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The Golden Book of Springfield

by Vachel Lindsay

... being the review of a book that will appear in the autumn of the year 2018,
and an extended description of Springfield, Illinois, in that year.

1920, Pages 6-8.

There is a woman who is florist of our town, Anne Morrison a descendant of the Chapman family. She holds in special reverence, John Chapman, (Johnny Appleseed,) who began his labors in a region a little north of Alexander Campbell's diocese, in the Ohio basin. He remains a tradition among the more northern group of those who worshipped Campbell, and

among similar pioneers. He is especially honored by that splendid sect, the Swedenborgians, for he was a preacher and teacher of the doctrines of Swedenborg. But he was even more notably a nurseryman. He was deserving of the laurels of Thoreau, three times and more, and by the test of life rather than writing, to him belongs nearly every worth-while crown of Whitman. He skirmished on the very edge of the frontier, but fought the wilderness, not the Indian. The aborigines thought him a great medicine man and holy man, because of his magical bag of seeds, for along their trails, wherever he tramped, there soon came up pennyroyal and all beneficent herbs. With the tenderness of St. Francis he wept over every wounded bird, and with the steadiness of a nation builder, he planted orchards of apples in the openings of the forest, fenced them in, and left them for the pioneers to find, long after. He wore for a shirt and sole article of clothing an old gunny-sack with holes cut for arms and legs, and winter or summer slept in the hollow tree on the pile of old leaves, and weathered it past seventy years, while the great Whitman lived in houses, and Thoreau was on Walden but a season or two. These men left behind them certain writings, but Johnny Appleseed

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left behind him apples, orchards heavy with fruit, beauty from the very black earth, and a tradition whose wonder shall yet ring through all the palaces of mankind. He was swift as the deer, and gentle as the fawn,—and stern with himself, as the Red Indian. Like Christ and Socrates he wrote only in the soil. He was welcomed more like an angel than a man in the pioneer cabins, and if ever there was an American saint left uncanonized in 1920, it is John Chapman, Johnny Appleseed, and by 2018 he is canonized indeed, and has his niche in the Springfield Cathedral, according to Anne Morrison's revelation.