

The Country "Frolic"

By ELIZABETH ROBERTS MACDONALD

A GOOD illustration of that judicious combination of work and play which is supposed to keep Jack from being "a dull boy" can be found in the old-time, but not yet obsolete, country "Frolic." There are wood-frolics, land-clearing frolics, barn-raising frolics—frolics in connection with any kind of work in which a number of neighbourly folk unite; and there are barn-dances, too, sometimes following an afternoon of work, sometimes a separate social function.

I have heard my elders tell of many such merry-makings—and fragmentary recollections come to me of a wood-frolic held in my infantine days. Just such queer, patchy memories they are as might be expected to survive in a very youthful mind. It was winter—there is a frostiness and sparkle and a relish of the goodly hearth-fires in my mind. I seem to see a country rectory, brick, set around with sheltering trees and shrubs. In the yard there is the merry jangling of sledbells, the stamping of feet, and the sound of loud, hearty voices. The men from all the country round have come to bring, cut up, and pile, the rector's winter supply of wood. The rector leads in the work and in the joking. In the house a small child stops often in her flittings to peer out through partly-frosted windows at the fun.

Within, what bustle of culinary preparations, what leaping fires, what spreading of long tables—for were not the men of all the country round to both dine and sup within those hospitable walls? In the kitchen some of the neighbour-women were assisting, and the small child (who was shy) was as much repelled from its precincts by their chatter as she was lured thither by delicious smells. She would dart in now and again for a luxurious sniff, and dart out to take refuge in the front-parlour, with her kitten and her doll. Those neighbours were good and kind, no doubt, but they had a peculiarly depressing way of saying "My, but don't her eyes look too big for her face, somehow?" or, "She don't look real rugged, does she now?"

The small child decidedly preferred the men, who never said things like that.

In the evening there were games and songs, and motto-crackers to pull—a startling city novelty. And a small child was forgotten in the excitement, and left to fall asleep in a retired corner—and carried up to bed (years after, it seemed), and asleep

again, with the sound of "Tell me, ye winged winds," in her ears.

But frolics and bees and similar whole-souled festivities are not extinct. Still they form one of the chief diversions in many a retired settlement. I had the pleasure of taking part in a barn-dance not many—not incalculably many—years ago. It was in a New Brunswick settlement, one of the



The Old-fashioned Barn Dance.

most attractive of the backwoods places. Oh, how good the air was there; how full the woods were of flowers, vines, and ferns; how the poplars whispered secrets, night and day, around the small, grey house!

It was from that small, grey house we went to

a barn-dance, one evening in autumn, when a little tang of frost was in the air.

That barn-interior, where we danced, would have made a good subject for an impressionist picture. Illuminated only by lanterns—not Chinese-lanterns, but good, safe, *real* lanterns—hung from wall and rafter, it was full of strange and mystical effects of light and shade. The high-peaked roof was all in darkness; the mows were heaped to the tops with this year's hay. But the great floor was swept and ready for the dancers, and along the sides were benches where the weary merry-makers might rest. I thought at first that those benches were for the wall-flowers, but soon saw that no such flower was known in Forest settlement. There are more men than women in that happy land!

Yet there was a goodly number of girls assembled in the barn that night—pretty girls and plain girls, awkward girls and graceful ones—but all full of genuine brightness and cheer, and every one with a devoted swain. Most of the music was furnished by a fiddler, perched on a big box at one end of the barn; but some of the dances were accompanied by songs. One, I remember, had a refrain of:

"Oh, dear, what can the matter be?
Two old women up in an apple-tree!"

Another, half a dance and half a game, was called "Hunt the Squirrel." One, I faintly suspected, really was a kissing-game, for when the last figure was started, the lassies laughed and shook their heads and vetoed it, with significant glances at "the city girls."

Ah, but they could dance, those country youths and maidens! There was no roughness or uncouthness there, none of the careless rollicking of some ugly modern dances, but real grace and real courtesy.

And when the dancing was over, how hungry we were! How good the steaming coffee tasted, and the doughnuts, rusks, and apple-turnovers. No oyster-patties or pistachio-ices can rival those home-made dainties in my memory.

Then came the brisk walk "home" to the little, grey house, across frosty pasture-fields and under glittering stars.

The good old country Frolics! May progress and education utilize (not abolish) them, for they are part of the poetry of Canadian life!

A Chip of the Old Block

By L. M. MONTGOMERY

WHEN David Carter came home from ploughing in the shore field one still, spring evening, he understood that something had happened to disturb his women folks. His meek, timid wife had been crying, although she tried to hide it; his meek, timid daughter, Mary, the youngest of his family and the only one left at home, looked even more cowed and lifeless than usual. Her meekness and paleness and general negativeness of personality angered her father, as always happened. Why couldn't she be like other men's daughters—like his own sisters had been—girls of spirit and fire and laughter? But no, like all his children, she must take after her mother in character and appearance. They had all been meek and apologetic and afraid of him; and he had bullied them as unmercifully as he had bullied his wife.

"What's the matter with you two?" he demanded, in his great, resounding voice, after the silent supper had been eaten. "You look as if you wanted to say something and was scared to say it. You haven't got as much spirit as a flea, neither of you. Mary, what's up?"

But Mary only cast an appealing look at her mother—a look that angered her father still more. He knew that she was afraid of him with good reason, but he despised her for it.

"Reckon you'll have to speak up, ma, since the cat's got Mary's tongue," he said, sneeringly. "I wouldn't have supposed that all my children would be cowards, boys and girls alike. It's your bad breed coming out in them, that's what it is. Your

folks were always sneaking and white-livered. What's troubling you, woman, I say? Confound it, speak up, can't you?"

"Oh!" Mrs. Carter's pinched and faded face grew white. She was afraid of her husband, and always had been afraid of him in all the forty years since she had married him because her father ordered her to. "Oh, Pa, Robert Glover is dead—he died this afternoon."

The poor little woman paused in sheer terror. Robert Glover was a forbidden name in that household. She had not ventured to utter it in her husband's hearing for fifteen years.

"Is he? Well, it's a good thing!" David Carter lifted his cup and drained it at a gulp. A shocked look passed over his wife's face, but she dared make no protest. "A good thing!" repeated David, striking the table with his huge, brown fist. "There's one less fool and cumberer of the ground on earth. And what business have you to be whining because he's dead—what business, I say? Don't you let me see any more of it in either of you. If he's dead it's a good riddance. Now, remember, no more sniffing."

David Carter got up from the table and strode from the room. Jim Boulter, the hired boy, who had heard all that had passed, also went out and hid him away to the blacksmith's shop to spread the story of David Carter's speech and behaviour when told of his son-in-law's death. It shocked

people but did not surprise them; they were too well used to David Carter for that. By next day Agnes Glover, in her widowed home, heard the tale. She wept over it, but showed no anger. She was very like her mother, even more like her than the pale Mary.

When David Carter had married, people said he had been lucky enough to get the only woman on earth who could live with him. She bore with his bullying temper in a placidly-unresisting, colourless fashion that always goaded him into fresh displays of it. Their four children—two sons and two daughters—were all meek, quiet little creatures, who submitted without remonstrance to their father's tyranny. Tyrannize over them he did, railing at them unceasingly, twitting them with their very submission, thwarting and denying every wish of their childish lives.

When Agnes was eighteen Robert Glover began to come to see her. Robert was a rather shiftless fellow, and as soon as David Carter had got his eyes opened to the amazing fact that this spiritless girl, whom he had always despised, was grown-up and actually had a lover, he stormily forbade the young man the house. Agnes he overwhelmed with invectives. She listened to him meekly and wordlessly; but the next week she slipped away from home one night and married Robert.

Her father disowned her, promptly and wholly. He sent all her belongings contemptuously after her, erased her name from the family Bible, and com-

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