamity. You have to pass through life as neighbors, and I know that if you appreciated each other at your true worth an affection would result that would allow the fence to be left down between your premises. With such a hope for the future these lines are written.

"A paragraph referring to the song of the robin, in 'Brain Leaks,' ended with the question, 'Who ever heard a robin sing?'"

"I should have telegraphed an answer instantly, and I ask the good Lord to forgive me for being derelict to that duty till now.

"I do not mean to be harsh, but I would have been no more surprised had you asked, 'Who ever saw a duck swim?' Yet after a moment's pondering it was easy to understand how the question could be asked seriously—how business cares can keep men from the haunts of birds and deny them this knowledge. Thus, I thought, has this good man passed so much of life's time and missed an air that is as sweet and common to the country boy as the metallic, rag-time notes of the talking machine are to him. The reflection was filled with regret. I recalled reading a while back your verses on going home to rest, and said to myself a man who can say such things should be sung to sleep by the nightingale and awakened by the robin.

"The robin, brother, is a leader in the feathered choir, and is second only to the red bird in joining the chorus of spring. In his gladness at nature's smile he fairly shouts out over the broad land notes that should reach the ear of every man as 'tidings of great joy.' From the highest bough his throat is utilized as a veritable escape valve through which his soul pours in an ebullition of ecstasy, and 'peace on earth, good will to men,' seems to linger in the cadence.

"For ages he has sung to a universal encore, and the one in his audience who should have heard him the plainest has not added his plaudit. Truly yours.

"J. L. POWER."

To the above letter is appended a note from an old-time newspaper friend, Lum McCarn, who settles the matter beyond cavil by saying: "If John says the robin can sing you can rely upon it as a fact beyond dispute."

We beg everybody's pardon, including Robin's. We know the robin's sweet note. Honestly, we often get up early enough—in springtime—to hear him calling, but we never called it a "song." But it is always as welcome as used to be the whistled signal of a schoolboy, chum who sneaked up through the orchard and waited behind the bole of some big tree until we could join him and hike off down to Walnut creek and splash around in the cooling waters instead of hoeing the cabbage or hilling up the potatoes. Even if the robin were as dumb as the proverbial oyster he would be welcome, for the sight of him hopping around, a knowing look in his bright eye and his saucy head cocked on one side, is as welcome as anything could possibly be.

Does he not bring news that spring is here? And does he not convey the welcome intelligence that Mother Nature is waking from the sleep which wrapped her bed in drifted snow and clinging ice?

Of course Robin Redbreast sings. Brother Power says so, and Brother McCarn endorses it. The trouble is that the rattle of the typewriter and the grinding whirr of the linotype have for years overcome the clear notes of his song, and we'd actually forgotten that he could sing. That's what a fellow gets for growing old and getting mixed up with a business that keeps him out of the sweet-scented fields and woods and condemns him to long, hot, weary days amidst scenery consisting of brick and stone and mortar and asphalt and printers' ink.

We hope this apology is sufficient, both for Brother Power and Robin Redbreast—so amply sufficient that the very next time we can play truant from work and hide in the woods, Robin will acknowledge the apology by giving us a concert in which he plays the stellar role.

Does a robin sing?
Of course he does—beautifully.
The trouble is that some people's ears have grown deaf to his call and their minds callous to his music.

Usually it is a little tin box, with a padlock clasp. Sometimes it is a satin-lined little box with fancy trimmings; sometimes an old cigar box. But whatever kind of box it is it is a treasure box, and in it we keep those little things, worthless from an intrinsic standpoint, but priceless because of the memories that spring up when the eyes behold them.

The author of this department moved his lares and penates the other day, and in the mixup his hands fell upon the treasure box so carefully stowed away by the major fraction of the household partnership. In it was a bit of polished steel. Twenty-seven years ago it was a piece of an old handsaw blade, and the writer had trimmed it down with cold chisel, file and grindstone until it was a printer's "make-up rule." For years it was carried in his pocket and it ro over the earth as he worked as a journeyman printer, finally to be laid aside when he was "demoted" to the position of newspaper man. Mighty glad that old rule can not talk, for although it might tell some good things if it could vocalize, it might tell some things that are better left untold. But it has made up stories of war, of peace, of love, of hate, of jealousy, of trust, of political intrigues, and of patriotism that marked its way with the best blood of the nation.

Old union working cards, some old and faded letters, a thin gold ring that mother wore from the day she stood before the marriage altar until the God she served so long and so well called her to rest. A pair of old-fashioned "half-moon" earrings worn by her in the old, old days long before the war flend left its scars upon her native Missouri and upon the hearts of its thousands. An old daguerreotype, the face of a smooth-faced young man whose neck is encircled with rolling collar and black stock—the same face now seamed and wrinkled with the passing years and adorned with a gray beard, but still the same kindly-eyed, pleasant faced gentleman who placed the gold ring on the mother's finger so many, many years ago.

Two or three brass buttons—all that remains of a blue uniform. A time-stained bit of flowered silk—the last remnant of an old-fashioned wedding gown. A thin lock of gray hair. And carefully wrapped up in tissue paper by younger hands a pair of little shoes, worn at the toe and wrinkled of tops, but speaking so eloquently of the little one called away just as his cherry-red lips be-

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