

A CARETAKER.

By Virginia Woodward Cloud, in *Woman's Home Companion*.

"This here's a tidy place o' yourn said the peddler. He wiped his face with a red handkerchief and came under the shade of a trumpet-flower which overhung the porch. "There ain't a neater on the road! I say that every Monday, since I took this beat, which is only here of late. I'm a stranger to these parts, but yourn seems to be the tidiest place, and mighty well kept, too—thanky, ma'am, I will have some"—he drank heartily from the dipper. "The best water, too."

The woman on the porch looked gravely pleased, and her gentle blue eyes, which seemed to plead for gentleness in return, followed his words with something of intensity. Her face was small and anxious, and she put back a strand of gray hair, which the wind had loosened.

"Mind them 'sturtions? Ain't they gold-like?" she said, eagerly. Jonathan Bragg gave me a handful of seed in an envelope. That vine's mornin'-glories and yonder's pretty-by-nights; they close at noon. That there's phlox—its real hardy, and that scarlet sage has done just grand! I raised it from a root I found. That mint around the pump I dug up from the stream down yonder—seems like a body can't have too many growin' things to see to."

"Chickens doin' well, too, and you work your land yourself, ma'am?"

She nodded. The hand which rested on the porch post was knotted and hard with labor, and her apron, although spotlessly clean, was patched with many patches of varied colors.

"There ain't finer tomatoes or cabbages along the road. Your garden stuff must have brought you a tidy bit, ma'am. And this here's fresh paint you got on? Do it yourself?" He glanced up at the little house, and again she nodded, but as if words were frozen on her lips. A gleam as of fear leaped into her eyes, and she wrapped her hand nervously in her apron.

"A good job, ma'am. And those pears yonder—I ain't seen finer!" He looked wistfully at the pears strewn upon the ground. It had seemed strange to him that this woman, with all her timid softness, should never have offered him any of the fruit off those laden boughs. She did not appear to be one of the sort that, in his rounds, he customarily wheedled because of their "closeness." Yet, she had bought nothing of him during the time in which he had travelled this lonely hillside road.

"Well, ma'am, is that all to-day?" She repeated the usual formula after him, her lips trembling, and the peddler trundled his cart down the lane and wondered.

The woman crouched for a moment under the trumpet, flowers, and buried her face in her apron; then she went indoors and moved mechanically about, seeking something to set to rights in the already immaculate kitchen. But there was not a flaw; the boards shone with scrubbing, the tins on the walls were like mirrors, and apparently unused, while near the stove hung several others, obviously well worn. There were red geraniums in the window, and the table, without a cloth, shone cleanly white. She straightened the tins and passed her hand almost tenderly over the table, and broke off several dead geranium leaves. Then she stood clasping and unclasping her hands, and with her lips twitching as if she were making a desperate resolve.

She went to the door, and shading her eyes from the sunset, looked toward the road whither the peddler had gone with his hand-cart. Then she latched the door, and passed quickly down the lane. The swallows were sweeping back in a dark ring, and beyond them the sky flamed red. The lonely road sloped deep upward, and on the top of the hill, black against the sunset, was the peddler. Even as she ran, his hand-cart passed over the crest and disappeared. There was no one else in sight as, panting, she ascended the hill, the soft wind blowing her thin hair backward, and the effort flushing her face.

When she reached the summit she paused with her hand upon her heart, and simultaneously the peddler, now below her, looked back and saw her, in turn, outlined against the sky. She

waved her hand and he stopped, resting upon his cart while she descended the hill.

"Wait!" she called. "I come to tell you somethin'."

He looked wonderingly at her agitation.

"Get your breath, ma'am, get your breath! Maybe you'll set down on the handles—shafts, I call 'em." But she shook her head, holding her faded purple calico at her breast with both hands.

"I come to tell you that it ain't mine—the place ain't." The words dragged themselves from her, and her timid eyes seemed grown large with nervous fear as they forced themselves to look at him. "Your place, yonder?" He made a bewildered gesture toward the hill.

"Tain't mine! It's Maria Max's place," the woman said. "I took it, that's all. I just walked in and lived in it three years straight along, three year come Candlemas, just like it was mine, and there's times I forget 'tisin't mine!"

He gazed wonderingly at her, his slow intelligence trying to grasp her import.

"Maria Max she come over to the Branch some three years ago, after her man died, and gave me her key to take care of, and she says, 'I'm goin' away travellin' in the West to see 'Lias's kin and get a change,' she says. 'And I'll come back when I've a mind to,' she says, and would I step over and take a look at her place now and then? And I said I would, and—and—" she stopped for breath. The words had rushed over each other in tumultuous eagerness.

"Get your breath, ma'am," said the peddler, kindly.

She paused only an instant and then went on in the same rapid way. "My place it burned down the time o' the election fire. 'Twasn't but two rooms and an attic. But they was mine, and I set such a store by 'em! I saved a few clothes and tins, and one hen and a settin' of eggs, and nothin' else in the world. I was always such a hand to take comfort from things, such as they were. I just laid out to start and walk to the city and get work, maybe"—her lips twitched, and she passed both trembling hands over her thin gray hair. "But I come over here first to see that Maria Max's place was all right, and I didn't have no roof that night, so I thought just to sleep here the night. The garden was all goin' to rack for want of weedin' and hoein', and things were all gettin' so mildewed from bein' shut up and all that, I thought just to see to 'em for a day or two. So I walked back to the Branch—"

"Matter o' six mile," interrupted the peddler.

"And fetched my clothes and my hen and my tins, and come back here and—and—I just staved along." Her face flushed and her hands worked together.

See page 845, May 30 issue, for continuation.

SOME IDEAS RE SENATE REFORM.

Below is given a short summary of two new schemes recently submitted to the Upper House at Ottawa with a view to senate reform. It is worthy of notice for several reasons, one especially being the assumption that either Ontario or Quebec are and will be equal in voting power and wealth to the entire Canadian West. That assumption alone is proof positive that all the senility is not confined to the Senate. The fight for the retention of the Senate in toto is due to the dominance of the old idea, born in many of our people as a result of living for generations under the control of aristocrats, than which there is no more deadening influence. The disestablishment of the church, marriage with a deceased wife's sister and that obnoxious appellation—Non-conformist, are all things, we in Canada have shed, and the main relic of feudalism is—the Senate.

Senator David enunciated a plan whereby the Federal Government, Provincial Executives and universities and other public bodies, respectively, might each appoint one third of the representatives in the upper House. Sir Richard Cartwright, who was careful to say that he spoke only for himself as an individual, presented a scheme for a Senate, two thirds of whom should be elected and one third appointed. Sir Richard would not interfere with the life membership of the present Senate,

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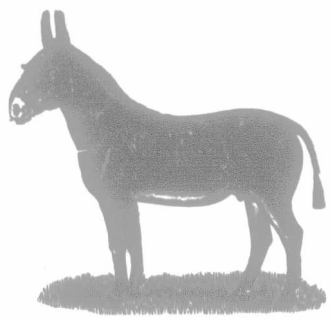
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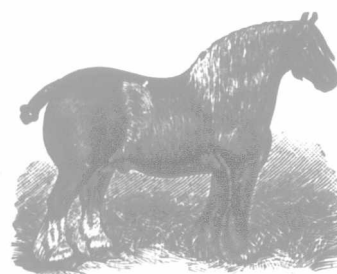


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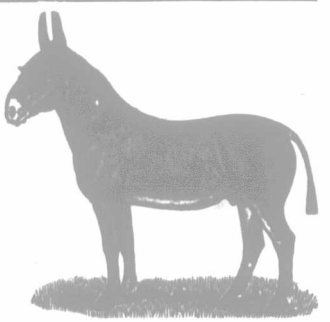


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