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The Valley of Peace

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Abstract: This article is a fictional story of Lehi's family and the Exodus as seen from the eyes of Lemuel's wife.

The Valley of Pea



Here is a romance of ancient America, the scene laid in the pleasant valleys of South or Central America, the characters members of those two ancient peoples — the Lamanites and the Nephites. The author is a product of Southern Utah, and a former student of the Branch Agricultural College, Cedar City. She now is married and living in Orderville.

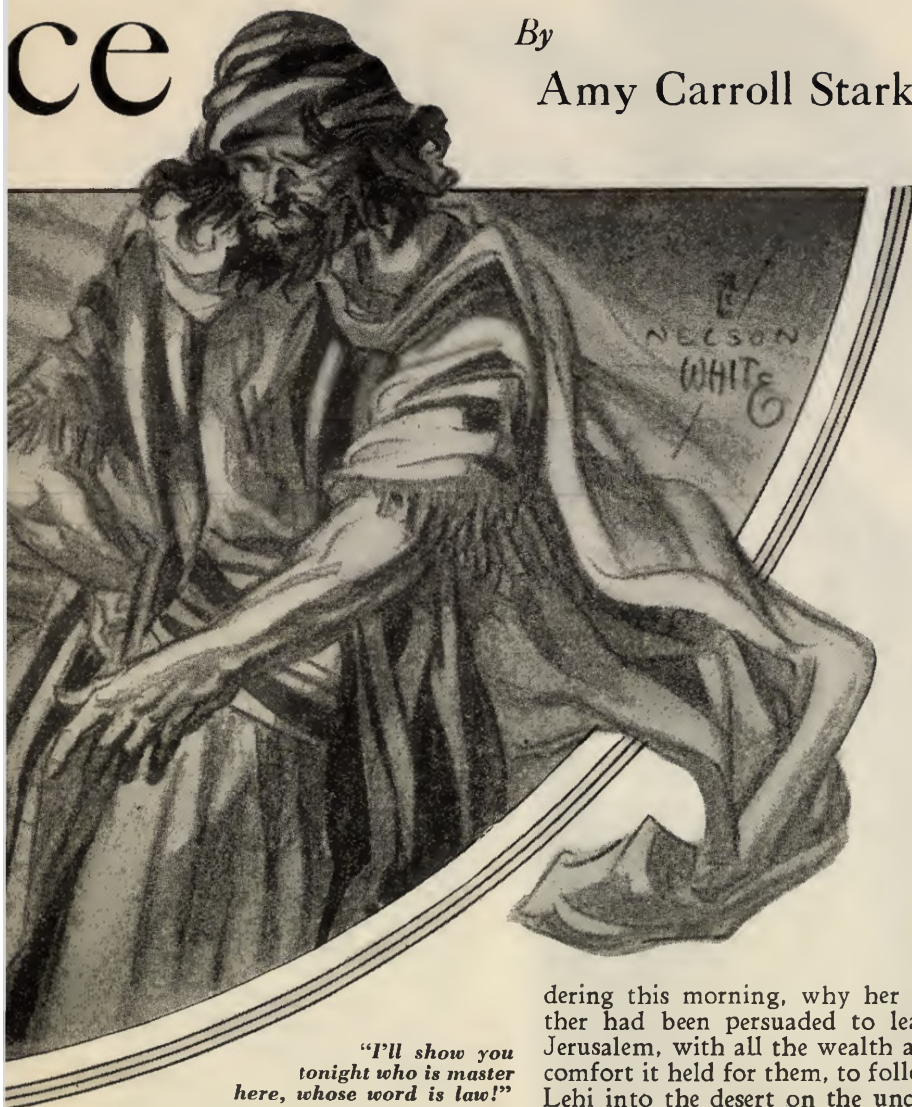
LEMUEL'S wife stood in the doorway of her tent peering anxiously through the fast deepening twilight, looking down the valley to the south, where the river ran, silent and deep.

That was the direction he had taken, Ishmael, her first-born—was it only this morning? It seemed so many mornings ago that she saw him standing by the campfire, tall and straight and defiant—hot, tempestuous words coming from lips that were so young, so tender.

It had been a miserable scene, a repetition of many such scenes; the father authoritative, critical,

ce

By
Amy Carroll Stark



*"I'll show you
tonight who is master
here, whose word is law!"*

even threatening at times; the boy stubborn and defiant.

She wished Ishmael would not talk back to his father as he did. Not but that the boy was right in many of the things he said, but it angered Lemuel so to have his word disputed. He was getting worse about it as time went on, hard and sullen, almost desperate at times, more like Laman, his elder brother. It used to be after scenes like the one this morning, that Lemuel would come to her, humbled and repentant, knowing that she was the one who had suffered most keenly.

SHE sighed deeply, for she was weary with thinking, with remembering. Unnumbered times she had wondered, as she was won-

dering this morning, why her father had been persuaded to leave Jerusalem, with all the wealth and comfort it held for them, to follow Lehi into the desert on the uncertain strength of dreams and visions.

But there was really something uncanny about Lehi's power over people. His words were gentle and kind, but they possessed an unusual strength and power, that at times made one quake and tremble with fear, and one dared not disobey.

And Nephi, his son, was like him, even more gentle and persuasive, yet his reproof cut like a two-edged sword. Too well she knew about that, for had not four of Ishmael's daughters married Lehi's four sons, and had there not been repeated occasions for trouble and dissension? And Nephi, the younger son, had dominated them all, insisted on having his own way. Even when they bound him and threatened his life, he had persisted in his determination, his purpose, his leadership. However, it may

have been that his strength was due to the power of God manifested through him. He always said it was, and really, it was something they could not resist.

Eight years they had journeyed in the wilderness; long, tedious years, intensified by the pangs of hunger, the fierce heat of the tropical sun, the scorching winds, the desert's burning sands. And they had left a grave by the way, her father's. He had not lived to reach the land that Lehi said the Lord had promised them. It was to be a land choice above all others. So many dreams are unfulfilled.

Babies had come to them, too, tiny and helpless, but oh, so sweet. Ishmael was born in the wilderness and his brothers, too, Seth and Joel. The journey was not so hard then, for there was the children's need of her.

THEY had found the promised land waiting for them, abundantly rich in wild game and fruits and honey, unlimited in natural resources.

For a short season they had prospered, and life had seemed wonderful. But the old troubles would assert themselves with recurring frequency—and then came the separation.

She had often wished that Nephi and his company had not left them. While it was rather humiliating for Laman and Lemuel, the eldest of Lehi's sons, to submit to the leadership of Nephi, their younger brother, still in those days there had been periods of peace; a comforting peace, a rare quality of peace which they never felt now.

And that was what was the matter of Ishmael. He had not forgotten the time when Lehi's children were all together. Some of his most intimate playmates, his closest friends, had been the children of Nephi and Sam and Zoram. After the separation he had bothered his father with questions. "Father, why don't we gather for prayers at eventide now, as we did when Nephi was with us?" or "Father, aren't we going to plant grain this season as we did when Nephi was here?" or "Nephi told me this was the best way to string a bow."

"He didn't tell us to follow Nephi; he told us to follow God."

his father would cut in irritatingly.

"It is all the same," the boy would persist, "for Nephi follows God!"

MISTS gathered in the dark, brown eyes of Mira, as coming back from her reverie, she searchingly scanned the valley again. Somewhere in its somber depths was her boy — her first-born. Or had he gone to the forest. Surely he wouldn't go there, at night, with the wild beasts hungry and ferocious.

"Mother!" The voice startled her, it was so near. She turned and saw him standing at the corner of the tent, young and straight and tall. He had come by way of the low western hills, and not through the valley—the direction in which he had disappeared.

"Is father here?" he inquired, his tone low and deep.

"He is at Laman's now. They are arranging for a hunt tomorrow. But you are hungry; come and eat—there is some roast left, and berries."

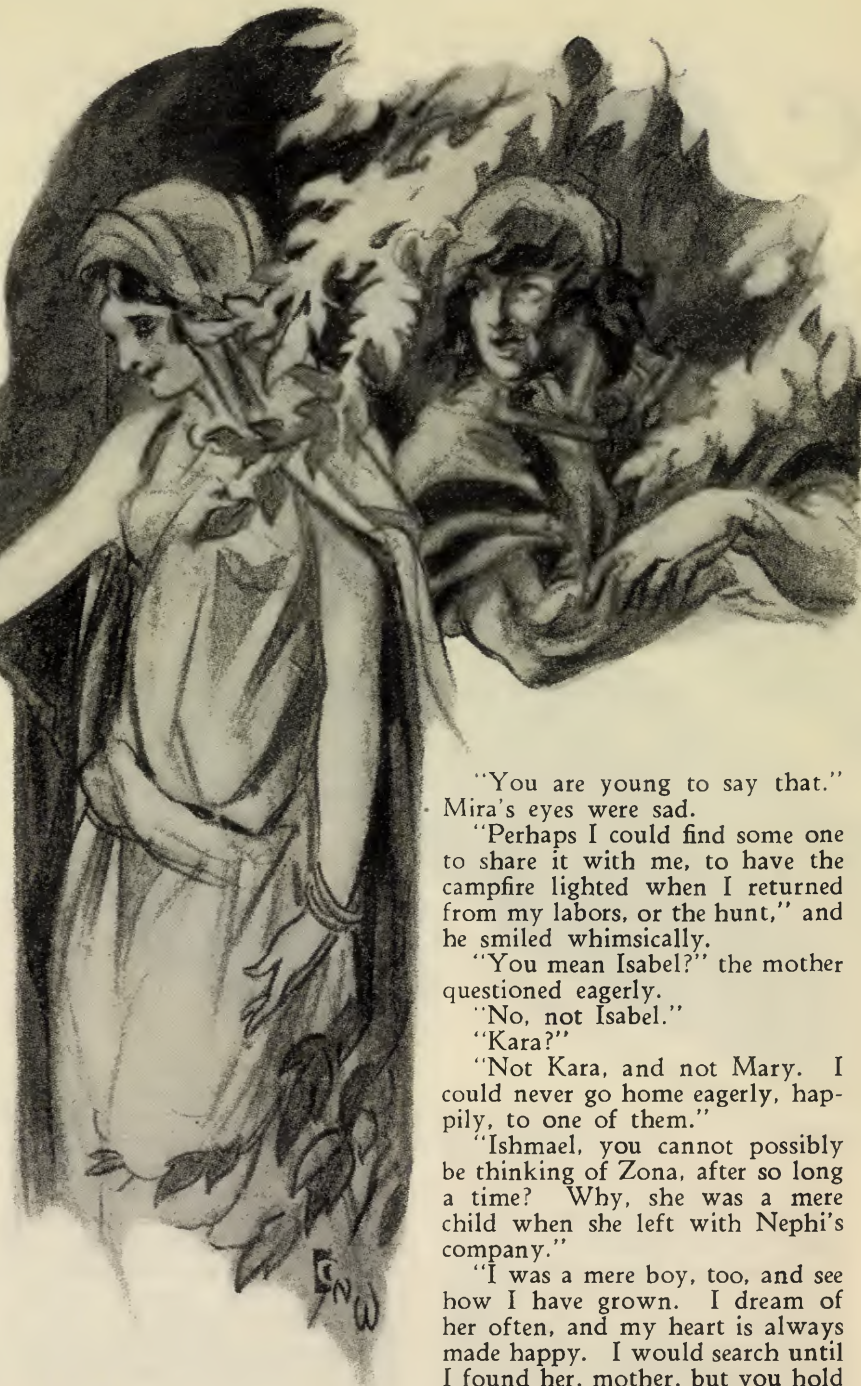
She placed her hand tenderly on his arm, but his dark thoughts were far from a mother's solicitous love. They were of a father's sullen tyranny.

"Ishmael, when your father comes tonight, don't say anything. He has scarcely spoken all day, and then only chidingly to the children."

"I'm not afraid! I'm not a child any more. He doesn't have to tell me what to think and what to say, and what not to say." The boy's brow darkened.

"I know, Ishmael, but not tonight. He is in no condition to control himself. He and Laman have been recalling their past grievances, and have been drinking too freely."

"It becomes more unbearable all the time," the lad interposed. "Idleness, fault finding, bickerings and quarrels! If it were not for you, mother, I'd leave it all. I would find me a little valley—



"Kim said you didn't even miss me—didn't inquire once. . . ."

plant fields and gardens, shrubs and flowers; I'd make friends with the animals, and tame them as Nephi did—as we used to do."

"But Ishmael, you couldn't do that. It would be unbearably lonesome to live alone, no one to talk to, no one to work for. Life's greatest joy comes from mingling and sharing with others."

"And greatest sorrows, too," the boy interposed dejectedly.

"You are young to say that." Mira's eyes were sad.

"Perhaps I could find some one to share it with me, to have the campfire lighted when I returned from my labors, or the hunt," and he smiled whimsically.

"You mean Isabel?" the mother questioned eagerly.

"No, not Isabel."

"Kara?"

"Not Kara, and not Mary. I could never go home eagerly, happily, to one of them."

"Ishmael, you cannot possibly be thinking of Zona, after so long a time? Why, she was a mere child when she left with Nephi's company."

"I was a mere boy, too, and see how I have grown. I dream of her often, and my heart is always made happy. I would search until I found her, mother, but you hold me back; not with your hands, I am too strong for them, but with your heart," and the boy looked at her tenderly. "But even without Zona, without anyone, I could be happier in my dream valley than I am here."

"It is a dream, Ishmael; but don't ever follow its lure. If you should go, there would be no one for me to talk to, no one to understand."

"Mother, it has been hard for you, too." The boy's tones softened. "How bravely you have borne it." (Continued on page 186)

leaving early one morning for a three-day camp. Menus were planned ahead and all preparations made so that the affair went off smoothly and delightfully. Hiking, trail-blazing, taking pictures and studying nature occupied the days, and the evenings were spent in games and songs around the campfire.

The trip was financed with proceeds from a drama they had presented in the spring.

Hyrum Stake

Hyrum Stake, at their Swarm Day, presented the pageant "The Quest", written especially for the occasion by a Stake Board member. A number of merit badges and certificates were awarded girls who had finished their work, and prizes were given for the best scrap-books. Handcraft exhibits and a delightful program made the affair one which will not soon be forgotten.

¶ The Valley of Peace

Continued from
page 138

"I bear it for the sake of peace," she replied. "There is enough trouble, without my starting anything."

"Oh! So you're the one who don't want trouble. You're the one who keeps the peace—you and Ishmael, with your heads always together—talking and planning and plotting! You're the one who makes the boy weak and soft—always remembering, always finding fault!"

THE sneering tones of Lemuel broke in upon them so suddenly, so fiercely, that Ishmael and his mother, startled and surprised, clung together tightly, each seeking as it were, to protect the other. They had been so preoccupied that they had not heard Lemuel's footsteps, nor seen his approach.

"Well, if it's peace you want, Mira, you'd better get into the tent. I would speak with Ishmael alone."

Fear clutching her heart she said low, but distinctly, "I would rather stay."

"Into the tent I tell you! I can handle him without help from you. Too often have I listened to your soft words, too often heeded the plea in your brown eyes. It has made me weak and soft like a woman."

"But I'll show you tonight! who's master here, whose word is law, whose actions will go unquestioned!" And he struck her a cruel blow, with force enough to send her reeling into the tent.

She made no outcry, but Ishmael, like a young jaguar, sprang at his father in uncontrollable rage. How could he know that the high, unfettered emotions of youth could not successfully cope with the garnered strength of maturity—justifiable as the cause might be, and that he only added fuel to the flames of his mother's tortured soul?

For she had heard Lemuel strike him down with a terrible oath—strike down Ishmael, her unfailing comfort—the only one who knew the depths of her troubled heart.

She heard him being dragged away, with Lemuel muttering oaths, and cruel, vindictive threats—threats that—"He hadn't forgotten how to tie knots, no, Nephi hadn't been gone long enough that he had forgotten how—and they'd hold too. Nephi might burst them, but no mere boy ever could. He'd find out what it was to lie in the burning sun for days, without food, without water—yes it would take days and days to vindicate that blow."

WHEN Lemuel returned to the tent and threw himself down beside her, Mira could have killed him, so intense were the fires of hatred scourging the heart of outraged motherhood. But

there was not a stir—not even the slightest of movement.

Soon Lemuel was breathing heavily from emotional exhaustion and drunken stupor, and Mira knew he would be dead to the world for hours.

She slipped noiselessly from the tent, stooped to pick up Ishmael's bow and arrows, where they had fallen when he had thrown his arms about her in an involuntary gesture of protection, snatched a bag of water from its peg on a tree, and disappeared into the darkness.

"Oh, Father, help me!" She breathed the supplication humbly, fervently, "Help me find my boy."

She went in the direction she had heard them disappear, weaving herself back and forth through the low brush, and calling softly, "Ishmael, Ishmael."

After an interminable agony of time she heard him. "Mother! Is that you? Mother!" She found him in a dry shallow stream bed, lying on hard pebbly stones. His hands and feet were bound with strong cord. Already they were hot and swollen, so thoroughly had Lemuel done the job.

Mira groped about her for a stone, and found a jagged flint, with which she cut the cruel knots. She caressed his tortured limbs gently, soothingly, until the blood began to flow naturally, and the pain abate. She bathed them with water from the bag—and with her tears. She ran her fingers through his hair tenderly, and kissed his brow and cheek and lips. She murmured words to soothe and comfort him, and lifted his head gently to the pillow of her lap.

"Ishmael," Mira murmured gently, "I have come to set you free—not alone to cut the cords that bound your feet and hands, but to sever too the heartstrings that bind my heart to yours. I want you to go now—to your valley of peace and happiness. See, I've brought your bow and arrows, for with them you will not hunger for meat, and the land teems with fruit and wild honey."

"But mother, without you? It is impossible," and Ishmael pressed his mother's cheek closely to his own.

"No, I will stay, you are almost a man now; but there are Seth and Joel, and Dan, Isma and little Joy—they will I care for—but my heart, Ishmael, my heart goes with you."

More words and tears and pray-

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ers—and Ishmael was gone, gone into the darkness, to the north.

* * *

IT had been a warm day, but the lengthening shadows of the trees, and the occasional breeze, with a mere suggestion of refreshing coolness, proclaimed it on the wane. And Joseph was glad, for he had been digging all day. But the ore was in the bags now, ready to be taken down the precipitous mountainside to the village in the green and fertile valley below.

"If I am any judge of ore," it was his companion speaking, "this is the best we have found yet."

"Then it is, if you think so, Jacob, for Nephi told me only yesterday that you were getting to be very expert in the judging and handling of ore."

"With Nephi to teach, one would be dull indeed, who couldn't learn," was the humble rejoinder.

The two brothers wended their way down the mountainside, each with a heavy bag of ore, talking congenially, or as congenially being silent.

As they left the heavy timber line, and came out into the open valley, they set their bags down, and wiped the perspiration from their brows. Joseph's fingers moving idly through the rich loamy soil, found a rock which he unconsciously lifted to throw into the sparkling stream nearby. But his hand paused in mid-air, then slowly dropped.

"What is that, Jacob?" he said, his eyes narrowing that their concentrating powers might be intensified.

"I see nothing. What does it look like to you?" Jacob returned.

"I can't quite make out—something or something—it moves so slowly, so peculiarly. Something is the matter." There was a note of anxiety as well as curiosity in Joseph's tones, as he started to his feet. Jacob followed him, and as they drew nearer, the object staggered, with an effort pushed on, then stumbled and sank helplessly to the ground.

"Heaven help us, Jacob, it is a man, or a boy," and stooping over him added, "and a stranger."

"But Joseph, that is not possible. A stranger, and in this land. That cannot be."

"My eyes have never before beheld him." Joseph's face and voice were filled with gathering fear.

"Jacob, a spy! The Lamanites!"

and he hastily scanned the valley in every direction.

"Calm your fears, Joseph, a spy doesn't come exhausted and ill, unless he is lost. There is no immediate danger. We will take him to the village, to Nephi; he will know and understand."

"We will set guards about," Nephi told them, after he had heard their story. "Perhaps the Lamanites are nearer than we anticipate."

WEEKS passed, but perhaps it was not so much time that lessened their anxiety, as the fact that the young stranger, who had been so critically ill, began to show signs of improvement. At first they could understand no words—just incoherent mutterings. He had been placed in a bed on a vine-covered porch at the east end of the house, and early one morning, as Nephi went to the bedside of the young man, his eyes were moving over the strange scene, and the brightness of the fever had burned out.

He was too weak to show signs of surprise, but his mind was rational. Nephi placed his cool hands soothingly on the brow of the sick lad, and he somehow seemed stronger, and could speak.

"The valley," he murmured low but distinctly. "I've found the valley," and his face lighted up and he smiled faintly.

"Were you looking for a valley?" Nephi inquired gently.

"Yes," was the rejoinder. "A valley of peace—a valley for fields of grain and gardens and flowers."

He looked at Nephi, inquiringly, and for the first time he seemed to sense that a stranger was near. His face saddened as he finished. "But someone else has found it first." He closed his eyes for a brief moment then murmured, "It can't be that I have found them."

"You came alone," suggested Nephi. "Was there no one with you as you hunted for your valley?"

"No one," he murmured and then remembered.

"Mother would have loved to come." His face saddened at the thought of her, and he closed his eyes.

"Your mother is?" Nephi's questioning tone rallied him once more, and he said lovingly, "Mira."

"The wife of Lemuel," finished Nephi, and the boy nodded.

"Go to sleep, my son, and when

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you wake up you will feel better," and Nephi kneeled at the bedside of Lemuel's son and prayed fervently for his recovery.

As Ishmael grew stronger he recounted to Nephi the story of his wanderings.

"It must have been months since I left my people," he mused. "I have no way of knowing, except that the moon grew full and waned many times. The valleys were so beautiful, but mother was right, I could find no peace and happiness in them alone. And there was always the vague unrest, which urged me on and on. I must have had hope that I would find you for each morning I would think, 'Perhaps it will be today,' but I knew how great were the chances against me."

"Did you pray, Ishmael, for the Lord to guide you?" Nephi questioned kindly.

"I am afraid not," he said candidly.

"We must acknowledge, however, that He did guide you," Nephi continued. "He watches over all His children, and helps those who put themselves in a condition to receive his blessings. He was very good to you."

WHEN Ishmael's story was known among the people, and he was well enough, they came to see him—his childhood playmates, some of whom he could not recognize, they had grown so much—young men and women, like himself.

As he grew stronger, they walked with him, and took him to their homes, and as places and people became familiar, he would go about by himself.

One evening as he was strolling leisurely down the grass-bordered path to the home of Kim, his childhood chum, he saw a young girl turn the corner of a fence nearby. He had not seen her before, and as is the way of youth he began to feel self-conscious and bothered. He glanced at her, shyly, of course, what boy would not, for she was comely of figure, and walked with graceful dignity. As he lifted his eyes to hers in passing, he saw they were larkspur blue, under straight black lashes, and that they smiled up at him in familiar playfulness. "Zona!" he stopped short, and put forth his hand eagerly.

"Why Ishmael, it is wonderful to see you again. I thought I never should."

"I thought the same, too. I noticed you didn't come to see me as the others did, to welcome a playmate—a friend."

"Well, when we found out it was you, Kim said he'd wager they couldn't keep me away — so I thought I'd show him."

"At my expense," interrupted Ishmael.

"Kim said you didn't even miss me—didn't inquire once" — and the red lips pouted, but the blue eyes smiled.

"A lot Kim knows about it," the youth replied vigorously.

He glanced down and smiled, and it was then he saw the ring on her finger. She followed his glance and smiled too.

"Yes, it is part of the stone you gave me the morning we left. Nephi mounted it for me last year. He said it was the most perfect stone of its kind he had ever seen—and it was the choicest of your collection, Ishmael."

"A sort of peace offering," he ventured.

"I know," and the girl smiled wistfully, remembering.

"It was audacious of me, wasn't it, telling a boy of your size that there was plenty of water in the creek to wash your dirty hands?"

"I thought so at the time, especially since I got them dirty building a house for you."

They both laughed together and Zona continued. "And as I remember it, you strode defiantly away and helped Isabel finish hers."

"And didn't wash my dirty hands either."

"No you wouldn't, if it were a girl who made the suggestion."

"Well, I have grown a bit since then, and take my word for it, Zona, since I have seen you again. I think I'm ready to go to work to build another house — under your direction."

"And wouldn't you walk out on the job?" she questioned banteringly.

"I surely would not, for I have no more jewels for peace offerings."

And they walked down the grass bordered path together, their eyes brighter than the glowing sunset.

HENRY DAVID THOREAU said: "What should we think of the shepherd's life if his flocks always wandered to higher pastures than his thoughts."