

Stonewalls of New England

by Shirley Cheney Usher

I saw them again this summer, old and grey, some moss-covered and split apart. Others, losing themselves in the tangled weeds, I saw them, leaning as if embracing the weather worn posts, posts waiting for the gates to be swung open once more.

When I walked down the gravel and dusty roads, I saw them: The Stonewalls of New England, and they spoke to me of the farmers, now gone, whose tawny, sunbrowned arms glistened with sweat under the heat of the noon-day sun as they toiled in the fields.

They spoke to me, these walls, in whispers, of young lovers that once sat there in the cool of the evening, and of the herd of cows, Holsteins, Jerseys and Ayshires munching on hay and stubble as they moved in closer and closer to the shade of the old apple tree that leaned over the walls.

I saw them, these ancient stonewalls, as I drove down the roads that divided the fields like walls dividing rooms in a house; I thought of the tired man at the end of the day, stepping back now to survey a day's work, a look of satisfaction on his face at the now finished job that took days, maybe months to build. Now he looks up towards the house and puts behind him the day's work and with a wipe of the brow, turns to go home, to refresh himself for tomorrow.

I saw them, the Old Gray Stonewalls of New England, the same that I'd seen all my life, over and over, the same that my father and *his* father had made, a lump arose in my throat. A special feeling of pride, happiness and yes, sadness came over me, for I was not seeing only stonewalls; I was seeing my heritage left to me and to my children, and to theirs, on and on, if not removed, and even then, for they are imprinted on the pages of our book of memories.

There is such a beauty in a rock, not perhaps, in a vegetable garden, or on a perfectly made lawn, but placed row on row, rock upon rock, broken here and there by post or gate, these stonewalls are the seams of New England's handiwork.