



FARM AND DAIRY



& RURAL HOME

We Welcome Practical Progressive Ideas.
Trade increases the wealth and glory of a country; but its real strength and stamina are to be looked for among the cultivators of the land.—Lord Chatham.

The Recognized Exponee of Dairying in Canada.

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The Soul of the Old Homestead*

Mr. Weaver was glad to see the dapper, light-stepping land agent drive away. She had not enjoyed the dinner hour in which he had been a guest at their table. All his talk and manner had seemed an affront. She had felt depressed in some indefinable way.

She had watched her husband a little uneasily as he listened to the guest, his blue eyes keen, his lips closed more tightly than usual. But he had not made any direct answer to the land agent's glowing descriptions of the country beyond the Rockies, his subtly insinuating comparison of its forests and rivers and mountains with the prosaic levels stretching away from the Weaver door.

Mr. Weaver had said almost nothing, but the color in his hale old face had deepened. Soon after the meal he had gone out courteously to assist the little man with his horse. Now he was standing outside the front fence looking after the agent's disappearing vehicle. His hat was far back on his head. With his smooth brow, his blue eyes, his ruddy cheeks and flowing white beard, he made an ideal picture of old manhood.

And then his wife's eyes full of pride, saw him turn and gaze away over the country slowly, until he had circled the horizon. She watched him across the road to join the hay-makers in an adjoining field. Her grey eyes grew distant and wistful and a shadow rested over her lined face. Presently she went out into the yard and moved slowly down a side path. The path was bordered with sweet alyssum, and Mrs. Weaver's clean print gown brushed against it. On through the picket gate and she stood at the edge of the orchard.

Her hands crept over the gatepost and her fingers slipped gently into the grooves of weather-worn, ill-shaped initials that scarred it. They

*This is a home story. It breathes of the old farm, the old associations that have been so dear to all who have spent the best part of their lives on the one farm. All the conditions of this Nebraska story may not apply in Canada, but the spirit of the farm story is the same in all countries, and all climates, and we believe this little sketch will be read with sufficient appreciation by all of Our People to justify its reproduction in Farm and Dairy.

By E. R. JOHNSON, IN NEBRASKA FARMER

were old, old scars, these in the gatepost, as old as some of the apple trees that cleft the tough sod of the orchard and lifted broad, fruitful crowns above their gnarled trunks—nearly as old as these. And yet she could almost hear the scraping and rasping of the dull blades, could almost feel the childish enthusiasm over the task of carving those letters. She ran her fingers over them tenderly and sighed to see them so blackened and old.

Now she walked by the side of the orchard

Above her was a warm sky fading to faintest blue over the close-cropped brown hill in the distance, but bending in braver tint over the old orchard. Every autumn for thirty years Mrs. Weaver had seen just such a sky as that over the homestead, bending over just such days as this. Days having the warmth, sometimes almost the color of springtime, but yet lacking that intangible spirit of new awakening. Days to let slip by dreamfully with folded hands and quiet eyes. Days in which to listen drowsily to the sociable insect-hum, watch the robins hop about in bright-eyed silence, smile to see the blackbirds flashing their vainglorious feathers in the sunshine. Days when the long heat of the summer gave fruitful evidence in the fields where the corn-huskers shouted at their horses and threw with unerring swiftness into the creaking wagons the firm, golden ears. Days such as this—the old woman lifted her face.

Under her feet the grass grew long and thick and green. It hugged the earth closely, as if a wind had passed over it. Here and there glinted the silvery flash of cowbess. Apples had dropped down and lay there, vivid red against the green.

Mrs. Weaver picked one up and held it while she looked at the trees whose

over burdened branches were propped with poles. Absently she rubbed the purple bloom from the apple.

She herself had helped plant many of these orchard trees. She had watched them grow from mere seedlings to this. She had gloried in the lengthening of the branches, year by year, and in the thickening of their trunks. She had helped build the smudge when the frost would have blackened their blossoms. She had seen their petals drift through the air of so many springtimes. Every autumn she had come for their fruit, at first with her husband, then also with her children. Their laughter haunted the old orchard still.

And here was the boundary fence of the orchard. And beyond, and beyond, lay all that
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"The Soul of the Old Homestead Was There Breathing from Every Room, Stealing from Every Corner."

fence. Ragweed grew there in tall abandon, left to thrive because of the summer's pressing work, and she found unexpected beauty in the sturdy stems and brown tops. Here and there among them the milkweed pods had burst open. She shook them and their silken-winged seeds floated softly out on the air like dusky elves on fairy parachutes.

By and by she neared the maple tree that had "volunteered" and had been allowed to stand at the edge of the orchard. Time was when a discolored rope had swung there from its strong branches and a worn, dusty patch had marred the green sward below.

Her eyes grew soft. She was thinking of the small girl who had used to like to swing there, but who had gone to other realms. How the memories tugged at the old mother's heart to-day.