



Old Houses

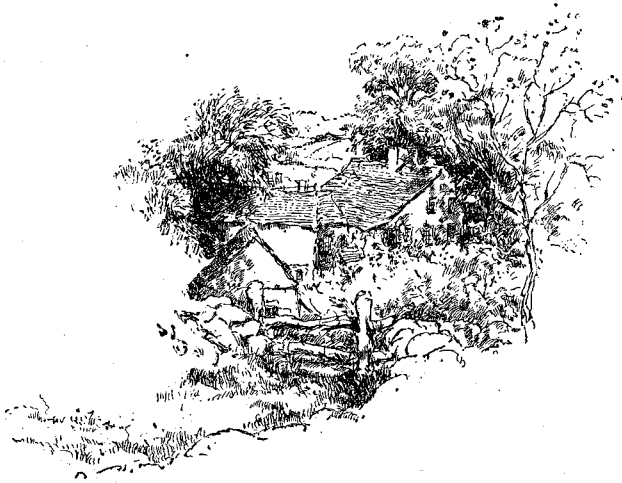
By ALICE CORBIN

THE images of old houses are as beautiful as old tunes,
Old faded music that brings a remembered pain,
Music that awakens music,
Like pain added to pain.
How many old houses are scattered
In the white ghost-field of the brain!

A room with four white walls
Where I read the Bible at thirteen:
Who can find a virtuous woman?
For her price is far above rubies."
And "Evangeline" and "Lucile,"
And the dark mysteries of Poe;
And when I was tired,
Powdered the face of the old negress
Who had fallen asleep
And who would awake
To see herself in the glass.
I was afraid to sit up alone.

A room in another house:
I remember when I stood with my hand on the knob,
Uncertain.
That door is no longer there.

Where the door hung there is no house.
 Yet I can open the door and pass in,
 And take down my coat from the corner,
 And brush the books from the chair,
 And sit down and look out the window
 Over an orchard of blossoming apple-trees
 At a landscape that has disappeared;
 Only the sky remains.



House of my childhood,
 As I grow older you come back to me
 And stay with me:
 Old house on Main Street,
 Where cattle browse in the ruined garden,
 And hollow-eyed memories
 Dwell in the dark shadows of the hallways,
 And rooms let to lodgers;
 Behind the heavy red curtains
 Of the recessed windows
 Were many curious little baskets
 Covered with painted flowers and fish and shells,
 Where lovers sat and whispered.
 Is it your unhappy shades
 Haunting the corridors?
 Sorrowful Mansard windows,
 Gazing down upon the grinning faces
 Of the darky quarter,
 It is not thus that I remember you.

House of love,
 House that is gone, house that is destroyed,
 Hidden and forgotten to make way
 For the bigger house built over you,
 For me you can never be destroyed or forgotten.

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I run up and down your steps—
Steps of thin air;
I go to fetch the broom
From behind the door—
Door that has vanished;
I answer the impatient click
Of the little gate on the stairs;
I go through all the rooms,
Shells of sunlight or moonlight,
And through all the rooms
Love follows me.

I remember an old house in France—
Ah, countless old houses in northern France!
They stand in rows, in broken ranks;
They wait quietly in the sunlight.
Where they used to stand
There is a hollow filled with water,
And the wide sky overhead.

Do you think that old houses have no souls?
That they do not stay
Where the body perished?

In a forgotten place
I have seen the corner of a crumbling basement
And the stunted half
Of an old apple-tree
Whispering together.

The lip of an old well-curb
Pushed up through the grass
With forgotten secrets.
It did not matter whether anybody
Listened or remembered.





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FROM THE PAINTING BY B. WEST CLINEDINST