

THE ATLANTIC ESSAY CONTEST

1925



1926

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Second Prize

HOME

By Dorothy Brain, Ward-Belmont High School, Nashville, Tennessee

WE had traveled for several hours through the fresh green countryside. Now our road lay between towering mountains, and in just a few minutes beside the dashing waves of the sea. The heather was in bloom over the mountains, giving them a soft, hazy, dreamy appearance, unlike their usual formidable ruggedness. When we stopped at the little seaside stations we could hear the soft lapping of the water as the tide came in, crooning a lullaby to the rocks and sand it was slowly covering.

As the train rushed on, my mind turned to the events of the past few weeks, and a mist came before my eyes, causing the lavender and green of the landscape to run together in a most peculiar way. I blinked impatiently and wondered why I should be weeping when I ought to be laughing with joy. The answer came like a flash—I was homesick. Now I don't mean the ordinary kind of homesickness, but a helpless groping after something that I had looked forward to for several years. When at last my dream was realized it lacked the most potent element, and I was bitterly disappointed.

I had been living in America from the time I was a small child; but, much as I loved my new country, England was still home, and I had been given the wonderful happiness of returning to the scenes of my childhood. But they were not the same. Are things ever the same, or do they always change beyond our ken when we wish to return? The crowning disappointment had come in those first few weeks when I had made a short visit to some friends before leaving for the coast. It was one of the places I had fondly thought of as home when I had dreamed of my return.

We had driven up to the door, where we were greeted very kindly by our host and hostess, who put us immediately quite at ease. The house was a very large, rather pretentious structure, decorated according to the dictates of the smartest interior decorator to be procured in that part of the country. It was all in the

loveliest taste, and the same note was carefully struck all over the house, but there was something lacking. It was too impersonal. Even the geniality of our host could not dispel the feeling that we were visiting a show place of some kind. I began wondering if there was n't some hidden nook in that vast house that would spell home, but I looked in vain. There were, to be sure, nice big chairs in the library, but not the kind one could possibly cuddle down in for an afternoon's read. There was n't a big, comfortable, homely chair with a footstool beside any of the many fireplaces. The bedrooms were all exquisite to the tip of the tiniest ruffle on the curtains at the latticed windows, but not one to which it would be possible to rush when the tears would come and one wanted to go to a friendly chair or bed to cry it out. I can just see those ruffled curtains lift their starched brows in surprise at such an exhibition of feeling. They could n't understand. They were part of a house — not a home.

I came out of my reverie with a start. Here we were already pulling into the station, and I could see our car ready to take us by road the last twelve miles of the journey. It seemed good to stretch our legs for a few minutes while the bags were being collected, and then to tuck ourselves in, ready for the drive.

We left the town through a quaint, narrow street paved with cobblestones and soon struck a fine highway. On our right for a few miles we had rugged foothills, at the other side of which we knew was the ocean, and on our left were fields with many wild flowers, lovely trees, and quietly grazing cattle. Occasionally we caught a glimpse of a stately house hidden in the trees, or tea being served to some ardent young tennis-players now resting for a few minutes. It was all so beautiful and fascinating that I did n't know whether to watch to the left, to catch these intriguing glimpses of the people who were also enjoying the summer in this corner of the world, or to watch closely for the first view of the ocean when we should put the mountains on our left and run along the shore.

We left behind us tiny villages, each with its church and inn and cluster of little white cottages, and soon we were driving along almost on the water's edge. The sky and sea were a gorgeous blue, and the whole countryside seemed peaceful and happy, basking in the friendly sunlight. In the distance we soon

saw the spire of the little church in Tydweiliogg, for that is the name of the village toward which we were journeying. We put it on our right and then "The Shop" was pointed out to us, then the Post Office, boasting the only plate-glass window in the village, and then the tiniest shop or "Shopisha," as the villagers call it. Around the corner we went, past the pond with the white ducks swimming lazily about, and then we saw our home for the next few weeks, and we knew it would be home. It radiated that mystic something no home-lover can mistake.

Mr. and Mrs. Jones were ready to greet us, and we had a feeling of being taken into the family circle, such was the breadth of their love and understanding. We were no longer strangers, but a part of that charming family.

We turned toward the cottage, and it was the most lovable one I have ever seen. It was low and white and had a red tile roof. The windows were tiny latticed affairs, with dainty white curtains and brightly blooming geraniums nodding a welcome to us from the window sills. There was a little flower garden in front with a green fence around it — just the kind you read about in fairy tales. Standing in the doorway was Miss Owen, ready to help us to settle down and to cheer us with a kind word, a smile, and a cup of tea. I found myself smiling happily. I just could n't help it; it was the atmosphere about that home.

Inside, the ceiling was quite low and had heavy oak beams running across that gave the room a beautiful dignity. There were two china dogs, one on either side the big fireplace. I know they must have been there for years and years. It would have broken their poor porcelain hearts to be taken away. They too came in for their share of love and in turn helped to make that homelike atmosphere.

My bedroom had a big old four-poster bed, and the window was one of the kind that swings out and fastens with a little rod. I looked out, and there I saw what was to me the loveliest part of a lovely household. A baby, lying in its carriage, kicking and cooing, was trying to catch the sunbeams as they flitted through the leaves of the trees. Off in the distance, across the green pastures dotted with white farmhouses, lay the sea, blue and calm and inviting. What more could one wish to see from one's window?

Again I noticed the calmness of the surrounding country. The ducks walked about the yard and hobnobbed with the dog, and even the cat was allowed to join them. From the front door I could see the heather-covered mountains and hear the tinkling of the bells on the necks of the sheep climbing about the rocky shore. Poor foolish sheep — they worked so hard to find tufts of grass, when they could have had them without any effort on top, where the fields were flat! But even they, along with everything about, seemed to radiate happiness. Most of all the little cottage attracted me. To be sure, it had seen sadness and distress, and had heard the sobs of the wives and mothers of many fine sailors and fishermen who would never come back from the sea. But love and happiness and understanding had found their way in and stayed. They made this house a home.

My mind turned once more to the other house, that would, in all probability, remain a mere house. Surely it was not without love, but the love was not far-reaching and unselfish enough. The happiness did not touch everything it came in contact with, and there was no breadth of understanding. The decorator said the dining-room must be Elizabethan and Elizabethan it was; and the selfish interest in the house would not allow the owner to add the little touches that would spell home.

“After all, it is n’t the four material walls of a house that make it a home, because we can have those anywhere, but the four walls of love, understanding, a common purpose, and a sharing of ideals.”