

REVERIES OF A LANDLORD.

(For the Review.)

By BENJ. F. LINDAS

Our family had long been known in the community as solid and substantial. Our possessions, that had been on the tax rolls for a time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary, comprised tenements, business houses, innumerable dwellings, and countless acres of suburban and farming land. My greatest inconvenience was to check up agents' rent statements and bank checks, and discover some method to keep at bay the ever-recurring ennui. My father, as I remember him now, was sleek; well-groomed and, in the eulogistic words of the daily paper, a solid business man who had helped to develop the wilderness. I can hear him now, as he sat in the library in his luxurious rocker, ramble reminiscently, "Yes, my boy, everyone must furnish something to the old world to keep it going. It was that way in my day—and some fine men I rubbed shoulders with. There was old Jones. Why! nearly all the handsome structures that adorn the town owe their origin to his inspiration. He was an artist, a lover of the beautiful—but he died poor. And Grizzly Smith, jovial old companion—he was a living dynamo; radiating life, and vim, and energy wherever he went. He lined the tracks with factories, he advertised us to the world, but he also grew old and shabby, and slipped away. What did I furnish, you say? Well, I furnished the land, and I am still furnishing the land, and I will always furnish the land, because it is the same land. As I always told you, each one of us must furnish something for the good of the world."

I was thinking over these old times as I leisurely drove through the woods one cool, pleasant day in autumn to spend a few days on our country estate. It was one of those afternoons in the early fall, when the trees, and bushes, and grasses, and flowers seem to be burning in one last, magnificent conflagration of bewildering colors, and when the hills and valleys look as if some invisible hand had flung over the landscape a vast tapestry of wierd, fantastic design. The gold of the hickory, the dark green of the firs, the innumerable shades of yellow and brown, with a bush here and there adding a splash of crimson, were dazzlingly blended, and stood out against the background of vivid blue like the masterpiece of an artist. The birds had not all left for their summer haunts, and a wild burst of song would greet us as we rustled along through the falling leaves. A gentle breeze just tinged with a touch of frost brought an invigorating glow of color to our cheeks. "Looks deserted here," I said to the driver, as I glanced over the endless solitude. "Wonder why people don't come out here instead of crowding into the miserable cities." "Don't know, sir," said the driver.

We had now reached the confines of my large estate, and as darkness

was rapidly descending I urged the driver to cut across the fields to the low, wide-spreading bungalow, that looked in the distance like the stump of a gigantic oak. We had gone but a short distance, when in passing a clump of bushes, I discovered what seemed to be the chimney of a house that had long since fallen into decay. "What is this," I asked the driver. "That's where the village stood, before your father bought it; he tore it down—I don't know where the people went, sir."

In a moment more I was in the old home; stretched out in a huge chair in the living-room, before a fire that roared and crackled in the open fire-place, throwing flickering shadows over the hardwood floor, and filling the whole apartment with a warm, cozy glow.

I gazed into the fire with contentment, when suddenly it seemed as if my whole being was dissolving in the lurid glare of the flames, the room melted away like a mist, and I found myself in a village street. What hills were those in the distance? Where had I seen before that lane of majestic, spreading elms? Why, I knew them well—they belonged to me—they were the ones I had passed in my drive that afternoon.

It was a pretty, smiling village. Well back from the grassy street, and anchored to the velvety lawns with chains of flowers, were the quaint homes and cottages. Bright-faced children romped and laughed in the shade. In one of the door-ways stood a mother with happy and contented smiles dimpling her cheeks, while from a window glowed the sweet, angelic face of an old lady, silently knitting. "A paradise on earth," I said to myself, as I inhaled the intoxicating odors of the earth. Then down the lane came golden-haired children to meet me with shouts of joy. Why, those were my children, and that trim, lovely matron waving her hand at me from the gate, was my wife!

The fire had fallen low during my reverie. I threw on another log and as the sparks ascended in the chill, evening air, I centered my thoughts again on that beautiful vision. But an ominous change has come over the scene. It is sometime later, and I am again walking down the wide, sun-checked street, but it seems as if a pall were slowly, steadily, settling over the landscape, chilling the hearts, and bringing looks of sorrow and despair to the cheeks. I swing open the gate, walk through the clustered arch of crimson ramblers and down the rose-bordered walk to the porch. Two strange-looking men are in the living-room. One man, tall and well dressed, with his face hidden in the shadows; the other a small man, with a round head scantily bristled in grey. My wife is in a chair, a frightened look on her pale face. "What is the meaning of this," I demanded. "You see," began the little man, rubbing his hands, and blinking his rat-like eyes, "this gentleman owns all this land. You didn't know it, did you? and he wants it—you'll have to get out, you know. We're sorry, but business is business." Then I heard something about Spanish land grants, bad titles, etc., but red swam before my eyes, and I blurted out in a rage, "What! leave my home, the home of my

little family, the home that we have built with our own hands, and christened with the tears of our joys and sorrows? Leave this home of my wife and babies? Leave this land that has nourished us since childhood? Leave this home filled with the clustered memories of all the yesterdays? Leave these walks and lanes, the friendly brook that talks to me in gentle murmurs as I go singing in the morning to my work, these flowers and birds and the humble, vine-clad church nestling in the trees that crown the hill? And why should I leave? These things are mine—mine by every principle of right and justice.”

“But the law, my fine friend,” puts in the spook in gray, “the law; this man has a deed; a regular deed, a legal deed; this is a civilized country, my lad; a civilized country.”

I reached for the old gun that was slung over the door. Then the tall, well dressed man turned towards me with a cold sneer on his clean-cut face, and for the first time I recognized him—it is the form of my father. The darkness falls. I arouse myself with a shudder. The fire in the grate has burned out.

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I am back in the city—in the old home of my parents. The rooms are large, the ceilings high. Another year has flown by. It is autumn again. Not the gold and brown autumn of the country, but the dull, drab, chilly autumn of the soot covered town. I am alone in my room, I have a coal fire in the grate. The chunks of anthracite have been welded into a steady, livid glow—as steady as human affections, I mused, as my thoughts returned to my reverie on the farm of the year before, and I try to weave into the vapors from the fire another reverie of my fanciful life since then.

I am again in the village under the elms. The first snow has fallen, mantling the hills in glistening white; draping the trees with garlands and festoons of winter's flowers; smoothing the highways, and covering the sordidness of neglect with a flimsy coat of spurious purity. We are leaving the old home never to return. Our neighbors have long since scattered to the four winds. Our footfalls are deadened in the snow. There are no smiling faces at the windows, no welcoming bark from the friendly dog, no shouts of children. Nothing but empty houses whose blank windows stare into the distance with the vacant look of the idiot. None of us speaks. The train pulls into the deserted station. An unearthly whistle breaks the stillness. A hill hides the old town from our view. “Don't worry,” says my wife, smiling through her tears, “you'll make good in the city; perhaps it is all for the best.”

We are soon in the hive of the metropolis. Then comes the first feelings of despair, and the ceaseless tramp in search of work. Then the realization that you are but driftwood in the infinite sea of surging humanity; the awakening to the fact, that from East, and West, and North, and South, a ceaseless stream of youth and brawn is pouring into the maelstrom of the city, all

springing from the same source. Youth with strong, lithe bodies; with muscles of steel and hearts of gold; men who could coax riches from any portion of the earth, yet now scrambling over each other in the wild pandemonium of chaos. Then come the days of terror; the days when I sit and watch the roses fade from the cheeks of my wife, and see the children transformed into the driftwood of the tenements. My spirits begin to sink and I slouch through the day with the listlessness of the lotus eater. The bright lights begin to beckon to me, and I can find my only comfort in the deadening poison of the saloon. Every night I reel home a broken, helpless sot, to find my wife sitting in the dim light of the lamp, working to feed the little tots who are tossing in restless slumber on the ragged couch. Night after night is the same story. Then one night I come home and find the room filled with people. My wife is huddled in a chair at the window, a picture of hopelessness and despair. An officer is bending over the bed. I stagger to him and push him away with an oath, and see the mangled form of our little boy, killed while playing in the traffic gorged street. I am sobered by the awful shock. The fumes of the liquor leave my brain, and with a reawakened vision I can see the ghostly specter that murdered my son. I can see myself in the shadow of the dead hand that has rolled back the stream of pioneers like a tidal wave until they re-settled in the stagnant pools of the cities. I can see personified in the class that owns the earth the insatiable greed that holds back from man the very means whereby he lives; the lust for power, the grasping selfishness, and the inhuman instincts that urge man to gamble in the life and death of his fellow-man, and I shriek my impotent denunciation of this twentieth century Herod.

My thoughts are getting beyond my control, so I arise from my chair, brush a hand across my eyes to blot out the horrible vision, and open the window to get a breath of the fresh evening air. And as I look into the night, I am fascinated by a wonderful star that hangs in the heavens, whose rays seem spreading and spreading until the moon, the constellations, even the earth itself, seem blotted out in the dazzling refulgence. As I gaze I can detect a scene, hazy and distant, like a mirage in its background of palpitating heat, and I can discern myself, standing as I am now, while before me is the indistinct image of a man from whose kindly eyes radiate pity, sorrow, hope and love, while behind him in ever-widening vistas, stretch forms innumerable; gaunt faces of helpless old age, pinched faces of children, appealing faces of sunken eyed women, listless faces of worn out men; faces without number all staring at me in helpless wonderment. I strain my ears and can hear the calm, musical voice of the man, "I came for all these faces peering at you through the mist to take this land that you call your own. I came for the thousands of acres covered with the rank growth of the forest and for the thousands of acres covered with the ranker growth of the slums. I came to gladden the hearts of these men, your brothers, and I came that the meek and lowly might secure their heritage of the earth."

The scene vanishes, and then, like a traveler gazing at the surrounding valleys from some mountain peak, I witness the transformation that begins to take place on the earth. I see the beginning of the second Exodus. I see cities emptied of their hordes who spread in every direction over the hills and into the valleys, along the banks of rivers and through the dark forests, across the deserts and over the prairies. I see them reclaim the deserts, clear the forests, drain the swamps, and dot the horizon with hamlets, and villages, and towns, while the products of their labor flow to the four corners of the earth in a never-ending golden stream. In the reconstructed cities I hear the wheels of countless factories whirr in rhythmic unison with the songs of the well nourished workers, while universal leisure unlocks the portals of the human heart for the reception of new truths that are already beginning to blossom into unexampled advances in literature, the sciences and the arts!

On the rolling acres of my country estate a new village is springing into being; new vine clad cottages are nestling in the shade of the elms, and once again the voice of childhood is rivaling the music from the feathered songsters in the trees. Once again I am musing under the old oak on the hill, with my gun by my side and my dog stretched in contentment at my feet watching in silent wonderment the paradise regained. Slowly and silently the sun sinks to rest and a breath of evening air stirs, and I find, in the words of quaint, lovable Ike Marvel: "Night had now come, and my day under the oaks was ended. But a crimson belt yet lingered over the horizon though the stars were out. A line of shaggy mist lay along the surface of the brook. I took my gun from behind the tree, and my shot pouch from its limb, and whistling for Carlo, I strolled over the bridge, and down the lane, to the old house under the elms."

"I dreamed pleasant dreams that night—for I dreamed that my reverie was real."

BELLANGEE "MAXIMS."

No real progress was ever made by force. Development can alone progress through growth.

The reason why the young with their ignorance consider the old out of date with their wisdom is not because they have more knowledge, but a more progressive and advanced viewpoint. They start with their active and quick perceptions where we, with our precepts, habits and prejudices leave off. They are taking counsel of their hopes and aspirations while we are clinging to our memories, our fossilized opinions and our unfinished purposes.

Dislike of work results less from fatigue than from discredit placed upon it by efforts to magnify self and belittle others in efforts to show one's self superior to the need of work.