

THE DEVIL'S HALF-ACRE.

BY FIDELE H. HOLLAND.

FAR away in the heart of the forest to the north-east of the square-mile granted to Chief Brant for services rendered the English in time of war, and then called "Wellington Square," there nestled in the centre of a clearing a small, rough log cabin inhabited by two persons—a white man, and his companion of the gentler sex. The pair were both young, fine-looking, and well educated,—quite unsuited to the style of life they had adopted; but this gave rise to no remark or speculation, for there was no one to criticise their motives or enquire into their relationship; complete isolation seemed to be their choice and portion.

Nearly four-score years have passed away since the square half-acre on which the primitive dwelling stood was cleared and planted with a few apple trees and tea plants by these lonely settlers, whose place of abode was known only to the friendly Indians who made the forest their hunting ground, or to the trappers who occasionally passed that way along the trail that led to the carrying-place at the head of Lake Ontario—where trading was brisk and skins plenty, and where fish and game abounded; hence Chief Brant's selection of the beautiful spot when given his choice of the location of his well-earned grant. Well the wily redskin knew the rare advantages of his acquisition. All around the lonely clearing in the forests the grand old timber kings stood, casting long shadows, at the bidding of the golden sun, on the young trees—so different to themselves—that the white strangers had planted; they guarded the clearing from the fury of the storm; they sheltered it from the fierce rays of mid-summer sun and the bitter cutting of winter's blast. Green and

fertile, the square of virgin soil lay at the feet of the forest kings, responding to the culturing hand of man, as a maiden to a lover's kiss, basking in their shadows, refreshed by their moisture,—a green oasis in a giant world of green.

At the close of one June day the female occupant of the lonely cabin was seated in the doorway busily stitching some rough work, ever and anon pausing to listen for a footstep in the forest that she knew well would soon be heard crashing through the dry branches on the homeward way. She was dark, slender and fair to look upon—this forest dweller,—the style of woman a man loves, oftentimes too well for his own peace of mind. Large, dark eyes framed in an oval face, finely chiselled features and sloe-black wavy hair, spoke of French descent; her claim by features to French parentage being accentuated by a certain quick, nervous manner, and more than one unconscious gesture peculiar to her countrywomen. As she sat there in the shadows of the tall trees, she seemed a most incongruous feature in the lonely scene,—an alien figure in a foreign landscape.

Far away in the woods, now nearer, now more distant again, came the sound of shooting, the sharp ping of shot: the Indians were abroad shooting game; it was no unusual sound at this hour.

The silent stitcher pursued her work undisturbed; then all at once she began to sing—such a bright, gay little French chanson, it fairly made the echoes ring. Her voice was strong and sympathetic. As she sang, she dropped her book, and crossing her hands over her knees,