

THE MUSIC OF SILENCE

BY HARRY ROMAINE

WHEN you leave the city and flee away,
To rest in some country solitude,
It is not to hear the low brook play,
Or the woodbird's musical interlude.
It is not to hear the fantastic strains
Of the symphony played by the wind on the
trees,
The hum of insects, the patter of rains,
For there is a music more soft than these.

Go, stand on the crest of a lonely hill
When the landscape lies in a sunset hush;
When man is absent, and nature still,
And the west is bathed in a tender flush;
Let the notes of silence arise and meet,
And fill your soul with their ecstasy,
With a silent music, soft and sweet,
With a grand and moving melody.

LITERARY WOMEN IN THEIR HOMES

*I.—MRS. AUGUSTA EVANS WILSON

BY T. C. DE LEON



PERHAPS from traditions—possibly from location and climate—Mobile's ways are quiet ones; and her material progress makes less echo than that of her sisters north or west. As with her business, so the old Gulf City does with that culture now forcing its

quiet way to recognition, notably in the works of several widely-read authors.

Mrs. Augusta Evans Wilson—standing easily foremost among southern writers—has kept her personality more hidden than would seem possible. In her quiet, English-looking



MRS. WILSON

home near Mobile she leads a life as placid and happy as inborn domesticity, supplied in its every detail, can make it. "Ashland" is a quaint, high-gabled dwelling, with the spacious rooms and broad halls and galleries of southern taste and climatic need. It sits three miles westward of the city, on the Spring Hill dummy road, and facing the Convent of the Visitation to the north.

Immediately around the house are hot-house dotted gardens, where flourish camellias, geraniums, begonias and ferns, which the loving care of their mistress make famous, even in this land of flowers. For on her simple Saturday receptions Mrs. Wilson's parlors, galleries and grounds show ferns of high caste, with geranium and begonia blooms that divide, even with their gentle, unaffected mistress, the interest of stranger pilgrims to her shrine. And, to the surprise of some, this noted authoress is as simple in her tastes, and in her talk, as though classics and history had not been coned since school days. The topics of the hour, the little troubles and interests of her friends, the projects and pleasures of young people, ever welcomed about her, move this true woman as genuinely as do weightier affairs of state, of political economy or of literature, broached by more noted visitors.

If Mrs. Wilson's books soar above the comprehension of the average reader, as some of her critics insist, I can vouch that her conversation

*The first of a series of interesting glimpses of famous literary women, which will appear in the JOURNAL from time to time. The series will present those literary women whose home life has escaped excessive portraiture.

never overtops her listener. Naturalness and cordiality are her salient characteristics, and brief contact puts the most timorous visitor at his ease.

In her intimate circle, Mrs. Wilson is universally beloved, the result of her frank, honest acceptance of worth, and of her unflinching desire to be helpful at need. In her home life she is literally adored, and to her radiates its every detail, whether of love, sympathy, or counsel. For she is a notable housekeeper, and in her hands the bunch of keys is, perhaps, for daily purpose, mightier than the pen. To favored intimates she talks frankly of her ventures in chickens, or her aspirations in a new yeast; and special ones taste buttermilk, fresh from her churning, with flaky biscuits.

Generous beyond the wont of connoisseurs, Mrs. Wilson's chief delight is to share her floral triumphs with her friends, leading them about the grounds for personal introduction to an especially rich bower of Cherokee roses; to her wonderful trees of azaleas, that carpet rods of earth with vari-hued leaves, and to her favorite, the odorous camellia tree. In her green-houses she comes as near to gush as her quiet nature may over potted plants of rare lineage and rarer perfection, each an individual with a name and a personality for her. Breaking a leaf here, a spray there, now a bloom, again a frond, she fairly buries her friends with flowers. I have seen her so earnest in this pleasure giving, when appreciated, that her reception dress and delicate hands were alike forgotten, as the latter probed into the mellow earth after some elusive root.

Yet social, genial and hospitable as she is under her own roof, or that of chosen friend, Mrs. Wilson is in no sense a woman of society. Her own receptions, lunches and dinners are her delight, but she cares nothing for balls, parties, or public entertainments. The death of her husband last year has, of course, thrown her even more in seclusion. Where the public of her home city knows Mrs. Wilson best is in the fair field of charitable deeds, wherein she is as tireless as she is an intelligent reaper. To the orphans and the needy of her own and other denominations she is an ever practical and patient almoner.

But "Miss Augusta," as near friends still call the placid matron, in their odd southern fashion, is a methodical business woman withal. Those who picture her stalking with upturned chin and eyes fixed on space, and careless of pebble and bog, would stare open-mouthed at the calm, unwrinkled face peering beneath the light lace cap that crowns soft, natural waving hair, into the recalcitrant churn, or the unduly delayed nest of careless Sister Partlet.

It is a thoughtful face, too, seen in any light; and at rest wears a cast of sadness that tells the gentle nature has been touched by trial. But this is evanescent, and quick erased by the smile of peculiarly winning sincerity and the gleam of kindly, color-shifting eyes. The figure is of average height and slight model, but no-wise spare; the hands and feet of peculiar delicacy and symmetry; and the walk of quiet, easy dignity that has much of decision and energy in it. So the active mind in the healthy body carries her through varied avocations without jar or chafe, each having its allotted time, and each going straight to completion under methodical habit.

Mrs. Wilson is singularly systematic in the distribution of her time. Each day she first attends to her housekeeping duties, arranging the various domestic details, and then comes the care of her plants. Returning to the house the mail is examined, and then comes study or writing until the dinner hour. The afternoon is generally spent going over the garden and farm fields, and inspecting the cattle and poultry. Once each week, on Saturday, the house is thrown open to visitors from ten until four o'clock, and the constant stream of visitors upon these occasions attests the popularity of the hostess.

Mrs. Wilson is not a rapid literary worker. In the writing of a novel she never begins the manuscript until the entire plot and characters stand out clearly before her. So clearly photographed is the story upon Mrs. Wilson's mind that she could as easily begin by writing the closing chapters of a book as the opening portion. In the case of her novel "Vashti," for example, the description of Mrs. Gerome's death was written before a word of the first chapter was penned. Mrs. Wilson's care of details is shown in the fact that for several years before her last book, "At the Mercy of Tiberius," was published, she investigated electrical phenomena, especially freaks of lightning, and collected eight well-authenticated accounts of electric photography. Among these were four remarkable instances of human faces photographed by lightning on window-panes. On this basis of fact Mrs. Wilson built her novel. In view of these facts, now printed for the first time, the ridicule of the literary reviewers touching the lightning photograph on the window-pane at "Elm Bluff" as "impossible, absurd and sensational," must have sounded rather strange and amusing to Mrs. Wilson.



"Ashland," the home of Mrs. Wilson, near Mobile