



CHAPTER XXI.—(Continued.)

"Tom has been showing me his hickory summer-house," Elsie replied with a forced laugh, "and I have been scolding him for spending so much time in fixing it, when he had so much other work to do."

"He must have taken it very seriously," said Genie, in mock gravity.

"The work he took seriously enough, whatever you may say of the scolding. Just look at it. The walls of hickory poles, the rafters of hickory branches, the roof of hickory leaves. And the seat. Whoever saw a more cozy one? Built of roots and branches, poles and twigs, all hickory, from within the summer-house itself, and twined together as only an artist could do it."

"I believe Tom is made of hickory, too," said Genie, approvingly.

And this time Tom laughed.

CHAPTER XXII.

The short spring was soon over. Then came the glory and heat of the summer, drying out the brushwood upon Tom's fallow, turning it into tinder, and making it ready for the match to set it ablaze.

Burning a fallow is an exciting event in backwood's life, and full of fascination. The hissing, the crackling, the roaring, the lurid flames, the intense heat, the sweep of the demon, as with rapid strides he throws his forked tongue round every object, grasping the whole in his satanic licking, are intensely interesting. And then there is the element of danger. Man delights in struggle; and when, in a contest with the fiery element, he says sternly: "Thus far shalt thou go and no further," and the devastating god is conquered, he feels a hero.

Tom's fallow was a noted one that year. It was the first to be cut and the first to be burned. There were many others in the neighborhood; but the fact that his was chopped and owned by the dead man came to life again, the lost returned, increased the interest.

People liked Tom. They were glad to see him back again. He had more dash and spirit than other young men whom they knew; and the tale of Jim inheriting the whole of his father's property, having got abroad, added to Tom's popularity, while it detracted from his brother's. Hence, when Tom's fallow was alight, they turned out in a body to fight fire and keep it from spreading. Fences had to be torn down and the rails thrown on the soft earth, but the fire had to stop when bidden, and the woods were saved; while in the fallow all debris was burned away, leaving nothing but charred logs and blackened stumps above the gray earth.

Tom likewise had the first Bee. Everybody in English Canada had bees in those days, particularly in logging time. A man who cleared his fallow with a single yoke of oxen, aided only by the members of his own family, was considered behind the time—slow—pokey—stuck-up. Oh, no! Every settler must have his logging bee. It would only take an afternoon to do the whole thing.

Neighbors all round, men and large boys were invited, and every one who had a yoke of oxen. Horses were not in it. They were all right for the roads, and plowing and harrowing, and all that; but for logging! Bah! The men would scowl at the very idea. And then the proportion. Four men and a boy to a team, as nearly as they could make it. One to drive the oxen, the boy to hitch the chain to the logs, and the other men to pile the logs into heaps.

And then the whiskey—ah, the whiskey! A little brown jugful—just enough to wet their whistles once in a while—when excitement was at the highest—but not to get drunk! Perish the thought. How would the men face the merry maids, who danced round the supper tables and laughed in the gloaming, if they dared to even dream of such a thing?

"I tell you it's going to be a big bee," said George Ross, on his return from business in the village.

"What did you hear about it?" Genie asked.

"It's all the talk at Linbrook. Every other fellow I met is going. What's more, a man you'd never dream of seeing at a logging bee will be there."

"Who is that, pray?"

"Gness."

"Johnston the fiddler?"

"No."

"Robert Thornton of the store?"

"He may come, but he's not the one."

"Dr. Hartman?"

"To attend to the wounded? What do you take him for? Guess again."

"I give it up."

This was pretence, for she fully suspected.

"Edgar Armstrong, of course."

"Gracious! What can he do? Besides, his school don't close till four."

"The news came straight. They say he's going to teach a couple of extra hours and close at two."

"I would not tell Elsie," said Genie.

"Let it be a surprise to her."

"All right. It's astonishing the number of girls are going as well. I guess they want to see Tom's house. You know the supper is to be there, and his mother will have charge of it."

"She is very proud of her boy, I know," said his sister.

"I tell you what, Genie, any girl that catches Tom Potter will be a lucky woman."

"Oh! I don't know," she answered, with a toss of her head. "He's good enough, but there are others."

"Are Elsie and you going?" George asked.

"Yes. We meet there after school closes. Elsie will take over a basket of cakes to surprise them."

Before one o'clock the next day half a dozen yokes of oxen had arrived on the scene, ready for the fray; while into the fallow men strolled in twos and threes, until they numbered a couple of score or more. They soon got into earnest discussion, and as Tom and Jim appeared with their respective yokes of black and white oxen, all eyes were turned upon them.

"I move that the Potter boys take the lead themselves," cried Harry Tait, "Jim against Tom—the Whites against the Blacks."

"Jolly for you!" roared Jack Slimmin. "Then oxen's splendid colors for a lead."

"Not so fast, boys," shouted Tom. "Choose who you like for leaders; but for heaven's sake, don't put Jim and me there. A man is never captain at a bee on his own fallow."

"Who has a better right?" insisted Tait. "Tom's little black steers may be young, but they're gritty. They pull like all creation, and I'd match 'em against Jim's white oxen any day."

"So would I," yelled another youth. "By jove, it's a bargain! If you're willing," cried Jim, on his mettle.

"Shake hands over it, then," returned Tom, with a laugh. "We'll have the fun of it anyway."

Interest deepened at once.

"Now for tests," said Adam Jenkins, the oldest man in the group. "I. Divide fallow in two halves. 2. Jim and Tom to draw cuts for best choice. 3. Each man to have four teams and hands. 4. Bad finish forfeits the race."

"Jenkins for umpire," cried Slimmin, and Tait seconding, it was agreed to.

Preliminaries were soon arranged—the side next the clearing staked off in the middle and the opposite centre marked by a red flag. Then the leaders started side by side, flanked by their respective followers.

Jim's big white oxen had grown old at the business. Nothing surprised them. "Whoa! back—haw—bunt! Gee there!" were obeyed with steady precision. They knew when to hold on, stretch their long necks and pull; and when Jim, with the chains over a huge rounder, yelled at them, they stuck the toes of their big white hoofs into the soft ground, and bearing all their weight on the yoke, fairly rushed things; and Jim laughed at the idea that Tom's four-year-old whites could touch his seasoned whites.

But Tom was not unprepared. For a month past he had fed full measures of corn to his little oxen; and though they were young and skittish, and would turn their yokes sometimes, they were better hardened for continuous work than Jim's whites, which had only been fed on grass.

"Well, have to take it easy for a while," Tom said in an aside to his three handspikers, "lill Buck and Bright get used to it. Then we'll make things hum. Half an hour now is neither here nor there."

(To be continued.)

In Egypt the usual words of greeting are: "How do you, perspire?"

REEROE TEA Is GOOD TEA