

The Florida Pioneers

Will Wallace Harney



Stay, love; for see! the sinking moon
Has drawn apart the braids of rain,
To look on happy fields of grain,
And grove and garden full of June—
The husks that fold in monochrome
The sweet small kernel of our home.

Long vistas of clear atmospheres,
Like mirrors that repeat themselves;
Low dirges, as by ledgy shelves
Of brook-falls, constant in the ears;
And palms and pools where herons wait,
Narcissus-like, to meditate.

How changed from that black Abaddon
We looked on first, that seemed to scold
In saw palmetto! vines that hold
The live-oak, like Laocoon;
But, cleft, the rough, thick-sharded pine
Gives aromatic finit of wine.

To clear away that outer bark
What work We had! what make-believes
Of cheerfulness those troubled eyes,
As children whistle after dark,
When progress seemed to balk the will,
Like a blind horse in a crushing mill!

The strayed ox and the balky team;
The cyclone rending through the grain;
The wood's fire, like a burning rain
That flowed off in a scathing stream—
We've had them all since first we planned
To own a rood of cow-penned land.

Ease came, unconsciously as sleep
When slept the boy Endymion;
Like tired oxen coming on
By sheaves of wheat and herds of sheep
And falling days, as blossoms shed
Their leaves to keep the fruit instead.

You smile, and call me patriarch.
The Southern sun has made the man,
And every year has laid a tan
Since baby shipped his Noah's ark,
And saw the pearl-coat minnows rise,
To call them pretty water-flies.

His plaything scraped by dismal isles,
Like ours, when baby had the croup.
O God! to hear him gasp and roup,
And not a doctor in thirty miles,
And we unskilled to know or do
But ask God's help! lie gave it, too.

Around us ebbd and flowed the change
Of town lot, store, and mill and school;
A slow tide, freshening sink and pool,
Of farm land eating up the range—
Around about us, little wife,
The slow, sweet percolating life.

By that, and by the timely stitch,
And not a railroad taxed and ground
From the public purse, it all came round
In the orange grove, and we are rich.
To think! 'twas just six years ago