

IV.—THE NEW HOME.

"Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home."—John Howard Payne.

"It's a sma' shiel' that gies nae shelter."—Scotch Proverb.

"Home is the nursery of the Infinite."—Channing.

"Home should be an oratorio of the memory."—Beecher.

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SIX weeks in Wall's cabin acquainted us in some measure with the privations and inconveniences of backwoods life. Folks who complain to-day of hard times know not the meaning of the words. During these weeks the settlers were busy harvesting from daylight till dark. Cutting grain with the old-fashioned sickle and scythe, on ground stumps dotted thickly, was slow, laborious work. Reaping-machines, mowing-machines, horse-rakes and the splendid array of labor-saving implements now in vogue, to lighten the task and multiply a hundred-fold the efficiency of the husbandman, had not yet been evolved. A cumbrous plough, hard to pull and harder to guide, a V-shaped harrow, alike heavy and unwieldy, a clumsy sled, in keeping with the plough and harrow, home-made rakes, weighty as iron and sure to blister the hands of the users, forked-stick pitchforks, first cousins of the awkward rakes, and gnarled flails, certain to raise bumps on the heads of unskilled threshers, with two or three scythes and sickles, represented the average agricultural equipment. Not a grist-mill, saw-mill, factory, store, shop, postoffice, school, horse, chimney, stove nor even a chair could be found in Beckwith. Two arm-chairs, constructed for father and mother by Donald Kennedy, a wood-worker, were the first in the township. Split logs furnished the materials for benches, tables, floors and roofs. Sawed boards, shingles and plastered walls were unattainable luxuries. The first year men carried flour and provisions on their backs from Perth and Brockville. Families subsisted for months on very scanty fare. Their homes were shanties, chinked between the logs with wood and mud, often without a window, cold in winter, stifling in summer, uninviting always. A hole in the roof let out such smoke as happened to travel in its direction. Still people seldom murmured. The fear of God, strong faith and bright hope were their rich possession.

As has been the case in all lands and all ages, women bore their full share of the burden. Besides attending to the children and household affairs, all spring and summer they worked in the fields early

and late, burning brush, logging, planting and reaping. Much of the cooking, washing and mending was done before dawn or after dark, while the men slept peacefully. At noon they prepared dinner, ate a bite hastily and hurried back to drudge until the sun went down. Then they got supper, put the youngsters to bed, patched, darned and did a multitude of chores. "Woman's work is never done." For these willing slaves, toiling to better the condition of their loved ones and never striking for higher wages, sixteen hours of constant labor would be a short day. They knew no respite, no vacation, no season at the seashore, nothing but hard work and child-bearing. The Sabbath was the one oasis in the desert, the one breathing-spell in the week.

When obliged to help out-doors, young mothers took their babies with them—babies were by no means scarce in Beckwith—to the fields and laid them in sap-troughs, while they worked near by. The larger children would hoe, pile brush, pick stones, rake hay, drop potatoes and be utilized in various ways. A fond mother near Franktown, hearing a strange noise at the trough holding her baby, ran to find a big snake crawling down the infant's throat! She caught the reptile by the tail and hurled it into the field, saving her child's life. The boy grew to manhood. The world owes a debt beyond human computation to the patient, industrious, unselfish women who have stood side by side with fathers, husbands and brothers in the stern battle for existence. The pioneer women of Beckwith were noble helpmeets, kind, hospitable, self-forgotten and trustworthy. "Full many a flower is born to blush unseen," so the public has heard little of their struggles, their trials and their achievements. The heroic spirit is not confined to the soldier. Look to the gentle, long-suffering, self-denying mother, cheerfully bearing the wearing grind year after year in her humble home, for its highest development. Yet some male bipeds in trousers talk glibly of "the weaker vessel," and think their own mothers and sisters not qualified to vote for a school-trustee or ward constable.

Autumn and winter brought little relief, except to vary the style of work. The women carded wool with hand-cards and spun it on small wheels, for stocking-yarn and the weaver's loom. Knitting was an endless task, by the light of the hearth-fire or the feeble flicker of a tallow-dip, and everybody wore homespun. Now all this is changed. The modest spinning-wheel is thick with dust in the garret, machinery knits and sews and turns out underwear, the music of the shuttle in the hand-loom is hushed forever, hand-me-down and tailor-made suits have superseded the honest homespun, and the kerosene-lamp has consigned the tallow-dip to oblivion. Threshing wheat and oats with the flail employed the men until plenty of snow fell for good sleighing. Then the whole neighborhood would go in company to Bytown—now

Ottawa—to market their produce. Starting at midnight, the line of ox-sleds would reach Richmond about daylight, stop an hour to rest and feed, travel all day and be at Bytown by dark. Next day they would sell their grain, sometimes on a year's credit, buy a few necessary articles, travel all night to Richmond and be home the third evening. A night's lodging at Bytown, unless they slept on their sleds, was the total outlay, as they carried food and hay with them to last the three days and nights of the trip. When the small grist-mill was built at Carleton Place the farmers would grind their wheat, often watching by their sleds two or three days and nights in the open air, until their turn came. They sold the flour at Bytown, the nearest market. Four dollars a barrel for flour and eight for pork were the highest prices, while dry-goods and groceries were extravagantly dear. Leather was an important item in the purchases, as shoemakers went about in winter, staying at each house to make a year's footwear for the family. In the absence of the men at mill or market, the women fed the cattle and hogs, provided wood and did much extra work. Yes, times were hard, not in stinted measure, but "pressed down, heaped up and running over."

Harvesting finished, the people turned out in force to cut down logs and build us a large shanty. They roofed it with troughs, laid a big flat stone against the wall for a chimney, left a space at the ridge for smoke to escape, smoothed one side of split logs for a floor, and put in a door and two windows. Having no lumber for partitions, we divided the apartment with curtains. One half served for a kitchen, dining-room, study and sitting-room; the other for bed-rooms. We lived a year in this abode. A well* dug through the clay and blasted a few feet into the rock supplied abundance of water, clear and wholesome to-day as at the beginning. Foxes, owls and wolverines helped the wolves make night hideous. Hunger sometimes drove the wolves to extremes. People could not venture far from their homes without the risk of meeting a band of them. At noon one day fifteen walked past our yard, heading for the sheep. Rattling tin-pans and blowing a horn frightened them off. Another time, going four miles with my sister Ann to see a sick woman, a fierce wolf assailed us on the way back. He followed us some distance, grew bolder, ran up and took a bite out of my dress, almost pulling me down. My loud exclamation—"Begone, you brute!"—and clapping our hands put the impudent fellow to flight. We skipped home in short metre, regardless of sticks, stones and mudholes.

In the winter father hired men to clear several acres of ground and take out timber for a new house. They worked hard until spring, hewing logs for a two-story building and sawing lumber for floors

*See page 26.

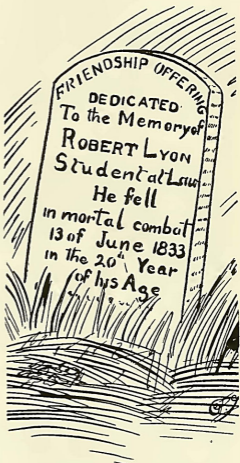
and partitions with a cross-cut saw. The seed sown in the rich soil yielded a bountiful crop, and we had a large garden. Two cows were bought in April, good women sent a fowl occasionally, and we got along nicely. The new house was ready for us in September, 1823. It had plank floors, a stone chimney, a number of good rooms and a cellar. Putting down the carpets brought from Scotland and arranging the furniture and father's library, we soon felt quite at home. A double stove and more furniture, hauled from Perth the next winter, added materially to our comfort. A year or two later, when Presbytery met at our house, the members spent the nights without unpleasant crowding. Those from a distance were Rev. William Bell of Perth, Rev. William Smart of Brockville, Rev. Mr. Boyd of Prescott, Rev. Dr. Gemmill of Lanark, and an elder with each minister. All walked the greater part of the way, as father and mother and Mr. and Mrs. Bell were in the habit of doing on sacramental occasions in their respective congregations. Two of my sisters, shortly after our arrival in Beckwith, went to Perth and opened the first school in the county taught by ladies. If anxious to see them, two or three other sisters would rise early, take a lunch and a small Bible along, rest on some grassy plot to eat and learn a chapter, and complete the walk to Perth by two or three o'clock. My first trip of this sort was in my eleventh year. Two more taught school in Montreal and one at Richmond, leaving sad gaps in the happy family.

This house was our home until father exchanged it for a mansion in the skies, the children settled elsewhere, and mother removed to the eastern section of the province. It passed into the hands of strangers long ago, nor has one of the original occupants beheld it for over fifty years. Verily, "here we have no continuing city," for "the world passeth away and the fashion thereof."

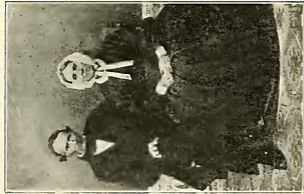
"Alas for love if this were all,
And naught beyond the earth."

John Wilson and Robert Lyon, two law-students of Perth, quarreled about a young lady and fought the last duel in Upper Canada. This was in June, 1833, a year before John Cameron founded the good old "Bathurst Courier," of which Sheriff Thompson, Charles Rice and the late George L. Walker were afterwards editors. Wilson sent the challenge, because Lyon slapped his face in the court-house. At the second fire Lyon, who is said to have directed his second to load his pistol with peas, fell dead before assistance could reach him, pierced through the heart. The dreadful tragedy occurred on the right bank of the Tay, causing great excitement. Wilson hid a few days, then surrendered to the authorities, was tried and acquitted. He moved westward, rose to eminence at the bar, was appointed to the bench, and ultimately became Chief Justice of Ontario. During his protracted judicial career he would never sentence a man to death, leaving the task to his colleagues. He bitterly mourned his participation in the duel, on each anniversary of which he would shut himself in his room to fast and pray and give vent to his sorrow. Young Lyon, a

brother of Captain Lyon of Richmond and relative of Robinson Lyon of Arnprior, was tall, handsome, genial and exceedingly popular. He spent two nights in father's house the week before his untimely fate. A number of his youthful comrades and friends placed a tablet at his grave. The stone, which is still an object of interest to every visitor to the old burying-ground, leans badly and part of the inscription is almost illegible.



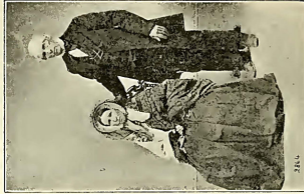
ROBERT LYON'S GRAVE.



DUNCAN CRAM AND WIFE.



ALEXANDER DEWAR AND WIFE.



ROBERT KENNEDY AND WIFE.

These portraits of three worthy Beckwith couples are from small photographs given me nearly forty years ago. Alexander Dewar, one of grandfather's first elders and strong supporters, removed to Lambton county and died at a patriarchal age. His wife, sister of the Kennedys and a true helpmeet, preceded him to the grave. The godly pair reared a large family. Duncan Cram, for some years an elder and a man of singular piety, died in 1873. His excellent wife survived the husband and father several years. Robert Kennedy, a skilled player on the bagpipes and sweet singer, was the last survivor of the members of grandfather's church. At the ripe age of ninety-two, he passed away in October, 1900, seventeen years after his devoted wife, Christina McDermid.

Revisiting Beckwith in 1906, many sad changes had occurred since my previous visit in 1867. Not one of the pioneers remains. The Kennedy and Dewar graveyards hold most of the early settlers. The descendants of many have located elsewhere, and even the names of families long well-known are memories only. "Our days are as a shadow."—John J. McLaurin.]