

Childhood Memories of a Very Old Lady.

My grand-father was a very grave, dignified old man; he never forgot that in his veins ran the blood of Governor John Winthrop of Boston and of that other John, his son, the most admirable gentleman of all the colonial New World. My earliest recollection is of the sweet strains of ^{my grand father's} ~~the~~ violin, which he had brought with him to Canada, when the family, consisting of himself, wife ~~and~~ ^{and several grandchildren,} eleven children, migrated thence from Massachusetts just after the Revolution, for he was one of those American Tories who, in order to still live under the British flag, came to Canada and were called United Empire Loyalists.

Our home was a rambling farm-house built of logs, situated half a mile north of the stage-road running westward on the Canadian peninsula between Lake Erie and Lake Ontario. The house was low, and the family living-room was a broad hall-like apartment extending through the entire length, and opening on a porch at each end. The east side of the room held one of those old-fashioned fire-places, such as one sometimes hears of now-a-days, but never sees. I remember hearing my mother say that it was six feet high, just as wide and proportionately deep. On the right

of it was a door opening on the stair-way leading to the three attic rooms above. On the left was a great brick oven built into the house, having a flue to the fire-place chimney. These occupied so much of the space that there was only room for a bed in the alcove made by the oven leaving a narrow passage between, which led to the east wing, occupied by our grand-parents. That passage-way, next to the bed with its chintz valance and fringed counterpane, where our parents slept, was a delightful play house for me and my brother Ned, and in many a game of "hide-and-seek" did we muffle our "coop!" in its dim recesses.

On the other--the west --side of the living-room, were two chambers. In one of them we children slept; the other was the spare-room. All over the house the ceilings were so low that that I often fancied our father, who was more than six feet tall, would bump his head against the uncovered rafters, but so far as I know, no such catastrophe ever happened.

My brother and I were happy children. With our simple sports and vigorous out-door life, the whole year in its round gave us keen delight, but no season more than the autumn. Then came the time for gathering

and storing our winter supply of nuts, which were candy and toys together for us. We had hickory-nuts, walnuts and butter-nuts, and for many days our hands were stained with the "shucking" necessary before putting them into the barrels. But what cared we for that! The stain was soon gone, and we had stores of nuts in the large unfinished attic which was that was our play-room in bad weather. Every fall we would be robbed by the squirrels, who, apparently knowing that we had obtained our treasures in their lawful domain, thought it no robbery to take their own again. They came in through chinks between the unmatched logs/and when we wanted to set a trap for them, our mother said:

"No, you have made their supply less, and it would not be fair to harm them, or hinder them from getting their winter food."

So we would off to the trees again, and proudly fill our baskets with the nuts which our father had whipped off for us long before we were up, and the little hole between the logs was left open. Sometimes, when we would be playing in the attic, a pointed furry noses with bright eyes would peer in, and great was our joy when the first squirrel, finding its

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self unmolested, ventured in. But they took our nuts so fast that we had to ask father to put in the heads of the barrels, to save any at all. The poor squirrels did not understand ^{this} ~~it~~ ~~small~~. They would jump on the barrels, and after hunting around for some chink or knot-hole, would look at us reproachfully and then scud off to the woods nearly half a mile away just as we had had to do.

Another special delight was to go with our father when he gathered the winter apples. This he did by climbing into the trees, or reaching the outer limbs where the best apples were by ladder, pick the fruit one by one and put them carefully into bags or a half-bushel basket. Having gathered a load, Bright and Brindle, our large-horned, gentle oxen, carted it to the place near the house where the apples were to be buried for winter use. This was done by removing the earth to a foot in depth from a circular space a couple of yards across, and lining it with rye straw, onto which the apples were turned until the pile was four feet high, and gay with the crimson Spitzenbergs, the Russets, delicate Rhode Island Greenings and ^{the} vari-colored Spy. With the prospect of cold weather, our father would cover the fruit lightly with straw, and finally, in November when the nights became freezing, lay a heavy coat of sod over

over the mound, leaving the heads of straw showing a golden crown at the top of it. These apples would stay close to mother Earth, mellowing day after day until mid-winter, when they would come out with a flavor so fine and rich that it seems to me there are no apples like them these days, - so so rich, so juicy, so fragrant.

The fall apples were stored in a shed off the chip-yard. The wind-falls, with the small and imperfect ones, were carried to a neighbor's cider mill and came home in barrels. Did ever boy and girl have more fun than Ned and I, sucking the sweet new cider through a straw in the bung-hole. We wished it would last the whole year, but in a day or two we had to throw our straws away, while the cider was boiled down in big brass kettles, in the open air. Though very unusual for that time, our father was a strict temperance man, and what the cider mill yielded beyond the needs of sauce, apple butter and mince pies, was made into vinegar, sharp-amber-tinted and spicy.

The October evenings brought apple-paring. Father, mother and Mary Ann would gather before the fire, father with his paring-machine, the others with dishes and knives, and at the table we children with long

needles and twine, ready to do the stringing. The peel would roll off in graceful curves as father turned the crank of the machine and the knife cut into the apple on his fork; and he would skillfully toss off one apple and pick up another at the same time. At nine o'clock the pared, quartered, cored and strung fruit was hung in festoons from beam to beam overhead to dry. It was before the days of canning, and the dried apples which the country merchant took in exchange for ~~produce~~^{goods} and shipped to parts unknown, were a great source of revenue to the farmer. Modern science would hold up its hands in horror at the "germs" that no doubt found lodgment in them, hanging for weeks above the dust and bustle of the crowded room where all the family life went on, but microbes to the contrary notwithstanding, a great many ills that afflict humanity ^{now} were unknown in my childhood.

When autumn yielded to winter, with caps on our heads, our hands in mittens knit by our grand-mother, our feet in coarse, thick and ugly shoes, we would chase each other through the snow-drifts, shout, laugh and build snow-forts. We had plenty of tumbles and hurts, but ~~our~~ our eyes were bright and our cheeks rosy, and the girl grew as strong as the boy.

The farm was long and narrow with the house near the south end, ⁷
cleared lands lying between it and the wood lot in the northern part.
Many trips were necessary to bring up the winter fuel, and the piles and
piles that lay in the yard at the back of the house, though homely addi-
tions, promised comfort for long evenings to come. We children were very
confident of our father's superior strength and ability, and it seemed
to us that he rolled those huge logs, often ~~two~~^{three} feet in diameter, from
the pile into position to ~~cut~~^{chop} into four-foot lengths for the fire-place,
with no effort what-so-ever. Our admiration as he deftly swung the axe
and the chips flew from the sharp angle where the two planes of cut wood
met, was an unconscious acknowledgement of his sturdy character.

To build a fire on the great hearth father would take a log on a
hand-sled, draw it from the wood-yard to the porch, tip the sled backward
until it stood on end and with an adroit kick send it out of his way,
leaving the log upright in his arms. We would follow as he "walked" it
into the ~~room~~^{room} and lowered it
into the ~~stove~~ in place on the hearth supporting it by an
axe driven deep into its fibre. Then the superstructure was reared.

On the "back log" was placed a smaller one called the "upper log";

then against them the brass-headed fire-dogs--andirons, some called them.⁸
Across the dogs in front was another small log called the "fowesticks"
between which and the backlog were split hard woods, as ash or hickory, on
which were put the live coals saved from the previous fire. On these came
the lightwood, pine, dry chips or corn-cobs--and when they were well
afire, dry split wood was laid on in loose masses, the split surface next
so that
to the flame, the splinters might catch the little tongues that shot up,
until all was sheathed in brilliant flame.

When the litter was swept up and evening fell--for the fires were
always rebuilt just before night came down--and the sparks would go roar-
ing up the wide chimney, the fire-light dancing and glimmering around the
room, Ned and I would draw our little chairs close to the red coals and
tell each other what we saw therein. The pictures were always in the
line of what we were familiar. There would be sleds and snow-forts, father
with his axe; turnover pies, our grand father's violin and the low, red
cradle in which our baby-brother slept, with dog Towser standing on his
hind legs to look at him. Or it would be our toddling little sister,
hanging on the mother's dress as she stood at the table chopping mince-

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meat. We found images of whatever we we had seen or heard, and as we grew older and our knowledge of men and things increased, the bed of coals possessed more varied attractions.

P Supper of bread, ~~of~~ mush, and milk, being over, the dishes washed and in-
der on the dresser, the table was drawn up before the fire, mother sat
at one end on the high-backed settle with a basket of mending, Mary Ann
with her knitting, a foot ready to rock the cradle, at the other: Ned, on ~~the~~
the floor, making a pile of not very skilfully cut shavings with his *first*
jack-knife, and I on a stool at my mother's knee, learning to knit on
goose-quill needles, all of us listening while father read aloud, from
Shakespeare's Plays, "The Heathen Gods." ~~A~~ History of the United States,
Robinson Crusoe, ~~and~~ *or Cooper's earlier novels.* ~~and~~ *our* ~~the~~ In ~~our~~ theatre of coals we
could see Man Friday, and the great Washington, grave and stately against
a background of the Colonial army, and Xantippe, whose sharp tongue drove
poor Socrates into the streets, where we saw him surrounded by his pupils
in philosophy. There were no childrens books in those days, ~~and~~ but the
fact and fiction, romance and sentiment, wisdom and wit ~~that~~ of what are
now the classics, that ~~our~~ father read aloud for the nineteen years of

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my life at the old home, are as clear in my mind today as if read from the printed page only yesterday. After the reading, and the comment and explanation that always followed it, Mary Ann brought in the apples and Ned and I climbed the stairs for a basket of nuts, which we cracked on the hearth. Never were children better taught how to take out the meat whole, without a scratch on its delicate crumples. We called the kernels that came whole out of the shell "Horses", the half-kernels were "colts", from what fancied resemblance I do not know, but through the entire family of children--and soon there were seven of us--the terms were used.

Part of our evening duty was to pick out the nuts and carry them rolled to accommodate her toothless jaws, to our grandmother. For this we always used a heavy silver spoon designated in the family "Thankful", the name of an ancestress of ~~Chenell's~~ time, whose initials, T.H., were twisted on the handle above a coat of arms.

One evening we heard a step on the porch and a timid knock at the door. There was no response to our father's stentorian "Come in," and getting up and opening the door he saw, and Ned and I and the children saw, for the first time in our lives, a colored man, a real man Friday. It was Norris, an escaped slave, cold and hungry and foot-sore. For several

for several years he was an important member of the family. He was strong and willing of work and had his corner in the living-room, where he sat in the evening, listening to what was going on but never speaking unless first spoken to. We children loved him dearly, for no matter how tired, he was always ready to play with us, and many a winter morning did he carry me to school on his shoulder when the snow was deep.

Ordinarily when the tall clock standing by the book-cupboard struck the hour of eight, Ned and I went to bed, soon falling asleep, to wake later, sometimes, and hear the voice of prayer from our father's lips as he, our mother and Mary Ann knelt to acknowledge God's mercy during the day. It was a sweet and hallowed spell. We listened hushed and awed by its potency. When it was over and the great room silent in the flickering firelight, we nestled down in our pillows, knowing we were safe, because of our father's prayer. For fifty years brother Ned has slept in a sailor's grave, but as men knew it would be well with the father, so I know also, "it is well with the child."

Katherine Corwin.