

# FROM MY COTTAGE VERANDAH

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THIS morning I waved good-bye to the train that carried my week-end guests away. It was waved regretfully, for I loved having them. We knit and sewed for the Red Cross. We talked about the aftermath of the war, the starvation in lands over the sea, and the social and economic problems here at home. Now, having had time to put things in order, I am to have Woodside Cottage all to myself for a whole dreamy summer afternoon. It seems too good to be true.

The couch-hammock swings gently. A book lies within reach of my hand. But how can I read when all the sunny stillness is so full of lure? My book does not look reproachfully at me; it even seems to shrink delicately under a neighbouring cushion, and I know that I shall find it waiting for me on some cold and cloudy evening when we will tell secrets to each other over the grate fire inside. No repinings. No sense of hurt or neglect. Books are like that.

My eyes wander lazily at first. They revel in the vista of sun-dappled earth under the tall white birches, where nothing grows but tiny mats of moss, and baby maples, frail, with pointed leaves. I wonder idly if in the long ago ages before man invaded their silence, these trees crowded so closely for company that at last they entered into a mad but joyous race up to the sun.

Anyway, the birches won. My eyes follow up one after another of their straight white trunks until, at a dizzying distance, their branches unite to form a feathery crown. They won in numbers too, for they crowded out all other growth except an occasional rock maple, whose dark rugged surface makes a welcome touch of colour in the midst of so much whiteness. During recent years some young evergreens, with a truly modern disregard for tradition, have made bold attempts to gain a foothold in their seclusion.

I have been reactionary enough to take the side of the aristocrats, and have ruthlessly uprooted the little firs. However, they burned so merrily in the open fireplace and gave off such a delightful fragrance that I concluded this was their intention all the time.

By turning my head a little to the left I can see the broad Saint John river, where the sun is just touching the water with

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a good-bye sparkle before he turns his attention to my woodland. So my eyes turn quickly home again—they can always go back to the river.

Over to the right is an open space where the trees have been cut away, and I know that the sun will cross it a little later in the afternoon. Then will begin my Cathedral Hour. The sunlight will pour down into the nave-like opening, with the birches towering up on each side like the pillars of a great cathedral. Even now the light weaves magic shadow patterns across the green aisle like the reflections from stained glass windows while the whiteness of the trees takes on the rosy glow of purest alabaster.

My eyes close as I wait for it. Perhaps I nap for a little while. All the time, instead of organ music, the fairy fingers of a wandering breeze play the flutes hung high in the tree tops, while the carolling of the bird-choir softly changes to evensong. The altar lies just beyond our boundaries, where low-branching evergreens droop over the covered spring on the "well-lot," the feathery ferns that surround it adding to the illusion of a shrine.

At the back of the cottage the land has been cleared of the early growth of hardwood and is now densely covered with small slight evergreens, so that it is like looking into a baby forest. A most alluring brown path, paved with resinous old fir needles, goes wandering through it; the beginning of what we know as "The Trail to Ingleside."

What have we done to merit all this beauty and undisturbed peace? The old familiar pain grips my heart as I think of the lovely home-spots in other lands, ruined, desecrated: and of the much worse desecration of their homes and families. How I wish I might gather them all into this blessed, blessed land, where we, by the merest accident of birth, have been left untouched! A very humble but fervent prayer goes up that we may prove worthy of so much undeserved loveliness.

My Cathedral Hour is over. The sun has travelled westward till it has almost reached the path. Each time the hammock swings outward the trail comes into view, edged with all the fairy-like growth that Nature loves to scatter along the sides of a woodland path. The trail is dark and cool, too, for the sentinel firs that outline it have interlaced their fingers over their heads in a resolute endeavour to shut out the sun. But just at the turn where the trail vanishes from view, a sunbeam

more daring than the rest has ventured in and lights up with a dazzling brilliance the white stem of a birch set in a vase of fern.

I catch my breath with the sheer loveliness of it all, but something else has roused me from my drowsy day-dreaming. My ears have caught the sound, (even before they round the trail and come into view), of two whistlers, each doing a different tune. My afternoon stillness is broken in the only way that is welcome and lovely—the cheerful din of two hungry boys.