

# One Quaker Girl

By LOUISE RICHARDSON RORKE



The Willows.

ON both sides of the family my ancestors belong to the Society of Friends, and there are many traditions of early Quaker settlement and of pioneer Canadian development which are as familiar to me as the A B C's. These stories were told and retold around our own dinner table and in front of our own evening fire until each is dear to me, not so much for its intrinsic merit as for sake of the teller of the tale. Most of all I like to remember the story of my maternal grandmother. It came to me in little pieces, anecdote upon anecdote, story by story. And, though in my thought it is now a connected whole, I can scarcely guarantee just how much of it is sober truth, and where my childish imagination supplied the cement which bound together the stories I have been told.

My grandmother was born in Belfast—and when she was nine years old was in a Quaker boarding-school for girls—Mount Mellech—witness her sampler and the maps of the counties of Ireland, meticulously and beautifully done in colored inks. Before she was seventeen her mother died and her father decided to take up land in Canada. This decision was due perhaps in great measure to that restlessness and longing for change which so often comes with great grief. Already his second daughter was married and living in New York, and her glowing letters may have been the deciding factor in the family's emigration. But it was toward Canada, not the United States, that Joseph Valentine set his face. He was a city man, but, as is true of every Irishman, it was his ambition to become a land owner. So he took passage in a sailing vessel for himself, his youngest son and his three unmarried daughters: Jane, not yet twenty-six but regarded because of her age as being hopelessly "an old maid"; Elizabeth, barely seventeen, and little Sarah, aged eleven. Three sons decided to remain in Ireland, being already in the way of successful business careers.

It took six full weeks to make the passage from Belfast to Montreal, and the three Quaker girls, crowded into the close quarters of an emigrant ship, even one of the better class, found the journey rather wearisome, especially as their upbringing had fostered a natural reserve and pride which prevented their associating with the other passengers, however friendly. Their father, no longer a young man, spent his days between planning—one should perhaps say dreaming—of honor and success in the fine new country in which he was establishing his home, and grieving for the happy hours, the dearly loved friends, and the native land which lay behind him. Jane, however, was extremely capable, and shepherded her young sisters through the experiences of an emigrant voyage.

A long trip by river steamer to York brought them almost to the end of their journey. Here they were met by a man who lived near their new home, and at whose house it was arranged that they should spend the next few days. Their father, however, was detained in York on some business of land titles and kept the little son with him, so the three girls were forced to make the remainder of the trip without them.

It was an inauspicious beginning to

life in the new country. The neighbor had only a "lumber wagon" with a board across the box for a seat, and he drove a yoke of oxen—a mode of conveyance which these Irish girls had never seen before they landed in York. The spring, so much later than in Northern Ireland, was raw and cold. It rained, and had rained for days. York well earned its nick-name of "Muddy York", and all the long twenty-five miles by the Kingston Road carried out the tradition. Long before they reached their destination it was night—"black dark—as black as ink!" my grandmother said—enhanced by the dense woods which grew close on either side of the road. It was im-

possible to hold umbrellas, and in spite of the greatest care the new gray Quaker bonnets were soaked with rain. Add to this that the girls believed their driver had been drinking and were in constant terror that the wagon might be mired in the frequent mud holes, and you have a picture of misery which made an impression deep enough on the mind of Elizabeth Valentine to be still vivid after seventy years.

The new farm was an unfortunate investment, as are many estates which must be bought at a distance. It was a long stony ridge, wooded with pine and oak, with a few fertile acres lying above the hill. The man who sold the property had written that there was "some stone on the land, but that was a sure sign of good soil", and it is always far too easy to make an Irishman believe the thing that he wants to believe. Just below the ridge a log-and-stone house had been partially built, and, as soon as it might be finished, the family took up residence there—a new and interesting existence which varied curiously between that of Ontario settler and Irish squire.

There was a Friend's Meeting within three miles of the Valentine place, and to this the newcomers walked, following a narrow path through the woods to the main road. The moss and leaves and pine needles there were soft and cool to the feet, and that first summer the Valentine girls walked barefoot through the woods, carrying their high-heeled slippers and their white lace stockings. At the end of the path, where a fallen log made a fine, dry seat, the footwear was donned and the girls proceeded on their way. Duffin's Creek, or Pickering as it was later called, was a Quaker settlement which had been established some years before by Timothy Rogers, and, though there were already many settlers who did not belong to the Society of Friends, everybody came to the little log Meeting House. The Irish girls, demure in their muslins, caused no little stir among the young men of the meeting.

I am told that my grandfather was so much enamoured of Elizabeth that during the week which followed that "First Day" on which he saw her for the first time he found occasion to go hunting in the vicinity of the Valentine home. It was nearly dinner time when he came to the house on some hunter's pretext, and Irish hospitality forbade his leaving until the meal was over. It was not his last visit, but courting a Quaker girl was not such an easy matter—not in a house where there were two other Quaker girls!—and it is told that he once cleared an occasion for his courting by paying another and more canny suitor for holding his (grandfather's) horse until his call was over.

In those days, Quakers, men or women, who married outside the Society of Friends were promptly dropped from membership. Few Quaker girls were willing to risk such a proceeding and, the only alternative being that the other contracting party became a member, many a Pickering man joined the Society—a "convinced Friend" by profession of love. My grandfather, I understand, was one of these.

On the 2nd of August, 1833, nine days after her nineteenth birthday, he and Elizabeth were married.



"My grandmother as I remember her."

I like to picture the old log Meeting House and the people gathered there—pioneers all, most of them clad in homespun, all with the quiet and serene faces which marked them—as, alas, it does not always now—the faces of the "Friends". They sat in silence, men on one side of the room and women on the other, as was the custom of the time. There was no choir and no pulpit, but ministers and elders sat on the "facing seats"—long tiers of wooden seats which faced the congregation. On the lowest of these facing seats sat the "contracting parties" with their parents. I like to think of my grandfather, whom I never saw, young, tall, grave before all these Friends, rising when the Friend who sat at the head of the meeting stated that the time had arrived when "the young people might proceed with their business", and of my grandmother standing there beside him, taking her unflinching part in the lovely Quaker ceremony which, it

always has seemed to me, must make one feel more married than does any other.

Their wedding certificate, written on heavy parchment in a hand fine as engraver's plate, explains this Quaker form of marriage which, since Friends are not married by a minister, required a special Act of Parliament to make it legal. It reads:

"Whereas: James Richardson, in the Township of Pickering in the County of York and Province of Upper Canada, son of Joshua Richardson and Catherine, his wife, and Elizabeth Valentine, daughter of George Valentine and Mary, his wife, of the same Township of Pickering and Province aforesaid, having laid their intentions of Marriage with each other before two Monthly Meetings of the Religious Society of Friends held at Yonge Street, in the Province of Upper Canada aforesaid, they having consent of parents, and nothing appearing to obstruct, their proposal of marriage was allowed by the said Meeting.

"Now these are to certify that for the accomplishment of their intentions this twenty-second day of the eighth month in the year One Thousand Eight Hundred and Thirty-three they, the said James Richardson and Elizabeth Valentine, appeared in a public meeting of the said Society, held at Pickering aforesaid, and the said James Richardson, taking the



"'Visiting Friends' who came to my grandmother's."

(Continued on page 33)

boiling point, boil 20 minutes, drain and repeat twice. Mix in top of double boiler 3 cups sugar and 1½ cups water, bring to boiling point, add grapefruit peel and cook gently to about 220 degrees F. or to a very heavy syrup. Drain grapefruit and cover with granulated sugar inside and out. Dip a candied cherry in syrup cooked until it almost discolors and attach to grapefruit cover for a handle. Fill the grapefruit with salted walnuts and candied fruits, or candied grapefruit strips. Add ½ cup water to the syrup and use to candy the peel of another grapefruit, cut in very narrow strips and prepared as above. The candied skins may be covered with syrup and left for weeks, to be drained and sugared as desired.

## One Quaker Girl

(Continued from page 12)

said Elizabeth Valentine by the hand, did on this solemn occasion, declare that he took her to be his Wife, promising through Divine Assistance to be unto her a faithful and loving Husband until separated by Death, or words to that effect; and then the said Elizabeth Valentine did in like manner declare that she took the said James Richardson to be her Husband, promising through Divine Assistance to be unto him a faithful and loving Wife until separated by Death, or words to that import, and they, the said James Richardson and Elizabeth Valentine (she, according to the custom of marriage, assuming the name of her Husband) did as a further confirmation thereof, then and there to these presents set their hands."

I have heard my mother say that on the day of her wedding my grandmother "put up" her beautiful hair, which she had worn in long ringlets, and donned the fine white net cap in which I have always seen her, which covered hair and ears and tied beneath her chin. As children we used to coax her to take off this cap and let us curl her hair. It was still beautiful, though snowy white, when she died in her ninety-first year.

My grandmother's home, as I remember it, was always open to "visiting Friends", ministers from a distance and others who came with a "concern to visit families". Yearly Meeting was a wonderful time at my grandmother's. I have been told that in the early days, when Quaker meetings were so much larger than they are today, every bedroom and every couch was filled and that the men of the family had to find quarters in the barn. My mother always added to this that she herself "slept in the clothes closet". Even in my day Yearly Meeting was a wonderful time at Grandmother's. It still speaks to me of huge glass bowls of strawberries, of cream in tall glass pitchers, of fried chicken and roasted hams, of yellow roses and sweet white peonies, of rooms filled with "old Friends" in stiff silk dresses and net kerchiefs, or in "plain" collarless coats and wide-brimmed hats; of restless horses, and carriages loading at the horse-block; of whole rooms full of people "falling into silence" without any spoken direction, because somebody there thought he, or she, was directed by God to speak to them for Him; of gracious aunts and kindly uncles and comradely cousins all gathered at "Grandmother's" for Yearly Meeting—above all of grandmother herself, little, dignified, serene, the centre of all the household undertakings.

## Christmas Day and New Year's Day Issues Combined

AS it happens, this year, that next week's issue of Canadian Countryman would fall on Christmas Day, and the following issue on New Year's Day, these two issues are being combined. The combined issue will reach our readers during the week ending January 1st. Thereafter you will receive your Countryman every week at the usual time.

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(Continued from page 12)

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I know little of the details of my grandmother's life after her marriage—perhaps because it was less interesting to childish ears. I believe she was very happy and had, perhaps, less anxiety and less hard work than falls to the lot of most pioneer women. She was the mother of twelve children, the oldest married before the youngest was born. All lived to grow to manhood or womanhood, and all but one to reach the promised three score years and ten. She was a widow for nearly forty years, and for the early part of this period had the care of a large family, yet she found time almost until the close of her life to keep in close touch with her large circle of relatives and friends, and to serve in the capacity of elder in the Friends' Meeting of which she was a member. She was an old lady when I first remember her, with wavy white hair, and blue eyes like my own mother's. As a little girl I liked to sit in meeting and watch her face, serene and somehow, in spite of all its wrinkles, beautiful.

I have never seen the home to which she went as a bride: it was destroyed before my day. My mother always spoke of it as "the log house in the orchard". To us as children Grandmother's meant "The Willows", a wide-spreading stone farm-house which befitted an increasing family, and a steadily increasing responsibility in the community. It was built the year grandmother's brother came to visit her from Belfast. Its floors, except for the "parlor", which had a "boughten carpet", were laid with rag carpet which grandmother had herself sewed, and which my grandfather had paid a neighbor to weave. These were the days of "Old Jake Liscomb", of whom I know nothing save that his hair was rough and untidy—have I not been told a hundred times, a tousled little girl dashing in from play, that I looked just like him? They were the days of "Big Maggie", who, questioned by grandmother as to my mother's whereabouts, made answer: "She's tombyin' out there: I dunno what she'll come to in the rare (rear)! And sorra ere a hair do I care!" Here, indeed, is Irish poetry for you! and passed down through the generations!

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