SINGING MOTHERS: BY ANNE P. L. FIELD

THEY came to me in a dream—those singing mothers. A long, slow procession of shadowy forms, beautiful as rainbows, and as wonderful, singing a strange haunting melody full of mystery. First came troops of girl-mothers, clasping their little babes with a tenderness that was half fear and with wide, inquiring eyes filled with holy light and the consciousness of the deepest realization of life. Then came strong mothers of youth, leading happy-faced children and confident with a sense of power; buoyant with hope and radiant with promise. Last of all came silver mothers of men, leaning on their stalwart sons and though bowed with years, yet gloriously young in spirit; hallowed by memories and glowing with the victory of achievement. And I, a mother, watching these pass by and listening to their haunting music felt as never before the divine significance of motherhood, and all the hidden meanings in the word "singing."

Singing, of course, immediately suggests a musical sound, such as the clear call of the skylark who—"singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest." How delightful it is to lie in the long grass in some sunny meadow and hear the insect orchestra fiddling and humming away the hours! And then the singing of instruments in a great orchestra! The clear treble of the violin; the mellow magic of the 'cello; the sonority of the French horn, or the pellucid ripple of the harp, all the "concord of sweet sound" issuing from pipe or reed or string. But the marvel of mysteries is the singing voice. We think of all the singing voices that have charmed a listening world since the beginning of time. Voices in opera, concert or cathedral. Voices so exquisite that they seemed scarcely human, and that had the power to sway and soothe and satisfy the hearts of multitudes.

Then there are the great choruses that have swept us up to the very gates of Heaven. Who of us can hear the Hallelujah chorus at the Christmas season, and not see the unfolding of those "portals everlasting?" Some years ago I heard a chorus of ten thousand voices sing our hymn of patriotism, "My Country 'tis of Thee," and as that mighty volume of sound rose from those singing throats, it seemed as if the Declaration of Independence were actually signed and sealed in the heart of every individual in that vast assemblage. Mere excess of emotionalism perhaps you will call it. That it may be, nevertheless it is that inrush of emotion, of which music is one of the divine agents, which keeps alive the idealism of a nation. It is the irresistible urge without which no great thing is ever accomplished.

All this is music in a marvelous mood, but there is no music on earth more appealing, or more far-reaching, than the voice of a mother singing to her little ones. No audience ever listened with keener rap-

ture to any prima donna than that little group gathered in the twilight hour at a mother's knee. It is her dearest joy at that time to put into music all the sacredness of motherhood and the happiness of childhood; to teach and to charm and to tune the hearts of her children.

But musical sound is not the only interpretation of the word "singing."

"HEARD melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter." There is a soundless music of the soul to which anyone, young or old, rich or poor, is heir. It is the universal music of life—the deep joy that abides in everything. It is the rhythmic pulse that beats unseen in all beauty, and that transforms ugliness into a thing of delight. In the Rijks Museum at Amsterdam there hangs Nicolas Maes' famous picture, "Old Woman Saying Grace." What do you see in it? Just a wrinkled crone, bent and worn with the stress of years, with hands clasped in prayer. But look closer and you see a transcendent beauty before which you stand in awe. It is the music in her soul—the inner singing, that floods her face with sublime melody, and makes a song of those shriveled cheeks and those sunken eyes and turns those reverent hands into a magnificat of praise. A deep joy was in that woman's spirit, a joy which no grief or care could obliterate, and which Maes, that master of interpretation, caught and made immortal.

There is soundless singing in the perfume of a rose; or the beat of a firefly's wing against the dark; or the breath of the wind over the smooth surface of a lake—all these have their song for those who understand.

The prophet Isaiah has sung "Break forth into joy; sing together ye waste places of Jerusalem," and I love to think of those "waste places" singing—blossoming into melodies of leaf and flower, for surely there can be no "waste places" in the realm of joy. Richard Le Gallienne epitomizes that joy in his beautiful "Easter Song,"—

"Arise my heart; yea, go thou forth and sing!
Join thou thy voice to all this music sweet
Of crowding leaf and busy, building wing,
And falling showers;
The murmur soft of little lives new-born,
The armies of the grass, the million feet
Of marching flowers."

And if this deep sense of joy is the mainspring of life, the music that sets in motion all the enthusiasm and the blessed activities of existence, then truly a mother's heart is the fountain from which this

spring of joy is fed. When I think of a singing mother, I think not only of a mother of the singing voice, lovely and inspiring as she may be, but I think of a still lovelier singing—the singing heart, the dream singing that has power to rule the world.

"We are the music makers,
And we are the dreamers of dreams."

Can any woman who has borne a child feel anything but a rapturous wonder at the potentiality which is hers in her relationship to the future?

In these crowded times when the air is resonant with the voices of mothers too busy with society or careers to pay much attention to their children, it seems as if the dream spirit which is the natural right of motherhood is being overshadowed by the spirit of materialism. It is the mother of today in whose delicate hands is the molding of the men of tomorrow. Froebel emphasizes that responsibility in the "Education of Man." "In the foundation of every new family, the Heavenly Father, eternally working the welfare of the human race, speaks to man through the Heaven he has opened in the hearts of its founders. With the foundation of every new family there is issued to mankind and to each individual human being the call to represent humanity in pure development, to represent man in his ideal purity." Colleges and schools and the thousand and one advantages of modern life have their important place and their well-deserved influence, but it is the mother whose heart is aflame with the joy of motherhood, and a realization of its divine responsibilities, who is the primal force in the glorious development of humanity.

I ONCE knew a charwoman who was a beautiful illustration of a singing mother. She had to leave her two little children at a day nursery when she went to work, but when she called for them at night, no matter how weary and footsore she was, her face was radiant with a love and joy that brought tears to the eyes of all who saw it. "Sure, ther's nothin' like bein' a mother, is there, ma'am?" she would say—"but ther's many a mother what don't know it!" I have no fear for the future of that woman's children, for they have received an inheritance beyond rubies, and this world is a sweeter place to live in because of her and others like her. Mr. Barrie was supremely right when he said, "A man can learn more at his mother's knee than by swaggering in bad company over three continents." And Mr. Eliot Gregory touches the same truth in his essay on "Charm." "There are few men, I imagine, of my generation to whom the words 'home' and 'mother' have not a penetrating charm, who do not look back with softened heart and tender thoughts to fireside scenes of evening read-

ings and twilight talks at a mother's knee, realizing that the best in their natures owes its growth to these influences."

There are divine indications stirring everywhere that the dream-spirit is returning to the world; surely it is to literature as one of our poet-critics has recently observed, and if to literature why not to motherhood? There are signs on every side that all the dear old-fashioned ideals of the past are returning to join hands with the progressive ideals of the present, and what a combination that will be! The immense vogue of the mothers' club of which even the tiniest village now boasts, shows the earnestness with which the modern young mother is striving for the best methods and results in rearing her children. . . . . .

"But the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice."—It is that "still small voice," that inner, singing voice that is to bring about the return of the dream to motherhood and that will enable the mother of today to see with that star-eyed mother of Judea, her child "grow and wax strong in spirit, filled with wisdom and the grace of God."