

## OUR FARM HOMES



**Victories** that are easy are cheap. Those only are worth having which come as a result of hard fighting.—Beecher

### God's Country and the Woman

(Continued from last week.)

SHE was not looking at him, but beyond him. In her face he saw again the strange light of hope that had illumined it at the pool.

"If I could believe," she whispered, still looking beyond him. "If I could trust you, as I have read that the maidens of old trusted their knights. But—it seems impossible. In those days, centuries and centuries ago, I guess, womanhood was next to—God. Men fought for it, and died for it, to keep it pure and holy. If you had come to me then you would have levelled your lance and fought for me without asking a question, without demanding a reward, without reasoning whether I was right or wrong—and all because I was a woman. Now it is different. You are a part of civilization, and if you should do all that I might ask of you it would be because you have a price in view. I know. I have looked into you. I understand. That price would be—me!"

She looked at him now, her breast throbbing, almost as in her quivering voice, defying him to deny the truth of her words.

"You have struck home," he said, and his voice sounded strange to himself. "And I am not sorry. I am glad that you have seen—and understand. It seems almost indecent for me to tell you this, when I have known you for such a short time. But I have known you for years—in my hope and dreams. For you I would go to the end of the world. And I can do what other men have done, centuries ago. They called them knights. You may call me a man!"

At his words she rose from where she had been sitting. She faced the radiant walls of the forests that rolled billow upon billow in the distance, and the sun lighted up her crown of hair in a glory. One hand still clung to her breast. She was breathing over more quickly, and the flush had deepened in her cheek until it was like the tender strain of the crushed lake-reeds. Philip rose and stood beside her.

His shoulders were back. He looked where she looked, and as he gazed upon the red and gold billows of forest that melted away against the distant sky he felt a new and glorious fire throbbing in his veins. From the forests their eyes turned—and met. He held out his hand. And slowly her own hand fluttered at her breast, and was given to him.

"I am quite sure that I understand you now," he said, and his voice was low, steady, fighting voice of the man new-born. "I will be your knight, as you have read of the knights of old. I will give no rest that is not freely given. Now—will you let me help you?"

For a moment she allowed him to hold her hand. Then she gently withdrew it and stepped back from him.

"You must first understand before you offer yourself," she said. "I cannot tell you what my trouble is. You

not tell you what my trouble is. You will never know. And when it is over, when you have helped me across the abyss, then will come the greatest trial of all for you. I believe—when I tell you that last thing which you must do—that you will regard me as a monster, and draw back. But it is necessary. If you fight for me, it must be in the dark. You will not know why you are doing the things I ask you to do. You may guess, but you would not guess the truth if you lived a thousand years. Your one reward will be the knowledge that you have fought for a woman, and that you



The Town of Sir-se in the heart of the fruit district.

have saved her. Now, do you want to help me?"

"I can't understand," he gasped. "But—yes—I would still accept the inevitable. I have promised you that I will do as you have dreamed that knights of old have done. To leave you now would be—he turned his head with a gesture of hopelessness—"an empty word forever. I have told you now. But you could not understand and believe unless I did. I love you."

He spoke so quietly and with as little passion in his voice as if he were speaking the words from a book. But their very quietness made them convincing. She started, and the color left her face. Then it returned, flooding her cheeks with a feverish glow.

"In that is the danger," she said quickly. "But you have spoken the words as I would have had you speak them. It is this danger that you must bear—deep—deep. And you will bury it. You will urge no questions that I do not wish to answer. You will fight for me, blindly, knowing only that what I ask you to do is not sinful nor wrong. And in the end—"

She hesitated. Her face had grown as tense as his own.

"And in the end," she whispered,

"your greatest reward can be only the knowledge that in living this knight-hood for me you have won what I can never give to any man. The world can hold only one such man for a woman. For your faith must be immeasurable, your love as pure as the withered violets, out there among the rocks if you live up to the tests ahead of you. You will think me mad when I have finished. But I am sane. Off there, in the Snowbird Lake country, is my home. I am alone. No other white man or woman is with me. As my knight, the one hope of salvation that I cling to now, you will return with me to that place—as my husband. To all but ourselves we shall be man and wife. I will bear your name—or the one by which you must be known. And at the very end of all, in that hour of triumph when you know 'that you have borne me safely over the abyss, the brink of which I am hovering now, you will go off into the forest, and—'"

She approached him, and laid a hand on his arm.

"You will not come back," she finished, so gently that he scarcely heard her words. "You will die—for me—for all who have known you."

"Good God!" he breathed, and he stared over her head to where the red and gold billows of the forests seemed to melt away into the skies.

#### CHAPTER IV.

Thus they stood for many seconds. Never for an instant did her eyes leave his face, and Philip looked straight over her head into that distant radiance of the forest mountains. It was she whose emotions revealed

happened in those years of centuries ago that lived women like you to fight and die for. I no longer wonder at men fighting for them as they have sung their stories in books. I have nothing done in this world which has called civilization—nothing except the hawks of murdered hopes, ambitions, and things that were once joys. Here I have you to love, to fight for. For you cannot tell me that I would not be a woman's law."

"Then you will do all this for me—even to the end—when you must sacrifice all of that for which you have struggled, and which you have saved?"

"If that is so, then I trust you with my life and my honor. It is all in your keeping—alike."

Her voice broke in a sob. She snatched her hands from him, and with that sob still quivering on her lips she turned and ran swiftly to the little tent. She did not look back as she disappeared into it, and Philip turned like one in a dream and went to the summit of the bare rock ridge, from which he could look over the quiet surface of the lake and a hundred square miles of the unexplored world which had now become so strangely his own. An hour—a little more than that—had changed the course of his life as completely as the master-strokes of a painter might have changed the tones of a canvas epic. It did not take reason or thought to impinge this fact upon him. It was a knowledge that engulfed him overwhelmingly. So short a time ago that even now he could not quite comprehend it all, he was alone out on the lake, thinking of the story of the First Woman that Jasper had told him down at Fond du Lac. Since then he had passed through a lifetime. What had happened might well have covered the space of months—or of years. He had met a woman, and like the warm sunshine she had become instantly a part of his soul, flooding him with those emotions which make life beautiful. That he had told her of his love as calmly as if she had known of it slumbering within his breast for years seemed to him to be neither unreal nor remarkable.

He turned his face back to the tent, but there was no movement there. He knew that there—alone—the girl was recovering from the tremendous strain under which she had been fighting. He sat down, facing the lake. For the first time his mental facilities began to adjust themselves and his blood to flow less heatedly through his veins. For the first time, too, he had undertaken—began to impress itself upon him. He had thought that "in asking him to fight for her she had asked him to give up his life, and that word in mind. But at the outset she had plunged him into mystery. If she had asked him to draw the automatic at his side and leap into battle with her, the physical world would have been surprised. He had expected something like that. But this other—her first demand upon him! What could it mean? Shrouded in mystery, shrouded in the physical world, he had no effort to uncover her secret, he was to accompany her back to her home as her husband! And after that—at the end—he was to go out into the forest and stand by her side, to wait for her. He wondered if she had meant these words literally, too. He smiled, and slowly his eyes ceased the lake. He was already beginning to feel the physical world as a mystery which she had told him he could not unveil if he lived a thousand years. But he could at least work about the edges of it.

(Continued next week.)

A well-planned day is a successful day. A convenient memo pad will help in planning the memo.

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