

JOHNSTON ANNIE FELLOWS,
BACON ALBION FELLOWS

SONGS YSAME

Annie Johnston

Songs Ysame

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Songs Ysame

TO

Our Mother

Mary Erskine Fellows

PRELUDE

WE cannot sing of life, whose years are brief,
Nor sad heart-stories tell, who know no grief,
Nor write of shipwrecks on the seas of Fate,
Whose ship from out the harbor sailed but late.
But we may sing of fair and sunny days,
Of Love that walks in peace through quiet ways;
And unto him who turns the page to see
Our simple story, haply it may be
As when in some mild day in early spring,
One through the budding woods goes wandering;
And finds, where late the snow has blown across,
Beneath the leaves, a violet in the moss.

1887. A. F. B.

NOW I can sing of life, whose days are brief,
For I have walked close hand in hand with grief.
And I may tell of shipwrecked hopes, since mine
Sank just outside the happy harbor line.
But still my song is of those sunny days
When Love was with me in those quiet ways.
And unto him who turns the page to see
That day's short story, haply it may be,
The joy of those old memories he feels:
As one who through the wintry twilight steals,
And sees, across the chilly wastes of snow,
The darkened sunset's rosy afterglow.

1892. A. F. J.

PART I. SONGS YSAME

The Lighting of the Candles

WHENCE came the ember
That touched our young souls' candles first with light;
In shadowy years, too distant to remember,
Where childhood merges backward into night?

I know not, but the halo of those tapers
Has ever since around all nature shone;
And we have looked at life through golden vapors
Because of that one ember touch alone.

At Early Candle-Lighting

THOSE, who have heard the whispered breath
Of Nature's secret "Shibboleth,"
And learned the pass-word to unroll
The veil that hides her inmost soul,
May follow; but this by-path leads
Through mullein stalks and jimson-weeds.
And he who scorning treads them down
Would deem but poor and common-place
Those whom he'll meet in homespun gown.
But they who lovingly retrace
Their steps to scenes I dream about,
Will find the latch-string hanging out.
With them I claim companionship,
And for them burn my tallow-dip,
At early candle-lighting.

To these low hills, around which cling
My fondest thoughts, I would not bring
An alien eye long used to sights
Among the snow-crowned Alpine heights.
An eagle does not bend its wing
To low-built nests where robins sing.
Between the fence's zigzag rails,
The stranger sees the road that trails
Its winding way into the dark,
Fern-scented woods. He does not mark
The old log cabin at the end
As I, or hail it as a friend,
Or catch, when daylight's last rays wane,
The glimmer through its narrow pane
Of early candle-lighting.

As anglers sit and half in dream
Dip lazy lines into the stream,
And watch the swimming life below,
So I watch pictures come and go.
And in the flame, Alladin-wise,
See genii of the past arise.
If it be so that common things
Can fledge your fancy with fast wings;
If you the language can translate
Of lowly life, and make it great,
And can the beauty understand
That dignifies a toil-worn hand,
Look in this halo, and see how

The homely seems transfigured now
At early candle-lighting.

A fire-place where the great logs roar
And shine across the puncheon floor,
And through the chinked walls, here and there,
The snow steals, and the frosty air.
Meager and bare the furnishings,
But hospitality that kings
Might well dispense, transmutes to gold,
The welcome given young and old.
Plain and uncouth in speech and dress,
But richly clad in kindliness,
The neighbors gather, one by one,
At rustic rout when day is done.
Vanish all else in this soft light, —
The past is ours again tonight;
'Tis early candle-lighting.

Oh, well-remembered scenes like these:
The candy-pullings, husking-bees —
The evenings when the quilting frames
Were laid aside for romping games;
The singing school! The spelling match!
My hand still lingers on the latch,
I fain would wider swing the door
And enter with the guests once more.
Though into ashes long ago
That fire faded, still the glow
That warmed the hearts around it met,
Immortal, burns within me yet.
Still to that cabin in the wood
I turn for highest types of good
At early candle-lighting.

How fast the scenes come flocking to
My mind, as white sheep jostle through
The gap, when pasture bars are down,
And pass into the twilight brown.
Grandmother's face and snowy cap,
The knitting work upon her lap,
The creaking, high-backed rocking-chair;
The spinning-wheel, the big loom where
The shuttle carried song and thread;
The valance on the high, white bed
Whose folds the lavender still keep.
Oh! nowhere else such dreamless sleep
On tired eyes its deep spell lays,
As that which came in those old days

At early candle-lighting.

A kitchen lit by one dim light,
And 'round the table in affright,
A group of children telling tales.
Outside, the wind – a banshee – wails.
Even the shadows, that they throw
Upon the walls, to giants grow.
The hailstones 'gainst the window panes
Fall with the noise of clanking chains,
Till, glancing back, they almost feel
Black shapes from out the corners steal,
And, climbing to the loft o'erhead,
The witches follow them to bed.
The low flame flickers. Snuff the wick!
For ghosts and goblins crowd so thick
At early candle-lighting.

An orchard path that tramping feet
For half a century have beat;
Here to the fields at sun-up went
The reapers. Here, on errands sent,
Small bare-feet loitered, loath to go.
Here apple-boughs dropped blooming snow,
Through garden borders gaily set
With touch-me-nots and bouncing Bet;
Here passed at dusk the harvester
With quickened step and pulse astir
At sight of some one's fluttering gown,
Who stood with sunbonnet pulled down
And called the cows. Ah, in a glance
One reads that simple, old romance
At early candle-lighting.

One picture more. A winter day
Just done, and supper cleared away.
The romping children quiet grow,
And in the reverent silence, slow
The old man turns the sacred page,
Guide of his life and staff of age.
And then, the while my eyes grow dim,
The mother's voice begins a hymn:
*"Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer
That calls me from a world of care!"*
What wonder from those cabins rude
Came lives of stalwart rectitude,
When hearth-stones were the altars where
Arose the vestal flame of prayer
At early candle-lighting.

No crumbling castle walls are ours,
No ruined battlements and towers.
Our history, on callow wings,
Soared not in time of feudal kings;
No strolling minstrel's roundelay
Tells of past glory in decay,
But rugged life of pioneer
Has passed away among us here;
And as the ivy tendrils grow
About the ancient turrets, so
The influence of its sturdy truth
Shall live in never-ending youth,
When simple customs of its day
Have, long-forgotten, passed away
With early candle-lighting.

Bob White

JUST now, beyond the turmoil and the din
Of crowded streets that city walls shut in,
I heard the whistle of a quail begin:
"Bob White! Bob White!"
So faintly and far away falling
It seemed that a dream voice was calling
"Bob White! Bob White!"
How the old sights and sounds come thronging
And thrill me with a sudden longing!

Through quiet country lanes the sunset shines.
Fence corners where the wild rose climbs and twines,
And blooms in tangled black-berry vines,
"Bob White! Bob White!"
I envy yon home-going swallow,
Oh, but swiftly to rise and follow —
Follow its flight,
Follow it back with happy flying,
Where green-clad hills are calmly lying.

Wheat fields whose golden silences are stirred
By whirring insect wings, and naught is heard
But plaintive callings of that one sweet word,
"Bob White! Bob White!"
And a smell of the clover growing
In the meadow lands ripe for mowing,
All red and white.
Over the shady creek comes sailing,
Past willows in the water trailing.

Tired heart, 'tis but in dreams I turn my feet,
Again to wander in the ripening wheat
And hear the whistle of the quail repeat
"Bob White! Bob White!"
But oh! there is joy in the knowing
That somewhere green pastures are growing,
Though out of sight.
And the light on those church spires dying,
On the old home meadow is lying.

Grandfather

HOW broad and deep was the fireplace old,
And the great hearth-stone how wide!
There was always room for the old man's chair
By the cosy chimney side,
And all the children that cared to crowd
At his knee in the evening-tide.

Room for all of the homeless ones
Who had nowhere else to go;
They might bask at ease in the grateful warmth
And sun in the cheerful glow,
For Grandfather's heart was as wide and warm
As the old fireplace, I know.

And he always found at his well-spread board
Just room for another chair;
There was always rest for another head
On the pillow of his care;
There was always place for another name
In his trustful morning prayer.

Oh, crowded world with your jostling throngs!
How narrow you grow, and small;
How cold, like a shadow across the heart,
Your selfishness seems to fall,
When I think of that fireplace warm and wide,
And the welcome awaiting all.

The Old Church

CLOSE to the road it stood among the trees,
The old, bare church, with windows small and high,
And open doors that gave, on meeting day,
A welcome to the careless passer by.

Its straight, uncushioned seats, how hard they seemed!
What penance-doing form they always wore
To little heads that could not reach the text,
And little feet that could not reach the floor.

What wonder that we hailed with strong delight
The buzzing wasp, slow sailing down the aisle,
Or, sunk in sin, beguiled the constant fly
From weary heads, to make our neighbors smile.

How softly from the churchyard came the breeze
That stirred the cedar boughs with scented wings,
And gently fanned the sleeper's heated brow
Or fluttered Grandma Barlow's bonnet strings.

With half-shut eyes, across the pulpit bent,
The preacher droned in soothing tones about
Some theme, that like the narrow windows high,
Took in the sky, but left terrestrials out.

Good, worthy man, his work on earth is done;
His place is lost, the old church passed away;
And with them, when they went, there must have gone
That sweet, bright calm, my childhood's Sabbath day.

An Old-Time Pedagogue

SLOWLY adown the village street
With groping cane and faltering feet,
He goes each day through cold or heat —
Old Daddy Hight.
His hair is scant upon his head,
His eyes are dim, his nose is red,
And yet, his mien is stern and dread —
Old Daddy Hight.

The village lads his form descry
While yet afar, and boldly cry —
(For bears are scarce and rods are high)
"Old Daddy Hight!"
But when their fathers meet his glance,
They nod and smile and look askance.
He taught them once the Modoc dance —
Old Daddy Hight.

How long we cling to servitude,
How long we keep the schoolboy's mood!
Still seems with awful power endued —
Old Daddy Hight.
They feel a cringing of the knee,
Those fathers, yet, whene'er they see
Adown the walk pace solemnly —
Old Daddy Hight.

Wide is his fame, of how he taught,
And how he flogged, and reckoned naught
The toils and pains that knowledge bought —
Old Daddy Hight.
He had no lack of "ways and means"
To track the loiterers on the greens;
He scorned all counterfeits and screens —
Old Daddy Hight.

Oh, dire the day that brewed mishap!
That brought to luckless back his strap,
To hanging head his Dunce's cap —
Old Daddy Hight.
No blotted page dared meet his eye;
The owner quaked and wished to die,
When rod in hand, with wrath strode by —
Old Daddy Hight.

He helped them up the thorny steep
Of wisdom's path with pain to creep,
With vigilance that might not sleep —
Old Daddy Hight.
Now, down his life's long, slow decline,
He walks alone at eighty-nine —
The last of his illustrious line —
Old Daddy Hight.

Her Title-Deeds

INSIDE the cottage door she sits,
Just where the sunlight, softest there,
Slants down on snowy kerchief's bands,
On folded hands and silvered hair.

The garden pale her world shuts in,
A simple world made sweet with thyme,
Where life, soft lulled by droning bees,
Flows to the mill-stream's lapsing rhyme.

Poor are her cottage walls, and bare;
Too mean and small to harbor pride,
Yet with a musing gaze she sees
Her broad domains extending wide.

Green slopes of hills, and waving fields,
With blooming hedges set between,
Through shifting veils of tender mist,
Smile, half revealed, a mingled scene.

All hers, for lovingly she holds
A yellow packet in her hand,
Whose ancient, faded script proclaims
Her title to this spreading land.

Old letters! On the trembling page
Drop unawares, unheeded tears.
These are her title-deeds, her lands
Spread through the realms of by-gone years.

INTERLUDES

Voices of the Old, Old Days

OH, voices of the old, old days,
Speak once again to me,
I walk alone the old, old ways
And miss your melody.
To-night I close my tired eyes
And hear the rain drip slow,
And dream a hand is on my brow
That pressed it long ago.

My thoughts stray through the lonely night
Until I seem to see
Home faces, in the firelight,
That always smiled on me.
Those shadows dancing on the walls
Are not by embers cast,
They are the forms my heart recalls
From out the happy past.

Forgotten is the gathering gloom,
The night's deep loneliness,
As round me in the silent room
With noiseless tread they press.
Though in the dark the rain sobs on,
I heed its sound no more;
For voices of the old, old days
Are calling as of yore.

Silent Keys

AS we would touch with soft caress the brow
Of one who dreams, the spell of sleep to break,
Across the yellowed keys I sweep my hand,
The old, remembered music to awake;
But something drops from out those melodies —
There are some silent keys.

So is it when I call to those I loved,
Who blessed my life with tender care and fond:
So is it with those early dreams and hopes,
Some voices answer and some notes respond,
But in the chords that I would strike, like these,
There are some silent keys.

Heart, dost thou hear not in those pauses fall
A still, small voice that speaks to thee of peace?
What though some hopes may fail, some dreams be lost,
Though sometimes happy music break and cease.
We might miss part of heaven's minstrelsies
But for these silent keys.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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