

WRITER'S WORKSHOP

A NEIGHBOUR

By JOHN RIPLEY

She was almost as indispensable as the table in our home. She rocked us as babies, pulled our teeth when the school age fall-out occurred and, as we grew older, with the wisdom born of sixty-odd years' experience she took upon herself the role of advisor, mediator and monitor in all our early adolescent difficulties. Though she was only a neighbour she spent so much time plodding between her house and ours, so much time rocking in our kitchen that we looked upon her as practically a member of the household.

She bore the pious name Mercy Mae but stretching herself up to her full height of five feet eleven inches and resting her hands on her broad hips she declared that she had absolutely no mercy for Liberal politicians, people who lied and dogs that did unmentionable things in her garden.

Often I used to watch her as she made her innumerable trips from her little three-roomed house to ours, a walk of about one hundred yards, through a gate, along a curving gravel path and through another gate to our door, on seeing her leave her house I would often rush out to our gate to wait for her coming.

As she closed her door she would pull her dark wool sweater closely about her, smoothe out her immaculate white flour-bag apron with both hands and look toward our house much like a ship's captain setting his course.

With her head high, looking every inch of her unusual height, her wide shoulders slightly rounded by the responsibilities thrust upon her by sixty years of hard work, she began her plodding way. As she walked she lurched from side to side. Carefully she would raise high first one leather-booted foot and then the other, placing them down again very deliberately as if testing the soundness of the ground in front of her as she made her slow trek. Framed against a background of emerald-green hills and a rich blue sky flecked with foam-white clouds she made a startling profile as she approached her gate.

It was not really a gate but was rather a hole in the barbed wire fence fitted with bars running through the posts on either side. Coming up to these bars she would carefully place her hands on the topmost one, capably hoist her ample form over and then would drop casually on the other side and continue on her way. As she plodded on she gave one the impression of a ship in a high wind. Her huge white apron covered her ample bulk well enough within the house, but in the wind it blew up around her head much like a sail.

In addition to being tall she was sturdily built and more than a little stout. In spite of this her body had a sort of symmetry accentuated by her well-formed head crowned with foam-white hair swept up on top of her skull and twisted into a neat topknot looking much like a slightly flattened snowball held in place by large, two-pronged hair pins of dark coloured bone. Beneath this mass of hair her complexion stood out fresh and clear with few wrinkles. Her high forehead and slightly hollowed cheeks drew attention to the light grey eyes, in which one could see traces of hardship but for all that a warm generous glow. These eyes were accented by just a faint trace of eyebrows, enough to call attention to her eyes but too slight to attract notice to themselves. Her slender nose with its broad nostrils served as a bridge to carry one's gaze from her eyes to her mouth.

Only her mouth gave a hint as to her age. Its wrinkled sunkenness betrayed the absence of teeth but her pale lips set in a firm, hard line appeared to discourage anyone from learning the truth or falsity of this assumption.

As she approached closer, the wind gustily whirled her apron upward allowing a dress of a vivid, purple-flowered design to show itself. Not content with merely whipping her apron the wind kept tugging at her ankle-length dress blowing it about her knees and revealing her heavy home-knit woollen stockings.

Coming close enough to be heard she began to talk and gesture violently with one hand while holding her skirts in place with the other. Her hands were scarred, seamed and work-hardened. Their backs were netted with light blue veins criss-crossing one another, running toward the sharp knuckles beneath the thin, almost transparent skin. Her fingers were long and strong although gnarled and twisted by long years of constant hard work. As she flexed these fingers the tendons in her wrists contracted and relaxed, revealing

the strength of the arms hidden by the woollen sweater. As her hand touched mine in greeting the calloused roughness of her hands was pleasantly caressing.

Her face was now wrinkled in a broad, toothless smile revealing hard, pink gums behind which her thick tongue appeared to be in constant motion, licking her lips or in between sentences, exploring all the nooks and crannies of the places vacated by teeth. As she talked her chin kept bobbing up and down, at times appearing quite firm and substantial, but again almost disappearing as she brought the toothless gums together.

Around her neck, reddened by the rubbing of the sweater collar over the loose folds of skin, hung a brown, well-worn nutmeg on a length of twine in the fashion of a locket. "Keeps you from having nosebleeds", she said. Her dress was fastened at the neck with a huge safety pin which pulled the purple-flowered collars together in an odd

lopsided fashion. Beneath a flabby bosom her well-rounded stomach protruded sharply beneath the ample covering afforded by the coverall apron as it hung motionless in long folds in the momentary calm.

As she stood there, hands waving, tongue flying, and the wind, having risen again, tugging loose a stray sprig or two of snowy hair she reminded me of some great rock, on which the storms may beat and the elements erode but no matter how great the opposing forces, the basic quality remains the same.

THE ROLLING STONE

get on in life, others how often. The majority will fade into oblivion, a few will rise above the multitude and gain cherished recognition. Such is the state of the Senior as he stands on the threshold of life.

See you after Christmas.

QUEENS CONSIDERS

(Continued from Page 2)
the insurance is paid in full.

The policy can be converted to a private policy of the same scale WITHOUT any medical proof of insurability when the student graduates. Any student desiring to increase the size of the policy in such circumstances would be required to have a medical examination. Premiums paid upon conversion would be in line with the age of the individual.

THE BRUNSWICKAN

This, as you will gather, is the last issue of the Brunswickan for the year 1956. So we will unfortunately be unable to accept any copy this term.

We start to publish again on the 17th of January next year.



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There will be no open house meeting of the S.C.M. this week. Instead "let's go a Carolling". This Sunday evening at 8.30 in Wilmot Street United Church there will be a special carol service and S.C.M. invites all students who already feel in the Christmas spirit to attend.

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