

OUR FARM HOMES



OUR opportunities to do good are our talents.
—J. G. Holland.

God's Country and the Woman

(Continued from last week.)

AND then, suddenly, she slipped lower among the cushions he had placed for her, and buried her face in one of them with a moaning grief that cut to his soul. She was sobbing now, like a child. In this moment Philip forgot all restraint. He leaned forward and put a hand on her shining head, and bent his face close down to hers. His free hand touched one of her hands, and he held it tightly.

"Listen, my Josephine," he whispered. "I am not going to turn back, I am going on with you. That is our pack. At the end I know what to expect. You have told me; and I, too, believe. But whatever happens, in spite of all that may happen, I will still have received more than all else in the world could give me. For I will have known you, and you will be my salvation. I am going on."

For an instant he felt the fluttering pressure of her fingers on his. It was an answer a thousand times more precious to him than words, and he knew that he had won. Still lower he bent his head, until for an instant his lips touched the soft, living yarmoth of her hair. And then he leaned back, feeling her hand, and into his face had leaped soul and life and fighting strength; and under his breath he gave new thanks to God, and to the sun, and the blue sky above, while from behind them came skimming over the water the slim birch-bark canoe of Jean Jacques Croisset.

CHAPTER XIX.

At the touch of Weyman's lips to her hair Josephine lay very still, and Philip wondered if she had felt that swift, stolen caress. Almost he hoped that she had. The silken tress where for an instant his lips had rested seemed to him now like some precious communion cup in whose sacredness he had pledged himself. Yet had he believed that she was conscious of his act he would have begged her forgiveness. He waited, breathing softly, putting greater sweep into his paddle to keep Jean well behind them. Slowly the tremulous unrest of Josephine's shoulders ceased. She raised her head and looked at him, her lovely face damp with tears, her eyes shimmering like velvet pools through their mist. She did not speak. She was woman now—all woman. Her strength, the bearing which had made him think of her as a queen, the fighting tension which she had been under, were gone. Until she looked at him through her tears her presence had been like that of some wonderful and unreal creature who held the control to his every act in the cup of her hands. He thought no longer of himself now. He knew that to him she had relinquished the mysterious fight under which she had been struggling. In her eyes he read her surrender.

And then, in the moment's silence that followed, Philip threw back his head, and in a voice almost as wild and untrained as Jean Croisset's, he shouted back:

"Oh! the fur feels sing on Temiskaming,
As the seven paddies bend,
And the crows carouse at Rupert's House,
At the sulen winter's end.
But my days are done where the lean wolves run,
And I ripple no more the path
Where the gray geese race 'cross the red moon's face
From the white wind's Arctic wrath."

The suspense was broken. The two men's voices, rising in their crude strength, sending forth into the still wilderness both triumph and defiance, brought the quick flush of living back into Josephine's face. She guessed why Jean had started his chant—to give her courage. She knew why Philip had responded. And now Jean swept up beside them, a smile on his thin, dark face.

"The Good Virgin preserve us, M'sieur, but our voices are like those of two beasts," he cried.

"Great, true, fighting beasts," whispered Josephine under her breath. "How I would taste almost—"

She had suddenly flushed to the roots of her hair.

"What?" asked Philip.

"To hear men sing like women," she finished.

"As swiftly as he had come up Jean and his canoe had sped on ahead of them.

"You should have heard us sing that up in our snow hut, when for five months the sun never sent a streak above the horizon," said Philip. "At the end—in the fourth month—it was more like the wailing of madmen. McTavish died then: a young half-breed of the Royal Mounted. After that Radisson and I were alone, and

sometimes we used to see how loud we could shout it, and always, when we came to those two last lines—"

She interrupted him:

"Where the gray geese race 'cross the red moon's face
From the white wind's Arctic wrath."

"Your memory is splendid!" he cried admiringly. "Yes, always when we came to the end of those lines, the white fogs would answer us from out on the barrens, and we would wait for the sneaking yelping of them before we went on. They haunted us like little demons, those fogs, and never once could we get a glimpse of them during the long night. They helped to drive McTavish mad. He died begging us to keep them away from him. One day he was bled, and by Radisson crying like a baby, and when I sat up in my ice bunk he caught me by the shoulders and told me that he had seen something that looked like fire thousands of miles away. It was the sun, and it came just in time."

"And this other man you speak of, Radisson?" she asked.

"He died two hundred miles back," replied Philip quietly. "But that is unpleasant to speak of. Look ahead, isn't that ridge of the forest glorious in the sun?"

She did not take her eyes from his face.

"Do you know, I think there is something wonderful about you," she said, so gently and frankly that the blood rushed to his cheeks. "Some day I want to learn those words that helped to keep you alive up there. I want to know all of the story, because I think I can understand. There was more to it—something after the foxes yelped back at you?"

"This," he said, and ahead of them Jean Croisset rested on his paddle to listen to Philip's voice:

"My seams gape wide, and I'm tossed aside
To rot on a lonely shore,
While the leaves and mould like a shroud enfold."

For the last of my trails are over—
But I float in dreams on Northland streams
That never again I'll see,
As I lie on the marge of the old Portage,
With grief for company."

"A canoe!" breathed the girl, looking back over the summit lake.

"Yes, a canoe, east aside, forgotten, as sometimes men and women are forgotten when down and out."

"Men and women who live in dreams," she added. "And with such dreams there must always be grief."

There was a moment of the old pain in her face, a little catch in her breath, and then she turned and looked at the forest ridge to which he had called her attention.

"We go deep into that forest," she said. "We enter a creek just beyond where Jean is waiting for us, and Adare House is a hundred miles to the south and east." She faced him with a quick smile. "My name is Adare," she explained, "Josephine Adare."

"Is—or was?" he asked.

"Is," she said; then, seeing the correcting challenge in his eyes she added quickly: "But only to Paul. To all others I am Madame Paul. Darcas!"

"Paul?"

"Pardon me, I mean Philip."

They were close to shore, and fearing that Jean might become suspicious of his tardiness, Philip bent to his paddle and was soon in the half-breed's wake. Where he had thought there was only the thick forest he



In Apple Blossom Time.