

WINTER IN THE WOODS

By HELEN E. WILLIAMS

THOMAS HARDY once averred that it was only those who half knew a thing who wrote about it, for those who knew it thoroughly didn't take the trouble. Certainly the time to write about winter is while it is still young in months, and the wonderment of its spell has suffered no diminution. After a little the eye becomes accustomed to phenomenal effects. They are "just winter." And—to quote the Frenchman asked for his impression of a country—when we do not speak of things with a partiality full of love, what we say is not worth recording.

There is a theory that love is the discovery of ourselves in others and our delight in the recognition. Applied to seasons and places this is even more true. But to effect it one must go alone. Then there is an exultation Homeric about walking through white storms that blot out all landmarks, mould roadside drifts into curvilinear convolutions, and shout windy dirges through the leafless, shuddering trees.

In winter the way seems farther to places where the feeling of people is left behind. But the Plain road takes you there. Always a means and not an objective—this level stretch which you must needs traverse before you partake of the inspiration of the hills—your mind races ahead. How will the creek look? In the village the river flowed swart betwixt its serrated white enamel banks. Under the "first bridge" it stained the virginal snow in one cream-coloured peppermint-drop. But the creek is snowed under. The landscape without the beautiful mystery of water.

Snowbound, too, is the sugar-



Most people haven't time to go to the woods in winter. Some people have no woods to go to. This article and photograph from Quebec give you the feeling of out-of-doors and decorative mystery without the bother of putting on leg boots

house, in the fold of the maple orchard. The bemarbled foothills wear a pulplish tint. A yellow light is on the snow. The short mid-winter afternoon sunsetting. Corot had a preference for those hours of changing light preceding sunrise and following sunset. Perhaps in them he found the sublimed realism which removed his pictures, ethereally from the subject of their expression, and made them painted music. Any other medium seems inadequate to convey the mystery of the incarnadined East, or the drama of the splendid close of day. But Alexander Smith, poet and essayist, translates one phase of the latter, when he writes:

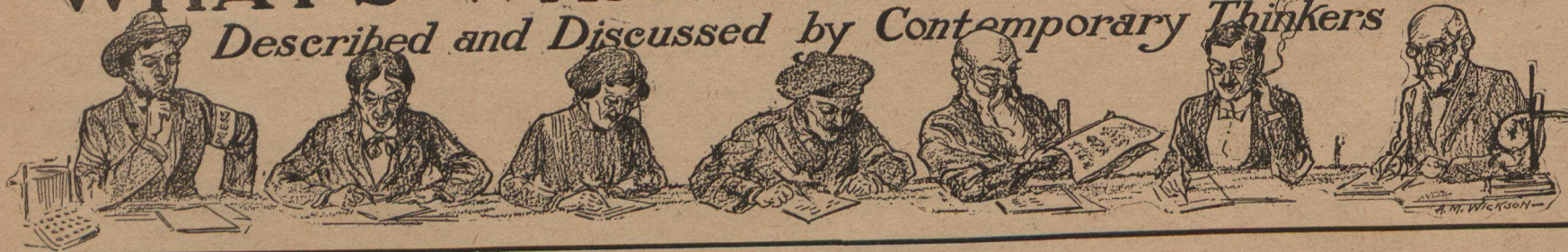
"The sun is dying like a cloven king
In his own blood; the while the distant moon,
Like a pale prophetess that he has wronged,
Leans eager forward with most hungry eyes
Watching him bleed to death, and, as he faints,
She brightens and dilates; revenge complete
She walks in lonely triumph through the night."

Next to skating, it is easier to leave an open fire and a good book for a snowshoe tramp than for any other winter recreation. And one's feet have a habit of turning lake-ward, which means parkward as well if the air is keen. There is a certain thrill about walking on water, even if it is frozen water, just as there is mountain climbing, in looking down on what usually looks down on you. A picturesqueness, too, about the ice-cutting in-

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WHAT'S WHAT *the* WORLD OVER

Described and Discussed by Contemporary Thinkers



JOYS OF TOWN MAJOR

Life is Never Dull to the Billeting Officer in France

YOU ask me what it is like to be a Town Major? says Major Kenneth Bell, in the Nineteenth Century. C'est une vie! My village—the village of which I am Billeting Officer, O. C. Troops, Representant de l'Autorité Militaire Britannique, and devoted slave—had, in time of peace, exactly 130 inhabitants. I love it with an almost paternal affection. I stand and look at it against the evening sky, or dim with the ghostly shadows of dawn, and feel for it what Dante felt for Florence or Pericles for Athens. Is it not my village? I love its dainty little clocher, its miniature eglise, proudly defiant on the mound in the very centre of its acres, overlooking the most odoriferous of the two principal ponds; its austere and tiny ecole, thrusting an unbelieving little person into the very churchyard—the equally defiant, but certainly less attractive champion of the

civil authority; its irregular line of whitewashed, round-walled farm buildings, big double-doored gateways and capacious greniers succeeding one another down the well-paved street; the little yellow cottage that houses the Garde Champetre; the fine three-storey brick villa, beautiful iron railings and pillared entrance gate and all, where resides M. le Maire (qui est rationaliste), and the modest town dwelling-house of M. le Docteur (qui est bien persant and the Mayor's bitterest enemy).

Yes, I can find it in my tolerant soul to love even both sides of that bit of the street which contains these two redoubtable antagonists. Have I not billeted myself on both? Have I not listened in M. le Docteur's back kitchen to the thunderous eloquence of his denunciation of a man so base as to refuse to his dying mother the consolations of the Church? Have I not seen him rise in his shirt-sleeves, his ancient corduroy pantaloons more even than normally deboutonnées, to thump out with the more decisive vigour on the table (till the coffee cups rang again) his detestation of a character so vile, of belief so degraded. Eloquence is the Doctor's strong point.

Sarcasm is the Mayor's. "Un medecin, lui?" he asks, with withering scorn. "Au contraire, c'est simple officier de sante," and if his enemy has absolute proof that the Mayor's grand-daughter is no better than she should be, the Mayor has really no need to repeat the notorious fact that the Doctor's adopted daughter has, well—shall we say no need of adoption? Petit village, mauvais sang.

So you see the village is adorable, indeed, but not ideal. Put fifty men into a barn to live and sleep, and it is not improbable that one of them some time or other will think of knocking in a nail to hang a coat on or support a shelf. But if he knocks it into a wall made of mud and straw, he knocks down the wall, and leaves a horrid skeleton of worm-eaten balks to support the roof. Put a full-fed Clydesdale with perhaps a little itch in his off hind into a stable made of similar materials, and in a surprisingly short space of time he will be indignantly shaking the remains of the roof off his broad back, and snorting in a cloud of dust which celebrates the euthanasia of the walls.

"Why the 'ell don't they 'ave 'edges round their