

OLD WOODRUFF AND HIS THREE WIVES.

A CANADIAN SKETCH.

BY MRS. MOODIE.

THIS must have been an adventurous old man. Three wives! Yes; and he was actually thinking of a fourth when we became acquainted with him. There are no histories so graphic as those which people tell of themselves, for self-love is sure to embellish the most common-place occurrences with a tinge of the marvellous, and every day events become quite romantic in the mouths of some narrators. Our biographer was not one of these flighty historians. There was not a dash of romance in his composition. Had a phrenologist examined his head, I verily believe that no bump of ideality could have been discovered in the mountain range of skull-land;—all about that wondrous region, being a dead flat—the aspect of his head giving you the idea of a copper pot with the head closely screwed down. He was a shrewd, humorous-looking Yorkshire man, with a sharp red weather beaten face, a pair of small keen grey eyes, glancing knowingly towards his ridgy nose, or looking obliquely back upon his high cheek bones. A large coarse good natured mouth, in a great measure relieved the upper portion of his face from the sinister expression which had been acquired by long dealing with the world, and in overcoming the knavery of his species; for Woodruff was not a rogue himself, though very expert in detecting roguery in others. His tall athletic figure, bent as it was, with hard labour, gave indication of great personal strength; and his appearance altogether was rather pleasing than otherwise. His manners were frank and easy; and the old man was such an hospitable entertainer, that you felt at home with him in a minute.

But to begin at the beginning, for I have a little outrun my story, the picture of the old yeoman coming so forcibly before me, that I could not forbear sketching it, prior to introducing the owner to my readers. A bad precedent—but I have not time to step back, and go over the ground again.

In the year 1840, a change in my husband's circumstances removed him from a long residence in the back woods, to fill a public situation in a populous town. He went down to B—, some months previous to the removal of his family, to

enter upon his new office, and prepare things comfortably for their reception.

He left his forest home in October, and we were to follow with the household wares, and five little children, the first of sleighing. Never did eager British children look for the first violets and primroses of spring, with more impatience than my baby boys and girls watched, day after day, for the first snow flakes that were to form the road, to convey them to their absent father and their new home.

"Winter never means to come this year. It will never snow again!" exclaimed my eldest boy, turning from the window on Christmas day, with the most rueful aspect that ever greeted the broad gay beams of the glorious sun.

It was like a spring day. The little lake in front of the window glittering like a mirror of silver, set in its dark frame of pine woods.

I, too, was wearying for the snow; and was tempted to think that it did not come as early as usual, in order to disappoint us. But I kept this to myself, and comforted the expecting child with the oft-repeated assertion, "that it would certainly snow upon the morrow."

But the morrow came and passed away, and many other morrows; and the same mild open weather prevailed. The last night of the old year was ushered in with furious storms of wind and snow. The rafters of our log cabin shook beneath the violence of the gale, which swept up from the lake like a lion roaring for its prey, driving the snow-flakes through every open crevice, of which there were not a few, and powdering the floor till it was as white as the ground without.

"Oh! what a dreadful night," we cried, as we all huddled shivering around the stove. "A person abroad in the woods to-night, would be frozen."

"Thank God," I said, "we are not travelling this night to B—."

"But, to-morrow!" said my eldest boy, lifting up his curly head from my lap. "It will be fine to-morrow, and we shall see dear papa again."

In this hope he lay down with the rest, in his little bed upon the floor, and was soon fast asleep.