

**THE VERSE-BOOK OF
A HOMELY WOMAN**

By Fay Inchfawn

[Elizabeth Rebecca Ward]

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Dedicated
TO
MY FIRST LOVE, MY MOTHER

PART I. INDOORS

The Long View

Some day of days! Some dawning
yet to be
I shall be clothed with immortality!

And, in that day, I shall not greatly care
That Jane spilt candle grease upon the
stair.

It will not grieve me then, as once it did,
That careless hands have chipped my
teapot lid.

I groan, being burdened. But, in that
glad day,
I shall forget vexations of the way.

That needs were often great, when means
were small,
Will not perplex me any more at all
A few short years at most (it may be less),
I shall have done with earthly storm and
stress.

So, for this day, I lay me at Thy feet.
O, keep me sweet, my Master! Keep
me sweet!

Within my House

First, there's the entrance, narrow,
and so small,
The hat-stand seems to fill the tiny hall;
That staircase, too, has such an awkward
bend,
The carpet rucks, and rises up on end!
Then, all the rooms are cramped and close
together;
And there's a musty smell in rainy weather.
Yes, and it makes the daily work go hard
To have the only tap across a yard.
These creaking doors, these draughts, this
battered paint,
Would try, I think, the temper of a saint,

How often had I railed against these
things,
With envies, and with bitter murmurings
For spacious rooms, and sunny garden
plots!
Until one day,
Washing the breakfast dishes, so I think,
I paused a moment in my work to pray;
And then and there
All life seemed suddenly made new and
fair;
For, like the Psalmist's dove among the
pots
(Those endless pots, that filled the tiny
sink!),
My spirit found her wings.

"Lord" (thus I prayed), "it matters not
at all
That my poor home is ill-arranged and
small:
I, not the house, am straitened; Lord,
'tis I!
Enlarge my foolish heart, that by-and-by

I may look up with such a radiant face
Thou shalt have glory even in this place.
And when I trip, or stumble unawares
In carrying water up these awkward stairs,
Then keep me sweet, and teach me day
by day
To tread with patience Thy appointed
way.
As for the house Lord, let it be
my part
To walk within it with a perfect heart."

The Housewife

See, I am cumbered, Lord,
With serving, and with small vexa-
tious things.
Upstairs, and down, my feet
Must hasten, sure and fleet.
So weary that I cannot heed Thy word;
So tired, I cannot now mount up with
wings.
I wrestle—how I wrestle!—through the
hours.
Nay, not with principalities, nor powers—
Dark spiritual foes of God's and man's—
But with antagonistic pots and pans:
With footmarks in the hall,
With smears upon the wall,
With doubtful ears, and small unwashen
hands,
And with a babe's innumerable demands.
I toil with feverish haste, while tear-drops
glisten,
(O, child of mine, be still. And listen—
listen!)

At last, I laid aside
Important work, no other hands could do
So well (I thought), no skill contrive so
true.
And with my heart's door open—open
wide—
With leisured feet, and idle hands, I sat.
I, foolish, fussy, blind as any bat,
Sat down to listen, and to learn. And lo,
My thousand tasks were done the better so.

To Mother

I would that you should know,
Dear mother, that I love you—love
you so!
That I remember other days and years;
Remember childish joys and childish fears.
And this, because my baby's little hand
Opened my own heart's door and made
me understand.

I wonder how you could
Be always kind and good!
So quick to hear; to tend
My smallest ills; to lend
Such sympathising ears
Swifter than ancient seer's.
I never yet knew hands so soft and kind,
Nor any cheek so smooth, nor any mind
So full of tender thoughts. . . . Dear
mother, now
I think that I can guess a little how
You must have looked for some response,
some sign,
That all my tiresome wayward heart was
thine.

And sure it was! You were my first dear
love!
You who first pointed me to God above;
You who seemed hearkening to my lightest
word,
And in the dark night seasons always
heard
When I came trembling, knocking at your
door.
Forgive me, mother, if my whims outwore
Your patient heart. Or if in later days
I sought out foolish unfamiliar ways;
If ever, mother dear, I loosed my hold
Of your loved hand; or, headstrong,

thought you cold,
Forgive me, mother! Oh, forgive me,
dear!
I am come back at last—you see me
here,
Your loving child. . . . And, mother,
on my knee
I pray that thus my child may think of
me!

In Such an Hour

Sometimes, when everything goes

wrong:

When days are short, and nights are long;

When wash-day brings so dull a sky

That not a single thing will dry.

And when the kitchen chimney smokes,

And when there's naught so "queer" as

folks!

When friends deplore my faded youth,

And when the baby cuts a tooth.

While John, the baby last but one,

Clings round my skirts till day is done;

When fat, good-tempered Jane is glum,

And butcher's man forgets to come.

Sometimes, I say, on days like these,

I get a sudden gleam of bliss.

"Not on some sunny day of ease,

He'll come . . . but on a day like this!"

And, in the twinkling of an eye,

These tiresome things will all go by!

And, 'tis a curious thing, but Jane

Is sure, just then, to smile again;

Or, out the truant sun will peep,

And both the babies fall asleep.

The fire burns up with roar sublime,

And butcher's man is just in time.

And oh! My feeble faith grows strong

Sometimes, when everything goes wrong!

The Daily Interview

Such a sensation Sunday's preacher
made.

"Christian!" he cried, "what is your stock-
in-trade?

Alas! Too often nil. No time to pray;
No interview with Christ from day to day,
A hurried prayer, maybe, just gabbled
through;

A random text—for any one will do."
Then gently, lovingly, with look intense,
He leaned towards us—

"Is this common sense?

No person in his rightful mind will try
To run his business so, lest by-and-by
The thing collapses, smirching his good
name,

And he, insolvent, face the world with
shame."

I heard it all; and something inly said
That all was true. The daily toil and press
Had crowded out my hopes of holiness.
Still, my old self rose, reasoning:

How can you,

With strenuous work to do—

Real slogging work—say, how can you
keep pace

With leisured folks? Why, you could
grow in grace

If you had time . . . the daily Interview
Was never meant for those who wash and
bake.

But yet a small Voice whispered:

"For My sake

Keep tryst with Me!

There are so many minutes in a day,
So spare Me ten.

It shall be proven, then,

Ten minutes set apart can well repay
You shall accomplish more
If you will shut your door
For ten short minutes just to watch and
pray."

"Lord, if I do
Set ten apart for You"
(I dared, yes dared, to reason thus with
Him)

"The baker's sure to come;
Or Jane will call
To say some visitor is in the hall;
Or I shall smell the porridge burning, yes,
And run to stop it in my hastiness.
There's not ten minutes, Lord, in all the
day
I can be sure of peace in which to watch
and pray."

But all that night,
With calm insistent might,
That gentle Voice spake softly, lovingly—
"Keep tryst with Me!
You have devised a dozen different ways
Of getting easy meals on washing days;
You spend much anxious thought on
hopeless socks;
On moving ironmould from tiny frocks;
'Twas you who found
A way to make the sugar lumps go round;
You, who invented ways and means of
making
Nice spicy buns for tea, hot from the baking,
When margarine was short . . . and can-
not you
Who made the time to join the butter queue
Make time again for Me?
Yes, will you not, with all your daily
striving,
Use woman's wit in scheming and con-
triving
To keep that tryst with Me?"

Like ice long bound
On powdered frosty ground,
My erring will all suddenly gave way.
The kind soft wind of His sweet pleading
blew,
And swiftly, silently, before I knew,
The warm love loosed and ran.
Life-giving floods began,
And so most lovingly I answered Him:
"Lord, yes, I will, and can.
I will keep tryst with Thee, Lord, come
what may!"

ENVOY.

It is a wondrous and surprising thing
How that ten minutes takes the piercing
sting
From vexing circumstance and poison-
ous dart
Hurled by the enemy straight at my
heart.
So, to the woman tempest-tossed and
tried
By household cares, and hosts of things
beside,
With all my strength God bids me say
to you:
"Dear soul, do try the daily Interview!"

The Little House

One yestereve, in the waning light,
When the wind was still and the
 gloaming bright,
There came a breath from a far countrie,
And the ghost of a Little House called
 to me.

"Have you forgotten me?" "No!" I cried.
"Your hall was as narrow as this is wide,
Your roof was leaky, the rain came
 through
Till a ceiling fell, on my new frock too!

"In your parlour flooring a loose board hid,
And wore the carpet, you know it did!
Your kitchen was small, and the shelves
 were few,
While the fireplace smoked—and you
 know it's true!"

The little ghost sighed: "Do you quite
 forget
My window boxes of mignonette?
And the sunny room where you used to
 sew
When a great hope came to you, long ago?"

"Ah, me! How you used to watch the
 door
Where a latch-key turned on the stroke
 of four.
And you made the tea, and you poured
 it out
From an old brown pot with a broken
 spout

"Now, times have changed. And your
 footman waits
With the silver urn, and the fluted plates.
But the little blind Love with the wings,
 has flown,

Who used to sit by your warm hearth-
stone."

The little ghost paused. Then "Away!"
I said.

"Back to your place with the quiet dead.
Back to your place, lest my servants see,
That the ghost of a Little House calls
to me."

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