

# IN HIS MAJESTY'S SERVICE

By BENEDICTINE

IT is a day in June, down in Norfolk County. Large farms stretch their verdant lengths on every side, almost within view of beautiful, sunny, fitful Lake Erie, and certainly within sound of it when tempests rage. The birds twitter happily in the green boughs of the thick maple woods. The leaves murmur drowsily, as if whispering in their dreams. Here, along the roadside, a meditative cow gazes pensively at some distant object of her sleepy attention; there a chipmunk darts gaily along the fence top; and in the distance lusty farmers are busily at work in the warm June sunshine.

But we are nearing our destination, the little post-office down the road near the large elm tree. You would not know that the little brown cottage with its humble ivy-covered porch, ventured to boast the dignity of post-office, were it not for the grey, weather-worn sign in the peak over the porch, bearing these words, "John Marston, P.M." Even then you might be excused for not understanding. However that may be, that is the only external mark or token which suggests that this little brown dwelling of three rooms and a dilapidated lean-to, is in any important respect different from other little brown dwellings that may be seen at intervals along the road.

This is the post-office, and John Marston, P.M., is the sole inmate thereof. The row of old-fashioned flowers skirting the front of the house, under the window on each side of the little low porch, testifies to his taste as a horticulturalist. There are bachelor's buttons, bleeding-hearts, and peonies; the whole fronted with a row of pinks, and protected at each end by a sturdy bunch of ribbon grass. The air is perfumed with the odour of the sweet-Mary over by the fence, and there, between the old sentinel-like elm and a corner of the house, swings—oh, modern innovation!—a very comfortable hammock. The sprightly newness of this seems almost a jar in the peaceful, old-fashioned, "once-upon-a-time" air that pervades the place as we walk up to the little gate directly in front of the porch, and connected with it by a narrow, well-trodden path. As we enter, the gate clicks. We hear sounds of life from within, and presently a bald-headed, shiny-faced, shirt-sleeved little man appears and hobbles to the entrance of the porch with the assistance of the cane he carries in his right hand, for he is quite lame. His little eyes twinkle welcomingly, but he is quite innocent of any attempt to remove his short pipe from his mouth, or to hide his collarless condition.

"How d'ye do. How d'ye do. Come in. Come in," he says with ready familiarity; for we, you and I, are strangers in these parts, and the old gentleman, who, we hear, has never been outside of Norfolk County since his arrival there from the Old Country at the age of seven, is very fond of a gossip, is exceedingly proud of himself as the postmaster of the district, and thinks it his duty as a public man to bid all strangers a hearty welcome to the post-office and thus to good old Norfolk.

He stands for a moment and looks curiously up and down the road and across to the maple woods through which winds a sleepy, shady driveway—a convenient cut for those living on the next concession. Seeing no sign of life in the latter direction, he remarks:

"Mail's late to-day. Thought she'd be, she was so late goin' down." Whereupon he hobbles back, leading

the way into the "office,"—a low-ceilinged, dingily-papered room, evidently doing duty as kitchen, dining-room, and parlor for "the P. M.," as well as general assembly hall, smoking-room, and post-office for the entire countryside. Its very uneven floor is covered with heterogeneous pieces of old rag carpet, evidently contributions of "the P. M.'s" generous patrons. The walls are decorated with all kinds and conditions of calendars, advertisements, and bills of auction sales and circuses. The "office" proper is a series of pigeon-holes—open to the public—and occupying on the dingy wall a very dingy space of about three feet square, between the front door and the window. Beneath these "letter-boxes"—with the owner's names written beneath each, but for which the owners never paid nor dreamed of paying—is a small, rickety table, on which is a well-worn blotting-paper, an antiquated affair that does duty as a pen, bottles of ink and mucilage, as well as an unwashed cup, saucer and plate. The P. M. must then be wont to use this as his dining-table, as well as office desk. Be that as it may, the P. M., after pulling up a couple of dusty chairs for us, seats himself in his chair at the window, his lame leg stretched beneath the table, his mail-bag ready on the floor at his side. He thus awaits the arrival of the daily mail.

"Lookin' fer letters?" he queries, quite innocent of any suspicion that we are there out of curiosity concerning him or his abode. Of course we reply in the affirmative.

"Hail from T'ronto, eh? Guess it's a fine place all right. S'pose you've been to the Fair. Great thing, that Fair. They send me lots of posters about it. I guess I know 'most as much about that there show 's if I'd bin there. How long hev I bin post-master? Well, now, lemme see. It's thirty years since my old father died—in that there room behind you—and I've hed the runnin' of it ever since, and fer two years before. Father hed it first, and I've hed it ever since, and I guess old John kin hev it, too, 's long 's he's a mind to keep it. A good paying job it is, too. Last year I hawled out about sixty dollars from the government. But that was a good year fer stamps. You see if we sell more stamps we get more pay. But this year ain't s' good, and I don't think as I'll manage to git more'n 'bout forty-five or so. I tell you that ain't bad pay, either. There ain't a man round these parts hes the time the P. M. hes," and here he winks appreciatively at us and takes a few whiffs from his pipe, which is almost out.

"See that there hammock of mine?" he resumes; "finest hammock in these parts. Sent to T'ronto fer that. Lyin' in that there old hammock's where I spend most of my time when others is working like sixty. How do I manage to live on forty-five dollars a year? Why, bless you, I couldn't spend any more if I tried. Did you notice my garden? Finest potatoes 'round here, and my onions and tomatoes 'll be good enough to send to T'ronto Fair. The neighbours often send me in a bit of a dinner and I kin tell you, John Marston, P.M., lives like a gentleman and hes the best time of anyone in Norfolk. Lonely? Not much! Why, there isn't a place 'round here hes 's many in to call. Everybody 's always droppin' in to hev a chat and git their mail. Oh, yes, it's just the job fer me with this leg o' mine. I'll hev to tell you all about this here leg some day, but the mail 'll soon be here now, and

everybody 'll soon be coming fer their mail. But you come 'long again and you'll hear the hull yarn. You see, I wuz a-hewin' square timber in the bush fer our new barn about forty year this spring. I wuz a-standin' on a big log a-hewin' away on one side, and brother Jim was a-standin' on the log with me with his back to me, a-hewin' away on tother side. Well, every time 's I'd give a chop, out'd go my leg backwards toward Jim, and once, when he wasn't a-lookin', he brung his axe down onto it. That was when I was a young shaver of about twenty-five or so. That's what made me post-master, and I guess I've got the job fer 's long 's I live. But I'll tell you the hull yarn some other time, when you come 'round, cuz there's the mail now, a-comin' through the woods," and with this he hobbles cheerfully out to the door of the porch again.

Yes, there through the window we can see, along the roadway in the woods opposite, an ancient, grey horse ambling its tired way along before an antiquated affair that does duty as a "buggy," wherein sits an old man of many winters, who seems to be part and parcel of the outfit. As the mail jogs leisurely up to the gate, the P. M. hobbles down the path to get the mail bag, then returns to the office, sorts the five or six letters and as many papers, transfers to the other bag those that are to be sent to the next office, locks the bag, and after informing us that there is nothing for us to-day but that he will have a letter for us to-morrow if he has to write it himself, he takes it out to the patient old mail-man. As we issue forth from the porch, the ancient driver gives the reins a gentle flip and off trots "the mail" to the next office some six miles distant.

The hospitable, garrulous little P. M. again stands looking up and down the road for sign of would-be mail seekers. But it is time for us to go. We bid him good-day, and

once more seek the shady protection of the maple woods, and again give ourselves up to enjoyment of the peaceful scene. But before we pass beyond view of the little, brown, time-worn Ontario post-office, we turn for a last look at the contented old post-master, and as we turn, we see his bent, shirt-sleeved form hobbling back into his office, while behind him lumber a couple of big, heavy-footed farmers.

Thus probably, for thirty years, has the P. M. hobbled hospitably back and forth, utterly oblivious, doubtless, to the beauty of the deep green woods across the way, to the sweet twittering of the birds in the trees, to the picturesqueness of his little nut-brown home nestling under the protecting elm-tree; but we may be very certain that he is ever conscious of his dignity at John Marston, P.M., proprietor of the only post-office for six miles around, and that he never forgets his duty as post-master in the service of the neighbourhood, the Canadian Government, and His Majesty the King.

## A Song of Earth

By STOPFORD A. BROOKE.

A little sun, a little rain,  
A soft wind blowing from the west—  
And woods and fields are sweet again,  
And warmth within the mountain's breast.

So simple is the earth we tread,  
So quick with love and life her frame,  
Ten thousand years have dawned and fled,  
And still her magic is the same.

A little love, a little trust,  
A soft impulse, a sudden dream—  
And life as dry as desert dust  
Is fresher than a mountain stream.

So simple is the heart of man,  
So ready for new hope and joy;  
Ten thousand years since it began  
Have left it younger than a boy.



### AS OTHERS SEE US.

Madame La Republique. "Well! How did you find them?"  
President Fallieres. "Of the most genial! and the Exposition—superb! On weekdays it is Franco, and on Sundays it is British!"—Punch.