# OUR FARM HOMES

ASPIRATION carries one half the way to one's desire.
—*Elizabeth Gibson.*

## God's Country and the Woman

(Continued from last week.)

HE leaned over the table as or about to spring. And then, slowly, his fingers relaxed, the fire died out of his eyes, and he sank back in his chair. In the face of the half-breed's outburst Philip had remained speechless. Now he spoke:

"Call it threatening, if you like. I do not intend to break my word to Josephine. I demand no answer to questions which may concern her, for that is my promise. But between you and me there are certain things which must be explained. I concede that I was mistaken in believing that it was you with whom I fought in the forest. But it was you who looked through my window earlier in the night, with a pistol in your hand. You would have killed me if I had not turned."

Genuine surprise shot into Jean's face.

"I have not been near your window, M'sieur. Until I returned with M'sieur Adare I was waiting up the river, several miles from here. Since then I have not left the house. Josephine and her father can tell you this, if you need proof."

"Your words are impossible!" exclaimed Philip. "I could not have been mistaken. It was you."

"Will you believe Josephine, M'sieur? She will tell you that I could not have been at the window."

"If it was not you—who was it?"

"It must have been the man who shot at you," replied Jean.

"And you know who that man is, and yet refuse to tell me in order that he may have another opportunity of finishing what he failed to do to-night. The most I can do is to inform John Adare."

"You will not do that," said Jean confidently. Again he showed excitement. "Do you know what it would mean?" he demanded.

"Trouble for you," volunteered Philip.

"And ruin for Josephine and every soul in the House of Adare!" added Croisset swiftly. "As soon as Adare could lace his moccasins he would take up that trail out there. He would come to the end of it, and then—mon Dieu!—in that hour the world would smash about his ears!"

"Either you are mad or I am," gasped Philip, staring into the half-breed's tense face. "I don't think you are lying, Jean. But you must be mad. And I am mad for listening to you. You insist on giving this murderer another chance. You as much as say that by giving him a second opportunity to kill John Adare you are proving your loyalty to Josephine and her father. Can that be anything but madness?"

An almost gentle smile flickered over Jean's lips. He looked at Philip as if marvelling that the other could not understand.

"Within an hour it will be Jean Jacques Croisset who will take up the trail," he replied softly, and without boastfulness. "It is I, and not the master of Adare House, who will come to the end of that trail. And there will be no other shot after that, and no one will ever know—but you and me."

"You mean that you will follow and kill him—and that John Adare must never know that an attempt has been made on his life?"

"He must never know, M'sieur. And what happens in the forest at the end of the trail the trees will never tell."

"And the reason for this secrecy you will not confide in me?"

"I dare not, M'sieur."

Philip leaned across the table.

"Perhaps you will, Jean, when you know there is no longer anything between Josephine and me," he said. "To-night she told me everything. I have seen the baby. Her secret she has given to me freely—and it has made no difference. I love her. To-morrow I shall ask her to end all this make-believe, and my heart tells me that she will. We can be married secretly. No one will ever know."

His face was filled with the flush of hope. One of his hands caught Jean's in the old grip of friendship—of confidence. Jean did not reply. But his face betrayed what he did not speak. Once or twice before Philip had seen the same look of anguish in his eyes, the tightening of the lines about the corners of his mouth. Slowly the half-breed rose from the table and turned a little from Philip. In a moment Philip was at his side.

"Jean!" he cried softly, "you love Josephine!"

No sign of passion was in Jean's face as he met the other's eyes.

"How do you mean, M'sieur?" he asked quietly. "As a father and a brother, or as a man?"

"A man," said Philip.

Jean smiled. It was a smile of deep understanding, as if suddenly there had burst upon him a light which he had not seen before.

"I love her as the flowers love the sunshine, as the wood violets love the rains," he said, touching Philip's arm. "And that, M'sieur, is not what you understand as the love of a man. There is one other whom I love in another way, whose voice is the sweetest music in the world, whose heart beats with mine, whose soul leads me day and night through the forests, and who whispers to me of our sweet love in my dreams—Iowaka, my wife! Come, M'sieur; I will take you to her."

"It is late—too late," voiced Philip wonderingly.

But as he spoke he followed Jean. The half-breed seemed to have risen out of his world now. There was a wonderful light in his face, a something that seemed to reach back through centuries that were gone—and in this moment Philip thought of Marechal, of Prince Rupert, of le Chevalier Grosseller—of the adventurous and royal blood that had first come over to the New World to form the Great Company, and he knew that of such men as these was Jean Jacques Croisset, the forest man. He understood now the meaning of the soft and faultless speech of this man who had lived always under the stars and the open skies. He was not of to-day, but a harkening back to that long-forgotten yesterday; in his veins ran the blood red and strong of the First Men of the North. Out into the night Philip followed him, bare-headed, with the moonlight streaming down from above; and he stopped only when Jean stopped, close to a little plot where a dozen wooden crosses rose above a dozen snow-covered mounds.

Jean stopped, and his hand fell on Philip's arm.

"These are Josephine's," he said softly, with a sweep of his other hand. "She calls it her Garden of Little Flowers. They are children, M'sieur. Some are babies. When a little one dies—if it is not too far away—she brings it to Le Jardin—her garden, so that it may not sleep alone under the lonely spruce, with the wolves howling over it on winter nights. They must be lonely in the woodsy graves, she says. I have known her to bring an Indian baby a hundred miles, and some of these I have seen die in her arms, while she crooned to them a song of Heaven. And five times as many little ones she has saved, M'sieur. That is why even the winds in the treetops whisper her name, L'Ange! Does it not seem to you that even the moon shines brighter here upon these little mounds and the crosses?"

"Yes," breathed Philip reverently.

Jean pointed to a larger mound, the one guardian mound of them all, rising a little above the others, its cross lifted watchfully above the other crosses; and he said, as if the spirits themselves were listening to him:

"M'sieur, there is my wife, my Iowaka. She died three years ago, but she is with me always, and even now her beloved voice is singing in my heart, telling me that it is not black and cold where she and the little ones are waiting, but that all is light and beautiful. "M'sieur"—his voice dropped to a whisper—"Could I sell my hereafter with her for the price of another woman's love on earth?"

Philip tried to speak; and strange after a moment he succeeded in saying:

"Jean, an hour ago I thought I was a man. I see how far short of that I have fallen. Forgive me, and let me be your brother. Such a love as yours is my love for Josephine. And to-morrow——"

"Despair will open up and swallow you to the depths of your soul," interrupted Jean gently. "Return to your room, M'sieur. Sleep. Fight for the love that will be yours in Heaven, as I live for my Iowaka's. For that love will be yours, up there. Josephine has loved but one man, and that is you. I have watched and I have seen. But in this world she can never be more to you than she is now, for what she told you to-night is the least of the terrible thing that is eating away her soul on earth. Good-night, M'sieur!"

Straight out into the moonlight Jean walked, head erect, in the face of the forest. And Philip stood looking after him over the little garden of crosses until he had disappeared.

### CHAPTER THIRTEEN.

ALONE and with the deadening depression that had come with Jean's last words, Philip returned to his room. He had made no effort to follow the half-breed who had shamed him to the quick beside the grave of his wife. He felt no pleasure, no sense of exultation, that his suspicions of Croisset's feelings toward Josephine had been dispelled. Since the hour MacTavish had died up in the madness of Arctic night, deep and hopless gloom had not laid its hand more heavily upon him.

He bolted his door, drew the curtain to the window, and added a bit of wood to the few embers that still remained alive in the grate. Then he sat down, with his face to the fire. The dry birch burst into flame, and for half an hour he sat staring into it with almost unseeing eyes. He knew that Jean would keep his word—that even now he was possibly on the fresh trail that led through the forest. For him there was something about the half-breed now that was almost omnipotent. In him Philip had seen incarnated the things which made him feel like a dwarf in manhood. In those few moments close to the graves, Jean had risen above the world. And Philip believed in him. Yet with his belief, his optimism did not quite die.

(To be Continued)

"What Will Mother Say."