

## OUR FARM HOMES



ANY lives would be a good deal sweeter if they were not quite so sugary

### Owing to Christopher

By Nancy Byrd Turner.—(Youth's Companion).

NEVER had Pleasant Plains, the home of the Dunaways, looked more truly pleasant than on the morning of that day in September—the day that was to mark the doom of the old homestead. In the early sunlight the big white house basked among the level fields as complacently as if it were not going to pass a'noon forever out of Dunaway hands. A thin column of smoke rose peacefully from the kitchen chimney; pigeons preened themselves gayly on the gray roof of the stable. The garden, bright with late flowers, opened in its lower side into the south cornfield, where little endless whisperings went up and down the russet rows. Michael, the hired man, and Mary Dunaway, the youngest of her line, stood in the barn door, and surveyed the fair scene gloomily.

Down by the pasture bars stood Christopher, the sole horse remaining of a goodly stableful; his angular form was sharply outlined against the blue horizon. Christopher had spent a busy summer; the corn crop, now almost ready to be harvested, was the result of his efforts, and the garden, too, had yielded its fruit to his patient labors. Without the ministrations of Christopher, Pleasant Plains would have been decidedly unpleasant—especially during the year that had just passed.

Christopher stood on one hip now, and gazed sleepily toward the west. Merely to look at him, few would have dreamed what strength of personality his old, rugged form embodied. For Christopher had what is commonly referred to as "a will of his own." It was seldom that he shirked; day after day he submitted gently to harness, and with all his energy bent to any required task. But at rare intervals he decided for some obscure reason not to move; and then not all the powers of mortal man could stir him one inch. Such was the "will" of Christopher.

Outsiders called him balky, and said that people ought not to expect any better of an animal so absurdly named; but to his owners Christopher's will was something more than mere balkiness; it was somehow an evidence of the appalling strength of character. From bitter experience they had learned that when Christopher once planted his four feet firmly on the ground, and switched his tall shaggy from left to right, there was nothing for them to do except to fold their hands and wait. When they had finally learned that lesson, life at Pleasant Plains became more even.

On this particular morning, Grandfather Dunaway had, as usual before sunrise, when Michael and Mary came out of the barn at nine o'clock, he was patrolling the cornfield, with his head bowed and his hands in his pockets.

Michael regarded him somewhat grimly. "Struttin' still," he observed, with a note of pride in his mournful

tones. "First to last, struttin' still!" Mary squinted through a sudden mist of childish tears to see whether she could make out any movement of the old bowed figure that could possibly be termed a strut, but she failed. Ordinarily she would have laughed at Michael's words, but to-day a sense of imminent loss and grief was heavy upon her.

Pleasant Plains was going to be sold. After struggling against fate for years, the Dunaways had been obliged to acknowledge at last that no other course lay open to them. In

but for some reason of his own told no one except Mary, that Shane was firmly convinced that there was valuable ore on the land.

"As a matter of fact," observed Michael, "there ain't no ore at all, but he thinks so, and he's like a tiger after blood."

Hitherto, grandfather had turned a deaf although courteous ear to Shane's advances; but finally affairs reached a pass where, as the old gentleman ruefully said, "deafness wouldn't do any longer." He had shut himself into his study and written to Shane, who a few days before had made a tolerably good offer. Grandfather told Shane that if he would appear within a week from that day—that is, before twelve o'clock noon of Wednesday, September 15th—the transfer of the property would be made. No one knew why the old gentleman inserted that "within a week" clause. Probably it was because he could not bring himself to sign away irrevocably, without any margin of escape, what meant so much to him.

Shane was away at the time he received the letter. However, he promptly telegraphed: "Shall come with lawyer Wednesday morning, September 15th, which will be within time you specify. Have us met at the tenth train."

During the short week of grace that followed, the Dunaways were a solemn household. There was not one of them, from grandfather to the or-



The Result of Hard Work in the North Country.

Five years ago the land surrounding the station at Katrine in Parry Sound Dist., Ont., was just an unattractive old lumber yard. The big mill had been burned and no attempt was made to clear away the debris. When Mr. F. Larson and his family took possession, however, they cleared up the land and the illustration herewith, taken in August of this year, shows the results. The ground has not only produced its "bit" but its share.

spite of the gallant efforts of Michael and Christopher, in spite of selling a slice of land here and a corner there, the Dunaways were unable to make economy, things would not hold together; the one solution of the sad problem was, it seemed, to sell out, buy a more compact place, and settle down to life on a smaller scale. Grandfather was old; Christopher was old; Aunt Luella was a woman, Mary was a child, and Michael, for all his resourcefulness, was only one man; the land was poor from much tilling, and the hire of outside labor and teams came high; the best timber and the choicest lowlands had been sold long ago. Pleasant Plains would have to pass out of the possession of the Dunaways, who had held it from time immemorial.

A keen, sharp-witted fellow named Shane had long had his eye turned covetously on the old farm; and he had come out frequently from town to nose round among the peaceful meadows. Once in a while he had made stingy offers for the place to Grandfather Dunaway. Michael knew,

phan girl grandchild, that did not lie awake at night, trying in vain to see some practical way to save the old homestead.

On the Monday before the fatal Wednesday Uncle Thomas Dunaway's letter exploded in the gloomy household with all the effect of a bomb. Uncle Thomas was a half brother of grandfather, a great deal his junior; and for the last twenty years he had been a wanderer in parts unknown. Home and family ties had never bound him; once in a great while a post card with a foreign mark would tell his relatives that he still lived; beyond that they knew little of him. He had long ago disposed of his share in the farm; and it was with utter amazement that they read the jocular, sprawling message that he sent.

"I've heard since I landed," he wrote, "that you may sell the old place. Don't do it. The rolling stone has gathered a lot of moss—or what's better, I'm on my way home with a mighty good reason in my pocket why Pleasant Plains has got to stay with the Dunaways."

Aunt Luella and Mary were just ant; but grandfather brought them up with a sudden check.

"I hope," he said, gently and solemnly, peering over his spectacles, "that Thomas will reach here before noon of Wednesday."

When the meaning of his words dawned upon them, they broke into loud protest.

"But surely, father," cried Aunt Luella, "under these peculiar circumstances the man will let you off; he didn't say 'a week to the very minute' anyway. Why, nobody but a shabby bargain like that!"

Aunt Luella's fat face was crimson with disappointment.

But grandfather shook his white head. No Dunaway had ever failed short of even the letter of the law. "I shall appeal to his generosity," he decided, hopefully, and shut himself again into his study, in order to write to Shane.

Shane's answer came back within delay; it was as short and curt as small as the man himself. "I shall gain's a bargain," it said.

Wednesday, the 15th, dawned, and still Uncle Thomas had not arrived. At a quarter to ten o'clock Aunt Luella, who had been standing in the bedroom window for a full hour, gazing out in unaccompanied idleness, called to Mary.

"Tell Michael that you and I'll go to the station; tell him to hitch Christopher to the spring wagon. I am about to let Michael go," she added. "It is in such a sulky state there's no telling what he might do."

She leaned far out of the window in order to see whether a cloud of dust in the distant highway was a drove of cattle or Uncle Thomas, and she heard when she found that it was a drove of cattle. Mary went downstairs with the message.

Michael listened in silence, and silence Mary watched him as he slipped Christopher into the shafts and drove him into the shabby harness. Then Aunt Luella climbed painfully into the wagon. "Is everything buckled?" she asked, distrustfully. "Why didn't you shine up the bridle a bit when we got to meet city folks?"

Michael sniffed sulkily. "There's plenty good enough for horse folks or any other kind of folks that too narrow-minded to hire a horse team for their mean purpose." Christopher only whined sulkily, as well as he looks, I'm asking you to get up, Christopher!"

The train was on time, and Shane hurried with Mr. Beale, his lawyer, toward the spring wagon. Then he untied Christopher from the hitching post, he gave the horse a light on the nose.

"Want time to lose," he said, bracing himself to step lively; today, God my boy!

Christopher flattened his ears at the insult, but he stood quietly enough. The two guests stowed away on the back seat. Aunt Luella, who would never let the reins to anyone, drove. She was little talk. Aunt Luella gave herself up entirely to the clicks and clacks with which she encouraged Christopher, who would never let to say beyond an occasional word his companion. When they reached the top of the Hazel Creek Hill, pointed westward.

"That's the property," he said, smiling.

Neither of the two on the train raised their eyes. They knew well following Shane's finger how the property looked from this particular elevation on a clear fall day—Shane's sunny farm, with the old homestead nestling at its base, a large tear splashed down on the outcrops; Aunt Luella's misgiving and anguish had temporarily come her.

(Continued next week.)