

A NOVA SCOTIAN PORTRAIT OF LONG AGO

A. L. O. W.

IF you, who have reached the maturer decades, or years beyond the grand climacteric, happen to read Lawrence Binyon's "O World, be nobler for her sake" or some similar lyrical lines, for the first or fortieth time, or else Ruskin's incomparable portrayal of a good and beautiful woman, you must be reminded of some lovely lady known to you in the past or in the present. Who knows how deep the sweet influences of such recollections go? There may be the inevitable halo of Time's illusion: and that also brings its blessing to the recesses of memory. But there is many a faithful, unerring remembrance that neither increases nor lessens, for it became fixed in plastic, formative youth, and remains a precious, personal possession. That it is so places such memories among the intimate mercies of life.

Long, long ago in childhood, I knew such a beautiful grown woman; and when myself grown, I used to see her occasionally. To-day her countenance and figure and gentle behaviour are as real as though I had just left her in the next room. The features of her face were regular, and above the white forehead on her shapely head was a mass of dark hair. And the steady dark eyes that looked at you had singular tenderness. Years ago when I first read Rossetti's lines,

Her eyes were deeper than the depth
Of waters stilled at even,

I thought at once of those eyes back there in youth. And later when Woolner's long, musical descant, "My Beautiful Lady", in the rare Pre-Raphaelite "Germ", captured mind and ear, it was this woman I could see again. She belonged to a United Empire Loyalist family of Irish ancestry, whose women were handsome and graceful with pleasant voices. They had charm, the characteristic that baffles description. You can only say that one has it or has it not. But she exceeded them all in charm, for it was far more than her manners and unconscious grace of physical movements. It was essentially of the mind and spirit. Whatsoever things were true and lovely, of good report and happy

humor, must have filled her thoughts. Gentleness was the mark of her speech and attitude to young and old. She had a devoted husband and children, who must this day be glad to remember their mother. She was a reading woman with a good mind, and a diligent one with her fingers, being a clever needlewoman, as ladies once were wont to be. She wore a cap trimmed with delicate, real lace which lay softly on her hair. I remember her poise, which was stately but not too stately for essential ease of movement. One memory of that bodily grace is with me yet. She was walking with a child in her arms and stooped to pick up something. If I had then known Wordsworth, I had thought of a willow bending. Unconscious grace is unconscious power in a person as in the style of a writer. It is worlds away from the willowy physical grace of the woman-creature who goes in the catalogue as a coquette. But that kind has no place in the memory of a beautiful woman with a soul to suit. She was neither blithe nor vivacious, but she had a keen sense of humor and shrewd searching views of people and of life, held silently, but if ever expressed, it would be quietly.

Looking back, I see her in her beauty of maturity, and I now know that her lovely face bore the marks of a pure and gentle spirit. "Thou hast kept the bird in thy bosom" said Scott's Magdalen Graeme to her grandson. The bird in the bosom is an exquisite figure used by Walter Pater when the mother of Marius the Epicurean tells her son that his soul is like a white bird carried in his bosom across a crowded public place. So must his soul be kept unruffled and unsoiled through a crowded life. This woman's soul, I know, was like the white bird of Pater and of Scott. Its echoes are heard long after death takes the rest away:

Still are thy pleasant voices, thy nightingales awake,
For Death, he taketh all away, but them he cannot take.

And our cry is to the world to be nobler for their sakes whose beauty and ineffable grace are potent for good only, whose spirits are touched to the finer issues of life. They are actual women, and not figments of the imagination. Everyone of us has known such a woman, and more than one, sometime, somewhere. Is it not so? It is so.

I love my lady; she is very fair;
Her brow is white, and bound by simple hair;
Her spirit sits aloof, and high,

Although it looks through her soft eye
 Sweetly and tenderly . . .
 Her mention of a thing—august or poor—
 Makes it seem nobler than it was before.

That is true because she never mentions mean and petty things, but only what can be turned to good talk. Many a woman has been idealized by poet or lover or friend. But this woman, yonder in the years of my childhood and youth, was in beauty of person and character actually as I have said. I believe her to have been so in every fibre of her being.

THE MESSAGE

C. F. LLOYD

High through the silvery twilight soared the tower,
 Clean as a sword's bright edge and strong as love.
 A sudden flight of sound proclaimed the hour;
 The rose of evening lingered far above.
 Skyward the deep-based portal leaped like flame;
 Grace and the power of patient thought were there,
 And craftsmanship, content without a name
 To find its rich reward for toil in prayer.
 Out of the deepening shadow silently,
 A figure stole in cowl and corded gown.
 The ascetic lips moved not, yet gave to me
 This searching message from the ancient town:
 How once we built for love, these stones can tell;
 For gain or glory, see ye build as well.