

PEOPLE WE MEET

MRS. CATHARINE PARR TRAILL.

I want you to see her—this dearest of dear old ladies, this Grand Old Woman of Canada. It is a fitting pilgrimage to make, on these last days of the year, to the quiet country home, where one who was born with the century, and who has journeyed with it through youth and prime and advanced age, now waits with it the final passing. The venerable woman of ninety-four and the century of ninety-six have borne close comradeship. Hand in hand they have travelled the long, long way, it may be that hand in hand they shall go out together.

So come away with me on this snowy December day. In truth, it is no small honor that awaits us, to spend the hours of it with one whom all literary Canada reveres—Mrs. Catharine Parr Traill.

Just nine miles' run from Peterboro' and we reach the little village of Lakefield—a charming spot in the summer, but now shrinking into forlornness of bare trees and snowy fields beneath the biting December air.

The neat little yellow 'bus awaiting the few passengers, jingles smoothly over the road-way, passes through the village center, and pauses finally at a rustic gate.

"This is her home," the driver says, speaking from the depths of his "coon" coat, and then the yellow 'bus jingles away.

Walking up the pathway to the brown frame house with its piazzas and cosy bay windows, we pause for a moment to note the environments,—of pine trees and leafless shrubbery, of lawn, sloping down to the pretty little curving river—ice-bound, save where in the distance the waters toss whitely over a dam.

It is a Canadian winter scene, holding full suggestions of summer beauty.

The door of the brown house opens promptly to our knock; we receive a warm Canadian country welcome; in a moment we are ushered into a cosy sitting-room, and are in the presence of the dear old lady whom we seek.

Her hand is on our arm, her lips touch our cheek, her voice—not quavering, but soft and in low musical cadence—bids us welcome, and presently we are seated at her side, and taking our first glimpse of this dear gentlewoman.

What a picture she makes as she sits in her rocking chair: Blue eyes, bright as a child's; silky white hair, parted over the high forehead and tucked away beneath the pretty cap, whose pink ribbons are not more delicately colored than the wrinkled cheeks; a smile full of kindness, and lips curving humorously. But the fascinating personality which we soon discover Mrs. Traill possesses

in marked degree, is not so easily put into words. It is in voice, perhaps, or dramatic gesture, or pungent humor, or conversational gift;—or is it in the sweet and wholesome nature? We cannot tell; but we instantly own the charm, and come under the spell which this lovely grandmother exercises on men and women alike. Indeed, the former are all her devoted admirers and friends.

"Grandmother takes all our beaux; we haven't even a chance," protests the pretty granddaughter, as she hovers fondly about her.

"She always did," answers the mother, smiling. "Neither children nor children's children stand much chance beside her."

The dear old lady protests, laughingly;



*Yours very sincerely
Catharine Parr Traill*

but her charm is only the more apparent as she does so.

"Don't call her 'a wonderful old lady,' begs one of the pretty granddaughters. 'Everybody does, and we get so tired of it.'"

Yet there is no other phrase so true. To reach ninety-four, and to be as attractive and full of vitality as this, is marvelous indeed. Shakespeare's *Seven Ages* needs more than revision here;—it demands rather an extension to a Ninth Age, sans not a single sense nor the slightest intellectual dulling, and plus the rich charm of mellowed experience, told in the tender golden glow of Buelah land.

What else should we call her but "wonderful," when we take up her very latest

book, "*Cot and Cradle Stories*," just fresh from the publishers, and find in it the prettiest and brightest collection of child stories ever published in Canada?—stories written, many of them, during the past summer, in her little island cottage in Stony Lake.

Think of those dear blue eyes and rosy cheeks of ninety-four, bending smilingly over her pages, to write pretty fancies for blue eyes and rosy cheeks of four, and twice four.

How brightly and entertainingly she talks to us through the swift-passing hours. We hear all about those early days, when, as a young wife, she left her "Suffolk woods," as she fondly phrases it, paused awhile among her husband's friends in the Orkney Islands, then crossed the ocean to begin her pioneer life in Canada. We learn of the nine weeks' slow sailing over the ocean; of the cholera epidemic, which laid her low in Montreal, of the faithful girl who nursed her back to life; of the two weeks' journey by boat through Lake Ontario to Cobourg, and of the commencement and privations of a settler's life.

We learn how through it all this brave woman kept mind as well as heart developing, nor amid hard domestic cares permitted her pen to grow rusty. To Mrs. Traill, no less than to her sister, Mrs. Susanna Moodie, we owe the best records extant of Canadian pioneer life, in "*Backwoods of Canada*," "*Lost in the Forest*," "*The Female Emigrant's Guide*," and other writings of the third, fourth and fifth decades of the century.

Yet in these later days of the eighties and nineties, Mrs. Traill is writing still, and in perfect touch with the age.

Mrs. Traill has children unto the third generation now, in many parts of the continent;—and even as she chats with us, the mail brings a letter from Prince Albert in our far Northwest, and from it drops a silky golden curl—clipped from a baby head.

"My youngest grandchild," she says fondly, and, opening an album, lays it beside other locks, dark and fair, each bearing some treasured name.

Ah, me, the beauty of it! To see the slender, wrinkled hand moving softly among these silken baby curls in tender benediction.

How merry she is, as she relates some amusing incident; how the hands reach out, and the hand uplifts in dramatic poise; how the voice deepens in unconscious mimicry.

The stage lost an artist, in the once upon a time, we say, as we watch her.

"Ah yes, my dear," she says, in answer to our question, "we little girls played Shakespeare to indulgent audiences of parents and friends in our Suffolk home. I remember that *Ariel* was my favorite role."

The talk grows graver presently. We speak of religious faith and the changing beliefs of to-day, and ask wistfully what this dear old lady has found in her long walk down the century.

"I have found," she says, solemnly, "that