

The Woman in the Country

Her Outlook

I AM a country woman. I was born in the country. Most of my life has been spent in the country. Country sights and sounds and smells are good to me. Even the malodorous prairie slough is not so evil to my nostrils as some of the malodorous perfumes of a city.

Not only was my earliest home in the country but in a hilly country. The house in which I was born was a rambling old frame building with one end of the main part nosing into a steep hillside, and additions to which you climbed by a half dozen steps from the roadway. Every way you looked there were hills, and winding roads disappearing round through or over them, while directly in front, below one of these roadways, ran the river. Rather, the river tumbled, for below the bridge by which the road led up over the hill, it rolled and tumbled and foamed over rocks and more rocks until it too, turned a corner and disappeared.

My second home was not far away, on a farm. None of your common farms, but on a block of fairy land bounded on one whole side by the river. Here, too, it was none of your tame, tortuous prairie streams but a mad, tumbling, whirling, gurgling, wimpling, dreaming, drowsing, dancing, twinkling dear delightful water, with speckled beauties lurking in the deep holes thereof.

River and rocks and hills. If the land was stony what did it matter. One of the most interesting sports of our early days was a race, stepping from stone to stone

room." Poor little city children I am thankful that a country home was my birthright, and lots of room.

One spring since we came West a family moved into our neighborhood. The young mother of the home, watched the flowering of the prairie about her.

When she drove to church or post office she stopped to gather the beautiful wild flowers. Such banks of gorgeous color. She was soon puzzled by the apathy of her neighbor women who could pass it all without comment, blind to all its beauty.

"How is it you didn't get that way?" she asked an old lady, an enthusiast after her own heart. "Did hard work take it all out of them? Did they wonder and rave over it as I do, at first, and then grow so familiar with it all that they do not notice any more? Do you know I just ask God over and over never to let me grow indifferent to the beauty of it all."

Not to grow indifferent to the beauty; to keep one's love for God's out-of-doors; to see the world about us; to know the birds as friends; to recognize them as individuals; to know the vines and trees and shrubs that grow, even in the bluffs on our farms, and on the hillsides along our valleys. Wouldn't even this be worth while to busy women? (Is there a handbook of Manitoba trees and shrubs published, I wonder).

During the past summer, an elderly farmer was walking along the beach of one of our lakes. He stopped to talk with a friend who lived in one of the cottages. During the conversation he said to her:



The day of days to children, and the superhuman Santa

to see who could go furthest without once touching earth. Some of the youthful lads boasted that they could go nearly a mile, "and never touch the ground once." When I go back now to the old home, the hills are not nearly so high nor so steep, and the stones have disappeared. Strange.

If one side of the old farm lay along the river, across the middle of it oozed and dimpled a spring-creek on its way to the river. A spring-creek with a log bridge over it. Down the lane, through the maple sugar bush you went—a maple "bush" with not a bush tree in it—over the hill, and there you were. A bubbling, crystal spring, under the roots of an old elm, tangled growth, tall mountain ash resplendent in autumn—a slashing where wild strawberries and raspberries grew in profusion, and wild gooseberries along the brush fence. These were the more apparent sources of delight. There were others. And child life to me meant hunting wood and carrying water, fetching cows from the pasture, tending gap on summer days when the teams were drawing stone for the lime-kiln or taking in hay or grain to the barn, washing dishes, picking berries, shelling peas and getting fun out of it all.

Poor little city children. Not allowed in a suite; run over on the street; no place to play; no place to work; no place to learn to think.

A woman said to me not long ago: "I cannot conceive of you people cooped up in a city suite, you would be cramped, cramped—you people seem as if you always had had lots of room, lots of

"Do you know this is the first time I have ever seen this lake in summer?"

"And you were one of the first settlers?"

"Yes, and I have been over it, many and many a time in winter when it was 40 below zero, drawing posts and lumber, but it didn't look much like this then."

"And you came from the sea?"

"Yes, I was born and brought up not far from the sea. I loved the sea. When we first came out I missed the water. I never thought this lake could look like it does to-day or I would never have been all those years without seeing it in summer. I have missed it."

He had missed it. He and his family might have enjoyed days or even weeks of pleasure even in those early days of hard labor and little results, if they had known how. What it would have meant for the children to learn to swim and fish and row.

We are eating mushrooms these damp days, fat, juicy, meaty fellows. If we valued them at city prices, we are faring like New York millionaires.

Go out early these foggy mornings and get them as they burst through the ground—white-headed, with a little damp earth still clinging to their caps, and a pink underfacing of a most delectable pinkness. Search for them in all the out-of-the-way places. Along the roads and in the potato ground that gave such a miserable crop this year, round the old coral and where old buildings have stood.

You do not like them?

Oh, my Countryman, you too have missed it. You make me tired.

—The Countrywoman



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