

HARVEST IN THE TOWNSHIPS

By HELEN D. WILLIAMS

WHEN the maples wave scarlet in the purpling haze, and pumpkins bespatter stubbly corn-fields with gold, and butternuts fall with muffled thud in the woods, townships folk begin to think of their annual festival, the Harvest Home.

As a preliminary measure delegates, two by two, make a soliciting circuit of village and foothills. Incidentally, they square arrears in their social amenities at the same time. Having, like Captain Cuttle, "made a note" of what each feels like contributing, a mutual exchange of news, continued from the previous year, takes place. The operation of taking up geraniums, or putting in bulbs, or soap-making in the great iron kettle in the yard is suspended for the nonce, while those who cannot often "get down" to the metropolis learn what is going on in the world where the road runs down. To the "beggars," as the hillfolk quaintly and appositely call the requisitioners, the view, the cluttered farm buildings, the westering sun on the clematised stone wall, the sheep and turkeys and hens and geese in the fields, all look very peaceful.

Twilight is darkening to-night as you jog homeward with your spoil, tangible as proclaimed by rotund revolutions under the seat going down hills, and prospective, as recorded in your note book. A great yellow cheese of a moon swings clear of the horizon. Mists rise from the marshes. Lights twinkle forth from windows. As you draw near one of these, it flickers and goes out. A moment later it reappears at the shed door, showing up in bold relief a woman with a lamp and a man carrying a little black bag turning from hitching his horse to a tree. "Oh, Doctor! I am so glad you have come!"

In a sparsely-populated settlement on the Lower St. Lawrence a visiting clergyman relates that the Harvest Home service was interrupted by a stalwart dame striding up the aisle with a pumpkin pie under her arm. Upon reaching the altar and seeing that the most auspicious places were already occupied by triumphs of her neighbour's culinary skill, she thrust these ruthlessly aside, and plumped her own concoction down into their place. In the townships, how-

ever, the church decorations do not excite emulative contention, being restricted in their range to the vegetables and fruits of harvest.

Artistically stacked oats eke out asparagus very successfully as a background against which to heap Calhoun pumpkins, Hubbard and crookneck squashes, ponderosa tomatoes, Mackintosh red apples and braided strands of golden bantam corn. Surrounded by these products of the year's maturity, to joy "according to the joy in harvest," seems a consummation devoutly to be wished, the choir's paean, "Now thank we all our God with heart and hands and voices," less a traditional obligation than a sheer necessity.

DESCENDING to the basement, the decorative scheme is curtailed to edibles. Long tables span the length of the room, and on these, sandwiched between string-marked silver and empty platters of cold meats, beet and cabbage salads, pumpkin and apple pies, white and brown bread and all kinds of fruit make a brave showing. From the basement kitchen is wafted the aroma of coffee, and on the stove are huge kettles of steaming potatoes, mashed squash and turnips, and in the oven a pot of baked beans and pans of chicken and meat pies. From time to time someone squeezes in with a basket or covered dish and deposits a cake or a tin of buns or a jar of whipped cream among the heterogeneous reserve store on the side table. Small boys and the squat, sandy-haired individual hired to "wash up after" regard each addition with an appraising eye, knowing that what is left will fall to their share.

Meanwhile everything is bustlement and good cheer. The minister goes about shaking hands with everyone. A Harvest Home atmosphere pervades the place. A clatter of backward pushed chairs, a hush—the prelude to the minister's blessing—a louder buzz of conversation perforated at intervals by someone asking someone else whether they will take tea or coffee, and the dinner is fairly launched.

In the main all goes well. The comedy-loving find

diversion watching the byplay furnished by a self-constituted mother in Israel who, conspicuous chiefly by her absence during the arduous, getting-ready stage, comes in strong, so to speak, at the last lap. She hurries down the basement stairs, responding to greetings with pre-occupied nods, and unrolling her apron as she goes. When she has elbowed her way into the kitchen she dons it with a precipitation which would seem to augur well for the amount of work to be executed. But it soon becomes apparent that her role is rather to get work out of others—or produce the effect of doing so. Her air of riding the whirlwind and directing the storm is amusing or maddening to those who have borne the brunt of the work, according as they are endowed with or lacking in the saving grace of humour.

Sometimes, the dispenser of avowed chicken-pie is brought to confusion by one of the cleric proclaiming to all and sundry that the flaky crust covers a deception.

"Chicken-pie?" he says, with stern displeasure, probing with his fork and producing a steak bone in confirmation of his statement, "chicken-pie? I think not."

And he helps himself sadly to baked beans, while the abashed waitress trips kitchenward to cock a humorous eye under other crusts, lest inadvertently she offend again.

Cups have many times been refilled, depleted dishes replenished before the minister invites certain of his male parishioners to adjourn to the Rectory for a quiet smoke. Of the rest, the hillfolk agglutinate into groups and visit, the girls and boys go out for a stroll, the waitresses make merry over their belated repast. Presently they will all congregate in the church for the three o'clock service. And a diminished number will round off the day with supper and games. With the exception of the church collection, it has all been gratuitous. It has been a lot of work and no one is a whit the better off. And yet, as surely as Autumn comes round, the feeling awakes for certain upland drives and familiar faces, and in the midst of city scenes and activities the mind previsions the Harvest Home in the townships.

THE BLIND MAN'S EYES

By WILLIAM McHARG AND EDWIN BALMER

CHAPTER V.—(Continued.)

EATON felt he was paling as he faced the blustering smaller man. He realized that the passengers he could see—those at the smaller tables—already had judged his explanation and found him wanting; the others unquestionably had done the same. Avery was gazing up at him with a sort of contented triumph.

"The telegram was for me, Conductor," he repeated. "Get that telegram, Conductor!" the stout man demanded again.

"I suppose," Connery suggested, "you have letters or a card or something, Mr. Eaton, to show your relationship to Lawrence Hillward."

"No; I have not."

The man asserting himself as Hillward grunted. "Have you anything to show you are Lawrence Hillward?" Eaton demanded of him.

"Did you tell any one on the train that your name was Hillward before you wanted this telegram?"

It was Harriet Dorne's voice which interposed; and Eaton felt his pulse leap as she spoke for him.

"I never gave any other name than Lawrence Hillward," the other declared.

Connery gazed from one claimant to the other. "Will you give this gentleman the telegram?" he asked Eaton.

"I will not."

"Then I shall furnish him another copy; it was received here on the train by our express-clerk as the operator. I'll go forward and get him another copy."

"That's for you to decide," Eaton said; and as though the matter was closed for him, he resumed his seat. He was aware that, throughout the car, the passengers were watching him curiously; he would have foregone the receipt of the telegram rather than that attention should be directed to him in this way. Avery was still gazing at him with that look of quiet satisfaction; Eaton had not dared, as yet, to look at Harriet Dorne. When, constraining himself to a manner of indifference, he finally looked her way, she began to chat with him as lightly as before. Whatever effect the incident just

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closed had had upon the others, it appeared to have had none at all upon her.

"Are you ready to go back to our car now, Harriet?" Avery inquired when she had finished her breakfast, though Eaton was not yet through.

"Surely there's no hurry about anything to-day," the girl returned. They waited until Eaton had finished.

"Shall we all go back to the observation car and see if there's a walk down the track or whether it's snowed over?" she said impartially to the two. They went through the Pullmans together.

The first Pullman contained four or five passengers; the next, in which Eaton had his berth, was still empty as they passed through. The porter had made up all the berths, and only luggage and newspapers and overcoats occupied the seats. The next Pullman also, at first glance, seemed to have been deserted in favor of the diner forward or of the club-car further back. The porter had made up all the berths there also, except one; but some one still was sleeping behind the curtains of Section Three, for a man's hand hung over the aisle. It was a gentleman's hand, with long, well-formed fingers, sensitive and at the same time strong. That was the berth of Harriet Dorne's father; Eaton gazed down at the hand as he approached the section, and then he looked up quickly to the girl. She had observed the hand, as also had Avery; but, plainly, neither of them noticed anything strange either in its posture or appearance. Their only care had been to avoid brushing against it on their way down the aisle so as not to disturb the man behind the curtain; but Eaton, as he saw the hand, started.

He was the last of the three to pass, and so the others did not notice his start; but so strong was the fascination of the hand in the aisle that he turned back and gazed at it before going on into the last car. Some eight or ten passengers—men and women—were lounging in the easy-chairs of the observation-room; a couple, ulstered and fur-cap-

ped, were standing on the platform gazing back from the train.

The sun was still shining, and the snow had stopped some hours before; but the wind which had brought the storm was still blowing, and evidently it had blown a blizzard after the train stopped at four that morning. The canyon through the snow-drifts, bored by the giant rotary plow the night before, was almost filled; drifts of snow eight or ten feet high and, in places, pointing still higher, came up to the rear of the train; the end of the platform itself was buried under three feet of snow; the men standing on the platform could barely look over the higher drifts.

"There's no way from the train in that direction now," Harriet Dorne lamented as she saw this.

"There was no way five minutes after we stopped," one of the men standing at the end of the car volunteered. "From Fracraft on—I was the only passenger in sleeper Number Two, and they'd told me to get up; they gave me a berth in another car and cut my sleeper out at Fracraft—we were bucking the drifts, about four miles an hour; it seemed to fill in behind about as fast and as thick as we were cutting it out in front. It all drifted in behind as soon as we stopped, the conductor tells me."

The girl made polite acknowledgment and referred to her two companions.

"What shall we do with ourselves, then?"

"Cribbage, Harriet? You and I?" Avery invited. She shook her head. "If we have to play cards, get a fourth and make it auction; but must it be cards? Isn't there some way we can get out for a walk?"

"There's the top of the cars, Miss Dorne," Eaton suggested. "If we could get up there, we'd get a fairly decent walk and see everything."

"Good!" the girl applauded. "How do we get up?"

"I'll see the conductor about it," Eaton offered; and before Avery could discuss it, he started back through the train.

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