

Mackellar and Son

By Louise Richardson Rorke.

It was Christmas Day and snowing—great feathery flakes that filled the damp air and outlined every branch and twig of the apple-trees in the orchard, and made wonderful the tall sentinel spruces guarding the gateway of the lane—that even clung in the soft wind to the fence, and the walls of the gray frame house and of the outbuildings, and cast a robe of ermine over the southernmost wall of the big red barn, making quite indistinct and unreadable the glaring, white legend painted across its face, "Mackellar and Son."

It was early twilight and the struggling lights from the farmhouse windows were quite lost long before they could have shone upon the big barn; nor, since the sign was on its roadside side, could they possibly have illuminated it, had they done so. Yet it was this sign which was at present the topic of conversation in the kitchen.

"I wish you'd get that stencil changed, Archie!" Mrs. Mackellar had been down cellar, hunting out some good apples to eat. She spoke questioningly of the brand on the barrel-head. "And on the barn! I never did like it! It looked too conspicuous, even when Fred was alive. And now—now it's terrible. It must look dreadful to the Almighty looking down on it. I'm taking away the only sign you had, and you persist in painting up in great big letters over everything 'Mackellar and Son'! And it certainly must look mighty queer to the neighbors."

"I can't see it that way, mother, about God," Mackellar responded, after a moment's silence. "And it doesn't matter much about the neighbors."

He was a thin, bent, little man, well past middle age, with white hair and blue-gray eyes looking courageously out from a face that was cleanly chiselled and smooth-shaven. His wife might have been ten years his junior. She expressed her annoyance by an abrupt lifting of her shoulders. The gesture was so marked that he continued deprecatingly:

"That sign's been on the barn for six years now; ever since the October that Fred was sixteen, and it was that same year we got our apple stencil made. Fred was terrible proud of those apple barrels! Mackellar chuckled reminiscently, and then sighed. He sat for a long moment gazing at the edge of his paper.

"Seems as if I just couldn't pack apples without that old stencil," he said.

Mrs. Mackellar did not answer. She had used up all her common-sense arguments long ago.

"It just makes me cold and sick whenever I get a glimpse of that big sign, just as if I read the letter again, as if I knew again he was dead and never comin' back. I don't see how you can bear it. I never look near the apple barrels when I can help it. It just looks as if you didn't care enough to bother buying a new stencil."

"She paused, shocked at her words. "Of course, I know it isn't that," she hastened, "but it must look so to the neighbors."

To her surprise, he made no retort. "I wish I could get you to know how I feel about it!" he answered patiently. "Fred and I were to be partners—we were partners. Of course, now he's dead—I don't know anything about the new life he's livin' now."

"The Bible tells you about it. He's with the angels in Heaven praising God, and far more happy and content than we be here."

"Well, maybe so, mother. Maybe so. Seems somehow a deal easier to feel that he's walkin' across the fields right on this here old farm that was to be his, or in the box stall talkin' to the colts, or comin' in now out of all the storm with the mail."

"I don't know what's got into you, father," Mrs. Mackellar answered sadly. "You talk about Fred like a heathen—and now when religion would be such a comfort to you. I wish you could feel different."

"I don't know as I want to," he answered slowly. And after a moment, "But we'll have to paint the barn in the spring. Wantin' him doesn't bring him, an' playin' he's here is only a child's game. We'll paint it red again, all red."

"Well, I'd be real relieved," Mrs. Mackellar answered quickly. "You'd best buy the paint when you're in town next week; no tellin' how it'll raise in price, an' paint'll keep, any time."



Mackellar rose slowly. "I guess I'd better be lookin' after the furnace," he said.

He went slowly down the cellar stairway, pausing for a thoughtful moment at its foot. Then he turned into the apple cellar. The Mackellar farm had won a reputation for its orchards. The apple cellar was three-quarters filled with new barrels, shining faintly golden in the light of the lamp which the old man held. Black and plain across every barrel-head ran the legend, "Mackellar and Son, Grade 1." From the ceiling rafters above, depended the stencils, made of cardboard and heavily shellaced, in all the rugged stages of long wear. It was more than time for new ones. They broke too easily. The next would better be of wood, or tin. Fred had helped him make these—that rainy day out in the drive-barn, just after the boy was sixteen. Ah, well! He took them gently from the nails, his clumsy old hands grown strangely tender. For a long minute he stood gazing straight into the blackness in

front of him. Then, lifting the lamp from the barrel-head, where he had placed it, he moved resolutely to the furnace. He watched the flames leap up for the crackling shellac, watched them run hungrily over the shining surface, watched them die leaving only a blackened mass, through which the words, "Mackellar and Son—and Son" glowed brightly, lit by the coals beneath, watched even this fade and fall into gray ashes, and forgetting his real errand, closed the door and came softly back upstairs.

"I'm going down for the mail, Annie," he said, after a hesitant moment. Someway the house seemed stiflingly close. "Yes, I'll walk down. Tain't worth the trouble of harnessing. The storm ain't bad yet, an' it looks like we'd be snowed in to-morrow."

"Tain't likely there'll be any mail," Mrs. Mackellar insisted.

"No. But I guess I'll go. I—well, I kind of want to see Barton about them new shoes—he hasn't fitted very like Thompson did."

"Men are all alike," Mrs. Mackellar thought as he went out. But she was glad he had gone. She went into the cold front room and stood looking at Fred's picture. "It would be a better world for people who are in trouble," she thought, "if there were

no Christmas times to make them remember." Yet, there was a sort of heart-breaking comfort, too, in remembering.

By-and-by, because she was shivering with cold, she came out again to the kitchen. She was knitting when the door opened to admit Mackellar, white with snow. He had some letters and papers in his hand. Some weariness in his face arrested her, even as she reached for the letters.

"You're tired out, Archie?"

"Oh, no."

He took off his overcoat, and hung it on the row of nails behind the door, brushing the snow carefully from his cap and boots. Then he went over and sat down by the table, his hands on his knees.

"Ain't I going to read the papers?"

"I guess not; there doesn't seem to be any news these days, nothing worth botherin' over."

Mrs. Mackellar opened the two letters which were hers. They contained Christmas messages and she pored over them with interest, holding them close to the lamp. She looked up at last to inquire of Mackellar: "Did you get any mail, father?"

"Nuthin' but a circular. I didn't bother to open it. Probably a price list. It's from the Brockman Apple Company." He glanced toward a large business envelope lying on the table. "I'll look at it to-morrow," he added.

The Mackellars were early risers. It was barely half-past six on Christmas morning when Archie Mackellar

all the long day, and others—and others stretching on interminably. He dreaded somehow to begin this long stretch of unending days without the thought of Fred. He had a strange hesitation about taking up their simple tasks, as if, thus doing, he, in some way, bound himself to them. Aimlessly he reached for the circular which he had brought home the night before. It was at least something to do—a feeble barrier raised with the last remnant of courage against the overwhelming flood of despair.

It was not, after all, a circular. The business envelope enclosed another addressed simply to "Mackellar, in care of the Brockman Apple Company." He opened it listlessly, but as he read, his face changed, and when he had finished, still standing by the lamp-lit table, he went back, sheet after sheet, over its closely written pages. This was how it ran:

"Dear Sir—I am visiting a friend of mine in Toronto, who has two barrels of apples bought from the Brockman Apple Company, and marked with your brand. I had seen that brand once before, and somehow I want to tell you about it. I think you would want to know this, but if I'm wrong and my letter only makes you sad, I hope you will forgive me."

"I thought perhaps you'd like to know that 'Mackellar and Son,' just as it looks in your stencil, is carved into the shattered trunk of a huge tree well up into what was then the enemy's line, near the little village of St. Onge, in France. It is close beside a sacrifice position, which was

held by two sections of the Third Battery of the Fourth Divisional Artillery. They had waited all day long hidden there, for the engagement to begin. I was sent up with a message for their major, and as I crept forward through the trees—we were within a few hundred feet of the German line—I came across a boy crouched beside a huge tree, cutting initials, as I thought, with a jack-knife. I stopped to ask him a question and glanced at his work, half expecting to see a girl's name. He had just finished, and was closing his knife. It wasn't very usual, a thing like that, and I asked him about it.

"His father and he were partners, he said, back on the Ontario farm, which was his home. The day he was sixteen, his father had had the name of the firm painted up on the barn—'Mackellar and Son.' I guess the boy had been mighty proud of it. At any rate, he'd carved 'Mackellar and Son' over the half of France.

"It seems he had another thought about it, too. He tried to tell me in a shy, boyish way. Soldiers grow confidential while they wait like that, and I was so much older, he seemed to like to talk with me. He and his dad were partners even now, while he was away. He's putting through my end

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"I had to come away then, but we heard next day that none of the men who were with those guns escaped. 'I thought you might want to know this about the sign. When I saw your stencil, I some way couldn't help writing it to you."

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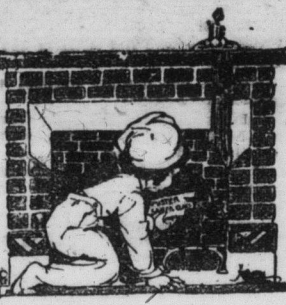
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LEADING MARKETS

Toronto.
Manitoba wheat—No. 1 Northern, \$1.26; No. 3, \$1.14.

Manitoba oats—No. 2 CW, \$2.14; No. 3 CW, \$2.04; extra No. 1 feed, \$2.04.

Manitoba barley—Nominal.
All the above, track, Bay ports.

American corn—No. 2 yellow, 69½¢; No. 3 yellow, 68¢; No. 4 yellow, 67½¢; track, Toronto.

Ontario wheat—No. 2 white, nominal.
Ontario wheat—Nominal.

Barley—No. 3 extra, test 47 lbs. or better, 56 to 58¢, according to freights outside.

Buckwheat—No. 2, 74 to 76¢.
Rye—No. 2, 84 to 86¢.

Manitoba flour—First pats., \$7.40; second pats., \$6.90, Toronto.

Ontario flour—90 per cent patent, bulk, seaboard, per barrel, \$8.

Milled—Del. Montreal freight, bags included: Bran, per ton, \$25 to \$26; shorts, per ton, \$27 to \$28; good feed flour, \$1.70 to \$1.80.

Boiled hay—Track, Toronto, per ton, No. 2, \$21.50 to \$22; mixed, \$18.

Straw—Car lots, per ton, \$12.

Cheese—New, large, 21 to 22¢; twins, 21½ to 22½¢; triplets, 22½ to 23½¢.

Old, large, 25 to 26¢; twins, 25½ to 26½¢; triplets, 26 to 27¢; Shiltons, new, 25 to 26¢.

Butter—Fresh, dairy, choice, 38 to 39¢; creamery, prints, fresh, No. 1, 43 to 46¢; No. 2, 40 to 41¢; cooking, 36 to 38¢.

Dressed poultry—Spring chickens, 25 to 30¢; roosters, 20 to 25¢; fowl, 20 to 25¢; ducks, 20 to 35¢; turkeys, 45 to 50¢; geese, 27 to 31¢.

Live poultry—Spring chickens, 20 to 25¢; roosters, 14 to 16¢; fowl, 14 to 20¢; ducks, 22 to 25¢; turkeys, 45 to 50¢; geese, 20 to 22¢.

Margarine—23 to 25¢.

Eggs—No. 1 storage, 52 to 53¢; select, storage, 57 to 58¢; new laid, straight, 56 to 58¢; new laid, in cartons, 58 to 60¢.

Beans—Can. hand-picked, bushel, \$4 to \$4.25; primes, \$3.50 to \$3.75.

Maple products—Syrup, per imp. gal., \$2.50; per 5 imp. gals., \$2.35.

Maple sugar, 16 to 18¢.

Honey—60-30-10, tins, 14½ to 15¢ per lb.; 5-2½-20, tins, 16 to 17¢ per lb.; Ontario comb honey, per doz., \$7.75 to \$4.50.

Smoked meats—Hams, med., 24 to 26¢; cooked ham, 36 to 40¢; smoked ribs, 23 to 24¢; cottage ribs, 25 to 26¢; breakfast bacon, 25 to 30¢; special brand breakfast bacon, 30 to 35¢; backs, boneless, 33 to 36¢.

Cured meats—Long corn ham, 18 to 20¢; clear bell's, 18½ to 20½¢.

Lard—Pure, tierces, 14 to 14½¢; tubs, 14½ to 15¢; pails, 15 to 15½¢; prints, 16½ to 17¢.

Shortening, tierces, 13¢; tubs, 13½¢; pails, 14¢; prints, 15½¢.

Choice heavy steers, \$7 to \$8; butcher steers, choice, \$7 to \$7.50; do, good, \$6 to \$7; do, med., \$5 to \$6; do, com., \$3 to \$4.50; butcher heifers, choice, \$5.75 to \$6.50; butcher cows, choice, \$5 to \$6; do, med., \$3 to \$4; carners and cutters, \$2.25 to \$2.75; butcher bulls, good, \$3.50 to \$4.50; do, com., \$2.50 to \$3; feeders, good, 900 lbs. \$5 to \$5.50; do, fair, \$4.50 to \$5; stockers, good, \$4 to \$4.50; do, fair, \$3 to \$4; milkers, \$3 to \$4; springers, choice, \$90 to \$100; calves, choice, \$11 to \$12.50; do, med., \$8 to \$10; do, com., \$3 to \$6; lambs, good, \$12 to \$12.50; do, com., \$5.50 to \$6; sheep, choice, \$5 to \$6; do, good, \$4 to \$5.50; hogs, fed and watered, \$10.25 to \$10.50; do, heavy and bucks, \$1 to \$2; do, f.o.b. \$9.60 to \$9.85; do, country points, \$9.35 to \$9.60.

Montreal.
Oats, Can. West, No. 2,