

Indian Summer

By Margaret Lillian Houts

ALTHOUGH Martha Grayson had never been blessed with the love of husband and children, without which no woman's life is really complete, she could not be said to have had a lonely existence. Indeed, ever since she could remember, her days had been filled to overflowing with service for those she loved. She was one of those women who, without being especially talented in any one direction, are capable of doing a great many things well; and being the oldest girl in a family of eight children, they all formed the habit, while she was still very young, of leaning on her.

"Go to Martha," the busy mother would say, when one of the boys came in with a cut finger or a missing button. "I've got my hands in the bread now."

And so "to Martha" they all went, even the father as the years rolled on and her capabilities assumed a wider range.

Finally, one after another the brothers and sisters left the home nest. The boys bought farms of their own, or went to try their fortunes in the West. The girls married, as girls will—all but Martha. Somehow nobody ever thought about Martha's marrying; it is doubtful if she herself did. There was so much to do at home; so many to do for.

When at last they were all gone and Martha was left with the father and mother, now beginning to grow old and feeble, she felt there was renewed cause for her to exert herself. Not

only was there much work to be done, in the house and out, but the old people must not be allowed to feel lonely and sad, now that the young life to which they had so long been accustomed, had passed out of their reach. So she made every effort to be lively and gay, and to make them forget that they three were alone together.

As time went on, she even looked after the farm; nor did it suffer under her direction. Those of the neighbors who at first shook their heads and prophesied that "everything would soon go to rack and ruin with a woman a-runnin' of it," were obliged to admit that Martha Grayson was an exception to the rule.

At last the dear old father passed away, leaving the mother to be cared for a few years longer, until she joined her husband on the other side. Hardly a week had elapsed after the funeral, when she received a letter from her brother William, who had been the first to leave home. He had settled in Ontario, married, and done fairly well. His wife had died a few months before, leaving a daughter twelve years old.

"I have tried to do for little Alice myself, dear sister Martha," he wrote, "but I am away from home a great deal, and she needs a mother's care. She is a sweet child, affectionate, gentle and biddable. With proper training she will grow up to be a fine woman. Without it, heaven only knows what will become of her. There is no one here to undertake it. You are alone, Martha dear. You are thoroughly capable in every respect. How well