

## An Old Boy's Recollections.

To one nearing the age limit set by Solomon, indulgence in reminiscence of incidents of one's early years is so commonplace in his experience that aged people are said to live largely in the past, even though they may not realize all the handicaps catalogued for their class by the wise man of the Scriptures, and may be unwilling to be rated as back numbers. Born on a bush farm in an Ontario township, in the first of the forties of the last past century, among my earliest recollections are those of sugarmaking in the woods, and the gathering of wildflowers in the springtime; of many men reaping the ripe wheat with sickles in summer; and of gathering nuts in the woods in the mellow autumn; of wading through snowdrifts to school in winter; of the swish of giant trees of the forest felled by axemen; the shouting of ox-teamsters in the logging fallow, and the burning of brush-heaps and log-piles. Bees were common in those days—not the honeymaking variety, whose posterior point a Chinaman described as "velly much hot," but something similar to what are in these days dignified with the title of co-operative organizations, neighbors joining to help each other over hard places, and so the men had chopping, logging and wood-hauling bees, and the women sewing, quilting and apple-paring parties, all of which were cheery gatherings, at which the gossip of the neighborhood was as thoroughly threshed as over the rural telephone or the daily press in these times. A common diversion of the young people at the close of a paring-bee was pelting each other with peelings, a practice which did not improve the appearance of the room, but served the purpose of waxing the floor for the dance which frequently followed, to the music of the fiddle and the call of the conductor, and was continued into the wee hours of the morning, where not against the principles of the people of the house. In those days, the schooling of farmers' sons, as a rule, was limited to the winter months, as those over nine or ten years were required to work on the farm in summer, and about the only holidays observed, other than Sundays, were Christmas and New Year's Day, the school term calling for six days in the week. School-lessons, long and perplexing, had to be learned "by heart," by the light of the open fireplace or of a tallow candle, and failure to recite correctly almost invariably carried with it the penalty of corporal punishment by means of the "taws" or a blue-beech "gad." And chores galore were always cut out for the boys before and after school-hours; while on Saturdays, after they were declared holidays, pater was pretty sure to have some extra work provided for the boys, to keep them out of mischief. Teacher-training received little attention in those days, and the "master," having few, if any, lessons to prepare, in some cases eked out his income by cobbling boots, tinkering tinware, or practicing the veterinary art, while some spent too much time at the village tavern, and not infrequently came to the school with "big head," which made them cranky and ready to use the rod freely on the slightest provocation. The boy who was not bright at learning lessons had a hard time in those days, and often suffered severe distress mentally, as well as physically, from failure to recite what he had learned with much effort, and in many cases with no help and little sympathy at home. An exceptional instance is, however, recalled, in which the father of a boy who had made little progress, and was often in trouble, called on the teacher to inquire the cause, and, on being informed that the boy had no faculty for learning, he innocently asked, "What would it cost to get him one?"

Immigration of Old Country people seeking work was then as common as now, and while a larger proportion than now were of the class of farm laborers who, though a bit awkward at first, quickly accommodated themselves to the kind of work required of them, and proved very satisfactory in every respect, others, coming from the cities, with no farm experience, were as ridiculously unsuitable as many of those coming to us now, requiring much patience in their training, their clumsiness in handling an axe often endangering their feet; while, in learning to thresh

with a flail—"Two sticks and a string," as the Irishman described the implement—the "green-horn" was as likely to hit his own head as that of the grain he aimed at.

The story is told of a pair of English bloods, newcomers to the Northwest, who, having hired a livery team to drive across the country in search of a suitable section of land, on coming to a stream, and concluding that the horses would be benefited by a drink, found that the animals were unable to reach the water, owing to the overdraw checks, and the only solution of the



Primitive Seeding Methods.



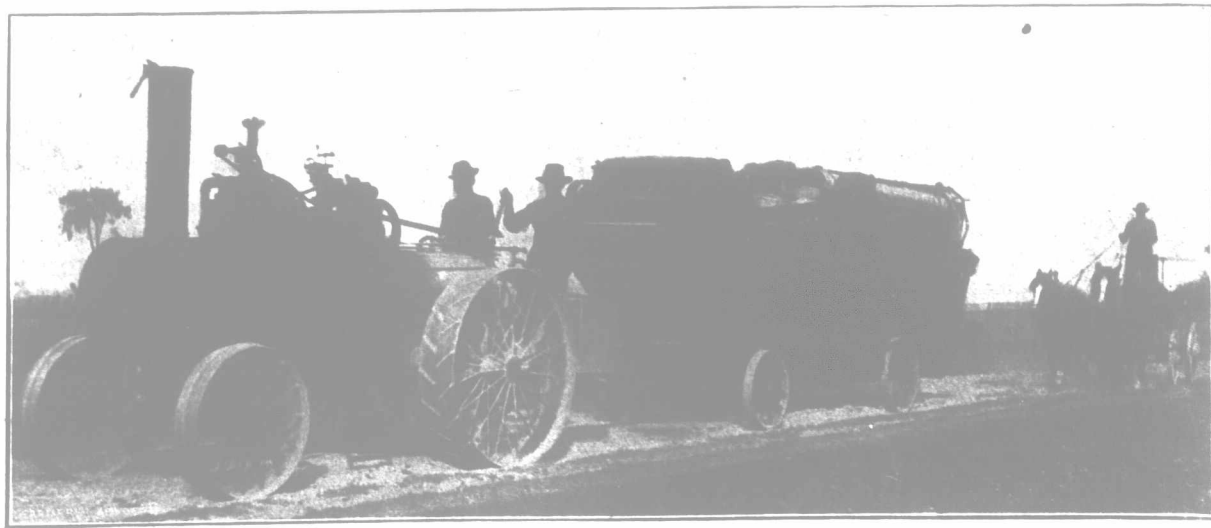
Filing the Good Old Crosscut.

difficulty which occurred to the men, that of raising the buggy behind, failing to afford the required relief, they drove on.

But to return to our bushwhacking—the clearing of land, and its preparation for cropping—the first thing recalled is the marvellous skill that was acquired by experienced axemen in bringing down the giant trees, felling them precisely where wanted, and where they could be cut into even lengths for piling to best advantage in the summer season, after the brush was burned away. One brave Irish neighbor, whose stentorian voice when driving an ox-team could be heard a mile away, was an expert axeman, and I recollect as clearly as if it were yesterday, hearing, as I passed him on my way to school, the deep "hah-hah," that sound forced from inflated lungs by the downward stroke, as he sunk the axe into the wood, making the big chips fly. The bringing together of the logs and piling them for burning was a laborious task, and here the ox-team served a splendid purpose, owing to the absence of harness and trace chains, their quick motion in turning around and their truiness in drawing a heavy load being admirable. It was the common practice to arrange a "bee" for this purpose. The men were divided into gangs of about half a dozen, each with a yoke of oxen, the land marked out into narrow sections across the field by means of flag-poles in line, and competition between the gangs as to which should complete its section first was keen. The shouting of the ox-teamsters, and the hustling of the men in placing "skids" and rolling the logs by means of handspikes into big piles for burning, constituted an exceedingly animated scene. It would appear almost incredible that a field thickly covered with the stumps of large trees could be brought into condition in a single summer, to be seeded to wheat in the autumn of the same year, when stumping machines or dynamite had not come into use. Yet that was the common practice, the seed being broadcasted by hand, and scratched into the soil between the stumps with a V-shaped drag. And bumper crops of 30 to 40 bushels an acre were commonly secured from little more than half the surface area, the balance being still occupied by stumps.

### THE EVOLUTION OF THE REAPER.

Horse-power reapers were, of course, not in vogue then, and would have been useless in such fields, the harvesting being done by means of hand sickles, the grain cut knee-high to economize barn room, and bound by hand with straw bands. On my father's farm, when it had grown to three hundred acres, and one-half that area was regularly seeded to winter wheat, the harvesting was done by sickle for years after the grain cradle was introduced, simply because of economy of time and space in hauling and storing. Of course, it required more men in the reaping, but help was



A Modern Threshing Outfit.

The traction engine drawing a grain separator, and sometimes the water tank as well, is a familiar sight on the highways of Western and Central Ontario. In some cases the engine is used to back the threshing machine into the barn.