

## WAYSIDE FANCIES.

There were three of them; little tots, the oldest not more than eight years old. They sat there on the bare black earth unconscious of the half-dozen spectators. The shadows were falling far to the east, and they had been there when you could scarcely see any shadows at all. It was Sunday—a cold, chilly, blustry day—the kind of a day when one wants an overcoat. And they were very thinly and poorly clad. Yet they did not seem to mind the cold. The youngest was crying bitterly, crying, as though her little heart would break, and the eldest was holding her in her arms, whispering soothing words in her ear. And the other little girl was sticking tiny sprigs of evergreen into the loose earth—sprigs which she had purloined from a neighboring tree.

“It is their mother’s grave,” said a lady who was watching. “She died a couple of months ago. And every Sunday they wander out here, all alone, and play for a few hours. Poor mother! I wonder if she knows.” I wonder.

## II.

It was a laughing merry crowd just coming from the dance. In the mazes of polka and schottische and waltz they had whirled the evening hours away, happy, joyous hours.

And, as they emerged from the dance hall, the golden broad-faced moon shone full upon them; the myriads of stars twinkled bright and merry. All nature was quiet and at rest. A rest so calm, so happy, so full of inexpressible serenity and peace. The heavens and the earth were pure gold; there was no place for dross or for alloy. This was a pretty good old world, after all; a jolly, happy, contented world—the home of joy and laughter, and hope and love. Truly, a rare old world; and the merry, laughing crowd, with its youthful joys and hopes and aspirations went gaily on.

“Help! Help! Help! Oh my God! Help me, help me, help me! Mercy, mercy, oh my God!”

It was a woman’s voice. From away up in the third story of the mad house it rung out clear and strong; a voice of agony and woe, of torment, hopelessness and despair.

“Help me! Oh, my God! Help! Help!! Help!!!”

## III.

They grasped me by the arm and said, “Come up to daily prayer meeting, come along.”

And their invitation was earnest and sincere. To them prayer means something; they know a God who sits up somewhere on a throne in boundless space—a God who answers prayer—sometimes. To me prayer means nothing—and I know no God. So I did not go. To them I am an object of pity—genuine pity. For they believe their God will damn me, because I do not know him. It all seems so strange; we are constituted very much alike, they and I. We have the same senses, live in like environments, think the same, in many instances, see politics, literature, science and art in the same light. Yet here we diverge, widely, irreconcilably. We are both in earnest, both sincere. Yet they believe that true which I know to be an absurdity. *They* would say they know that to be true which I believe to be an absurdity.

They know all that I do; know of Siberia with its awful horrors and unjust sufferings; know of vice and crime rampant and triumphant; know of virtue squalid and in rags; they see wrong conquer good, falsehood subdue truth. And seeing and knowing all they can say, “Altogether just and righteous are thy ways, Lord God Almighty.”

And I, knowing and seeing the same things, can only say, with the intensest conviction, “There is no God who has ordained and permits all these things, and if there were I should hate him.”

Why are we, who are so very similar, so very different? H. E. NEWBRANCH.