

THE OLD HOMESTEAD

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*If these walls could talk, what stories they'd tell,
For this house has been lived in, and lived in well.*

SUDDENLY as I dreamed in the warm sunshine of the September afternoon in the old farm orchard, the walls of the ancient house remembered and seemed verily to speak.

On a hilltop it stood, overlooking the blue waters of a lake, and for this reason, some traveller who had once visited there had given it the prosaic name of "Lakeview", but to those who love the wind songs through its pines, its name will ever be the one given to it by a little Pioneer Lady, who, many years ago, had known and loved every part of it and had named it "Whispering Pines". She it was who found beauty and poetry in ordinary tasks, and her soul lives on in the flowering vine of the old veranda, the lilac bush by the kitchen door, and the flower-bordered path, which welcomes one and all to the old homestead. Of her it can be truly said,

And having lived, and having toiled,
I'd like the world to find
Some little touch of beauty,
That my soul had left behind.

"An ordinary farm home," passers-by might say. Ah yes, perhaps, to some, but to those who stay to linger and to love, the old home reveals itself, and favoured indeed are they who learn to know its soul. How could the passer-by know that the little log shed near by was the first homestead? The snows of a hundred winters have lain on its roof, moss and ivy have found its walls kind, and little animals know that it gives a welcome shelter, just as it did a hundred years ago to the staunch pioneers who built it and called it home. The stone walls of the later homestead look kindly on the little log house, for these two have much in common. Their walls have echoed to the same happy sounds of music and laughter, but a still closer bond holds them, for they have known sorrow too. Suffering may pass, but to have suffered endures—how well all homesteads know this! The marks of sorrow only leave them stronger and dearer.

The casual caller enjoys the comfortable farm kitchen with its sturdy pieces of furniture, its scrubbed floor, and its

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large wood stove, whose warmth makes cosy the farthest corner of the room and from whose roomy oven comes the delectable odour of pies and homemade bread. How could such a visitor know that generations of new-born babies have received their first bath in front of this oven door and that these same babies, grown older, have sat in its friendly glow to hear tales of pioneer days, to sing familiar songs, and to have family prayers, for *The Cotter's Saturday Night* might well have been a poem of the old Homestead.

How could he know that, over this kitchen, there is an attic, with relics far more interesting than those of an antique shop: a cradle made by pioneer hands, that has rocked three generations of babies; a spinning wheel that has woven its way into the lives of so many; a frame that has been used at countless quilting bees and has heard the gay laughter and bright hopes of wedding preparations. There is an old churn whose worn handle has felt the touch of many hands, and, in the farthest corner, a trunk that crossed the Atlantic in a sailing vessel, bringing well-loved treasures to a new home in Canada. How proudly the old attic guards its treasures, revealing its secrets, only to those who have understanding souls!

Three steps higher than the kitchen is the large parlour, truly a living-room, where so many have lived. A large stone fire-place brings thoughts of the Homeland, and one can almost hear the yearning in the woman's voice as she said, "John, we need a hearth in the new home,"—and a hearth they had, made of stones carried and placed by willing hands. Around it they gathered, and the old stone walls echoed to their songs and happy voices as they watched the glowing flames of a wood fire. Let the winter storms come, let the winds blow, they were content, safe, and happy within the kindly walls of the old homestead.

In one corner stands the organ, now replaced by the more modern piano, but still the favourite of the aged Grandfather, who remembers well the day it was bought and with what pride it was placed in the home. It was to its accompaniment that on his eightieth birthday, he sang lustily all the verses of his favourite hymn; and on special occasions—Thanksgiving, Christmas and Yuletide—the piano is forgotten, and the old organ comes into its own, its keys, yellow with age, respond to the touch of understanding hands, as Grandmother plays the tunes that never grow old.

In this room little ones have worn the treasured christen-

ing robe, brides have repeated marriage vows, and death, with its solemnity, has made it a hallowed place.

A wide staircase leads to roomy bedrooms, with "low windows, a view for miles"—of fertile rolling acres. The old homestead remembers when these same acres were a wilderness of trees, and of how strong, sturdy men, encouraged by brave, dauntless women, helped to make them what they now are.

Circling the maple tree near the front door is a rustic bench, built by a tall pioneer son who marched away with Canadian soldiers in 1866. He did not return, but others reap enjoyment from his handiwork. Soft moonlight has shone through the branches on young lovers, and the old tree has heard tender vows. Many an initial has been carved on its bark, and boys and girls have stood on the bench, to record proudly their height from year to year. One of them gave his life at Vimy, and nearly thirty years later, the old Homestead again heard words of farewell, when another stalwart son donned the uniform of a Canadian Pilot. This time, however, there was a day of rejoicing to welcome him home again, and now he spends many an hour on the bench, finding balm for tired nerves as the old home radiates healing and serenity.

A gentle breeze stirs the boughs of the old apple tree, and the kindly rays of the late afternoon sun linger on the tombstones in the most sheltered corner of the orchard. This is a place set apart, bordered by a flowering hedge. Where could be found a more fitting resting place for early pioneers than this quiet, shaded corner, near the trees which they planted, and surrounded by fields which they cleared?

A marble headstone marks their resting place,
But that stone fence, it seems to me,
A far more fitting epitaph, will ever be.

One small headstone bears the name of a little pioneer who did not live to toddle away from the wooden cradle, and another tells of a young mother who found the hardships of a new land too much for frail health. Friendly old trees give protecting shade, and sweet bird calls bring a restful peace to this sacred spot.

The sun has set, and a fine afterglow floods the sky. The old collie dog at my side suddenly awakes from his reverie. He, too, has been listening to the story, and in his kind brown eyes one sees the wisdom of the ages. He, who has never lived

elsewhere, shares the secrets of the house, and they have made him very wise.

A young boy calls from the orchard gate, "Come, Sport, we must find those cows," and the faithful collie, wagging me a friendly good-bye, goes to his young master.

Following the little path that leads to the rustic bench, I hear a well-known voice say, "Ah, the old orchard has claimed you, and has told you its secrets. I can see them in your eyes."

The kind old house seemed to reach out welcoming arms, and a British war bride knew she had found Home.
