

iar. To one who has always lived in the country these pages would simply repeat the sounds and sights of every day; to one who had always lived in the city they would be the revelation of a new world. A dreamy book is this, the writing of a silent, reminiscent man, a man who has had a boyhood, whose perceptions have been keen and whose impressions are vivid, a man who loves the world as God left it and shrinks from the artificial uses which his fellows sometimes make of it.

We append a single extract from the paper on "Running Water," which we may entitle

#### From the Wood-pile to the Wood.

I have on many a bright June morning perched myself upon the apex of the tall wood-pile which reached almost to the mid-top of the wide-limbed sugar-sweetening tree behind the wood shed, the white and pink blossoms of the old apple tree drifting lightly, silently down about my shoulders with every breeze, and from thence watched my father plying the rude tools that comprised the limited carpentry equipment of those days. Here was the out-door workshop for the making of sleds, ladders, and such other handiwork, however rude and homely it may have been, as belonged to the husbandry of the farm, and of all the quaint reminiscences of which none has lingered with such distinctness as the asthmatic squeak of the old rusty auger, as it made its journey downward into pillar or post with every half-twist of its stubby, oaken handle; a fit companion to the antiquated draw-shave, which had been so many times "upset" at the village smithy, and which was wont to share the honors with a plane of like remote ancestry, a narrow-bladed adze, a chisel or two, with maul of frizzled elm, and all of which were carefully housed and kept beyond the reach of the youngsters. The old wooden "draw-horse," with its flaring legs with long foot-pedal between, and spring-pole atop of all, securely fastened to its unwieldy head with a castaway bit of clothes-line, and that has held many a birch hoop and oaken wheel-spoke between its upper and nether jaws in its time, may have suffered much perturbation of spirit at the distinguished and delicate consideration shown the lesser tools while itself was left to shiver and shake in the winter winds, or hide its head as best it could under the drifting midwinter snows, neglected and forgotten quite. There was for years an old pine log that haunted the shadow of this apple tree, a great gnarled stick that was not worth the labor of working it into firewood, and to which the old "draw-horse" was firmly spiked at one end, which was to me the paradise of the Borer family. After the frost had departed and the warm weather had touched up the fields and budding trees with anticipations of springing grasses and singing birds, the wheezy grind of these wood-workers has begun, and many a curious conjecture occupied my mind, in those days, as to the impelling motive that actuated these great white worms to such constant, unflagging industry. Many a time, while sauntering through the thick-leaved woods, I have come across the fallen trunk of some huge pine or spruce, overturned by some summer tempest or winter storm of damp, clogging snow, and have bent my listening ear to it, to be rewarded a moment later with the faint music of this master workman among subterranean engineers; and now, when in the woods with rod or gun, or perhaps with witless purpose, hosts of far-away recollections will come with every bar of this insect wood-worker's strident song. If I tap my appreciation upon the bark, my wood-working friend lapses into silence, to begin his boring anew a moment later with renewed vigor. I detach some of the bark from this log in my search for the little fellow who is making all this music for me, but have only found, however, one of those beautiful mysteries which Nature hides away from those who are indifferent to much of her charm. On the inner side of this bit of bark is a miniature tree, of snowy white, with well-de-

veloped trunk, with spreading branches, and all the delicate film and interlacing of twig and leaf, and all soft as down, as if worked with fairy fingers. It is a fungus known technically as a group of *Mycelia*, belonging to a low order of leafless, flowerless plants, numbering half a hundred thousand species. They remind one very forcibly of the coarser frost-work on the window pane of a cold morning, and are not the less beautiful or wonderful in their foliage-like distribution of line and tracing which make up the picture before me, which is of the kind known as the *Polyporus radula*, the most active of all the fungi in taking from the cell structure of the different varieties of wood to which it attaches itself all the elements which they have assimilated or taken into their woody structure during their growth. The stripping off of more bark will disclose further beauties in this land of fungi. Here is a bit of *Polypori* in *resupinate* form, with its cream-like coloring and irregular contour, a mass of soft fungous growth attached to the inner surface of the bark, much resembling a bit of dough thinly rolled out, but of rich, velvety texture, with orange-tinged edge, with just a suggestion of a fresh smell about it, and wonderfully cool to touch. Hawthorne's tales of Wonderland, dear as they are to the childish heart, do not approach in their quaintest, weirdest guise to the suggestion of magic that lies within the portals of the woods.

#### HOMESTEAD HIGHWAYS.\*

M. R. SYLVESTER was introduced to the reading public last year with a book of *Prose Pastorals*, a collection of out-of-door essays in the familiar vein of Thoreau and John Burroughs, dealing with woods, birds, pastures, brooks, and meadows. *Homestead Highways* is a further excursion in the same direction. Its principal essays or chapters are five in number, a very short final one on "A Drop of Rain" having perhaps been added to meet the requirements of the printer for a little more copy. Each of the five chapters centers about some one object or incident, but is rambling in the extreme, and takes the reader through a wide and heterogeneous range of observations, experiences, and meditations, brought into unity simply by their common inspiration — nature. Or if we liken each chapter to a musical composition, then it may be said that each consists of a single theme buried in variations. Thus "An Old-Fashioned Festival" gathers up the features and associations of a New England Thanksgiving Day, the climax of the harvest and the portal of winter. In "A Winter Resort" we have a picture of the primitive district school, with portraits of teacher and scholars, and a recital of the familiar round of incidents which make up the school-house history. "Running Water" has the brook for its text, but does not stick to it any better than some other preachers do to theirs. "A Snug Corner" takes us into the quiet forest in winter, under bending boughs laden with snow, to the coverts of lingering birds and lurking game. "A Wayside Watering-Place" is a study of road life.

The human element, almost wholly absent from *Prose Pastorals*, creeps here and there into *Homestead Highways*, but its interest is always subordinate to that of the still-life of the outer world, enlivened only by the participations of the brute but mute creation. The book is written in a low and quiet tone. It is more than descriptive; it is reproductive. There is an attempt at microscopic minuteness and photographic exactness in its delineation of the homely and the famil-

\* *Homestead Highways*. By Herbert Milton Sylvester. Ticknor & Co. \$1.50.