

IN THE THRESHING TIME



WHEN HE, after sowing vast fields of wheat, in the Canadian West, calmly sent and requested ME to come out there to look after his heart, his shirt-buttons, his hens and chickens, and a few other incidental belongings, I never knew of the inevitable Threshing which must ensue later on. If I had, I should certainly not have come! I shall always look upon it as an act of doubtful honesty, that I was not told of it.

The wheat looked so tender and green and innocent, too, when I first saw it, that one could never dream it held such possibilities. Later on, however, I noticed, it grew more aggressive, crackling and rustling in the wind in a very defiant manner. It was learning the West, and asserting itself!

Finally, it "headed out," and then, in no time, greenness and innocence were left behind forever. The long, serried ranks of heads formed in solid phalanx, and stood, shoulder to shoulder, and line on line, for miles. It bent, it swayed, it sighed in the wind—that wheat—it grew steadily yellower and yellower until one day, when it seemed to be blushing all over in a gorgeous coppery gold, out went the big binders to cut it all down. And then there was nothing but sheaves and stooks and stacks. But the worst was yet to come!

One day, a neighbour's little boy, brown of eye and browner of leg, suddenly appeared on the verandah where I was lazily swinging in the hammock after an arduous morning's work, and calmly announced:

"Say, Mis' Ransford! Mum says to tell you th' Mill 'll be to your place to-morrer 'n time fer dinner!"

"The What?" I enquired, aghast.

"Th' Mill! Th' Thrasher!" he explained. "It's to our farm now," he continued. "Look at th' smoke yon!" and he pointed a brown, fat finger to a distant column of smoke.

"The Threshers are coming!" I moaned to myself, "and HE in town for the day! What should I do?"

Quickly I made my plans. It was inevitable and I must rise to the occasion. Dismissing my little messenger, who was so much sweeter than his message, and making him happy with a cookie in each hand to eat on the way home, I literally "rose to the occasion" and rolled up the hammock as a piece of frivolity unworthy of the time and circumstances.

First and foremost, I hoisted the dinner-flag, well knowing that, although dinner was scarce an hour gone, the "hired men" would obey its fluttering call, hoping that it meant food. If they dreamed of that flag at midnight, I am sure they would present themselves at the kitchen door, ready for action.

I was right! A brief colloquy in the field resulted in one of the outfit heading for home at once, after, no doubt, promising to recall Number Two if the flag meant what they hardly dared to hope at that hour of the day.

I flew over to the barn. "Dick," I cried, "Mr. Ransford is in town with the buggy, but you ride 'Fly' in as soon as you can get off, and catch him before he leaves for home!" Fortunately Dick is a smart man, and the tangle of pronouns by no means disconcerted him.

"Anything wrong, Mrs. Ransford?" he enquired.

"Wrong, Dick! Well, it quite depends upon what you call wrong!" I replied. "The Threshers come to-morrow—Mrs. Stanhope's boy just brought me word—and Mr. Ransford does not know. Tell him, Dick, to come home as soon as he can get here, and to bring with him every single thing on this list, particularly the meat—fifty pounds of meat, at least, tell him—unless," I added, in a sad attempt at wit, "unless he thinks it would be easier to drive a steer home intact, than to carry it in pieces in the buggy!"

"I guess a steer weighs more than fifty pounds, Mrs. Ransford," replied Dick, who is a Scotchman. But I scarcely heard him, as I ran back to the kitchen, breathlessly, to begin operations, while the literal Richard galloped madly forth townwards.

And then resulted a grand stampede of cake-tins and pie-pans, as may be supposed. Fruit was dumped into pots and kettles and boiled fast and furiously. Sugar was added to butter, eggs were whisked out of all recognition, bottles of flavouring were emptied, flour was sprinkled around like snow—the air was thick with it! Fortunately for the

By HELEN GUTHRIE

digestion of the coming Threshers, the swear-words which were freely used, did not drop into the batter, or the various cakes would not have turned out so harmless as they did.

Supper-time came and so did Bob—the hired man, Number Two. I pushed him a fresh scone and told him to make himself some tea, and then I went on, and on, and on!

Finally, dozens of egg-shells, rows of baking-powder tins and a depleted store of sugar, butter and flour testified to my efforts in the culinary line, while the kitchen settle, the dining-room cupboard, table and sofa were piled high with dainties of all descriptions, and the pantry shelves fairly creaked beneath the weight of pies, pies, pies of all descriptions.

And then arrived HE—my husband—tottering beneath the weight of as much of an ox as could be carried by one man—while his whole being fairly bristled with all sorts and conditions of parcels, followed by Dick—also a very porcupine with bundles, bundles, bundles.

"Good gracious, Sally, where shall I put these things?" HE cried, helplessly—and dumped them ignominiously on the floor, Dick following suit with his cargo. This completed the picture, and I sat down forthwith on a sponge cake and laughed till the tears ran down my cheeks.

It was funny, although I was dead tired. However, a cup of tea is a wonderful transformer and healer of woes, and very soon I was up and busy again—this time with an able helper—for HE had once "batched." All night that semi-steer sizzled and spluttered in the oven, and if it lacked the orthodox "basting," the Threshers knew it not, judging by their appetites.

For they came, right on time—of course they did. The "Machine" looked exactly like a steamer coming slowly along over the prairie, and I quite imagined I was at the sea-side, the delusion was so complete. It was quickly dispelled, though—that delusion—for, no sooner was the Mill "set," when a loud and vigorous and long-drawn-out "toot-toot-tooooo" announced that dinner-time had arrived!

And then!!! Oh! how they ran! "They all ran up to the farmer's wife," who would fain have "cut off their tails with a carving-knife"—and certainly I "never saw such a sight in my life" as those twenty hungry Threshers!

And such spectacles as they were—men from England, men from Scotland, men from Ireland—Canadians, Americans, Belgians, a Swede, and all sorts and varieties. But, "blest be the tie that binds," and the "tie" in this case was Hunger!

THE REAR GUARD

By NOEL GRANT

HE was only a youngster and yet he was a General too. He had been elected such by the boys and then had had to hold the position by a series of pitched battles, but he still held the position.

Periodically the boys met to vanquish an invisible foe. Perhaps they would carry stones up hill all forenoon of a Saturday, only to roll them down again on their enemies. Then in one wild charge, with their wooden swords flourishing, they would race down hill and slay, slay, slay and give no quarter. Never had they been defeated. If ambushed, their General always pulled them through safely and no matter how difficult the foe to dislodge, yet they were dislodged.

No one was ever killed either. The General insisted that some, at least, should be killed and others wounded, but after one battle, in which certain were persuaded "to be dead," no more were ever killed. It was unanimously agreed that there was no fun in lying perfectly still when your arms just itched to be cleaving a sword through an adversary's skull. Besides, it was even worse when the battle drifted away and you could only hear and not see what was going on.

Next Saturday was to be the biggest battle of them all and the little General was explaining all about it and drawing plans on the carpet.

"You see, mother, there's a hill on our left and the river on our right. When they attack us, we will retreat. But when we get as far as this valley, where the rear guard will be stationed, the rear

I would I had the pen of a ready writer to convey to my readers some conception of the unfathomable depth and dimensions of those cosmopolitan stomachs!

Custom and politeness forbade my putting at each place a flagon of tea, a loaf of bread, a pound of meat, and an entire pie, but, by so doing, I should certainly have saved myself much trouble. Working unremittingly from daylight until dark in the hungry Western air, produces an appetite astonishing indeed.

For fully fifteen minutes not a word was uttered—business was pressing—but after that time, the tongues began to give forth sentiments in truly Western style. Many and varied were the compliments I received as to my cooking powers—sometimes veiled, sometimes unmistakable, but always with a spicy Western flavour which somehow repaid me for all my trouble. HE says I have been conceited ever since!

For three and a half days I had those Threshers! I suppose that engine *sometimes* tooted for sheaves or for fuel or for something else, but my ears heard only the peculiar "toot-toot-tooooo" which meant "grub." And the very instant that sounded, horses galloped, stook-waggons swayed and jolted over the stubble, dogs barked, men hooted and called—then, a general rush for the row of wash-basins and towels set out on the green—and then, a grand stampede for the dining-room—pushing, scrambling, getting ahead of one another—always with the one end in view and *always* good-natured.

This was several years ago—my first experience—and it is all so vivid to me now, in looking back—the shaggy, unkempt, yet clean, men—the merry, watchful, kindly eyes of them—their ready, spicy Western repartee—and, withal, their huge, ever-present, prodigious, always satisfying, yet ever-returning appetites! I shall never forget it! But it warms my heart even now to remember how, when they were leaving us and I was smiling and making my adieux, one of them—a young, fresh, red-cheeked boy—made redder than ever by the effort—stepped out from among them and taking off his hat said, "Good-bye, Mrs. Ransford, and thank you. We boys all want to come back next year, for this we consider the best grub-shop we have struck yet!" Dear boy! That was the finest compliment I ever got in my life. And then ensued a volley of "Hip! Hip! Hurrah! So long! For he's a jolly good fellow!" until the medley of sound gradually receded as the "steamer" slowly moved away across the Prairie Ocean.

We sighed, and then we laughed, and finally, we went back into our Shack to count up our bushels of wheat—"Thirty to the acre!"

guard will fall on their flank and we will turn on them too and so drive them right over into the river and they will all get drowned."

The poor tired mother had listened to these plans of battle over and over again and was ever ready with sympathy, as he well knew. She had even added a bow or two to his paper hat to show his higher rank.

* * * * *

"Mother, dear, what's the matter with me anyway?"

"Well, dearie, the doctor says you have pneumonia."

"Yes, I know, mother, but what's pneumonia?"

Many a grown-up has asked the same question and has not found a satisfactory answer, but at least the mother found an answer satisfactory to the General.

"Now listen, dear, and don't interrupt me and I'll try to explain it to you. When God made you He placed a big army in you. The soldiers are so small that you cannot see them, but they are dressed in red and white. The white soldiers do all the fighting and the red ones carry the ammunition and food. They march around and around in your blood and come back every little while to the heart, their General, and report that they are ready to fight. And you listen and you can hear what the General says—'Not yet—not yet—not yet—not yet.' Now there is a big storehouse where all the food is kept for them; it is in your lungs.

(Continued on page 22)