

OUR FARM HOMES



NOT a day passes over the earth but men and women of no note do great deeds, speak great words and suffer noble sorrows.—Charles Reade.

The Messenger Maid

BY HELEN WALLACE

THE mistress of Calderide stood at the high window of her drawing-room, gazing steadily down into the courtyard below. The old house had been built a century before, when, with a French queen upon the throne, French influence was at its height in Scotland, and Calderide might have been modelled from many a Norman chateau, whose steep-pitched, heavily-slatted roof and quaint pepper-box tourelles still peep out above the tufted orchards of that pleasant land. It formed two sides of a square, and on the third, across the court, stood a range of stables, from which came a clinking of bridles, a stamping of hoofs, and loud voices and laughter—most unusual, save on some great occasion, for a quiet country-mansion remote amid its fields and woods.

But it was no festivity which had filled the stables to overflowing and crowded every corner of the house even to the garrets high up beneath the steep roof. The Laird of Calderide had not, indeed, openly taken part in "the rebellion" that had sprung from loyal hearts, which had just been quenched in blood at Culloden. He was shrewdly suspected of Jacobite sympathies though, and half a troop of horse had been quartered on him to overawe the countryside and to watch for stray "rebels," who, with a price upon their heads, were now seeking the coast, in the hope of escaping to France. And the chief prize among these was the young Nigel Maitland, a near kinsman of Lady Calder's. He had been one of the Prince's right-hand men, and it was now believed that he was lurking somewhere in his own neighborhood.

Lady Calder was not consciously hearing the unwanted noises, nor seeing the occasional dragoon who strode across the sunny flags beneath her high window, but both sights and sounds served to heighten the panic anxiety which possessed her. Some days, caught by chance, had left her in no doubt that the neighboring house of Ledington was to be closely searched, how soon she did not know, the illness of its aged mistress having alone saved it hitherto from more than a cursory inspection.

"We can't wait any longer; the old woman won't recover while there's a Jacobite to smuggle out of the country. She may have a posse of them behind the bed-hangings—Nigel Maitland himself, I am enough. Well, we'll have to ask her to change her bed for a day, or roust her out of it," Major Walsh had said with a laugh, and then the door which was shut, and then Lady Calder had heard no more.

But she had heard enough, and now who was to carry the warning to Ledington—that warning so urgently

needed—who? She and her husband were virtually prisoners in their own house—he might soon be a prisoner in reality. She dare not propose to ride to Ledington, nor could she commit such a trust to any of her servants. They were suspected, too, and while to the laird among them it might bring dire trouble, to the waverers it might be too sore a temptation. Yet the message must go, or young Nigel's days were numbered! With clasped



The Home-Like Home of a Reader of Farm and Dairy.

This is not a mansion. It is something better. It is the well-kept home of Wm. J. & Son, Oxford Co., Ont. The mes of the family are enthusiastic Holstein fanciers. Mrs. Jell is an equally enthusiastic and successful poultrywoman. Their farm was one of the winning ones in the last Prize Farms Competition conducted by Farm and Dairy.

—Photo by an editor of Farm and Dairy.

hands and unseeing eyes she stood gazing before her, desperate in her helplessness. Those men mounting below might even now be setting forth for Ledington. The warning must go, but how—in God's name, how?

A long, deep sigh of unbounded satisfaction and relief sounded through the stillness.

"I have finished my sampler, to the very last stitch," said a child's voice, and Lady Calder started and turned round. In the recess of a window at the further end of the room a child had been sitting, so still that it was no wonder her mother had forgotten her presence. Now she came across the room, a quaint figure, in her long-waisted, long-skirted gown, like a little old woman's, contrasting oddly with the pale, serious child-face round which the dark hair was dressed in heavy falling curls.

In her hand was a square of fine canvas—one of those wonderful "samplers," which their fortunate possessors are nowadays unearthing from the forgotten recesses of old chests and drawers, and which fill one with wonder and pity for the tiny hands which wrought them, and the young eyes

which must have pored so closely over them. The one now held up for Lady Calder's inspection was a marvellous example of its kind. Within the scroll-border of "flammi" work, as it was called, the alphabet was repeated again and again in every size and variety of letter. In the centre was a wonderful representation of the old house of Calderide, tourelles, steep roof, eave-stepped gables and all, in the midst of a grove of very Noah's Ark-looking trees, while underneath, in the most delicate, fairy-like stitchery, were the four lines:

"Isabel Calder is my name,
Scotland is my nation,
My parents they were very good
To give me education."

Poor little nine-year-old Isabel, her education in life and the world was yet all to come, but she had already been to a hard school, and the dark eyes now lifted to her mother's face may have owed some of their wisdom to the long hours spent in fashioning those endless A's and B's and C's. But children were not consulted in those days as to their wishes, and as Lady Calder was a conscientious mother, Isabel had been so well brought up that she may never have consciously rebelled against the hours of sewing in summer sunshine or by the dim lamp in the long winter "fore-nights." Only as she watched her mother's face she heaved again that deep, unchildlike sigh.

Across Lady Calder's face a look

to say to her from me that there must be nobody left in Ledington to-night to be nobody but the one who belong to it," with slow emphasis. The bairn was wise and thoughtful (thoughtful for her years); still she was but a bairn; she must not be burdened with a more direful message, thought Lady Calder, looking into the troubled young eyes. After a moment's pause she said, "If there's no chance of that you'll show her your sampler. She'll know fine I wouldn't send you at a time like this only to show a bairn work, and she'll be on the lookout. You'll tell her which of the letters you found hardest to do, and you'll point to this and that," swiftly touching one and another as she spoke, "till your finger rest a moment on this," pressing hers on a very elaborate G and then passing on to an O. " 'Tis a poor device," she sighed, "but I can think of none better, and if Major Walsh or any other one asks you, I'm sending you to Ledington, it's to show your sampler—only to show your sampler, Bell," with piteous insistence. "They mustn't guess anything else, or it'll be bad for you." "They won't," said Isabel, her dark eyes kindling, and her little figure seeming to expand with the very might of her resolve. This was a greater trust than the marking of the blankets. "They'll get nothing from me."

A sharp rap on the door stopped the words on her lips. It was immediately followed by the entrance of a smart, middle-aged soldier.

"Your pardon, my lady, but I thought Calder was here," he said, in a loud, jovial voice.

"No, but I was just about to seek you, Major Walsh. My little lassie here has finished her sampler at last, and nothing will serve but she must show it to her granny-aunt at Ledington. I expect there was something promised when an answer to Bell," said Lady Calder, stroking the dark curls. "The bairn may go, mayn't she?"

"To Ledington!" said Major Walsh with an odd smile, while the careless bonhomie of his answer seemed to be like a mask over some bent purpose behind. "Well little maid, come and show me this wonderful work, and we'll see about it."

He took the canvas from Isabel's hand, scanned it closely, front and back, then he thrust it into his pocket with an eye on Lady Calder's face as he did so. But if he looked to read disappointment there, there was no trace of it.

"Those little fingers must be tired after setting so many stitches. They deserve some reward, so I'll e'en take little Miss Bell myself, since she's so set on it, and I'll carry her sampler for her," he said with a grin. "Bring Isabel, and we'll go e'en now."

Isabel pressed close to her mother's side. "Must I go with him? I'm—I'm scared of him," she whispered.

"You'll be a brave lass. You're the only one I can trust, breathe her mother, as she tied on the scarlet cloak, and drew the hood over the dark curls.

But for all her pride and resolve it was a very white-faced child who was promptly perched up on the front of Major Walsh's saddle. Had she been in the clutches of an ogre she could not have been more terrified, and to her he indeed seemed such. She had heard the story of Culloden, and was not Major Walsh here to hunt to death the foe who had escaped from King George's vengeance, and was that that some one who was to "Go" from Ledington. Even when her father was not safe from him. But the Spartan training stood her in good stead.

(Continued next week.)

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