

THE OLD HICKORY

Story of a Line Fence Feud That Came to an End in a Bigger Conflict

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THE two farms—Sunnybrae and Maple Hollow—lay side by side with the selfsame road winding past their respective gates and the selfsame river flowing behind their lower pastures. There was, too, the same Canadian sky overhead, and the air that played about the gables of each old home was filled with the same bird-songs.

Yet, relatively the two households might have existed upon different hemispheres for all the interchanges of courtesies that ever took place.

The progenitors of the two families had been United Empire Loyalists, and therefore the history of each was the history of the noble patriot and hardy pioneer. The Hargraves, of Sunnybrae, and the Deanes, of Maple Hollow, had fought side by side in the War of 1812, and in the living-room of each spacious farm-home were hung the swords that had helped to purchase a common freedom.

But although wars may come and wars may go, a line-fence dispute goes on forever. So that in the year of grace 1914 only the barest civilities were exchanged between the members of the two households, the bitter feud of old Colonel Hargrave and Major Deane in 1830, having been handed down from father to son along with the prized heir-looms and dear traditions of a former day.

Once, when the members of the present generation of Hargraves and Deanes were frolicsome children, little Jimmy Hargrave and small Larry Deane had disobeyed parental injunctions and gone fishin' together. Freckle-faced Jimmy knew where the best butternuts grew, and to black-haired, saucy-eyed Larry he imparted this interesting information in return for a few lessons in boat-building. They had spent one glorious afternoon, only marred somewhat at its close by a near-drowning, in the which both lads participated.

They had been fished out of the river in a limp and unpromising condition, but on the following day, when it was apparent that neither of them was likely to suffer any ill-effects from the occurrence, the father of each boy took him out to the woodshed and applied the time-honoured birch rod, supplemented by stern threats as to what would happen in case of further overtures between the Hargraves and the Deanes.

The early friendship thus nipped in the bud languished for years. Then suddenly, late in the afternoon of August fourth, 1914, it was re-kindled. Larry Deane, wending his way home from the village with an astounding piece of news, was in no mood for picking and choosing his listeners. He was nearly bursting with it as it was, having walked two dusty miles without meeting either a vehicle or a soul a-foot.

From afar off he glimpsed the scion of the house of Hargrave busy "stooking" grain in the upper field. Larry, a fine, tall lad now, twenty-two past, was the same Larry of the generous impulses. Leaping over the "snake" fence into the enemy's meadow, he plowed uphill, knee-deep among the daisies, and coming at length within hailing distance, he made a megaphone of his hands and shouted:

"Hey, Jim! Heard the latest?"

JIMMY HARGRAVE turned with elaborate carelessness—he had seen the other coming three minutes since—and lifting the pitchfork high, sent it careening into a "stook" nearby. Then he advanced toward Larry, with just enough dignity to uphold the Hargrave pride.

"Well, no; I can't say as I have," he said.

They met at the corner of the old fence.

"England," said Larry, "has declared war on Germany."

Jimmy stared at him a moment. Then, taking off his "cow's breakfast" and pulling a red bandana out of his overall pocket, he mopped his face.

"Hot work, stooking," he observed, gravely.

"Did you hear what I said, Jim?"

"Aw, go chase yourself!"

"See here, then!" and Larry drew a newspaper from his pocket. The two young men bent over it. When they looked up their eyes met, and neither pair shifted. The high courage of the old Loyalists still lived!

Jimmy walked with Larry up to the old line-fence that separated the acres of Sunnybrae from those of the Hollow.

"When," began Jimmy, and then paused at the flash in the dark eyes of Larry.

He followed the latter's angry glance. From the top of the rise just beyond, in the Deane domain, stood an old man grimly watching them.

"Now for a row!" said Larry, bitterly.

"We're both of age. Can't we judge for ourselves a bit?" demanded Jimmy, also incensed.

"He'll stand there till I come, so good-bye, Jim."

Larry leaped over the line of contention.

"I was going to ask when we would be wanted?" observed Jimmy.

"Right away."

"Then I'll go into the village to-morrow night. Meet me at Benson's store."

"I get yuh, Jim."

Jimmy Hargrave stood lost in thought when the other had disappeared. Where they had been standing there was a padlocked gate shutting off a strip



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of land upon which rose a gigantic hickory tree. A companion gate faced upon the Deane field. Old Colonel Hargrave and the Major had each claimed this tree and the nuts thereof. But it stood firmly rooted directly upon the dividing line, and after years of bickering, a disinterested neighbour had been called into the matter in the capacity of referee. This individual had immediately called the game a "tie" and had fenced up the arboreal giant.

"The nuts," he declared, "are the finest in the county. I'll send a committee from the Methodist church up here in October each year and we'll raffle 'em off and give the proceeds to charity."

But charity had never so benefited, for, as though she felt a deep sense of personal injury in being thus discriminated against and isolated like an Indian cemetery Old Hickory bore no more nuts. Anxious urchins came in late summer and gazed up into her branches, seeking to make an appraisal of the probable harvest, only to depart, disappointed. Old Hickory, following the spirit of the age, had chosen a life of idle luxury. She had cast in her lot with those of her sisters—human and otherwise—who live only to themselves.

Jimmy's thoughts, however, were not of the tree. He was wondering what his mother would say when he told her that he was going to enlist.

There came a day in late autumn when two young men, lithe and straight, keen-eyed and brown of face, looking very trig and capable in the King's khaki, said good-bye to their respective parents, and joining each other at the little woodland path that curved up over the hill, marched away together down the old grey road.

Elizabeth Hargrave, scorning tears, rolled up her

sleeves and turned to the weekly washing, for it was a Monday morning. She was a stern-faced woman, strong of limb and Scotch to the marrow of her bones. "Goodness knows, I'll have enough to do now!" she thought. "Our only boy—an' Pa not well this fall, an' the girls havin' to keep at school an' all. As if there weren't lots of other families with three an' four grown sons, that it must be ours to go!"

BUT when she went out to hang the snowy clothes on the line under the apple trees, she stole a glance across the bare meadow-land to where the old gables of Maple Hollow shone red in the morning sunlight.

"I wonder if she took it hard," said Elizabeth to herself. At almost the same time, Mary Jane Deane was standing in the doorway of the cook-house, looking up the rise toward Sunnybrae. There were traces of grief on her proud, gentle face. Her lips were still trembling and now and then she would lift a corner of her blue-checked apron and wipe away a tear. Mary Jane came of Irish ancestry and had not such perfect control of the emotions as had her neighbour, up on the hill.

"They'll miss their lad sore," she said to her husband, who was standing below her, on the "stoop."

"They will that," replied Larry, the elder. "'Course we've got our two wee lads growin' up," Mary Jane went on. "But it don't seem to make no difference. Larry. I—I jest can't spare none!"

"Whisht, whisht," interposed Larry the elder, gently, as a sob broke from his wife. "Mebbe we won't have to spare him. He's Irish, lass, an' the Irish have a way of comin' out o' the thickest fights with flyin' colours. Mark my words, ye'll hear before spring of an O'Donohue or a Flynn or an O'Leary that'll be earnin' the Victoria Cross!"

Mary Jane brightened up and turned to her work. In the afternoon she baked squash-pies and made doughnuts.

"I—I'd like real well, Pa," she began, at supper time, "to take 'Lizabeth over a mess o' doughnuts."

She propounded her wish half fearfully. Larry always grew wrathful at any sign of weakening on her part, in the matter of the Hargrave and Deane feud. This time, however, he said nothing, merely shrugging his shoulders indifferently.

Mary Jane stole out a few moments later and took her way over the pastures and through the orchard (where the late fameuse apples hung weighted on their branches) toward the line-fence. Then she halted, undecided as to her next move. Under her arm she carried a large plate covered with a snowy napkin. The cakes were her very best frying, and she was pardonably proud of their combined lightness and richness.

Suddenly a remembrance of Elizabeth's coldness and aloofness stung her. With a foot on the lower rail of the fence, she

paused again.

"No," she said, half aloud. "No! 'T'won't be me that'll make the first advance!"

Turning, she walked rapidly back to the house. Winter came and went, and spring arrived. From time to time during this period the boys had written home. Neither of them had as yet distinguished himself by any great feat of arms, but they spoke cheerfully of "a few scratches" and longed, they said, "for more real fighting and less watchful waiting."

THEN, after two months of silence, a short letter from Larry Deane came to hand, telling of a strong movement forward and a probable "fight" that would take place in the course of a day or two. "If I don't write again, Mother o' mine," he said, in closing, "tell Dad to chop down Old Hickory. 'Tis Jimmy's wish also. (He'd drop a line to his folks only his right arm is out of commission.) I have a feeling that when you have laid the old tree low there'll be an end of all this family strife. I tell you Jimmy's been showing the stuff he's made of, and we're all proud of him. All honour to the parents of such a lad! The heart of me is sore to think my folks and his are not on speaking terms. Down with Old Hickory! If she even bore nuts to justify her existence! But there she stands a monument to a petty quarrel, useless, unproductive and a subject for witticism the county over."

Larry Deane the elder, upon receipt of his soldier-son's last letter, armed himself with a saw and an axe and set forth to the line-fence. It would be hard work and risky, too, for one man to perform, but he was determined to achieve it. Henry