

FARM ETCHINGS.

THE FARM HOUSE.

IT is not a modern building. It is not even the fresh-painted, glaring, unshaded new house of the average Ontario farm of to-day. For it was 'raised' sixty years ago, when Farmer Mynheer, then a young man, brought his bride up from the more closely settled precincts of Little York to this unsettled and almost trackless portion of the province. The thickly wooded land, richly loamed and free from stones, with its northern shelter of hills and gentle slope toward the water, and the presence of the pretty blue ruffled inland lake, whose counterpart may be found a score of times repeated throughout the province, determined his choice, and the first axe-blow rang out a cheery prophecy of the new home.

Twenty years of pioneer struggle, when the axe and the plough were ever busy; when the young wife spun and wove her days and months into busy middle age. . . .

Twenty years of life's prime, with hours of leisure now; with little festivities, weddings and good-byes, and a gradual thinning of the household group. There was a pulling down of barns to build greater; the flower garden was more carefully tended; the young people had their lawn and tennis courts; the cedar hedge grew tall and thick. But the little log house remained. "It will last our time," said Farmer Mynheer. When mother and me are gone you children can do as you like about buildin' another."

Twenty years of life's decline. It is an old, old couple now who sit out upon the stoop. The children are married and in new homes; some within call, others in the far North-west, "a country as likely to get at as the North Pole when I was young," says Farmer Mynheer, "but things has changed since those days."

The flower garden is full of sweet old-fashioned bloom, still lovingly tended by trembling withered hands. Great barns and stables, wide fields of yellow, heavy-headed grain, environ the old log house. The blue lake shows here and there a white sail, while a steel track encircles its shores, and the shrill whistle of passing trains break the stillness.

Farmer Mynheer lets his old clay pipe go out while he looks over the stretch of yellow fields, all ahum with drowsy August heat, beyond the great barns and well-travelled road, to the rippling lake; then he lays his knotty, trembling hand on the soft ample lap beside him.

"Sixty years since I brung you here, a bit of a seventeen-year-old girl, and me only twenty; but you were a brave one, Lucy, and my axe was strong," he says.

Then the old, old couple seem greater than monarchs, and the little log house better than a palace.

* * *

ON THE SELF-BINDER.

A bevy of gay girls walk up the lane. They 'let down' the bars and cross the fresh-cut stubble field, where the shocks of grain lie loosely waiting the approach of the stackers. They reach the shore of a swaying yellow sea, a rippling forest of heavy-headed gold that bends beneath the breath of their merry laughter. They pluck the full-lipped grain and thrust it in among their ribbons.

The big mowing machine comes slowly toward them, the sturdy horses planting their feet firmly yet cautiously down in the stiff-stemmed ground, the clatter of the revolving knives and swish of the falling grain sounding musically through the wide field spaces.

The driver's "whoa!" brings the big machine to a pause. He deserts his horses and comes

down among the gay girls, who affect a world of interest in the intricate workings of cogs and wheels. Presently there is a little leap, a swirl of light skirts, and the merriest of the group is perched on the high, isolated seat, and with reins well in hand rides off among the billowy grasses. The breeze catches her tossy, sunny hair; her slender figure sways with the movement; the light summer gown and bright ribbons form an accentuating point above the stretches of yellow grain. Above her is the deep blueness of a midsummer sky; all around her to the cool verge of far-off maple bush and rippling lake waters extends the soft bending sea of plenteous yellow, while the great sun drenches the earth and water with August heat.

Slow and steady the sturdy horses step across the great field, the careful farmer beside them. With swish and clatter the ripe grain falls; and in a wealth of gold the sunay-haired, laughing girl moves on—a Canadian goddess of plenty, seated unconscious upon her throne.

* * *

"DR. BASSWOOD."

It is not his real name. That has either never been known or has been forgotten in that far-away past of which he is the only surviving record. The memory of the oldest inhabitant recalls him only as a dispenser of harmless medicines at a time in the pioneer history of the province when country doctors were few. One of his favorite prescriptions was a basswood poultice—hence he became 'Doctor' Basswood.

It was at Kirkfield that we made his acquaintance, but the old man is known all up and down the county as he journeys from village to village, from farm to farm, collecting imaginary rents. For it is his delusion that he is a wealthy property owner, and that farm, country store, and hotel is leased by him to tenants, good or bad according to the grace with which they humour his belief.

We were waiting in the big country store when the odd old figure passed down the street.

"Come in, Dr. Basswood," called the genial proprietor; "your rent is ready."

He came blithely up the step and took the proffered chair, a slender shrunken figure whose age it was impossible to guess, save that it went far up into or beyond the nineties. Nose and chin nearly meeting, toothless, mumbling lips, light blue eyes, restless yet clear, a few wisps of fine white hair, a heavy stick, a curiously compounded garb,—such an old, old man. But the motley clothing was clean, the face free from all repellant lines, while the shrewd, kindly eyes, humorous mouth and ready smile gave the queer old fellow a very likable personality.

"Now give us a song, doctor," said some one, after the rent in the shape of a nickel or two, had been gravely accepted and transferred to his pocket. The old man's laugh had a quaver, but the merry look was in his eyes as he struck the floor with his staff and broke out into a Gaelic "Bonnie Prince Charlie." The voice was worn with the tears and laughter of nearly a century, but the verve and humour remained, while the words rang stirring and distinct from his toothless mouth. The verses were many, the staff kept energetic time with the oft-repeated chorus in a series of sharp raps, while the odd figure and head swayed in rhythmic bend. A high quavering note, one last sounding rap, and the song came to an end. Then the humorous old face turned to us with a whimsical expression which seemed to indicate that the amusement was not all on one side.

A 'month's rent in advance' was his payment for the song, and in excellent mood Dr. Basswood started down the village street to 'look up a recreant tenant.'

THE COUNTRY RIDE.

A steady horse; a high topped buggy, whose occupants are two young women—a pretty girl and one of graver years. A long country road stretches narrowly ahead of them; a long country road stretches behind. On either side range ripened grain fields, giving hints in sound and sight of whirring machines and slow-moving horses. The young women chat or are silent, in the easy confidence of their sex. All the day is before them; all the world is blue and gold.

"It is so much nicer to be without a man along," remarks the pretty girl tentatively. The graver one cordially assents.

"Of course men are all right sometimes, but they never will believe that women can get along or have a good time without them. I'm so glad we got off alone to-day; although, to hear Uncle Tom, one would think women were not to be trusted with a horse one hundred yards from the farm gate. Hello! what's the matter with Ben?"

Ben had suddenly gone woefully lame.

"Perhaps he's tired," suggested her companion.

"He can't be; we've only gone eight miles. But we'll let him rest for a few minutes."

Ben rested in the middle of the road, while the young women discussed his sudden indisposition. When a gentle flip of the reins started him again, Ben was lamer than before.

"Oh dear! I believe he's got a stone in his foot. Why, he's turning pale with pain:—poor Ben!"

"Couldn't it be taken out?" asked the older woman.

"Yes, of course, only it's a hind leg, and he might kick. If there was only a man around now!"

The yellow fields and long roadway were scanned carefully, but no man was in sight, save where in far back acres the glimpse of a self-binder might be seen.

"I suppose we might find out what's the matter, but a man would do it so much better," continued the pretty driver, her white forehead puckered up into troubled little wrinkles. And as Ben proceeded slowly and lamely upon his way, these two independent young women searched with eager eyes in the bordering fields.

For a mile their quest was vain. Then "There's one!" they exclaimed together, as they reached a yellow-burdened field, at whose farther side a strong man's figure walked beside the whirring machine.

The pretty girl skimmed the fence lightly and made her way across the stubble. The whirring mower stopped in its passage down the field, and presently both maid and man came toward the roadway, where the graver woman and lame Ben rested in all the drenching noontime sunshine of an August day.

"Which leg is it?" queried the farmer.

"I think it's that one," answered the woman, with an indicative forefinger.

"Then I guess it's the other," he responded placidly, and lifting that 'other' he dislodged a large stone which lay beneath the hoof.

He took their proffered thanks easily, with a courteous lifting of the big straw hat; but there was a lurking amusement in the sun-browned handsome face, and a laugh in the eyes, that indicated a full appreciation of the situation.

"I'm so glad we found a man at last," remarked the graver woman, as Ben started off briskly.

"Yes; though of course we could have done it ourselves," said the pretty maid, as she turned to watch the tall figure striding over the stubble. "But wasn't he handsome, and wouldn't Uncle Tom laugh?"

FAITH FENTON.