

A Pipe Of Oaten Straw

Mary Austin

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WHEN south winds smelt of earth and brooks ran clear,
I made a little pipe of oaten straw,
From which of old the shepherd lads could draw —
Each on the greensward laid, his love a–near —
Such strains as voiced the blithe, young–hearted year,
Till down the greenwood aisles the piper saw
Small, shy wood–creatures, hushed of wing and paw,
All rapt and still to give his piping ear.

Perchance he heard Pan pipe the reeds among,
Or his blown breath along the fluted pines,
Or lilting choruses by gleaners sung
Wine–red and merry in the Tuscan vines,
Or Satyr's lyre that charmed a shy wood–maid,
And mixed their music with the airs he played.

Perchance no loftier themes the shepherd knew
Than pewits calling the young world awake,
Or tranquil music such as hyl³/₄ make
When jewel–weeds drip all with starry dew,
Or cry of weanling lamb and travailing eye,
Or rattling reeds that in the wind do quake,
Or wild untutored melodies that break
Across the piper's fancy while he blew.

But thin as summer rill the music flowed,
Not over–loud, and sweet, and crystal clear,
And all his thought unto his true love showed, —
Ah! if a listening heart down bent to hear,
Such skill were mine, compelling notes to draw
From this my little pipe of oaten straw.