In a Canadian Shack

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IN A CANADIAN SHACK

BY

J. G. SIME

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

I wish to thank my old friend, Frank C. Nicholson, for his co-operation in the writing of this book. Without his constant sympathy and expert aid these pages would not be here at all, and I am very grateful to him.

J. G. SIME

at Cowley Cottage,
Midlothian,
Scotland.

July 3rd, 1937.

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In a Canadian Shack

I

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Remembrance is an odd thing, for the act of remembering seems always, whether we will or no, to bring a picture along with it. How far this is true of everyone I cannot say, nor do I know how closely the memory-pictures of others correspond with mine. I only know that as I wrote the words "In a Canadian Shack" at the top of this page, there rose up before me, clearer than life, as we say, a picture or a vision of myself driving towards that shack on the day that I first set eyes on it. I could not have helped this picture forming even if I had wished to do so. It came, it presented itself before my inner eye with extreme vividness and without any ado, apparently as an accompaniment of my thought. It was there as if by magic, rising, it would seem, out of nothingness and making me aware of details that my conscious self had long mislaid. How can such things happen? No wonder people thought of enchanted rings and Aladdin lamps as the possible agents in such a mystery.

I approached the shack in the company of my hostess. I had heard of her as one who wished a summer companion in her shack, and on this first occasion of our meeting I was sitting beside her in her very old buggy—her "rig", as the people round about that district would have called it—while the French-Canadian pony was reluctantly pulling us up the steep bit of hill that led to the log hut, and I was wondering what to say.

It was a summer afternoon—June, I think it must have been—but in that hard-bitten climate of the Province of Quebec it was still spring. It was hot, I remember, and cloudless and quiet; and the sky had that curious Canadian trick of seeming right above one (not sheltering in umbrella-fashion, as in

England) extremely high and with the look it always has to me of an immense egg, standing on its smaller end, inside which one gazes up at the curving dome.

As I write these words the curious languorous feeling of the close of a summer afternoon in Canada comes over me. I do not know of any other place where I can feel so absolutely relaxed. We drove along through the quiet village, past the mill and its tumbling water and, as I have said, were ascending the hill that, though I did not know it, led to our journey's end. I was uneasy in my mind. I had not been encouraged by the untidy ramshackle cluster of wooden houses round about the St. Aniel Station at which I had arrived. Beautiful as the prospect was, the country even in that hot, straight sunshine, seemed desolate to me. I am town-bred and not accustomed to stretches to which one cannot see an end. I asked myself, "Have I been silly to come?" I realized that I had undertaken, in payment for my lodging, to "keep" the house. *Could* I keep it? I remember asking myself. I felt grave doubts. And just then—how very clearly it all comes before me!—Nellie, the pony, feeling that her journey was near its end, made a last effort and cleared the crest of that steep and narrow bit of hill; and there we were. The log hut stood before us. It was old and shabby and rather untidy too, but not with the somewhat sordid untidiness of the station houses, the outcome and appendage of a great commercial enterprise, so much as with the unreasoning prodigality of nature. Tall grasses grew up to and on to the little wooden "gallery" that ran before the front of the house. Beside the three steps that led on to this narrow verandah and up to the door of the hut were flowering—weeds, shall I call them? What I really remember here is the beautiful late-afternoon light that suddenly bathed everything. In that light the hut stood out like something carved from a solid background; the trees over the way seemed each to have a personality of its own. I have always thought that in Canada inanimate or simply growing things have more importance than they have in the older, established countries. There, and especially away from what are at best the mushroom cities, man resumes what is perhaps his appointed place. He is no longer Man, monarch of all he surveys: he is a mortal creature working amongst what he finds surrounding him, and no better than the material he works in. A tree has a life of its own, just as he has; and in the wilds of Canada (and you don't need to go far from a town to find them) you *know* that the tree has this life of its own, as good as yours, while we all lose this knowledge when we live in towns. The log-cabin in that late June afternoon stood out, alive and *being*. The little overgrown clearing round it faced me, living too. The trees

over the way were like sentinels, waiting to see what I would do. I found my tongue. "Oh, how charming!" I cried. "How beautiful! How *nice*!"

My hostess looked gratified. "Come down," she said, jumping off the rig, and her terrier jumped after her. "Come in. It's tea-time. We'll get some tea."

As we went in at that door and entered the sitting-room of the shack; as I stood at the entrance, facing the door at the opposite end and seeing the light fall on the wooden table set for tea under the narrow window; as I glanced at the sink, also at the other end of the hut, and watched my hostess fill the kettle at the tap, place it on the stove and then put a match to the triangle of logs beneath it, I felt somehow that I had set my foot on a new life. It was *all* different from anything I had ever known before, from the shape of the sky to the two bare bedrooms opening off the living-room and only separated from it by a matchwood partition; and the *free* look of everything in sight was new too.

My spirits rose. My doubts passed away. "I shall be happy here. I shall enjoy this," I said to myself as I looked through the tiny window of my bedroom at the tossed-looking bit of country beyond. And as I continued to look at one thing after another, so like the things I had left behind in England and yet somehow so essentially different, I found myself repeating in what I can only call a surprised tone of thought, "Yes, it *is* new." I prepared—but not, I will confess, without misgiving—to enjoy. It is the mood, I think, of a mingled anticipation and apprehension with which every immigrant faces his life overseas.

2

The life in the shack was as "new" to me as if I had stepped into the planet Mars. Whether I should have had an equal feeling of novelty if I had cast my lot for a while with the peasantry of England or of France, I do not know. To a town-bred mortal (and I am as town-bred as a London sparrow) country life, as we call it, and town life must always seem like two different existences, their interests being so divergent and in many things so conflicting. But it added, I think, a spice of further strangeness to my adventure, to be, as my hostess and I were, amongst the French-Canadian farmers and villagers and their families. For what is so puzzling about Canada is that just when you expect things to remind you of England, they *don't*; and similarly, just when you expect to be carried back to Old France by mixing with the French-Canadians of Quebec, you are only made aware that you are in New France and that all you looked to be reminded of is three

thousand miles away. My life in the shack was so different from anything I have experienced elsewhere that it stands out distinct and apart from all the rest, like a little, quite round circle; and I wish I could present it on paper in that way.

Nothing is odder, I think, than to step casually, as it were, from one life to another in this world of ours where all things, it would seem, must be interrelated. You *were* interested in books and liked to talk about ideas, and you were fond of taking things up to lodge them in your head and dispose of them as theories there: you *are* (you find you are) interested in getting the fire to light, and you are disconcerted at your not being able to achieve the apparently simple triangle of logs which the farmer's wife over the way arranges with such dexterity and sets alight with such ease. It is no use having theories about such a thing as that: you either can do it or you can't. And I never could—at least I never could do it like the farmer's wife.

How busy she was, that farmer's wife, and how pretty! She had that grave beauty which, it seems to me, you find so often among the *habitants* of Canada. She had everything to do, everything, I mean, that is connected with the house. She was the one half of what she and her husband represented together. He worked outside, she in, and which was the busier of the two it would be hard to say. With the Brassards and the rest of the people round about, one felt that one had stepped backward, one might almost say close to the beginning of the world—when Adam delved and Eve span, and there was no time to meditate on this or that or to form theories about anything. One duty followed another from the early rising in the morning—a novelty for me to see the delicate flushing of the morning skies!—to the early retirement at night. There was no scramble or rush such as you get in city life; neither was there that clipping of life, if I may term it so, which comes from the telephone call or from the constant turning on and off of the radio; the time I speak of extended through the war years and radios were not to be found then in every farm-house as they are now. No, the day, each day, lay before you, fair and full. You turned from one thing to another: there was so much to be done it was impossible to be idle. But the things you did claimed the time you were able to give them; what you did you could do *well*; and when the day was over and it was time to sleep again, you had the —possibly only unconscious—satisfaction of knowing that what you had done was useful. Most of it had gone to sustain life. In *that* there is, I think, such a fundamental satisfaction that nervous worry—fear—hardly touches the life that can provide it. I know that I never saw the tension of strained nerves in the face of any of those mountain-dwellers. They were tired and often showed it; they looked older than their years, or older than those of the

same years who worked in cities. But they looked calm; they were not running a race with anything. They were merely toiling from dawn to dusk.

I don't know. I often disliked the life myself, as I was trying to do my duty in it, but I went back to it constantly, as often as I could, so there must have been something in it that I liked; and perhaps the lines that city work and fuss had stamped upon me may have become less ingrained when I was feeding the hens and trying to produce an eatable meal by my activities at the black stove. Curiously enough my remembrance is of the constant beauty there—beauty in whatever direction I might look. But if I glance at the notes I took when I was in the thick of it all, I see that it was the drawbacks that impressed me most forcibly. I hardly seem to have seen the beauty. I hated the discomforts.

But perhaps that is life.

With a vivid recollection of these two opposing feelings—my dislike of almost everything that I did, in the actual doing of it, and my perhaps half-reluctant affection for the real beauty of almost everything that surrounded me—I naturally find it very difficult to depict things as they were. I could write two descriptions of the shack life, one all charm and attraction, and one all distaste and rebellion, and both descriptions would be equally true. It would depend simply on which bit of me was giving the description; and this too, I think, is very characteristic of our emigrant psychology. We all, we immigrants, feel this mingled attraction and repulsion for our step-country, no matter what part of it we happen to settle in, and the account we give of it must depend on the mood which always, behind our seeing eyes, colours and limits or even distorts our vision. This applies of course to novel sensations in general; our sense of taste savours what it is accustomed to and we rarely like, at first trial, a dish or a flavour that is entirely "new". The same is true of our sense of hearing; our ears are seldom pleased by sounds they have never heard before. So it is, I believe, with vision. We may *see* the beauty of the unfamiliar as soon as it is presented to us, but long usage and slow reception of it are required (and this cohesion of outer and inner is best accomplished in childhood) before it can, if one may put it so, become a part of ourselves. This feeling of being aware of outside beauty and yet incapable of accepting it, of appropriating it, is probably the "focus of infection", as doctors would say, of that painful disease—is it of the mind or the soul?—to which we give the name of home-sickness. The gusts of pain so typical of this malady are, I fancy, at the root of all cantankerous or peevish criticisms made by immigrants, whatever land they may have emigrated to. We shall need to have time (and time will doubtless be given us) to accustom

ourselves to Paradise. There is nothing good or bad, in fact, but *feeling* makes it so.

Such reflections, of course, only come to us afterwards. At the actual time we are so occupied in trying to get things to rights that we cannot "think" at all, but even when we are at our busiest a miraculous something in us is apparently at leisure to take notes; and it is to this bystander in us that we are indebted if we wish in later days to size the matter up. "So and so it was," says he, "and so and so you felt, Madam. Now size it up."

It is what I am endeavouring to do in these pages.

3

My hostess's line in life was poultry-farming, and very precarious was the living she made by it. There is something odd in the idea of one's life being dominated by the behaviour of members of the furred or feathered kingdom. Their view of life and ours are so essentially different that any attempt to reconcile the two is bound to be a chancy business. However hard I tried to enter the mind of a hen during the times of my residence in the shack—and I did try—I never felt that I got *quite* inside. The hen had a lot of femininity and so had I. But its femininity seemed somehow (except when we met occasionally on some grand high road) of a different brand from mine. Indeed in my incursions into the hen's mind I felt a little as I feel about my incursions into Canada. I saw the hen's mind as an immigrant sees the country which he seeks to make his own. Part of it was familiar to me—a poor thing but my own—and part of it so unlike anything I was conscious of in myself that I couldn't really "survey" it at all; and therefore, just as in the case of Canada, I can give only a very partial opinion of the hens I met at the shack.

They were Wyandottes as to breed, these hens, large and white, low to the ground, deep-breasted and thick as feather beds. I have yet to see a more charming picture than they made when, catching sight of me in the summer dawn with their millet in my hands, they came clucking and crying, pushing and scrambling, heads forward and claws hardly touching the ground, in one great, snowy mass, breathless, enthusiastic, silly and greedy. How lovely they looked! I had got up reluctantly; I had, all the time I was dressing, disliked the subdued sound of their voices as they went pecking about in the lovely sunlight. But once out in that untarnished air, viewing that snowy descent on the food I bore, I could never feel anything but acceptance of the moment and pleasure at forming a part of it. They clustered round me, jumping for a grain of millet from my hand; they scrambled and pushed, and

I sent jolting showers of the seed on their backs; and the sun shone down, and the hill behind the shack stood out on the clear air like a green, glistening sugar-cone. It was all so quiet at that hour: I and the hens seemed the only things in creation. But if I looked forward, there was my hostess ministering to Nellie, the French-Canadian pony. Over the way the farmer's wife had been busy for an hour. Early as it was, the world was going steadily, like a wound-up watch. At that hour, too, and on each day, the *new* look of everything had an appropriate air. The hens, the mare, the farmer's wife, my hostess and myself were all beginning again. The tossed-looking country was having another chance to settle down into something rather more familiar. Never on any summer morning at that hour, even though no cup of tea had fortified me, did I feel anything but hopeful at the shack. Nowhere else have I ever had quite that feeling of beginning again. Everything appeared possible: circumstances seemed malleable (in a way that was afterwards to prove fallacious); a sense of change and growth and promise was in the air. This is the offering, I think, that Canada makes to any immigrant, no matter in what part of the Dominion he may be placed: this feeling, in a large sense, is Canada. I myself have experienced it to a lesser degree in walking in the Canadian city in which I live, but at St. Aniel hope seemed to blow across the waste spaces to where I stood and to envelop me. The fact that, as I say, the hope was not fulfilled did not make the moment in which one cherished it less precious.

4

Over the way, just across the primitive road that was so inappropriately called "La Grande Route du Roi", Madame Brassard's hens scraped and scratched round about the door of the farm-house to pick up any likely additions to their none-too-plentiful meals. There was no snowy drift of hens on the Brassard farm. Hens, as I have said, were the mainstay of my hostess, and on their punctuality in laying depended the upkeep of her shack. With this in mind she had expended money she could ill afford in acquiring aristocrats of the species. But for all that, when it came to filling the egg-crates which were to find their way to city markets, it was often the produce of Marie Brassard's very mixed breed that went into the last of the twelve dozen cardboard sections and so saved them from travelling empty to town. The snowy hens looked lovely and ministered to my aesthetic sense in the early morning, but it was the mixed red, brown and yellow lot that gave the eggs which made the Brassard household's omelettes and brought the envelope with the cheque inside it to the doorway of the shack.

How different those two sorts of hens were in their attitude to life!—Madame Brassard's views of the world and ours could have shown no greater contrast. The snowy hens expected everything. Marie Brassard's mixed birds expected nothing. They went about all day picking up what they could find, and the rooster among them shared his "findings" to a surprising extent. They were hardy, rarely had anything wrong with them, were pretty in their own way, as you recognized if your eye happened to fall on them, and in a queer fashion fitted into their surroundings, so that you hardly noticed they were there. All the same, if they had been spirited away, you would have missed something out of the landscape. The snowy hens stood out on the landscape: your eye couldn't help falling on them. They were "art". But the mixed Brassard breed made part of the landscape: *it* was French-Canadian and so were they. Whether you liked them or their neighbours better really depended on your preference for the exotic or the natural, or perhaps it might be more accurate to say, for what has been passed through the sieve of man's imagination or for what is still redolent of nature. Madame Brassard's hens might at any moment, by man's thought having turned upon them, be changed from nature into art; but when I was at the shack they were still unadulterated and, except for me, unadmired. For my part, I liked to watch them running and grubbing about and so exuberant when anyone found a worm. And then I would look at the white ladies languidly passing the time of day as they strolled about the field. *Their* dinner was sure.

It was, as I have hinted, just the same difference that I noticed between the Brassards and ourselves. My hostess and I were not alike; she had passed her earlier days in Northamptonshire, spending her passions in the hunting-field, and I had passed mine in London or abroad, frequenting concert halls, sitting or lying about with books in my hands, and, later on, earning a living. We were not alike; we were very *un*like in our general outlook on life, but we both resembled the Wyandottes in expecting to find our dinner ready for us when we were ready to eat it. So ingrained was this expectation that, on coming in, say, from a long round of delivering eggs, although we knew that no one could possibly be in the shack to prepare our dinner for us, it none the less always remained a disagreeable surprise to find the fire unlighted, the table unset, the place cheerless; whereas no Brassard ever expected to do anything but get its dinner itself—who else could get it? The hens in their adjoining but contrasted lots, illustrated *our* lives. We too could be decorative, on occasion; we probably had passed in our time through the sieve of some man's imagination; while the Brassard family as a whole, and Marie Brassard too, far more decorative though she was than either of us,

were like their tawny hens that scratched about in the deep summer dust round the farm-house. They toned in with the landscape, they fitted into it and actually made part of it, so that, pretty as Madame Brassard was, you might for long periods together hardly notice the fact. My hostess and I stood out: you might say that in our poor way we stood for "art"; but the Brassard family were not as yet detached from the land they lived on. They were parishioners of the Church—so far too big for its worshippers who only lived, as it were, in a corner of it—which they attended in the village. They were children of God, but not the separated, spoilt, "only" children that we were. You might, as I say, have gone about the country and hardly noticed their presence in it. Yet take *us* away and what difference would there have been? Take away the Brassards and their like, and at once—yes, before one's very eyes as one looked—the land they were slowly turning into another and very different France across the sea would revert to the desolate vastnesses of what the Brassard forebears had found when they arrived from France four centuries ago. I often thought as I glanced over at the farm while I shook from the shack gallery the home-woven strips that decorated the floor, "Yes," I thought, "*you* are necessary; *we* are luxury" (though it is true we didn't look much like it). And then, glancing up the field at the band of snowy ladies who looked so charming in the sun, "You too!" They and we really had no business in these mountain parts of Canada at all.

5

One of the things that sharply differentiated our lives from those of the Brassards was that the iron hand of necessity was not constantly upon us. My hostess was often "hard up", as the phrase is, and I may even go so far as to add that there had been moments when she was on the brink of destitution. And there is nothing in this world, I imagine, so educative as to have no more than fifty cents between yourself and that abyss. It is so educative, that experience, that I am almost—but not quite—sorry that it has never been vouchsafed to me. I should not be quite what I am if I had known it. My hostess *had* known it; and it was on the rare occasions when she spoke of what she had gone through as a dish-washer in the back premises of a cheap Canadian city restaurant that I listened to her most attentively and felt most respect for her. The recital was harrowing in its way; but out of that experience she had brought a capacity for drying dishes to which I never attained. I used to wash the dinner-things at the shack and sometimes, when she had leisure for it, she would do the drying. She would take four or five plates or saucers in one hand, steady them with her thumb, rapidly dry, with

the dish-towel which she held in her other hand, the topmost of them on its upper surface, and then dexterously slip it to the bottom of her little pile, wipe its under surface dry, and repeat the process with the next in order. Having finished with the first pile she would place it on the table, ready to put away, seize on the second with a surprising quickness and recommence her operations. You could see at once that in dish-drying—and probably in dish-washing too, but I never saw her at that part of the work—she was a professional; for in dish-drying, as in all else, there is a professional as well as an amateur way of attacking your task. I remained and remain a more or less admiring amateur. All the same I really preferred it when she went about her own outdoor duties and left me to dry my dishes in my own way. In these tiny premises it took less time. My heart used to sink when she said she "thought she had time to help me", and I never felt more grateful to Nellie than when on such occasions she whinnied impatiently and called my hostess away. It is a sensation familiar to many of us when people *will* help us in our work.

You would have thought perhaps that my hostess's drastically realistic and my own at times unvarnished experience of life might have taught us to be methodical. But no. Not at all. The Brassards, opposite, had never had any desperate experience of life. The hardships of life were part and parcel of their normal condition, but the rigorous climate, the loss of some portion of their live-stock, nay, more, the death of one of their quickly coming children, they accepted—as dispensations of God and in the nature of things; and they adapted themselves to the case. If life was all hard, it none the less had its mitigations and blessings. And assuredly, in order to keep it from becoming *too* hard, it was necessary to stick to the job. They worked year in and year out, and day in and day out too; almost every minute had its requirement that must be satisfied, and it never occurred to them to shut the farm up for the day and go on a jaunt, as it did to us, who had had in a sense more stringent lessons from life than they. And yet when we two—at one about this—suddenly felt that the routine was unbearable and the hens fools, and that—never mind whether they laid eggs or not—we *must* have a change, it was Madame Brassard who, after my hostess had got out the rig and harnessed a most unwilling Nellie, readily undertook, at my breathless request, to feed the hens; and while she stayed at home and added the burden of our work to her own, my hostess and I and Joan, the terrier I have spoken of and a most important addition to our household cares, jumped into the rig and waved our hands to whatever Brassard might be in sight, all-acceptant and neither resenting nor criticising our escapade. Nellie, whose temper was not the best of her, sulkily started, Joan curled herself between

our feet, and I raised my head and sniffed the ineffable—what is it?—clarity of that air. And my hostess took the reins into hands that had held such things from childhood, and we were off. Up the road, down the road, it didn't matter where. We were off in that adventurous air—and the air of Canada *is* adventurous—to see what we could see. The shack, its duties and its pensioners or wage-earners (in whichever light you choose to regard them) no longer existed for us; and such a mood as that not only did not exist, but could not exist, for any Brassard.

6

There must have been moments in those drives that my hostess and I took together, when I was bored and even acutely bored; but the memory of them has faded away and there only remains with me the sense of joy that I often felt—in what? It is impossible for me to say. A bit of me loved the spaciousness we moved in; my blood responded to the crystal clearness of the air; and where else have I had that complete sense of freedom? Behind me was the shack, where I could stay as long as I liked—for life, if the fancy took me, or so it seemed to me then. Nothing but the bare necessities of life around one: one felt as if one were down at life's very roots and that the branches and twigs no longer existed for one. Something of that kind a monk must feel, I suppose, when he dons the habit, only his blood will hardly help him to rejoice. As we drove off, sometimes without the slightest idea of where we were bound for, I often had a feeling of impersonal happiness, if I may call it so—a happiness that was not connected with any other human creature but simply existed between me and the air and space surrounding me—such as I have never known in any other place.

One day, after ascending a hill up which Nellie had clambered like a cat, while her mistress and I put our shoulders to the empty rig behind her, we were lying on the grass, at lunch, and I remember, with an odd distinctness, how any hostess, dreamily eyeing the scene before her, said with an astonishing emphasis: "I shall never go home." "Won't you?" I exclaimed, quite surprised. "No," she not so much answered as appended, for she was not really speaking to me but communing with that something we all possess within ourselves, "I should feel cramped in England after this." And then she said thoughtfully, "England is so *small*."

As we sat there, eating the sandwiches I had cut before we started and drinking *all* the tea out of our thermos bottles—it was a late lunch or an early tea as you may choose to think of it, for we had come a long way, much further than we had intended—I looked out on the prospect before me.

It was very beautiful. From our hill we surveyed an infinitude of other hills. There we lay; Nellie, with her remarkable capacity, born of a hard life, for finding some sort of nutriment wherever she might be, was cropping the sparse grass near at hand and Joan crouched at her mistress's feet, eyeing the sandwiches. The empty rig stood by. But except for these signs of humanity the hills might have been alone with their God. The fact was that we had lost our way. When we set out, my hostess had intended to introduce me to a lumber camp which she herself had once chanced upon and where they had given her a lunch; but she had lost her bearings, and after reaching the top of the hill we were resting on, we had agreed to compromise and stay where we *were*. We had no idea where this was: we just were there, and in time we would get back to the shack. The tea was good, the sky was blue; it was intensely, extraordinarily quiet. I think I never *felt* Canada as I did at that moment. The way I felt then is the way Canadians feel when they are far from home.

My hostess was never a very talkative person and nothing more, I think, passed between us on that occasion. But the episode made an impression on me. Here was an immigrant quite different from myself. Would she indeed become more of a citizen of Canada than I? I doubt it. But I knew then that her decision to stay in the newer part of the world was unalterable. A bit of her was drawn to it with a vehemence that the rest of her could not withstand.

When we got back to the shack that evening, all very tired and Nellie extremely morose, Madame Brassard came hurrying to us out of the dusk. "You were so late," she cried, "I put your hens to bed and lighted your fire. The kettle boils." She was just like a Madonna, Madame Brassard, and never thought but only *did* things. I went into the shack and my hostess bedded down Nellie and pacified her with a meal; and our late supper did us no harm. In bed that night, as indeed on every night during that first visit of mine to the shack, I lay and listened to the cry of the whip-poor-will coming in at my window. And then I faded into sleep, as I never can do in a city, and slept till morning. Sleep like that is a remembrance in itself. It is *profound*.

7

When I got back to the Canadian city in which at that time I made my home, I was genuinely surprised to find how often my mind dwelt on what might be happening in the shack. I was surprised because (I have sworn that I will tell in these pages all the truth I am capable of telling) when I came away from St. Aniel, the village on the outskirts of which the shack was

situated, I was glad to come away. The drive back to the station was quite different from the drive from the station to the shack. I had arrived at St. Aniel in June when, in that snow-and-frost-ridden district, it is spring. I left towards the end of August. The roads were thick with dust—and one can hardly realize the force of the expression "dry-as-dust" until one has summered in this part of Canada. The sky was pitiless rather than beautiful. I had had enough of lighting—still anything but expertly—a log-fire or struggling, also inexpertly, with a refractory oil-stove in a sun-baked hut in order to cook a dinner I was too hot and tired to eat when it was on the table. I resented mosquito and black-fly, and regarded the sink with disfavour. Ungrateful as it sounds, I was thankful to leave, thankful to feel myself in trim clothes again (I couldn't *see* myself in the square, six-inch glass but I knew I was in them), and willing to put up with the red-hot oven which called itself a train; and in my bath that night, soaking in water of just the right temperature and lots of it (nothing to do for it but turn a tap!) I thought "Thank God for town life! A *city* is where I want to be." I strolled in my dressing-gown—taken out of a real cupboard and not just lifted off one of the three pegs which constituted the provision for the hanging-up of one's clothes in the shack—on to my balcony and there, from under the still-lowered awning, I looked out over the roofs of the city below me and to the St. Lawrence river beyond. There it stretched, wide and powerful and, at that hour, quiet. Beyond it rose the Green Hills of Vermont. The city was still, or I was too high above it to hear much of its noise. The lights in the houses glimmered. Immediately below me a tree which still lingered in what had been an old garden and was now a garage, had that curious, and in its own way, lovely, varnished look that is given to trees by electric light. It seemed transfixed in that clear summer night, and from my left came the strains of dance-music. If I bent down, I could just see, through the windows of the Dance Hall out of which the music drifted, the dancers—as far up as the waist! Their faces, owing to our relative positions, I could never behold, but only the quartets of legs moving in unison and following one another in an endless, monotonous procession; and it often amused me to stand there at night observing, as it were, the half of a human enjoyment. Out of such a spectacle our humanity is eliminated but a sort of group-exaltation remains.

On that first night of my return, too, I remember savouring the joy of solitude. There was no one to whom I needed to adapt myself. The most blessed companionship brings with it the necessity for adaptation, and there is a great ease and assurance—for a short time!—in feeling oneself alone, with nothing to modulate oneself to but one's own mood. Behind where I stood was the ice-box. No need for me to lift the heavy flap in the shack

floor, over the iron ring of which I was eternally stumbling, to make my cautious way down the almost perpendicular ladder with the butter and milk in my hands, and to face the possible rat in the dusk below. He and I had met, and I never knew until then how a rat's eyes look in something that is more than twilight and less than dark. Here in my city flat there were no rats; mosquito-wired windows and doors protected me; the electric fan beside my bed favoured my slumbers, and the jazz-band in the dance hall replaced the queer, romantic note of the whip-poor-will and the musical-comedy croaking of the frogs in the water that splashed and gurgled its way from the Brassard farm to the village street.

I went to bed that night wrapped, one may say, in the blessings of civilization, and gave thanks for my fate. "It"—my life—was comfortable at least. My body rejoiced.

But later, as I have said, and only a very little later too, I surprised myself by thinking of St. Aniel. Its *shape*, if I may put it so, or the shape of the life there, underwent a change in my mind. How can one put these vague impressions into words?

For one thing, there was *time* there. Everyone, it is true, worked from morning till night, women, and men too; but if *leisure* was virtually non-existent for them, still they always had *time*. I remembered Madame Brassard waiting until Moose, the big, red-brown, nondescript dog who went twice a day to fetch the cattle, should drive the beasts into the yard; her silhouette, so sharply defined in that clear air, often came before me when I walked westward and saw the city sunset. It had been rare for me to see her at dawn, but very often when I crossed the road from the shack to the homestead, jug in hand, to get the afternoon milk, I would watch her as she waited there, taking a breath of the freshening air and looking not in my direction but where Moose was to be seen leaping and barking and obviously proud of his ability to do such a job all alone and without a clock.

There *was* a moment of leisure, then, after all, in the stretches of time; but where was such a thing to be found in the city? The discomforts, or rather perhaps—from a city point of view—the rough-and-readiness of the shack life seemed in retrospect to grow less and less, and its beauty, its quietness and, in a sense, its freedom stood out more and more prominently. What is *not* always tends, I suppose, to take on an iridescent colouring, while what *is* can be easily recognized as the cinder-wench. At any rate, I had said to myself, on leaving the shack, all the way to St. Aniel Station and all the way in the train too, "Well, it was an experience. It is over. It is nice to have had it but I shall never go back again." My bathroom, my ice-box,

and my electric stove and oven confirmed me in this view. I had been sorry for the people, when I was among them, and especially for the women. I remember one day mistaking the woman who did our laundry (for my hostess and I drew the line at washing when all the hot water had to be made ready in a small kettle on an ill-tempered oil-stove) for the grandmother, instead of the mother, of the baby who was tumbling so lustily in the grass. I doubt if she grasped the fact, for we often did not understand each other's French, but I felt ashamed of my mistake. Of course when I looked at her again, I realized that she was a woman in the late thirties, but I had carelessly taken her to be almost sixty. I felt sorry for her and, queerly, disgusted with myself. For, after all, why not? What could she have been doing anywhere, more than she was doing here?—and she looked happy enough. Her eldest girl sometimes came in to do a half-day's cleaning, polishing the windows till they shone like diamonds and scrubbing the rough log-floor till it was almost white again; and then our shack would look as spotless as the one the cleaner had come out of. Just such another existence as that of her mother was before Yvonne. Why not? She too looked happy in the grave way these people do.

The ridiculous thing, however, that drew me back to the shack life was one of those pictures that engrave themselves upon the mind without, as one may say, one's will or even one's cognizance having anything to do with it. One day in the course of one of our drives we had come to a farm-house set in an acute angle formed by the meeting of two cross-roads. The land belonging to it was divided from the roadway by a fence, through which a wild rose had forced its way to root a fresh part of itself in the thick dust outside. The month was July, and it was intensely, it was brazenly hot. We had saved one of my thermos bottles full of tea at our lunch-time and we were on our way to find some shady spot where we could recuperate our energies by means of it. We *longed* for tea. We were lounging along, for Nellie too had flagged in the heat, all eyes. Nothing shady was in sight when I noticed the rose bush. It was anything but luxuriant: it was small and stunted, and its leaves were grey with dust. But out of its disadvantage and disabilities it emerged, not bold, not beautiful exactly, but—what is the word?—undaunted. Its large blooms were not pink or crystal-white in colour, as roses are when they grow wild in England, but—magenta is the nearest I can come to it. But think of a magenta transparent with a down-pouring sun shining through, and you will see that these blossoms, if not beautiful, had a life, a vitality of their own. They shone there in the dust like strange jewels. And I remember thinking—no, I thought nothing. But a feeling went through me as I looked at those unfamiliar flowers, and I was

conscious that if I could accept them they would be beautiful to me: and I could well imagine a transplanted Canadian having towards them the self-same feeling that I had to the smaller, more delicate, but far less arresting roses of our English lanes. We drove past the farm-house and found our shady spot at last, and an unharnessed Nellie drank water as thankfully as we drank tea. It was not till I came back to the city, where there were no roses except in the shop-windows, that I realized how this picture—of the hot day, the decayed-looking farm, the ankle-deep dust, and the blooms starting out of it—had imprinted itself on what we call our "memory". But that bush now, outside the fence, square-set in such an unpropitious soil, seems to me the symbol of the life set round about our shack. I detested it and I liked it; I was drawn back to it and it repulsed me, exactly as I saw that if I could accept those roses as beautiful, I should want them for my own. As it is, they remain to me, with their five transparently magenta petals and their golden upright stamens, the symbol of, not so much a harsh as a hard but a steady and vigorous life. I see them now.

I went back to the shack in the late fall, the earliest moment when I could steal away from town, and Nellie and Joan and my hostess met me at the station.

II

1

The second visit to the shack ranks in my mind as one of the pleasantest I ever paid there. For one thing it was not too prolonged, and for another, autumn is to me the loveliest time of the year in Canada. It is so beautiful that one's prejudices against the "new" life, of whatever nature they may be, vanish and one confesses, "It is good."

All the way up in the train I said to myself, with anticipation, "I am going back." I was surprised to find how glad I was at the prospect of being in St. Aniel again, but so it was. As I have already said, Nellie and Joan and my hostess were waiting for me at the station. The rig was still dirty; Nellie, who cast a glance of recognition at me—she was far from unintelligent—looked as morose as ever; and Joan, always the lady, as any compatriot of hers might have put it, without offering to descend from the rig wagged her tail and generally testified satisfaction at the sight of me. She too was anything but unintelligent and knew that while I stayed at the shack I was manager of the meals and purveyor of the meat. My hostess, I felt, was not displeased at having a companion in her solitude. She was never expansive, but on this occasion her friendliness somehow filtered through her reserve. A welcome is a nice thing.

How lovely everything was during this visit! In all far-northern lands, I suppose, the autumn months bring with them a sense of "closing-in". In the Canadian city in which I lived (and perhaps the realization of this came to me with special force from my being able to watch from the balcony and windows of my flat the gradual *solidifying* of the river) there was a sense of being shut in, and irrevocably shut in, during the long winter months; but here among the mountains you only had the sense of nature closing in (as you draw your blankets and eider-down round you in bed) to keep you warm in the winter. Early autumn in Canada, even up here among the hills, is luxuriant beyond measure, and the *habitants*—the Brassards over the way and the neighbours who occupied the farms to right and left—had taken advantage of this luxuriance and stored away supplies of food for the winter months. Even my hostess, who lived mainly on canned goods from the General Store near the station (and, I regret to say, threw the empty tins into the yard, where they formed a mighty tower nor'-nor'-east of the back door)

had also done a little in that line, and the rat in the cellar below the living-room had doubtless been as glad to see the "root-vegetables" thrown in there as Joan had been to see me arrive at the station. The digestive system is a great master of us all.

The sky was different now in the fall. It had lost its brazen, polished look and was soft. The trees were in their last glory. They had been more flashy in September but now, while one still saw the scarlet and gold here and there, ambers and leaf-browns were creeping in. The landscape was spiritualizing itself like a beautiful old age. I shall always remember, I think, a breakfast my hostess and I took together on the last day but one of my visit, if I am not mistaken. I had got up more reluctantly than ever, now that it was cold. In town I had long ago adopted the possibly vicious practice of eating my breakfast in bed, but here early rising was imperative (it would be difficult to persuade a hen to have its breakfast in bed) and I rose each morning as morose as Nellie and continued in that state of mind until I had "started"—that is to say, begun to cook—the breakfast. I hung over the stove. I ran, all wrapped up, over the way for the milk. It was not, really, till my hostess and I had seated ourselves at the table in the now warm living-room and Joan had taken her place on the floor beside us, while Josaphat, the cat (about whom I shall have something to say later) sat in a restrained calm by the stove, detached apparently as an Indian chief might be, from all mundane considerations—it was not till then that I thawed, body and mind, and could become human again.

On the morning I speak of, the view I saw, as I glanced out of the window, *struck* me, as we say—hit me almost as it were a physical blow—and I felt and feel now, as I think of it, overwhelmed.

I have never, I think, said much about the living-room of the shack. It had been built by M. Brassard's father—Pé-père, as they called him—with his own hands and his own axe, and structurally it was simple; and this simplicity gave it a grace and beauty of its own. It was very solid; the matchwood partition that cut off bedrooms and the flimsy, ill-fitting doors that gave entrance to them were later additions, for originally the shack had been one large room. The floor was of logs. The great iron ring that gave admission to where the rat kept his establishment had, to me at any rate, a sort of fairy-tale appearance: take hold of it and you did not know what might happen. The roof was arched—pointed as the roof of a Gothic cathedral is—and directly underneath the arch and reached by a rough ladder-staircase going up from the shack's back door end (in the alcove of which we kept our ill-smelling oil-stove, the "summer-girl", as it is

sometimes called in Canada) was the attic that stretched the whole length of the living-room. So low that one could not stand upright in it, so bitingly cold in winter and so bakingly hot in summer that degenerate mortals like us could make little use of it, though doubtless Pé-père and his family had slept there in their time.

The Quebec stove on which I did my cooking occupied a middle portion of the living-room, and emerging from it a round black pipe, with two subsidiary branches that served the bedrooms and distributed the heat, rose, like Igdrasil, and disappeared through a hole cut in the roof. The sink—an after-thought since Pé-père's time, for he and his had carried water in from the now disused well—stood, as I think I have already indicated, to the right of the back door, balancing, as one may say, the ladder-stairway. The walls were of log, like the floor—rough-hewn logs that may no doubt have harboured insect-life belonging to the forest trees, small beetles and what not, but had a beauty of their own. There is nothing more beautiful than wood, dead or alive.

Into this domain, which reflected the life of Pé-père (and that alone) my hostess had come. Have I ever attempted to describe her? She was rather short, strong and sturdily built, very dark, with black hair and eyes. She was well-made, well-proportioned, with hands and feet that matched her figure. Her features were not regular, but good, each of them being, as it were, a feature in itself and demanding its own room to live. It is impossible for me to say why—and I did not know then if my supposition was founded on fact or not, for we were at all times reserved with each other, accepting things as they were and exchanging no confidences—but I always took her for a representative of the tail-end of what had been in its day an important family. She had that unconscious "air" about her that nothing but time can bestow. She was not really beautiful, or handsome either, but one liked to look at her; she and, oddly enough, Nellie too, and most emphatically Joan, had something about them that one can only call "well-bred". Thackeray said that if a woman is handsome one must demand no more from her. Perhaps if he had seen my hostess and Joan and Nellie, he might have made an aphorism to cover femininity in general and said as much for the word "well-bred". It sounds a snobbish word but, like most things in this life, it can be viewed in two ways.

Into Pé-père and Mé-mère's environment, then, came this representative of a wholly different species. It is true that my hostess had had very little money; it was only the opportune death of a relative, an aunt, and an ensuing legacy that enabled her to buy the shack, the hens and the rest. Her furniture

was largely constructed out of the packing-cases in which she had brought to St. Aniel her few possessions. But much can be done with packing-cases, especially if you leave them as they are. We sat on Windsor chairs at a deal table. We were surrounded by the bare necessities of life, and no one could say that the black Quebec heater and its attendant pipes were things of beauty. "If you are musical and must have a piano," says William Morris in one of his essays on furnishing, "you are in a bad way." What would he have said to my "cook-stove" or the "summer-girl" at the other end of the shack? But at any rate, and in spite of everything, there were always the windows which, with due regard to the far-below-zero cold of winter and the dazzling, overbearing heat of summer, Pé-père had built long and narrow, along two walls of his hut. One of them looked out across the road to where his son's homestead now stood, and the other stretched the length of the deal table which stood underneath it. It was through this window that I saw the picture—designed and carried out by nature—that so engraved itself upon my mind. Raising my eyes casually from the breakfast I had prepared and glancing out, I saw the hills.

They say that the beauty of mountains was discovered in the romantic period, but what about the man who lifted up his eyes to them and saw that from them his "help" would come? These hills, a long chain of them, lay eastward from our window. The early morning sun was still on them. On the crest of the highest peak there was snow: it had fallen during the night and looked crystal-white, but on all the lower hills there still remained the colours of autumn. As the sun caught them, they turned to the most shining scarlets and to the warmest and most comforting of crimsons. There was gold and amber amongst the red and the deep sombre browns of which the whole landscape might have seemed composed if we had made a part of it instead of viewing it from the outside, forming, as it were, a basis, a *setting* for the feast of colour.

It is at such moments that we love a place, exactly as we love a human creature, in whom some impulse of generosity displays itself to us. At that moment, over the tea-cups, under the arched roof of the shack, warm and secluded from the chaos of the world of man, I ceased to wonder that Marion Ellbank, my hostess, had sought refuge in St. Aniel. For the moment, I envied her.

2

On my first visit to St. Aniel I had felt, in driving up from the station to the shack, at least a half-hope that I might become intimate with my hostess

(a lonely flat-dweller does cherish such desires) and possibly form, in time, part of the life of the place. But I soon saw that Marion Ellbank and I, though we might nod and smile to one another across the hedge, had been brought up on too different lines and were perhaps too fundamentally different in ourselves to be more than companions in a strange land. After all, friendship is a delicate plant and can only be grown very seldom for most of us. Acquaintances one can pick up any day but a friend seems to me almost more of a rarity than a lover; and *he* is rare enough.

With the St. Anielites I had never expected to be friends, and indeed I got from them more than I had looked for. Language was a barrier between us. They were very polite to me—more polite than my command of their speech warranted. They understood all that I said, and I understood all that those of my own sex among them said; but when the men spoke to me out of their beards and I was unable to watch the motion of their lips, I could make very little out of their remarks. Dogs and cats get on well enough without the spoken word, but it is difficult for humans, I think, to make much progress in conscious communion without the exchange of whatever it may be that they have in their minds. My acquaintance with M. Brassard and Pé-père and André Savard, the village baker, throve chiefly on smiles, which get you on in one direction but not in another. I was more intimate with Joan and Josaphat, even with Nellie, and certainly with the hens, than I ever became with any two-legged male inhabitant of St. Aniel.

However, there is another relation between human beings—not friendship and not acquaintanceship either. One may call it perhaps the bond of our common humanity—a firm bond it is too—and on this second visit of mine to St. Aniel I began to be very conscious of it: indeed I felt it, I think, more strongly there than I have ever done in any other place. In cities it is felt, I imagine, among the very poor, but the more prosperous you grow the more feeble, as a rule, its hold on you becomes; and perhaps the worst charge one can bring against the commercial era is that it has induced the decadence and virtual disappearance of this bond. Here, among the hills, I found it linking me, in its own fashion, with the Brassards over the way. They began to be to me—even M. Brassard, with whom I was unable to converse—definite personalities, each with leanings and aptitudes peculiarly his own. I soon recognized that Albert, the eldest boy, very clever with his hands but so dull with his head that his mother, in order to stir his brain to action, often had to throw a cupful of cold water in his face—her favourite form of punishment and one new to me—could not in any way be identified with his brother Gervais, a bright child, dragging his leg, alas, with infantile paralysis, and on this account set aside to become a Christian Brother—"un

Frère". What use could he be in the fields or in clearing new land? And little Jeanne, next to Albert in age, the only girl and already full of usefulness, was like no one else except perhaps Mé-mère Stéphanie, the old lady who had accompanied M. Brassard's father through life. Both had the same staidness of appearance; they were, one may say, congenitally neat—they couldn't be otherwise. And their minds were staid too: one could see it in their rounded, bounded outlook on life. Nothing is more curious or makes one believe more in the continuity of things than such a similarity between an old woman and a child. You could see how Mé-mère turned naturally to Jeanne: "There am I again as I was in my youth," her air used to say. And indeed it would not have been easy to find a more united or should I rather say a more solid *bloc* than this portion of the Brassard family presented. The rest of the family was scattered.

It is, I think, in such remote places as this, quite cut off from our commercial life in cities, that family life—the little group among the hills or in the wilds—is nice. It is a necessity there: if life is to go on at all, everyone must help. And therefore the Brassard family, the Goyettes up the hilly road, even farther from the station than the Brassards were, Mme. Allard next door to us with her vigorous family (she was the mother whom I had mistaken for the grandmother of the baby) had none of the *stuffy* appearance that is so characteristic of family life in cities—where "families" are apt to strike one almost as an anachronism. Here, where everyone had something to do, each new baby took its place. He or she would be useful later on. And this time, when I came, amidst all the fertility of the Canadian soil, with the teeming produce of the short, flaming summer hardly yet stowed away in the cellars which underlie every Canadian farm-house, it seemed natural somehow to find Marie Brassard pregnant again. She too was doing her part. In the summer it had struck my hostess and myself that she sometimes went slowly about her garden work, groping about for insects among the vegetables—in French Quebec the vegetable patch is the charge, one might almost say the property, of the farm-wife and her children—and then my hostess had said, "I hope Madame Brassard isn't going to have another baby. She has enough on her hands now." On this second visit of mine the fact was unmistakable; and it was certainly true that the still young mistress of the Brassard household—she could not be more than twenty-six or twenty-seven—had as much as she could manage without another child to care for. And yet—how can one say it?—the way she so evidently accepted the fact, without words, as a tree accepts the foliage of a fresh year, as the earth grows its corn, made one accept it too, in the same spirit, as part and parcel of the world's rotation. This baby would be useful too; he would work his

way peacefully into this world. How far we were then, up there in our fastness—yes, though St. Aniel was only a four hours' ride in the train from my city habitation—from the limitations of our modern commercial life! It was odd, but amidst the bareness of that mountain existence (and even the teeming fertility of summer could not make it anything but bare) the way my own life in the city was ordered seemed ignominious and my attitude to the luxuries of it even more ignominious. I think it was in this short autumn holiday that I realized that if only I could leave my body behind, to enjoy its bath and ice-box and breakfast in bed, and could transport my *spirit* to the mountain-heights, I should be perfectly ecstatic at the shack—"ecstatic" because I would bring more to the life than any Brassard could do. There my body was, however: I could not get rid of it. How lovely "life" will be when we are spirit only! Meanwhile I disliked being unbathed, the fire wouldn't light, the hens still insisted on early rising, and at night it was very cold. I was neither a Brassard in the flesh nor a spirit escaped from bondage. I only enjoyed things at moments, as I and my like do, in this world; but these moments I enjoyed very much.

3

I remember very vividly a couple of drives that we took during this autumn visit. The first was a drive for the drive's sake and due to a caprice on the part of my hostess, who had suddenly got tired of loading the rig with root-vegetables and, gazing up into the sea-blue sky, had cried, "Let's go for a drive!" and forthwith proceeded to put her idea into execution. Nellie was not only visibly astonished at this change of programme but definitely resented it. Work she regarded as the natural order of the day: she didn't *like* hauling turnips but she accepted it as something that needed to be done. And here was her Dictatress saying, for no earthly reason, "Stop your work and let us go out for the day." Her countenance took on its contumacious expression: I never did see an animal look so argumentative as Nellie.

The turnips were accordingly jolted out of the rig into the heap that they had originally formed on the ground; the rig itself—it served for all purposes, that buggy—was hastily dusted and wiped; my hostess dusted and wiped herself, and I, no less hastily, cut some sandwiches and filled the thermos flasks. Marie Brassard undertook to keep the necessary eye, as one may call it, on the hens. Joan, of quite a different kidney from Nellie, with the aristocratic and nonchalant view of life, testified to her satisfaction at our new plan; we packed ourselves in and were off. I turned and waved to Marie Brassard at the gate and kissed my hand to little Jeanne who had just come home from the Convent School for the mid-day meal and was standing close

beside her mother, with Moose beside her looking very red in the autumn sunshine.

I have said that I remember this drive, but what I really remember is a moment of it; and why that moment should remain impressed upon my memory is more than I can tell. But it does. The earlier part of the drive—where we went and what we saw—has faded away. We must have been out for hours, for the moment I do remember fell in the afternoon when we were coming home again and turning the corner that led into the village street. The clear piercing light of an autumn sunset kept everything in a glow. Opposite to us, as we turned the corner and left the tannery with its evil smell behind us, was the Convent to which Jeanne went to school and in the garden of which the nuns in their grey habits worked all the summer long, with the big church to one side of it and next to it, on the other side, the priest's small house, which he had built himself. I can never say what sensations that road always evoked in me. Whenever I came back to St. Aniel, that village street invariably made me feel a little differently to life. There was something so settled in its "lay-out"—its physical, mental and spiritual disposition, so to say. One felt that one had come—returned, perhaps—to something believed and made secure by belief. The aspect of peace seemed everywhere, and if the storms that cannot but play a part in this mortal life of ours troubled or even at times rent that peace, one still felt —*I* felt—that the storm-tossed creature had something to turn to and something that could not be broken. Such a persuasion is hard to lay hold of in our cities. Was it, I wonder, an unconscious desire to come within its radius, if only for a moment, that brought me so frequently (and sometimes, ridiculous as this may sound, reluctantly) to the shack?

My hostess, loquacious for once, had been discoursing on the ideal life as she pictured it for herself. It was to be an existence all compact, if I may put it so, of independence. She wished for ground on which she could grow everything necessary for her sustenance, fields for grain, a garden for vegetables, and a good cellar in which to store her winter supplies. She even envisaged sheep from whose fleeces she could spin and weave her clothing. It was to be an all-sufficient life, far indeed from the madding crowd, and I remember how her recital brought before my torpid mind—nothing, I think, lulls the mind as the old-fashioned driving behind a horse used to do—visions of the households that Ulysses hit upon in his wanderings, and their women, strong and active, still untouched by the malady of "thought", intent on their work, and ready to give themselves. My hostess, it seemed to me, wished either to set the clock back or to push its hands forward to where they had never been before. She wanted a *thinking* woman to have and hold

her flocks and her fields and to be content, alone. Is this possible? I don't know. Where would be the fun of shearing the sheep and fashioning a gown for oneself out of the wool if there was no one there to cry at the end, "Bravo! You look nice"? Marie Brassard might manage so. Yes, but my hostess and I were not in the circle—perhaps unhappily for ourselves—in which Marie Brassard stood. *She* was not even where the women of the Odyssey had been, for they had either passed through or were inevitably to pass through the sieve of a man's mind. Madame Brassard and her like could never do this because in *their* men's minds the necessary sieve had not been evolved. My hostess was asking for two incompatibles—primitive conditions with their beauty and a fulfilment that primitive conditions cannot give. We did not want the same things, Marion Ellbank and I, but I am sure we were tacitly agreed on one point: we neither of us wanted a partner or a male, as you may choose to put it, of the kind of Joseph Brassard, good fellow as he was. I wonder if we were snobs, like Joan when she showed her teeth, say, at Red Moose. Or is it that women look upon men in two ways—as *men* or else as fellow-creatures? And if you come to that, what about the reverse side of the question? Are women, in men's regard, *women* or else nothing at all? It is a thorny problem.

We drove round the corner, then, into the broad village road. It was completely quiet; the St. Anielites were all indoors preparing or eating the evening meal. I glanced at my hostess. She was sitting quite upright and motionless as a statue. Oddly, in that steely light of the late October, she had the look of an image—an image that might typify not a goddess exactly but the spirit of a people. Her expression was rapt. She seemed to be looking *into* something; and even as I glanced at her, she gave herself a little shake and came to. "It is cold," she said, quite in her usual voice. "Come, Nellie, hurry up!" We quickened our pace down the village street and began to climb the steep bit of hill that led homewards. Where had my hostess been at that moment when her body sat there, still as a statue? Had she seen something? and if so, what? I never knew. But what an odd moment to come across amongst those hills, in that safe enclosure, as it were, with the Convent over the way and the priest's house beside it! We went uphill in the growing darkness and reached the shack, and I jumped down and ran in to light the fire in the stove, while my hostess drove on to the stable to unhitch Nellie and give her her supper. We were back in St. Aniel, *doing* things, but the moment remained, graven on my consciousness; it seemed to me that I had partaken, for a fleeting instant, of a life alien to me and far away. The things that cling to us are those that we can't explain, and that, I suppose, is why this moment clings to me.

The moment that I remember in our second drive is as essential a part of the Quebec Hills as that other moment was remote from them. (My hostess had looked, on that occasion, as some Assyrian may have looked thousands of years ago; one would have to visit one of the world museums to see *her* prototype in stone.) This second drive was a planned one. Once a month or so Marion Ellbank, having filled a crate with those income-earning eggs of hers (reinforced rather more than less by those from over the way) "hitched up" and set off to deliver them. Their destination on this occasion was a largish pension-hotel, if I may give it that name, on the brink of a lake, and with one or two "summer cottages" close by, where summer visitors lodged, going up to the hotel for their meals. These cottages were empty now but the hotel itself was always at least partially filled—with bathers in summer and skiers in winter. Even at this in-between season of the year a few guests, seeking health or solitude in those high regions, occupied some portion of the big, rambling, wooden building that broke into Nature's untidiness with an untidiness of its own. The spot was a lovely one. As we approached it on that late October, or it may have been early November, afternoon, it looked threatening perhaps but it still looked beautiful; and the hostess of the hotel, who must have heard our voices or the sound of our wheels, was at the door to welcome us and cry to us to "come on in".

This we were glad to do. We had started immediately after our mid-day meal but the road to Lac Grand Plongeon was long; it was now after four o'clock, and we were chilled to the bone. How nice to be ushered into a stove-heated house (houses in Canada are always warm) and to know that Nellie was being led away to a good stable where she would enjoy in peace the plentiful meal that would be provided for her. This was Nellie's idea of a Christian excursion. She loathed pleasure-jaunts, as I have said, and regarded with suspicion any departure from a rule of thumb, but she was not lazy; she was perfectly willing to carry eggs as an "extra", and she had known well enough where we were bound for when we set off for one of the few local customers to whom Miss Ellbank delivered her wares. It was lawful toil that was being demanded of her now, and Nellie loved the law. She might have been a Jew.

We were shown into the dining-room and there, on a table close to the window and surrounded by a screen (for we were not legitimate guests paying our way but "strays" who must be sequestered) our tea was served to us. Such a plentiful, home-made tea!—hot toast and fresh gingerbread and buckwheat honey, and hot biscuit too, out of the oven and puffing with lightness. We ate and drank. There is a singular pleasure in "getting" your own meal yourself, and there is an equal pleasure of a quite different kind in

having it all "got" for you by someone else. We had nothing to do but "warm up" and enjoy ourselves to the full. Our bodies were comforted: the strong Ceylon tea—not the green tea that our hostess herself drank—fortified them; and something else in both of us—something that did not stir in Joan, who sat on the floor between us, turning her head from one to the other with glistening eyes—was gratified and made happy, I think, by the view outside. We gazed out at that most beautiful of all prospects, a lake. It was still and dark: soon it would be a frozen mass. There was life in it—anglers came to the place in spring to fish for its trout—but what a different type of life from ours! Round it one could still distinguish in the twilight the golden foliage of the birch in the fall. It all looked mysterious and with a mystery distinct from anything I have known in Europe. If there are tutelary spirits in that place, as different from us as we are from the fish in the lake, they must be wholly unlike those that haunt the mountains which lie east of the Atlantic. Marion Ellbank asked me once if these Canadian hills were like the Austrian Alps, as someone had told her they were. I looked round, I remember, in bewilderment, at a loss what to answer. These were hills, yes. But how dissimilar in every characteristic from the hills of Austria! As well maintain that the Austrians and the Canadians are alike. They have their humanity in common, it is true. But what else? So with the hills. We sat in that warm room and looked out on what would always remain strange to both of us—a landscape that may perhaps have had something of the same effect upon our imaginations that Mrs. Burnett's black Ceylon tea had upon our nervous systems. We were very quiet except when our cordial hostess came in and passed a wholly commonplace remark with us. "Now," she said at last, when she saw that we were "done" and when the business arrangements were concluded and the welcome "bills" had crackled into Marion Ellbank's hand, "you'd best get off. It's a long road and it's getting dark. Al!" she shouted into the night, "hitch up the mare and bring her round."

There was no tipping of Al. He was as good as we were, did his job and wasn't ashamed of it. We wished our hostess good-night and wished Al good-night too; they wished us a good ride home; and we were off. As Nellie's hoofs rang on the road, I turned round to see the last of those hospitable lighted windows that mellowed the darkness of the night.

"How nice she was," I said, almost regretfully.

"Yes," Marion replied, "Mrs. Burnett is a kind soul: she's always been good to me."

We skirted round the lake on to our dark road and Nellie broke of her own accord into a brisk, even trot. We were homeward bound again.

We were neither of us in a talkative mood (nothing, I think, is more fallacious than the common masculine idea that women are always talking); it was very cold, and we instinctively sat close together, while Joan crept close in under our skirts, so that I felt her warm little breathing body against my limbs. It was dark, as I have said. And it seems to me now that it was then—during this drive homeward—that I consciously and definitely realized that I was, not exactly in a foreign, but in a strange country. So many things in Canada, even in French-Canada, blind one to that fact—the language of the country (which is of course, officially, English as well as French), much of the vegetation, which is similar to though not identical with our own, and a certain tradition of sentiment. There is, or was at the pre-War time I am speaking of, an English, or rather a British—Scotch and Irish as well as English—sub-flavour to everything, as if one had gone away from "home" (for so England was once persistently spoken of across the sea) and while imbibing fresh ideas and adopting new customs, still clung underneath to "Mother's" teaching and what "we" had done at home. There is even yet so much of this in Canada, that it masks, as it were, the Canadianism of the country. One forgets, in looking at an oak, that the leaves, while retaining their undulated form, have increased so greatly in girth that they might belong to a new kind of tree. Things seem vaguely different—enough so for the British, who are the kings of grumblers, to grumble about and object to—but it would be possible, I think, to live for half a century in Canada without recognizing it as the essentially different country from England that it is, just as a woman—Nora Helmer, for example—may live with a man for years and bear him lawful children and only by some chance discover at length that the landscape of his character is fundamentally unlike her own and perhaps incompatible with it. So it was with me that night in the Province of Quebec.

The road seemed strange. The dimly descried outlines of the hills surrounding us were unfamiliar. The air we breathed was "new" to us. Trees grew as they do not grow in Britain. The whole place was other than one had supposed it to be: it was as if someone had stripped off a mantle and suddenly stood revealed for something one had never expected to see. How can one describe that curious sensation when something one has never apprehended before all at once takes a firm hold of one and changes one's point of view? And, as if to drive my new conviction home—"Yes, you are right: you are far from home and in a country that has nothing to do with little Britain"—there came from the hills behind us the long-drawn, infinitely doleful cry of a wolf. I cried instinctively, "Oh, what is that?"

Nellie knew. For some time she had been showing signs of uneasiness. She had shifted her pace, increased it spasmodically, glancing round and pulling at the reins. "What's wrong with Nellie?" we had asked each other innocently; and Joan too had shivered, curled herself round more tightly, and drawn closer to the protection of human limbs. Now, with this cry piercing, as it were, the blackness of the night, with the hills round about taking it up, tossing it from one to another and, at each echoing roll, increasing the fearsomeness of the sound, Nellie was neither to hold nor to bind: she broke out into a mad run of sheer sweating terror, and we went helter-skelter down the road. Joan laid her paw across my instep.

I felt my hostess beside me, very straight. She neither moved nor spoke, only tried, with her practised hands, to hold Nellie in, and when the cries ceased began to reassure her with her voice. Nellie was past reassuring, but she listened, apparently, for after a while and in the deep silence that followed that dreadful din, she got the better of her mad fit and ran sanely again. She galloped, but straight, and so covered the miles that divided us from home.

We were all very tired when we reached the shack. Miss Ellbank saw to Nellie and gave her, I am sure, a good supper, and I got the stove going and boiled the kettle and made a pot of the insidious Chinese drug, as Mr. Shaw calls it. We drank cups and cups of it, in our dressing-gowns and with our feet on the stove a part of the time; and Joan had her share of the feast and looked up at us both with her gleaming black eyes. We all thought: "What a gruesome life is going on beside us, there in the hills!" and doubtless Nellie thought the same in her stable. Then we turned in and in spite of the "drug" slept in that clear mountain air like queens—I mean as queens *should* sleep. And awakened again to the innocent business of a new day.

4

It must be remembered that such an experience as this of hearing the wolves cry and having it brought home to one that one is a wanderer in a strange land has its pleasant as well as its painful side. Anything "brought home" to us lights up something in us that we find a certain—what is the word?—satisfaction in discovering. Some depth in us is momentarily plumbed; we have got one step further in our reading of the riddle of life. The man who sang "Home, sweet home" for the first time—the versifier, I mean, who indited the doggerel—can, as Heine pointed out, have had no home when he did so. He thought of the thatched cottage really and truly for the same reason that makes me think now of the shack and its environment

—because he wasn't there. *This* is what the immigrant who has been dowered with perceptions that will rise to the heights of the unexpected, actually gets in return for his emigration. We all know people who prize their nearest and dearest only when they are apart from them, and others who find out their love for someone only after he or she is dead. As it is with our fellow-creatures, so it is with countries. Almost all of us, I think, have to be somewhere else before we know how nice it was to be at home; and *vice versa*, when we are at home again, how exciting it was to be somewhere else. Because I was, like Nellie, *stirred* by that long, deeply dismal and vaguely menacing howl reaching us through the blackness of the night, because I was cold and Joan laid her paw across my instep, because I was lifted out of myself by Nellie's wild gallop, and because I expected the rig to overturn—because of all these things the fact that I was a wanderer, with Marion Ellbank and Joan, that it was I among those French people, whose language I only half understood, that it was I myself there in the heart of those lonely hills, and in a city equally strange to me, was borne in on me. I realized it. Yes, it was that wolf's howl that made me realize that I was in Canada and that gave me that half sweet, half bitter taste of being far from home. It was a kindred feeling to what we have in bitter grief or in passionate resentment. The thatched cottage of the calm life is lit up for us by these feelings, and we see its value and prize it, as a roué prizes innocence in a girl.

And what else happened during this visit? One day, when I had gone up the road to Madame Goyette (a dressmaker before her marriage and still ready to add a trifle to the family budget by taking in a little needlework) and was coming back towards the shack again, what should I see slowly riding round and round the paddock, if one can give that name to the tossed-looking ground I had viewed from my window on my first arrival at the shack, but Miss Ellbank, in full riding kit, breeches and hat and all, and mounted on Nellie? She explained later that, fired perhaps by the sight of some clothes I was taking to Madame Goyette for repair, she had felt that she *had* to do it. After I had departed with my parcel she had climbed the ladder into the loft, hastily taken from a trunk what she had worn—and *all* that she had worn—when she went hunting in Northamptonshire, and having dressed herself and mounted Nellie, whom she was riding bare-backed, she was re-living past glories in an empty dream when I came upon her. She further explained that she had meant to be in her stable-clothes again before I got back; but time passes, time passes, and she hadn't managed this. She looked like Don Quixote on Rosinante. I shall never forget the expression on Nellie's face: she looked half-incredulous ("*Can*

people be such fools?"), half-resentful ("and to *me* too!") and wholly surprised ("Could anyone ever have thought it?"). There they were, slowly pacing, as I have said, round the bit of ground that lay immediately outside the shack. And just as the wolf's howl had brought "Canada" home to me, so Miss Ellbank's English tailor brought it home to me that, while not handsome, his former client had the groundwork, if I may put it so, of being what is called "distinguished". Her dark, thick hair was pushed back beneath her hat. Her gloved hands held the reins. She was sturdily built and not tall, but one saw, as she sat there, how her knees gripped the sides of her mount. That woman's forbears had ridden for centuries; she came at the end of a long, long family history, and the family was worn out now, but with her dark eyes gazing into space, and her pale face, tanned over the paleness and wind-blown and a trifle weather-beaten, she looked as if—as if she were one of her own ancestors bound for the Wars of the Roses, with his squire momentarily out of sight. You see why I thought of Don Quixote and Rosinante, do you not? And if she had been in a canoe instead of on a horse, I should no doubt have thought of Christopher Columbus. Joan was sitting on the back door-step of the shack, evidently saying, "What is this?"

When Miss Ellbank saw me, she blushed. This was the only time I saw her do so. And except for the explanation that she had intended to be in her normal garb again by the time I returned, nothing was said on the subject. There was always something sombre and bizarre and tragic about that woman to the end.

5

Something else happened to me in this packed little visit to the shack in the autumn of 1916—I say "packed" because we all, I suppose, reckon events not so much by their number or even their intrinsic importance as by the depth of the emotion that they arouse in us. And the shack, the mistress of the shack, all that happened under its roof or in the four *arpents* of tossed-looking ground that went with it, and, for that matter, though in a lesser degree, St. Aniel and its life as well, awakened in me both sentiments and sensations that I never had experienced before and never have experienced since. It was as if during those War years when humanity was tearing itself to pieces, I passed into a world quite different from any I had known and was enabled in some way to lay hold of the little bit of it that I could assimilate and to incorporate it into myself—from whence it issues now, authentic enough, yet inevitably tinged with my personality.

This last event that is connected in my mind with my October visit is, in its small way, a tragic one. And perhaps the largeness or smallness of a tragedy, as seen by our eyes, is of little moment; and poor Josaphat's fate may be as melancholy as Hamlet's.

Josaphat was the grey, striped cat of whom I have hitherto only made a passing mention. He was called after Pé-père (Josaphat is an old French-Canadian name) from whom he had been an offering. I didn't exactly like him but I recognized at once that he had a distinct personality of his own though, since he was, like Nellie, a born Canadian, it was a personality that I did not at first, or perhaps ever, fully understand. I can, with a little difficulty, make my way more or less into the mind of an English cat, but Josaphat's mind, if not wholly sealed to me, had at any rate a Bluebeard's chamber that I could not enter.

He was handsome in his way. He did not, it is true, conform to the Persian ideal, but he was in all respects a striking cat. He was long in the body and lithe; his stripes, dark grey on lighter grey, were as regular as a zebra's and as beautiful; his head had the shape of a wild animal's—not that which the domestic cat has, no doubt very gradually, evolved; and the expression of his eyes too was that of the wild creature, such as you may see in the cages of the cat-house at a zoo. Altogether, when you regarded Josaphat sitting by the stove, absorbing the heat, and quite evidently detaching himself from contact, physical or mental, with everything in the room, you could hardly help feeling that you had an Indian, or at any rate something authentically aboriginal, on your hearth. He *was* remote. The cat that walked by himself was a *viveur* compared with him.

Notwithstanding this I had a regard for him. I respected him. Joan, when I was cutting the meat for dinner, would either sit and gaze at me with adoring eyes or would wander round me in a semi-detached, sycophantic manner ("I am not greedy, Lady, only loving!") but Josaphat, with an air of disdain, remained aloof, his tail curled round his legs, contemplating a universe of his own. If I inadvertently trod on the tip of his tail, he didn't, like Joan, say, "It was *my* fault; don't mention it!": he turned and cursed me. We only saw him when he wanted something (and then he was too proud to ask for it); at other times he was either in the stable, catching rats, or hunting somewhere in the wilds, and we often did not see him for days. On these excursions he drank blood instead of milk and he throve on it. I have never seen a finer set of muscles or a smoother coat than Josaphat's.

It was for his useful qualities, however, that Miss Ellbank kept him. She gave him house-room because he kept the stable clear of rats. Joan watched

at rat-holes and caught rats at times, but she barked too much: her brain was easily excited. Josaphat maintained a deadly calm. He would watch, day and night, for any length of time, requiring apparently neither food nor sleep. When the enemy appeared, there was a short, sharp scuffle, and Josaphat emerged with the rat in his mouth. At such moments Joan looked wistful.

Josaphat therefore earned his keep by ratting and doubtless in his own way he grasped the fact, for intelligence was the last thing he was lacking in. But like the rest of us, he was open to temptation, and his Tempter whispered in his ear that chickens and even young hens tasted good. And in the Lady of the Shack's domain chickens and pullets were the apples on the tree of life.

Have I made it at all plain what Josaphat's character was? He was lawless; he was restrained by no affection for humans; his passions were strong; and his sense of taste and still more, perhaps, his longing to be *doing* something overmastered him. Hens and chickens began to disappear.

But who could have suspected Josaphat, sitting stoical and Indian-wise by the stove? Miss Ellbank said, "Weasels!" and both Joan and Josaphat were urged stable-wards, and Joan barked and frightened the rats away, and Josaphat maintained his calm; until one day Marion Ellbank met him with a pullet in his mouth.

I wonder if I have been able to suggest anything of my hostess's complex character. She was "as English as they make them" in one sense. And yet deep down among the strata of her disposition lay something that reminded one of what the English may have been, far far back, when they were under Northern influences and the wonderful amalgam of today had not yet been evolved. When she was strongly moved, as she was by the sight of this Judas in her sanctuary (the fact that she was the proprietress of the shack and its little bit of country meant at that time a great deal to her) something far down in her, hidden from sight in the every-day Englishwoman Marion Ellbank, flared up to the surface and overmastered her. She could no more control herself than Josaphat could control *himself* when his hunting instinct drove him to the destruction of a hen.

"He must die," she cried indistinctly, standing at the door of the shack, and then, still indistinctly, she called out, "M. Brassard!" Before I could stop her she was off, round the shack, across the road. I ran to the window at the other end of the shack and saw her enter the Brassard yard. She hurried round the house to the door from which I fetched the milk every morning and evening, and went out of sight.

When she came back she was calm. It was mid-day and dinner was set and ready. M. Brassard, accepting facts—Josaphat had formed the habit of hen-killing and must therefore die—had without any ado taken the cat out of Miss Ellbank's arms, gripped him firmly by the hind-legs, and swaying backwards to get a purchase, had knocked his brains out against a stone. She became excited again as she told me, and I could eat no dinner that day.

Josaphat was gone. The best ratter in the district had been done away with, and I think Miss Ellbank, once she had calmed down and had had time to think, felt that she had been hasty. But he was dead. A real life was ended—an essential bit of the country-side, as he had seemed to me, a sort of emanation from the tossed-looking jungle that I have spoken of so often. Miss Ellbank and I were adjuncts, something in the nature of extraneous ornament, however far from ornamental we might personally be. Even the Brassards over the way were only recent importations from the old civilization of France. Joan, like us, had no kinship with Canada. Even Nellie, the French-Canadian pony, was, so to say, the product of man. Josaphat alone amongst us had sprung from the soil; he was one with it; he was a part of Canada.

Well, he had been done to death, but anyhow he had lived. If any one of us had been *alive*, it had been Josaphat. How he had enjoyed hunting! How he had revelled in walking—calmly—out of the stable with a rat in his mouth! The short, fierce love-affairs that he had no doubt had in the bush—what satisfaction they must have given him! And as for family life, what a simplification he had made of that! He made possible the entry of kittens into this world and then thought no more about the matter.

There is a great—I think the word is "satisfaction" and not "interest", as one might at first be tempted to assume—in meeting with something definitely *wild*. It is only then that one can see, or perhaps, rather, faintly surmise, how far "we" have come. I take it that Josaphat's attitude to life was not so utterly different from that of the original red man's: it was about as near to it, let us say, as Joan's attitude was to ours. Animals partake of our lives when they are brought into association with us. But Josaphat was too remote from us—from Miss Ellbank and myself—to be able to accept our views or, for that matter, to wish to accept them.

Nellie in her own way knew what our views were and generally, unless she was compelled to acquiesce in them, flouted them: she regarded her own as better. The hens, of course, hadn't much to think with, and I doubt if they "thought" at all: they were just hens. They knew how to keep themselves alive and did it, more in the mass than individually. Joan was, *socially*, only

a bad imitation of us. It was only on the rare occasions when she broke bounds and went off hunting with a Canadian-born daughter (but that was later) that she was herself. Josaphat was always himself. I think it is a treat to come across something like that, and perhaps it was my lasting inability to understand him or to win his affection that kept me attached to him—like a woman in love with a man who does not care for her. There *is* a fascination in someone or something that *won't* respond, and I can imagine the excitement touched with regret with which one would welcome a response at last. Josaphat, however, never awakened this regret in any of us. He remained indifferent to the end.

Where he was buried, or if he was buried, I do not know. He should have been buried in the bush. But the manner of his death shocked me so much that I asked no questions, and before long Minou, the mother-to-be of innumerable kittens was installed in his place. Minou kept herself very clean and had a pleasing manner but I never cared for her as I had cared for Josaphat. Perhaps I understood her too well.

6

When I left the shack this time, I felt regret. The light-hearted and slightly penitent sense of relief (for we are all a little penitent when we find ourselves unable to feel pleasure or gratitude in response to kindnesses received) with which I had left St. Aniel after my first visit was replaced by —what? One of those mixed sentiments that are so difficult to define and so troublesome to entertain. One is sometimes conscious of the desire to change respect for a fellow-creature's good qualities into that other feeling which we call affection, but can one? No. A universal charity towards others one may perhaps attain to—by prayer and fasting!—but affection comes all by itself and at no man's bidding; and often enough, as we all know, will take possession of us when some critical bit of us cannot respect the human being whom none the less we "must" love. Such a divided feeling is bound to bring dissatisfaction with it, the critical and acceptant elements warring within one. And this division is not confined to one's attitude to one's fellowmen; it runs through one's attitude to everything. As I have already said, there was much at St. Aniel that my spirit accepted and loved. Life there had a solid basis to stand on: one was away from so many of its complications and confusions—yes, even, in those days, away from the War. Life in the hills still went on as usual, man working in the open and propagating his kind, and woman doing her share at home and bearing and bringing up her family. Also—and this was soothing too—Madame Brassard, though she looked more like Raphael's seated Madonna than

anything else in the world, had never heard of Raphael and hardly perhaps of Florence. This restricted our intercourse, no doubt, and yet there was a great restfulness about it too. I remember once, on another of my visits, watching Marie Brassard clip the fleeces of a few sheep with a pair of scissors and thinking to myself, "Well, there goes the wool that will eventually be Albert's trousers or Jeanne's frock," and feeling, deep inside myself somewhere, that there was in that simplicity and hard work something that has got lost, and irretrievably lost, in a more "advanced" state of affairs. It was at such a moment that I not only understood but sympathized with Marion Ellbank's desire for a little commonwealth of her own. Yet how silly that aspiration appeared to one part of me! Chain-stores and sweated labour do such things so much more cheaply and so much more easily, and the "semi-ready" garments, the coat and trousers from off the peg, certainly look better from one point of view. No one could say that M. Brassard was "smart", Sunday or week-day. Yet on that occasion I speak of, with the sun slanting down on the group—the woman and the sheep whose fleece she was clipping, the children keeping guard over the other sheep whose turn was to come, little Jeanne looking already so like a nun, Red Moose in attendance and frightfully anxious to be allowed to bark and make a noise and do his duty—it all looked so nice, so wholesome, so calm, almost I was persuaded to be a simple liver. Almost, but not quite. I suppose if one has experienced a good many things in the world, it is difficult to confine oneself again within the narrow boundaries of one or two.

None the less during this second visit of mine, Marie Brassard and I grew in a sense more intimate. I think the intimacy of women is a queer thing. I had much more in common with Marion Ellbank than with Marie Brassard but I was much closer in reality to the latter. She and I, when we were together, got down to bedrock and stayed there. We were hampered, as I have already explained, by the difference in our tongues. When we talked, I did what Mr. Wells once declared that he did in French: I said not what I wanted to say but what I *could* say; and Marie Brassard, in a sense, said very little. But she began now shyly to ask me questions about a big city—what did tramcars look like and so on—and though I doubt if I made city life very plain to her, she and I understood each other very well. Down below the talking-level we were one.

She was always busy in the morning when I went to fetch the milk—it was one of the children who filled my jug out of the foaming pail—but she would smile at me over her shoulder from where she stood at the stove. I see now one of the gigantic omelettes she used to make, as she turned it dexterously or tended it in its earlier stages. It was creamy inside, browned

to the eye, and when M. Brassard came in and was seated at the end of the long, narrow table (the children sat on a bench against the wall and filled the length of it) and the omelette was put before him, he shared it up into not equal but appropriate portions, and the family ate. I have come in at breakfast time, with apologies for being late, and one of the boys would jump up and take my jug and fill it. There was something nice about that too: it looked what so few things look nowadays, *in place*. And Moose too, outside and not at the table hoping for alms, looked in place. He was exceedingly dirty, a stranger to a bath, I should say, from birth; and I should have disliked him exceedingly in my flat, but I didn't dislike him in the yard. He rather liked me, and, metaphorically, we patted each other's heads and said "Good dog" when we met. Only Joan, partly from snobbery and partly from other reasons which I here didn't need to feel, had the strongest objections to Moose and wouldn't have anything to say to him. She growled if he came near her and displayed a set of teeth that would have ornamented any dentist's outside show-case; and he understood the hint and "vamoosed", as he doubtless would have phrased it had he been using human speech. Moose had had no education. Neither had Joan for that matter, but then she was a lady of high degree and worth a lot in the market, which Moose wasn't. It all comes round to hard cash when you push it to the limit.

Marie Brassard had come to St. Aniel from "the town"—not much of a town—St. Gervais, with one main street and houses—wooden houses and not much of houses either—running up and down it. Still it was a town. It was right on the railway, much nearer the city in which I lived than St. Aniel; indeed it was only when I left St. Gervais that I really felt I was at the entrance of the hill life. She had come from there and, like all people who come from bigger to smaller places, felt, in a way, that she had demeaned herself—a very little, for Marie Brassard was fond of her husband and loved her children and she was "good" to the very centre of her heart. Still, she had a feeling somewhere that when she married she had come down just a little in the world, and perhaps this was why she showed an interest in street-cars and, timidly, in shops. She *wanted* to know about the Departmental Stores (to which her husband sometimes sent a mail order, on her behalf, for "ready-mades", as illustrated in the catalogue) but had such vague ideas about them that she was at a loss what questions to ask. I remember once being in the same condition myself with regard to Einstein and his doctrines. I had my own wish to learn and the necessary physicist was at hand, but I was so unable to ask any questions that I could not profit by the opportunity and I know no more about Einstein today than I did before that abortive

conversation—which lasted a couple of hours. I tried to picture to Madame Brassard what a big city is like, to explain to what part of the feminine psyche Departmental Stores appeal, to suggest what sort of noise electric street-cars make as they whirl along, and she looked wistful like Joan. I think that was the sum of it. I doubt if she *realized* anything of what she wanted to know. As for M. Brassard, he, on the occasions when we found him there on our evening visits to the farm, asked me questions that I couldn't answer. He was very intelligent, M. Brassard, and I fancy he would have got a good deal more out of the Einstein conversation than I did. He had a masculine brain, in the elementary stage, perhaps, but definitely a *male* brain, for I suppose men's brains and women's brains are as different as are other parts of them. I should doubt if M. Brassard had as high an opinion of my intelligence as his wife had; on the whole I should say that he regarded me rather as many of us regard the ruck of objects in Exhibitions—as possibly valuable, certainly odd, and emphatically nicer to contemplate than to possess. He looked upon me with the eye of reason, and reason, if it is not irrigated with a little affection, is pretty sure to see woman as a dry and dusty landscape. I am sure that he considered me "respectable" in the Jane Austen sense, and also that he regretted the complete lack of understanding which prevented me from telling him anything about the inner workings of street-cars and motor-trucks and such adjuncts of city life. If M. Brassard was "in love" with anything (he was exceedingly *fond* of his wife) it was with the engines that control our modern locomotive power. He did adore engines and spent a great part of his evenings studying "in", as Canadians say, the catalogue from which Madame Brassard drew the details of her two-piece frocks, and running to earth all that he could about tractors. If he could have had an outfit of completely modern farm-implements wherewith to administer his farm, he would have been what we call a "happy" man. That is, he would have been satisfied in one part of him and would then have taken steps to satisfy another part, as a luxury-lady who has wrested a string of pearls from a possibly unwilling lord sets about preparing the way for a mink or even perhaps a sable coat. M. Brassard, then, regarded me not as a woman but as a human creature (really just as I regarded him) and there is nothing in the world, I do believe, so reasonable and so dry-as-dust as this attitude of man and woman to one another. That it is a common attitude today explains perhaps why men and women are so seldom *friends*. Madame Brassard and I had hardly anything in common intellectually; but it is wonderful how little that top storey of intellect counts for when it is a question of two women understanding one another. It may be seen that I approach M. Brassard rather as I approached Josaphat, but with even less assurance, his mind being so much the more complicated of the two.

However, we always looked at each other in a friendly spirit over the fence of our mutual incomprehensions.

As Miss Ellbank drove me to the station on the conclusion of this second visit, it was snowing a little. Lazy flakes, despatched before their time, came loitering to the ground. It looked—curiously enough "idyllic" is the word that occurs to me. The air was crystalline. The dark trunks of the trees and the white gleam of the birches proclaimed themselves in that air. And how can I indicate the symphony of gold, ranging from amber to Spanish brown, and the glitter of crimson shading on one side to scarlet and on the other to carmine? The leaves came fluttering down, lazily too, but with a different kind of laziness from that of the snow-flakes. *Their* work was over: the snow-work was to come. Over all this scene of beauty and colour the steady autumn sky still prevailed. The flakes that issued from it seemed dropped by chance, as if, with the matter undetermined in its mind, it let fall a wintry sign or two: "This is going. It is going. Gales are on the way, wild snow, ice on the roads, fields covered, trees groaning, life withdrawn and invisible, sheltered from the fierceness of winter. Enjoy things while you may. Enjoy them while you can!" There is charm in a Northern climate *because* what is sweet to the body is so short-lived, so soon to be taken away. The discomforts vanished from my mind: the charm of the shack and the farm and the fascination of primitive life drew me back. Something said "Come!" But something else said, "Oh, how nice it will be to be in the flat!" I never lost this feeling of being divided in two. One bit of me did love the shack and parts of the Brassard life. Another and a very insistent bit liked the noise of the city, the ease of reading and so disporting one's mind, the rapidity and change of restaurant-life, the engrossment of work and of settling down in the top storey of one's being and letting the basement take care of itself. We are drawn both ways, I think, in this divided modern life. Anyhow I reached my flat with the *evening* picture of the Brassard farm (which I had never been invited to see on the occasion of my first visit) in my mind's eye: M. Brassard pursuing his investigations in his illustrated catalogue, Madame Brassard busy with the eternal occupation of the mother, mending, Albert at his sums, apprehensive perhaps of a cup of cold water in his face, little Jeanne always like the miniature model of a nun, and Gervais already asleep. And the whole enclosed—and it was this that differentiated it from the Cottar's Saturday Night and the Ayrshire Presbyterian household, which it otherwise resembled—by a faith which, originally brought from France, still held fast among these primeval hills. I *liked* this picture—though I could only look on at it.

It soon grew dim to me, shut up as I was in the upper storey of myself and furiously at work again. All sorts of things tore at my mind at one and the same time. We all know the feeling: “I *should* be doing this.” “I must be doing that.” Nothing is more disintegrating. The shack would be horribly uncomfortable in winter. I stayed in town.

III

1

How difficult it is to collocate accurately in one's memory the *what* and the *when* of what happened to one! The incidents of my life at the shack, or many of them, remain like pictures on the walls of my mind: they hang there, segregated as it were in a little room of their own. That shack experience was something quite unique for me. Once, as a young girl, I attended a fancy-dress ball dressed as a figure out of the Bayeux tapestry; and if my counterfeit had been turned into reality and I had been translated to the authentic Norman Court of the eleventh century, the adventure there could hardly have had a more distinctive quality of its own than that at St. Aniel. I suppose that a bit of me would have liked it, just as a bit of me—quite another bit—liked the shack life, and that later on its pictures would have had to have a corridor of their own in the gallery of my memory. But I am sure that in the one case as in the other I would have found it difficult to place the incidents in their right order. "That *happened*—when?" "I don't know, but it happened." Accordingly I here put down events as they present themselves in my mind and ascribe them to the particular visit to which they seem to belong. I went up to the shack at every possible opportunity—whenever I could screw the time out of my city occupations—over a period of three years, so that I saw St. Aniel life at all seasons. The actual incidents I recount exactly as they happened or at least exactly as these eyes of mine saw them, but the precise dates at which they took place I must leave to the goddess of accuracy to fill in. I hope she will do it, though I don't know who she was. Perhaps Urania?

One visit I paid to the shack was in midwinter, in the month of January. I don't know what made me go up then—probably the thing that makes us do all the surprising actions of our lives without our foreseeing in the least what they will be like—and on this occasion, it seems to me, I saw St. Aniel at its worst. Oh, how uncomfortable the shack was! It was true that Pé-père's axe had done its work well. The heavy doors which were never shut in summer, day or night, kept out something of that wintry blast. But not all of it. What tempests came roaring down the Grande Route du Roi from the hills, which now looked stark and forbidding! They seemed to blow on us straight off fields of Polar ice. The gusts would come with tremendous force, as if from

some infinite distance, and then, in a final run, at full speed down our road; and it was a marvel that our little homestead should stand dauntless and firm in the face of such an onslaught. We would sit there in the evening, the lamp, which I had so disliked "doing" in the morning, casting its mellow light on Miss Ellbank, as she sat reading by the deal table at which we took our meals. Joan was curled up at her mistress's feet. Minou, who had by this time entirely taken Josaphat's place, was just growing up and presented that appearance of a girl changing into a woman (or in her case of a kitten changing into a cat) which has something so attractive about it. It occurs only once in the lifetime of anything, and what a pity to let it go unnoticed!

Otherwise we were alone. Nellie was outside in her stable, and before we—"closed up" I was going to say, but we *were* closed up—Marion Ellbank would array herself like Nansen setting off with his exploring party, for her good-night expedition thither. It was cold, cold. We stoked the stove day and night with logs, taking our turns in rising during the night, so as to keep it going; and the evening-hour that comes before me now is that when, our meal over and done with, Miss Ellbank settled to her book, the animals arranged themselves beside us, and I, trying to keep warm and thinking longingly of my heated city flat, occupied myself apparently in storing up material with which to fill this page. At that time, once again, I *liked* the shack. It looked very charming in the lamplight. Miss Ellbank's curtains of rosebud chintz had a singularly—perhaps I may say a pathetically—entertaining appearance, as they were drawn before the windows. They symbolized a bit of her nature that, half starved as it was among these wilds, still sprouted in spite of everything. She sat against her rosebud background, her head bent over her book; only now and then, when the hut stood solid against some extra battering of the gale, she would look up and say with a queer little shiver: "I wonder if some day the whole thing won't go blowing down the road." And she would tell me of some log-cabin to which such a fate had come, the building, with its inmates, turning like a ball as it went tossing down the hill. We all have some nightmare or other when we are widest awake, and this was Miss Ellbank's. Nor was it any use—it never is any use—to tell her that such a thing couldn't happen. The story had got hold of her in that place, common to all of us, which believes anything, and you can't argue with *that*.

We seemed at those moments in the evenings like creatures set aside in safety from the perils of this world. We might have been out in that driving storm and we were not. Yes, the shack at those times had its charm, but is such a charm worth the price it costs? I don't know.

The Brassards opposite had no such reflections. They took the winter as it came. M. Brassard was not so busy now; he could "rest up", as the English Canadians at the station would have said; like the animals he could sleep more. But his wife was as busy as ever. This must, I think, have been my third visit to the shack, for I remember her, very heavy now and moving slowly and with her face showing that curious, patient and yet expectant look one sometimes sees in the faces of pregnant women. She was as sweet and charming as ever too. It seems odd that a woman with whom I exchanged so few words should after all these years have a place in my heart, but the friendship of women does not, I think, depend upon the interchange of words. We are all alike in the groundwork, as one of Hardy's characters puts it, and it is only in the working out of the design that we differ a little. Men are much more individual. And I suppose Marie Brassard and I understood one another. I always felt, without speaking about it, that she had the same sort of affection for me that I had for her, and though Marion Ellbank was far more intimate with the whole Brassard family than I ever became, I doubt if she ever felt quite that special bond that I think united Marie Brassard and me—as if we were bits of the same thing, only perhaps we had developed a little differently, and that didn't matter. This isn't friendship; it isn't love; I couldn't say what it is. But all women know it; even the over-intellectualized ones know it—I was going to say "by name". I doubt, however, if they can know it in any other way. One has to pay even for education.

I think it was on this visit that I began, not so much to know as to take more particular notice of the Brassard children. Albert, the eldest, I never knew, nor did I ever come into close relations with him except on one occasion, to be mentioned later. Poor little Gervais, the victim of infantile paralysis, I never knew either. I was cut off from the children, as I was from their father, by finding them almost impossible to understand. But little Gervais had inherited his mother's smile, and that spoke for him. He was a pretty child, the only fair member of the family. He had fair, fine, curly hair which, if washed, would have been a pale gold, and his eyes were of that lovely pale blue which, when set in a liquid environment—that is, when the eye is a healthy one—sometimes shines in a way that is all its own. Those eyes too spoke for him. He was an intelligent and a merry child and very active: he could get along as quickly on all fours, dragging his crippled limb, as the others could on their pairs of legs. And, mingled with his merriment, there was sometimes something slightly mocking in his smile, that took me back to France. Yes, these people, among their lonely hills, had still that heritage which no one could rob them of; and a part of it showed itself,

beyond the possibility of a doubt, in little Gervais's civilized smile. It rose out of the struggles of his ancestors three thousand miles away. It represented—so unconsciously on the part of the smiler—what they had gained amidst suffering, and brought an assurance to the bystander that everything is worth struggling for. For what is once gained of good is never lost again.

Jeanne wanted a sister. Indeed it was her confiding to me that she had had enough of boys that first drew us together. (Not that *I* had had enough of boys: I have never yet had a sufficiency of them.) She hoped that "it" would be a girl. "Such a companion for me!" she said sighing. "Boys are so noisy. Ils font tant de train. When I grow up, I shall be a nun. But I would like a little sister now. She would be company." I must offer Jeanne the tribute of a little section to herself, for though she was not subtle, I have never again met anyone like her. She stands out in my recollection as always neat, amazingly neat, as if she had dropped from Heaven like that and stayed just so ever since. Her abundant dark hair, which her mother always found time to arrange in ringlets, fell down her back, midway to her waist, in a thick clustering—mane is the only word I can think of; each ringlet was, as it were, to itself and remained miraculously in place, the whole lying heavily on her shoulders. In front it was parted and brushed to each side evenly at the temples, so that you could see the brow, broad and placid already, the well-shaped ears, the dark, calm eyes, the lovely rounded cheeks of childhood, and the mouth which, if God, as the saying goes, gives us all the rest of our face, we form for ourselves. Jeanne was right, I believe, in thinking herself already a little nun. She did what she had to do methodically, with no fuss. She liked set hours for set duties. She was useful, industrious and in her own way cheerful. She was never put out, that I saw, except occasionally with the boys. I don't know that I have ever before or since my acquaintance with little Jeanne Brassard seen anyone who had a *vocation* for a sisterhood as she had. She seemed in a way pre-ordained to be a nun: you felt that if she married she would be led astray and be unhappy. The days should tick themselves away for her by the Convent clock. She would not be a mystical nun but she would be a useful one. I see her now, approaching me with our milk-jug in her hand; it was usually she who measured out the fresh-drawn milk for me. I see her sedate smile. "Bonjour, Madame." She spoke well: the nuns at the Convent School were "real French"—vraies Françaises de France, as the *habitants* said—and she copied them in everything. Did she look an anachronism in that warm, bare, French-Canadian kitchen? Not exactly. She just looked a nun in miniature, and she would have looked that anywhere.

This was the atmosphere that the new baby was on its way to penetrate and make his own. I have spoken of the naturalness of pregnancy among these hills and among these people. The baby was already a citizen of this New France which, while it differed so profoundly from the thing it had set out from, yet shared its characteristics. We all *accepted* the baby. He was coming into a hard life, but it was a life. He had brothers, and a sister (who fervently hoped "he" would be a girl); he had a mother who would support him and a father who would acknowledge his parenthood. These seem ridiculous things to say, or perhaps, rather, impossible things to say. Hasn't nearly every baby most of, and often all, these things? Well, in that place which seemed so remote, where there were so many quite real discomforts to face, there seemed in the coming of this baby a naturalness that has been lost in the towns. He was not so much expected, perhaps, as taken for granted—as "Father" is expected home after his day's work. Each thing round about was reproducing its kind, and this human reproduction varied from the rest only by the fact of humanity's possession—or should one say by the great gift that has been bestowed upon humanity?—of consciousness. Madame Brassard went about her work as usual, and doubtless much of it was a burden to her. The child itself would be a burden. She was an overworked woman and often looked dreadfully tired. Yet—how is one to say this?—behind all that, behind the ill-adjusted framework of her life (for I will dare anyone to maintain that the conditions of a St. Aniel are ideal) there was something that not only sustained her but made her happy. No one could doubt it who regarded the sweetness of that contemplative face of hers. She not only believed that God had sent the child, and so accepted it; in spite of all the drawbacks and the increased work the child must bring, she *wanted* it, boy or girl, to press to her breast and feel. The instinctive joy in bearing children—that kind of joy that we can neither master nor control, no, nor increase or make other than it is, when it takes possession of us—had not lapsed among those wilds, as it has often lapsed in cities now. Twenty years ago we were still down near the bare rocks of humanity in St. Aniel.

2

I have been led away by that part of me which liked and likes St. Aniel and so have been kept from mentioning what the other part of me, which from first to last was in flat rebellion against it, felt on this visit. And I may say now that the latter part was vociferous.

Miss Ellbank's rosebud curtains deflected my reminiscent attention from the draught that blew under Pé-père's heavy door (and, parenthetically, I

think it is odd that something beautiful or even pleasing, as these casement curtains were, can make one forget, for the moment, acute discomfort or incipient pain) but they were unable to cheer me when I rose, a mass of reluctant flesh and bones, to stuff the stove with fresh wood at 3 a.m. *Then* I was inclined to curse the day, not that gave me birth, but that drew me away from my happy, heated flat to the mountains of St. Aniel. The fact that I did not behave well during this visit, or at least not as well as I could have behaved, added to my moroseness. I do not know how it is with other people, but most of my own bad spirits and temper I can trace to disappointment with myself. If I *have* resisted temptation—the temptation to be cross, to answer back and so on—I am usually happy, I notice, even under unfavourable circumstances. When I fall into the temptation towards which I have no doubt been led, I am either despondent or snappy, as the case may be, never remorseful until I have confessed (to myself alone is all that is necessary but to someone else is better) that I was wrong. Then I am sorry and all ready to do the same thing over again the next time opportunity offers. Why this should be I do not know. We should think such behaviour an inexcusable waste of time, say in learning the Spanish language. I suppose we are "made that way." But are we?

During this visit anyway I am afraid I was a disagreeable companion; and when one morning I saw that a small but growing bank of snow had squeezed under the door into our very living-room itself, I felt the life to be unendurable and doubtless was, in a passive way, more unpleasant to be with than ever.

The others were, of course, if not inured to it, at any rate more or less hardened. To the Brassards, grandfather and grandmother, Joseph and Marie and all the children, this was life in winter. To this they had been born and bred; nor, since their views of the world were circumscribed by their knowing so little about it, did they conceive of winter as possible anywhere under very different conditions. They were tough as twine and hard as nails, and old M. Brassard, when he wielded his axe on the logs that built the hut I grumbled so about, must have slept in the open, I suppose. He was far more comfortable now. I daresay his tiny dwelling in St. Aniel village seemed to him as luxurious as any palace could seem to a king. Nellie was a native too, and so was Minou. Miss Ellbank, by dint of living most of her time in the open air and contenting herself, for the rest of it, with the vague shelter of a door through which a snow-bank might effect an entrance, was weather-beaten and, in her own fashion, joyous. Very funny she looked when she set off on her expedition to the stable at night. Things of a woolly kind, all of which, I think, had seen better days, wrapped her round. Over several pairs

of stockings she wore men's pull-on rubber boots; her head was bundled up in a shawl-hood, out of which her black eyes glittered in their curious way; and in her hand she had a lantern. I used to hold the back door a crack open (for there were no windows at the back of the shack) and watch her making her way past the wild-cherry bushes which had been a mass of bridal blossom at my first coming in June, and along the snowy path that led to Nellie's stable. A queer, unexpected figure she looked in that, as it seemed to me, outlandish scene. My green cone-hill, which kept the Western blasts off us and to which I had climbed daily in summer and autumn, to admire the peaceful view, was now covered in snow. It looked like a white peaked hat or one of those sugar-cones (only with bits chipped off it) which the more elderly among us remember as children. Joan, who always accompanied her mistress on this nightly visit, danced about in the snow, throwing it up, rolling in it. She too had taken precautions against the cold of Canada by changing her wire-haired coat for one of soft fur—fluffy and with a double supply of hair. They were all provided but me with some means of facing the rigours of life. My blood would do nothing but congeal within me, and when I closed the door-crack again and shut out the sight of Marion Ellbank, with bent head and glimmering lantern, making her slow way to her goal (and not disliking it) I fear that I felt towards a winter in the mountains nothing but what William Morris called a "sour distaste". I have often thought how lovely it will be to be free of these bodies of ours which, with all the joys they bring us, also debar us quite as much from delights of another kind. Floating over the St. Aniel hills or wandering in them as a disembodied spirit, how I should admire their loveliness in winter! Lovely they are then, if one's blood-stream is flowing freely; but the loveliness is shut out when the disabilities that flesh is heir to obtrude themselves between you and it. Yet I still have that picture of Miss Ellbank moving through the white landscape, such a *solitary* figure! And the flakes, so quiet, so persistent, so obstinate and so pure, covering her and all else with a mantle of white. For there were nights when it was not blowy but very, very still, and the whole world seemed resting while the heavens emptied themselves of something long held in reserve—as a poet, I suppose, at last pours out his verses.

I remember in particular one night when I was returning from over the way with a pail of water in each hand; for, as if it were not enough for the snow to edge itself in under our doors, back and front, there was now no water in the shack; the pipe leading to the one tap over the sink had frozen. I fancy none of us can realize, without the actual experience, what it is to be without water, without any water at all. Pé-père Brassard and his wife had of course lived habitually in the shack without it; our tap was one of

civilization's innovations and regarded as making the log-cabin into a "real" dwelling-place. I had on my previous visits felt it a hardship that I had to warm over the Quebec stove or the "summer-girl" any of this running water that we might want for washing—for our own ablutions, I mean. Now there was no water to warm.

The nearest—the only—tap was in the Brassard's cow-house. Miss Ellbank, realizing that she was more muscular than I and, when she thought of others at all, not really inconsiderate, would always have gone to fetch our supply herself, but I insisted on doing my share and we went turn by turn. On the occasion that for some reason sticks in my mind it was an iron-bound night. No snow fell; perhaps the cold was the more intense. It was dark long before supper-time and only the dim outline of the white country could be descried. I had been in the cow-house. With an empty pail in each hand I had crossed the road and the Brassard's yard, had gone round the farm-house to the cow-shed at the back of it and, walking down the passage left between the cow-stalls and the walls, had reached the tap and set the water flowing, first into one and then into the other of my pails. *That* scene too is clear in my memory. The cattle, shut off from the outer world all winter long, had turned Quietists, I suppose. They ate the scanty provender that was given them (for they were "dried off" for the winter and therefore were only thought worthy of just enough rations to keep them alive) and once they had eaten it—and eaten it again, and yet again—how did they pass their time? As I went past them, even I, who am afraid of cattle, felt no awe of them. They stood there, warming and scenting the air round them with their breath. In the glimmer of light cast by the lantern that hung by the tap I dimly saw them, nice creatures, sharing the world with me, and then, with my pails full, I left them and began my journey home again.

But what I really had in my mind when I said that I remembered one of those nights particularly was a moment when, thus laden, I was returning to the shack. I was stiff, perishing with cold, as we say; I was yearning for even the warmth of the black stove. Yet the pails were so heavy for me that I was obliged to put them down for an instant and stand breathlessly in the Grande Route du Roi. *How* cold it was! Standing there, miserable in my body, longing for the warmth of my city flat, gazing out into the black night set in its white environment, and in frank rebellion against it all, I suddenly, to my own amazement, realized that, side by side with the rebel within me, there was something else that did not indeed *like* it but wished to be akin to it. Remember that these were the years of the Great War. Out of that turmoil of echoing misery (for though we were far from the scene of conflict, the facts of death and destruction were brought home to Canadian women in the cities

of the Dominion) one came to these hills where the echoes were no longer heard. These *habitants* hardly knew that a war was going on. They were not French; they were Canadian. Their fight was with the earth—an unending one; and they had no time to think of anything else. It was peaceful to be at St. Aniel in those dreadful years; one could forget. But that was not the only thing I felt in the middle of that frost-bound road. There was also a sense of —I do not know *what* it was—satisfaction, perhaps, at having got back to something that could not be controverted. It was a queer feeling that came over me that night, as if I hated being there and wanted to be away and yet as if something or other within me had at last found its way home. I took up my pails again, got back to the house, lifted the latch of the heavy door, went in and placed my pails beside the sink. If they had been full of the golden sovereigns that the older among us also remember using as current coin, they could not have seemed more precious. This time I had brought "something" home. But two days later I went "home"—back to my city flat, I mean, and all that it stood and stands for; and thankful I was to be there.

3

What a queer thing a modern businesswoman's life is! She is, more often than not, divided from nearly everything that was originally thought to constitute a woman's lot. If she is married and works, she is divorced from her house (which at one time fitted her as his shell fits a snail): if, as is too frequently the case today, she is obliged to be the bread-winner for her family—for in these abnormal times women can often enough find work more easily than men—she is divided from more than her house: she is separated from what was once regarded as almost identical with herself, her children. If she has a lover, she cannot live with him (except in the special sense in which that phrase is used), and if she is a spinster and a virgin and has no connection with man or child, she runs the risk of desiccation. It is very difficult for a woman divorced from her "rights" to—what shall I call it?—remain unspoilt.

These remarks may not seem to have any connection with the episode I have just described of my fetching the water from the cow-house on that iron night but the connection is there. At that moment, doing unaccustomed work, using muscles that had long lain idle and now turned very rustily in their sockets, I was, quite definitely, physically in revolt. I did detest the shack life and all its implications, and as I stood there on that austere earth, under that cold sky, I felt that life was too hard. Yet at the self-same moment something within me felt at one with my surroundings. This thing declared: "It is not bad. It may be hard, but there is more *in* this life than in the

feverish existence you, not hanker after, but half desire or at any rate lead." It was as if something in me had gone back to primitive conditions under which "I" would have done these tasks as a matter of course, and the scaffolding of civilized life—to term it so—that I had erected round about me fell away and was no longer there. We do not often reach stark life, I imagine, and if we do, we remember the moment of reaching it, as I remember this one. It is connected with the warmth inside the shack, and the drawn curtains, and Miss Ellbank's dark head bent over her book. She read like a child, intently, laughing out loud now and then, wholly engrossed. I used to speak to her sometimes when she was reading and she would make no answer; she was buried in her printed page. No "intellectual" reads like that, and it is a pity.

The impression which that winter land made upon me was not exactly that it was asleep (I have seen English country that seemed to me asleep in winter) but that it, with all that it contained, was sunk in something more profound than sleep. I do not know what name to give it: "catalepsy" would be too strong a word, and one could not say that the earth was in a trance either. It was perhaps the condition that animals fall into when they hibernate. How do we know what a bear feels when he passes the winter, subsisting on his own tissues? We don't know, and never can know. But if I may judge by my own sleep, and the enormous variations in its quality, ranging from a doze or nap, the merest closing of an eyelid, to an unconsciousness of myself so profound that I cannot even guess what my dreaming-self has been doing, the bear must be very fast asleep indeed. I would say that he was dead to the world and that his revival in spring-time might be called a resurrection. *That* is how the Canadian earth, or the earth of the Province of Quebec, appears to me in winter. It looks as if it had withdrawn itself to an infinite distance. The Canadian soil is always "remote" to the immigrant eye, but it never seems so aloof, so utterly detached from participation in the life of man as in winter. There it is, wide, desolate, austere and beautiful. Never did the hills surrounding St. Aniel look more imperial than on this winter visit of mine, and never did it seem less likely that our help would come from them. One stood alone in that chill universe, as I stood that night on the King's Great Road. One *feared* the majesty of God, and in a sense one felt one's nearness to His might by reason of that very loneliness. Sometimes in town the wind would come lashing at the window of my flat. It whistled with a shrillness I have never heard except in Canada. I would shiver, think of St. Aniel, and draw nearer to the radiator of my city flat. It was good not to be exposed to the rigours of the night.

The Brassards and their neighbours up and down the road and the St. Anielites in the village street behaved very much as the bear does in the "home" he makes for himself in the winter. They "hibernated". It is very difficult, I think, to give any idea of the stillness of a Canadian winter on the land. It is as if the people not only ceased doing things but as if they ceased throwing thoughts into the air. The air-currents seem to have stopped flowing. The bear is in his den, slumbering deeply, far below the region where *his* ideas take shape. The brisk squirrel is in a retirement which it only breaks in order to reach for its larder and select one of the morsels it so providently stored there in summer-time; and the ground-hog or whistler, "siffleur" as the French-Canadians call it—so much more charming than its name—awaits in sleep the traditional moment in February when it will come out of its hole to observe how the sun treats its shadow, and then, if weather omens prove unpropitious, go back to finish its sleep. The birds have migrated. When the first "robin"—big, red-breasted thrush, as it is—comes back and you have bowed three times to the first sound of his note, it will be spring-time again. Meanwhile in the Brassard household the children went to school, Marie Brassard worked her loom, cooked and swept, *was*, in a curious way, for one could not imagine the house without her. Her husband came and went, quietly occupied with his winter jobs. And in the cow-house the cattle ruminated, ate, ruminated again, stood waiting for the spring. One has to go to a place like that to mark the contrast of the seasons. It is the difference between radiant blue and black. Amazing.

It was shortly after I got back from this winter visit that I received a telegram from Marion Ellbank asking me to send a wreath—"it didn't matter what it cost". Little Gervais, the merry one of the Brassard children and his mother's favourite, was dead. He had been seized by meningitis and in a few days was off this earth. I thought of the wind-blown cemetery far up the hilly road, so bleak, so desolate, so lonely-looking. We English, I suppose, have all at some time or other, in coming across one of our kindly country churchyards, had the feeling: "How pleasant it would be to lie here! There, under that yew-tree." I remember having it very strongly at one time when I went daily to look at a rounded may-tree, white, as if snow had fallen on it, with its fragrant blossom. It was quite round and every branch was loaded, and it stood up bravely on its firm healthy trunk. It was like a bridal bouquet, and while one looked at it death had no terrors. The St. Aniel cemetery was without trees: it had been "cleared" too energetically of everything, and the poor little graves (not many of them, for it had been an uncleared piece of hilly ground when Pé-père Brassard came up to found a settlement) were marked, as they clustered here and there, by artificial floral "tributes", stiff

and metallic, such as one sees in Old France, uglier than you would think the human mind could devise and touching in their ugliness. Sometimes in our drives with Nellie we passed this graveyard. In going up the King's Road, past the Goyette dwelling and then past the much larger and more ambitious mansion which, it was rumoured, housed a foreign lady who had broken her nun's vows somewhere and fled overseas to end her days as a suspect among the devout St. Anielites—past these signs of human habitation and then past a long stretch of what I can only call "nothing", a waste, one came to this monument of man's mortality. If I like some churchyards, I did not like this one, and when we were driving past it I always averted my eyes and looked the other way. Now Gervais was to be buried there: but for two or three tiny Brassards whose term of existence might be counted by days and not by months or years, he would inaugurate the Brassard "plot". The same impulsive vehemence, the same total incapacity to harbour more than one idea at a time, that had made Miss Ellbank send Josaphat so peremptorily to his doom, now urged her in the other direction. As I bought and paid for her wreath, I foresaw for her a prolonged diet of cheap sardines and butterless bread and strong tea as the retrospective warrant for this extravagance. There was no way of cheating Marion Ellbank; she insisted that the bill should be sent to her by the florist. She was a generous soul, and a scrupulous soul when she remembered; I would have my money back and neither Joan nor Nellie would be docked of their rations. The expense of the wreath would fall on her alone. I was sympathetic; my heart was with Marie Brassard; I understood and loved this impulse of pure, unadulterated generosity (such a nice virtue!), and yet I grudged the money that Marion Ellbank could so ill afford to pay for the lilies which—with reluctance, really—I sent off to her. In fact I re-enacted, with variations, of course, a scene that we are told took place some two thousand years ago, and thought the money might have been better kept and spent on provisions at the Irish-Canadian General Store down by the station, where Miss Ellbank kept a running bill. Doubtless I was wrong, and doubtless if the same series of events were to repeat itself, I should be wrong again. I did send off these flowers with the deepest reluctance. Here, surely, is another proof, or should I say another indication, that when we have got rid of our bodies we shall find it much easier to be "good". Little Gervais's body would lie in the "charnier," the refuge where those who die in winter must await burial. When spring came and the frost was out of the ground he could be interred. The baby on the way would have to take his place in Marie Brassard's heart.

There is no doubt that Marion Ellbank's telegram set me thinking, more than I had ever done before, not only of the Brassards but of the St. Aniel life in general. We all know these gradations of interest in things and places and people. Some little, apparently insignificant event takes place, someone makes what seems to be a quite trivial remark, and the whole scale of our feeling is changed. Probably what seems trivial to the conscious is often of the highest importance to the unconscious self. In any case, interest, sympathy and intimacy assuredly progress at their own rate, according as they feed on—something that no one amongst us can put a name to.

The wreath I had sent was hopelessly out of keeping with the environment it was bound for (not but what we often like what is out of keeping with our surroundings) and doubtless many of the tiny articles that I was gradually getting together for "Joseph" (for that was to be the name of the baby if it was a boy) were equally unsuitable for a small citizen of the mountains of Quebec. But I justified myself by counter-balancing every dainty thing I bought with something thoroughly solid and serviceable. The things were pretty, and I often took them out in the evening and stood looking at them and smiled.

I have said that Marie Brassard in her maiden days had been an inhabitant of St. Gervais, which was a big village, almost but not quite a town; and very uninviting it always appeared to me when I passed through it. It was in that in-between state which is not primitive and certainly not sophisticated; you felt that nothing would ever happen there that you would like to happen, that everything to do with humanity there was written in the middle bourgeois register, and that nothing but the climate touched extremes. When St. Gervais was not deep in mud, it was deep in winter snow or summer dust; and its long street had that terribly slovenly appearance which wooden houses so easily generate. I never passed it on the level crossing on my way to St. Aniel without giving thanks that I did not need to live there. The town is the town and the country the country, but one moulders in such places as St. Gervais.

Naturally this was not Marie Brassard's point of view. She regarded herself as a townswoman and even, in the sweetest, nicest way, as an exile. She had "known better things", and she wanted not to forget them but to pass on all that she could of them to her children. It was only when you recognized these facts and this part of her nature that you could understand her for what she was. Her very name belonged to the town—Marie and not the older Maria, by which her husband would often call her. "Albert" had been a true flight from convention: she had called her first-born by a "real"

name, not after his grandfather "Josaphat", and her husband she almost always spoke of as "Joseph", though he inherited his father's name. Now her baby, if it proved to be a boy, was to be, spuriously, called after its grandfather and father. Madame Brassard, like many gentle people, had an extreme inflexibility. She looked upon St. Gervais as superior to St. Aniel, and she hoped, perhaps, rather than expected that her husband would take the same view. Lots of things in her house hinted at this attitude of mind—her cooking, her care of Jeanne's ringlets, her anxiety that Albert should become master of his sums. What were M. Brassard's sentiments on the subject? I don't know how far they were unconscious, but I think they were pretty well summed up in a perhaps slightly regretful smile, not untinged with pride, when St. Gervais came into the conversation. He took his Marie all for granted in the place he kept for her in his heart. Mé-mère, singularly clear-sighted, as mothers-in-law often are, might say this and that, but Joseph, the best of sons, the youngest of twelve, and not at all unintelligent, while capturing the fact that his mother perhaps was sometimes right, still stuck by his Maria. He had taken her into a bit of himself, yes, even if he was unconscious of the fact; she was growing out of him now, as a limb grows from a tree, and nothing she did could be wrong. They were *married*. Mé-mère could call the new baby Josaphat if she liked, but his father knew that his name was Joseph.

As I made my tour of the city stores to get my little "collection" (as Paris dress-making houses say) for Joseph, after my return from that muffled winter visit to the shack, I thought of these things and of the country that Joseph was coming into, a country muffled in snow, and silent, with the covering growing deeper and deeper: that is what Canada is in winter. How can one suggest that Northern winter softness, so intimately associated with and yet, to our thinking selves, so alien, so wholly divorced from the fierce, gripping cold and blasts of winter? It is curious how the physical characteristics of Quebec obtrude themselves in any consideration of its inhabitants. In England one can think of the English without consciously taking its climate into account at all, but in Canada life seems conditioned by that overbearing climate with its violent contrasts: the ice, the snow, the bitter, piercing cold of winter; the spongy, slushy, knee-deep mud of spring; the deep, dry dust of blazing summer; and the singing autumn landscape, in which every leaf is a new note in a graded symphony that is almost sound. The seasons all have beauty but it is a beauty that insists on notice. You cannot overlook any physical characteristic of the country, and the people like the Brassards and the Goyettes, the Bonenfants, the Allards and the rest, do not so much blend with the essentials of what they live amongst (as the

people of the older countries seem to me to do) as stand out not exactly in rebellion but in bold relief against a background of the difficulties with which nature confronts them—a background that can never for a moment become *chiaroscuro*. It and they combine to form the picture, as in an ill-assorted marriage two people of incompatible temperaments may yet "love" and wish to be together. I always see Canada against these climatic conditions and dominating landscapes, not as I see, say, the French of France, worked, if one may put it so, by long, long usage into the conditions among which they live, so that, as in the ill-assorted marriage, refined at last to affectionate and almost unconscious forbearance, one hardly notices the background against which the people are silhouetted. It all "works in". If this is ever to happen in Canada, it has not happened yet. And that fact, I think, makes to a great extent the interest and curious, half-antagonistic fascination that this vast and lonely country exercises over its immigrants.

There is nothing nicer in this life than making a "collection" which you know someone will take pleasure in when you give it away. It seemed odd to look round at the simple elegancies of my flat, my "apartment", as such places are called in Canada, to see the one old Chinese vase remaining to me from a "collection" of another kind than Joseph's, to observe with pleasure, mingled with amusement, the very "modern" Poiret curtains that shaded the windows out of which I watched the sea-going craft making for "home". How different from the shack! The Persian rug on my floor was represented there by the *catalogne*, the home-woven strips from Marie Brassard's loom. The audacious Poiret curtains—as audacious as the magenta roses striking up out of the St. Aniel soil and with something of their colouring too—how far from anything that the art of Canada ever could devise! (Canada's art, when it comes, will be Canada's own, and not an importation from either Europe or the East.) Yes, I would look at these possessions of mine, and that curious feeling which is sometimes borne in upon us, of two apparently quite disparate things fusing and becoming one within us, would come over me.

It was at this time, then, after that third visit to the shack during which I had been so *very* uncomfortable that I seemed to feel the tendrils of the life there clinging to, or rather perhaps closing round my heart. I have spoken of the gradations in the progress of our affections, and all of us who have been in love will remember the moment when, for no reason apparently, our conscious self, startled, says suddenly to us: "But you are in love. This is *love*". *Mutatis mutandis* it is the same with friendship or with your feeling for a place or a house or a country. During this brief period when I thought of the wind-blown churchyard and little Gervais's spirit no longer

imprisoned there, and of Joseph steadily making his way to where we all are and where his brother so lately was—when I thought of the shack hidden in snow and Joan emerging from it with her resonant bark, and of the coming of spring, there were moments when my flat seemed merely too sophisticated and when the one thing in it that had any affinity with the life at St. Aniel—but I cannot explain this—was my Chinese vase, all fawn and grey-green like the hides of the moose and the stirring life of the trees, and with gleaming points of white on it that made me think of the narrow shafts of the first spring sunlight striking on the ice and snow. This will sound very fanciful but all connection between our conscious and unconscious selves is at once fanciful and entirely prosaic. It is only when the two meet that we "know our mind", as the saying is, and the pity is that they meet so seldom. I wanted St. Aniel *and* my flat, as usual, at these moments, but I wanted St. Aniel more. Queer how we often resist the things we want, just as we resist falling in love. We only really fall in love because we have to. Why?

5

The question I have just asked is a foolish one, the answer being so plain. We resist falling in love because the rational part of us admonishes us that falling into love is falling into trouble; and a good solid part of me resisted to the end the power of attraction that St. Aniel had for me, because it didn't like being made uncomfortable there. We can answer a great many of the questions we ask ourselves *if we want to*. Also, of course, if you fall head over ears, as we say, into love, your hesitations are silenced, because the rational part of you is under water. When it comes up again later (and we all have to come up out of water unless we drown) they return with it, and we are lucky if we do not find that they bring regrets along with them. I never fell head over ears in love with St. Aniel. I had moments of the greatest delight up there among the hills—as on one day when Nellie was pulling us reluctantly along and we found ourselves in an open piece of ground where the thaw had come and the bound ice of the winter had given way to trickling streams, and the space was alive with flowers, yellow and violet-blue wild irises, and how lovely it looked! But all the time I was at St. Aniel, whenever I was not swept away, as at such a moment, the rational part of me kept on reiterating with monotony and persistence:—"It *isn't* nice up here." It further went on to say: "These people opposite are dirty, or at least they are unwashed—as unwashed as the *sapins* on the hill behind their farm. More unwashed, indeed, for those fir trees are not shielded from the weather by home-spuns that may last for twenty years with only the most occasional excursion to the wash-tub all that time."

"I find none of the comforts of civilization up here," something in me would cry out at this point. "Then," something else would whisper to me, "why don't you go home?" But when I did go home, at once the shack would resume the rainbow colours of the past. I would see the irises in that solitary piece of marshland standing out against the grey, resisting rocks, under the cerulean sky of the Canadian spring, and would hear the sound of the trickling, gushing water. And yet still quite a big piece of me preferred an electric oven and a large white frigidaire to that. How odd!

It must have been shortly before Easter that I went back for my fourth visit to the shack. Much of the winter discomfort still remained. The water-pipe was still, though now only spasmodically, in the grip of frost; but somehow moods have a great deal to do in creating the atmosphere of our own individual world, and on this occasion I didn't mind—so much!—fetching the water from the cow-house. I would even at times set off joyfully, swinging my pails in my hand as I went, and carrying them full, without rancour, as I came back to the shack. I think rancour against the world is one of the worst things you can feel. It used to be called "Weltschmerz" but that was in the Romantic days and far too good a name for it.

I don't know that I ever appreciated spring in Canada until this year. I had always been in town before, and though spring is beautiful in Canadian cities, cities everywhere cannot but stultify the special beauty I am thinking of. On the roads of St. Aniel were hillocks and valleys of mud that reduced to insignificance the mere inch-deep slush and mud that I had left behind me in town. Nellie's expressive countenance showed with clarity and accuracy what was going on in her mind when she was asked to take us for a ride along the King's Great Road. She was not so much sullen as scornful. "Fools!" she seemed to say, "why not stay at home and be comfortable when you can?"

But what a diaphanous air! What shining iridescence if you lifted your eyes from the mud and still-melting snow and ice and regarded the upper atmosphere and, beyond that, the heavens! What becomes an excess of clearness in the later months, divesting the world of mystery (as if it were demanding its "rights") is in the earlier season a divine unfolding. The trees, on the occasion of this drive, seemed if not human, yet certainly and determinedly alive—with a life which was not ours but which expanded side by side with ours. I suppose it is the prolonged torpor of the Canadian winter that makes us so alive to all the signs of spring. As we got back to the shack, there was a lamb stumbling about the Brassard's yard: it was a solitary lamb

and amidst the mud and melting débris of winter it was certainly not in a choice environment, but I remember how the sight of it—burst upon me, I may say. It seemed to me that I had never seen a lamb before; and the fact that this was rather a sad lamb made no difference. A great deal has to be taken from you and you have to be left for a while in the outer darkness, I fancy, before you can have the feeling of beginning again.

And inside the farm something had begun "again". Joseph. He was here. He had made his perilous voyage successfully, and he and the ship that carried him had come safe to shore.

How well I remember the visit I promptly paid to Marie Brassard and her new son! She had moved, for her delivery, down to a small room just behind the kitchen, and her bed, with its head to the wall, was in the narrow place between the hinge of the door opening on the kitchen, and a window that looked on the cow-house from which we fetched the water. She lay in bed, very quiet. Mothers, I think, when they are "new", are apt to look pretty, and Madame Brassard looked very pretty indeed. She was still pale—Joseph was hardly forty-eight hours old—and the strain of constantly bearing children was telling on her. The delivery too had been a difficult one. But as she lay there, quite unoccupied for once, her dark hair smoothed off her face, which was suffused with a grave sedateness that easily changed into serenity and contentment, she made one think of a Madonna more than ever. She was *right*. The accessories were right too. Mé-mère, who prevaded the scene, had scrubbed and polished everything in sight. She looked exactly the right kind of grandmother for a baby. It was she who came forward and, with an air of triumph, quietly pulled back with her knotty old hands the home-made sheets and blankets that covered the treasure. There he was, the new baby. (And is anything in this world so entirely, so amazingly and miraculously new as a new-born baby?) He had spent his time well in his security. He was not a pretty baby; indeed he looked like a little gnome, very solid and brown and with a suggestion of independence and of scorn for all humanity—except his mother who, of course, was necessary to him.

He was solid, as I have said—solid, that is, as far as he went. The architectural part of him had been well executed; he had taken time and evidently knew his business. I called Joseph, to myself, a thoroughly workmanlike performance.

But what an expression in his mother's face as she looked down on him! And what an expression, in another key, yet also in accord with the scene, in the face of the old grandmother who surveyed what was, in a sense, her work too! He lay there, at first asleep, a tiny brown monkey-boy with the

funniest thatch of dark-brown, silk-fine hair. Then, as we looked, he stirred, moved—he was *alive*!—and finally, breathing hard, puckering up his mouth and whimpering a little, he began to search with his hands. With that imperial gesture which every woman has it in her to make, but which does not in every woman come to birth, Maria Brassard uncovered her breast and drew her son to her. He sucked, and Mé-mère pulled the bed-clothes up again and covered the pair.

I suppose it was this scene, and the lamb in the foreyard, and the trees with the sap rising in them in spite of themselves, as we might say, that fixed this spring visit of mine to St. Aniel in my heart. You could say all sorts of things *against* that way of life. The lamb might, for all I know, be destined for the butcher, many of those hopeful trees were marked for the axe; it was incontrovertible that Joseph would have been well advised, from the aesthetic point of view, to take after his mother, who was beautiful, rather than his father, who was short and sturdy and had no pretensions to "looks". Still, they were there, all these things. I was happy on that visit. No one was not happy except—I think, transitorily—little Jeanne who wept and said, "I *knew* it would be a boy and I *wanted* a girl." (What she really said was:—"Je savais ben qu'ils m'enverraient un p'tit garçon; moé, je voulais avoir une p'tite fille.") I do not imagine that she can have adopted this attitude of mind from the nuns!

IV

1

It was on this spring visit, I think, that I began to make acquaintance with Jeanne's nuns. I may have mentioned how I often passed their convent and saw them—three or four or perhaps five or six of them—gardening in the fine weather, with their habits kilted up under great aprons, much as our mothers of a now distant past used to kilt up their voluminous skirts with an elastic circlet which they fastened with a safety-hook round their hips. Very funny they must have looked as they took the air, thus bunched up, and avoided the mud. In those days ladies might perhaps show ankles, but not legs, and the nuns held even more strictly to that rule. Voluminously fenced round in this fashion they bent over their flower-beds, for the garden in front of the Convent had nothing in it but flowers. Probably the vegetable garden and the herb-patch were to the back, but these I never saw. Under the trees and in the open spaces between the trees where the flower-beds were, the nuns came and went. As they bent over their work they had the unmistakable air of flower-lovers: one felt that even beneath the ground the plants would know that someone up above was affectionately interested in them and, in response to the affection as much as to the work, would come and shed their charm and perfume on the world. I always liked to turn the corner into the village street, for I always hoped I might see that little group of women, indistinguishable from one another in the distance, all grey and white, all busy, all bent over the earth and absorbed in it. I can't explain the feeling it gave me—of peace, of rest, of apartness and, if I may stretch the word a little from the meaning we usually attach to it, of joy.

What a queer life, to our way of thinking, for a whole band of women under that convent roof! They were grey, as our hens were white, and they too provided me with an aesthetic pleasure, naturally of quite a different quality from that provided by the hens and yet analogous to it. I loved to see them; and one bit of me wished that it could know them, not *better* perhaps, but differently, and could share their life. (This distinguished my pleasure in them from that which I took in the hens, for however lovely I might think the snowy sweep the latter made as they crossed their field in a battalion, I never wished to be a hen or to share the life of what Milton calls tame villatic fowl.)

It somehow gave me a new view of the nuns when I saw them one day pass the shack and go up the road with a flock of their pupils, little girls who, released in the magical spring sunshine, kept together, separated, ran hither and thither and came together again like the companies of swifts that you see tumbling and soaring in the air from the pure joy of living. Two nuns accompanied them, clad in their charming grey habit and with head-gear that flapped and generally relaxed itself in the spring wind. I have said, I think, that these Sisters came from France, and I suppose their habit was adapted to the ways of France, but beyond a doubt it was conspicuously ill-adapted to St. Aniel, and it would hardly have been more surprising to see a landscape of Cezanne's hanging above the Brassard's stove than it was to see the Sisters of Wisdom making their laborious way uphill along the Grande Route du Roi. Their headdress flapped, their habits, ample in length and breadth, had to be gathered into their bare hands, and the "mules" that they wore upon their feet, now covered by rubbers and going clip-clop through the mud, were displayed to view. They were out with their pupils, in search of dandelion leaves as vegetables for their dinner. This gave the little girls, in their convent suits of black, an excuse for dispersing and chattering like starlings, while the two good Sisters walked side by side in the dirty road with ample smiling faces.

I find it, as usual, impossible to give any idea of the charm of this picture. It was a picture that could not have been composed in any other environment but that in which it presented itself to me. It was partly, of course, the incongruity of the scene that made it so unforgettable. The nuns were suited to France and not to St. Aniel, and yet their very unsuitability to their surroundings gave me a feeling that was half incredulity and half delight, as if an angel from the skies had suddenly made his appearance in our midst. There they were, these two surprising figures in the Canadian sunshine of spring; they conducted themselves in the ordinary fashion, just as the angel might have done, while their pupils disported themselves like little animals in training, for as they ran and scattered and came together again, they might have been rabbits, just as well as swifts or starlings; and one knew too, at the back of one's mind, as one looked at them, that had they stopped and knocked at the door of any farm-house in the neighbourhood, their visit would have been regarded as a privilege and all that the farm contained would have been at their disposal. The trees stood erect as I watched the children go up the road; here and there among the melting snows there were patches of green upon which they fell with cries of joy. That air is so crystalline that any sound comes travelling down it as clear as a bell. What matter the mud? When all is said, it would look well in

the picture that an artist would paint; and do we any of us know exactly *what* is taking place in such an atmosphere of universal good-will? No, the good Sisters did not look out of place after all. I made a mistake.

I have always felt an interest in the life of a nun. Next to the rôle of beloved mistress or happy wife and mother, it has always seemed to me the woman's life that is best worth considering—provided of course that the woman has a "vocation" for it, and that provision applies equally to the prospective mistress or wife. There is always to me something mysterious in the life of a nun, a Sister in a Convent, when one thinks of it as going on side by side with the lives of the rest of us ordinary women in the world. "What do they think about, these nuns?" I have often asked myself as I sat opposite to one of them perhaps in a street-car. It is impossible—I judge by my own thoughts—that they can be always on the topmost pinnacle of their devotion; they must come down. And what do they think about then? Hair-shirts and scourgings become credible enough when you consider their lives from that point of view. It seemed to me, in spite of strong discouragement from Marion Ellbank who disapproved of "Catholics" on principle, that St. Aniel might offer me a chance of coming nearer to their way of thought, and I determined to visit the Convent in the village street.

In order to do this I had to invent what is sometimes called a pious lie, which I take to be a lie with no harm in it. I may say, however, that when I faced the blue eyes of the Mother of the Nuns, I regretted this lie and would rather not have told it—it was merely the fabrication of an imaginary child whose mother might wish her to become a pupil at the Convent—but I couldn't have got in without it. And when I did get in, I liked what I saw—everything about the Convent and the nuns too. A bit of me felt at home there, almost as if it had *got home*. I never felt that way about the shack.

The inside of the Convent I found as clean and shining as insides of convents always, I fancy, are. What a difference between that cleanliness attained by bended knee and strong and practised hand and the scientific cleanliness induced mainly by the aid of some machine or other! This House was not old: nothing is "old" in Canada, except Nature. But the nuns had been there for a good many years: the plants in the garden had had time to grow and to present an early-middle-aged appearance against their primeval background; and the inside of the place had an atmosphere of use and wont about it. Nothing had the self-consciousness of what is "new". Perhaps the nuns had brought something with them from France: I do not mean anything that one could touch and handle, no, but together with the faith that sustained them and fed their lives from day to day they may have carried

with them from that old Gaul which was divided into three parts to this new Canada, which is roughly divided into five, something that has a life of its own and keeps its essential character under all circumstances, as a transplanted vine may change in a new soil and produce a new wine and yet all the time remains a vine.

When the Mother of this Religious House came to me where I sat waiting in the shining parlour and I rose to greet her, I felt, as I have already said, ashamed of the untruth that had brought me into her presence. Still, it was too late—or I thought it was, but was it?—to retract, and I could only frame a resolution inside myself that I would find somewhere a real child, a live paying pupil, who could take the place of a fictitious one, whose conception and birth I now regretted. The atmosphere of that place was immune to lies. The parlour was small and bare, floors stained and slippery with polish, and the white walls naked except for some reproduction (I cannot say of what—Christ, perhaps, carrying his cross); through the window the hills that surrounded St. Aniel could be seen; and immediately before us, for we were at the back of the House, was, I think, the vegetable garden I have referred to before. The Mother Superior had those excellent manners which come, partially at any rate, from the sense of a complete remoteness from the world. She was a personable, if not absolutely a handsome, woman. She held herself upright and from the citadel of her belief looked down at me. I have never forgotten her. She had that round or rounded face one often sees in France. Her hair had doubtless been brown and, I should say, abundant. Her eyes were blue and of a steely nature, so that while you could not penetrate behind them, they seemed to pierce into you. Her step was firm, her cheeks rosy; she had that self-contained yet ample air that has become so rare in our world. I *knew* she managed her Convent well, without sentiment and with daily, constant, unremitting capability. She seemed, as she stood there in an environment so foreign and yet in a way so fitting to her capacities, to be both a prolongation of what had been and a premonition of what is to be—a present link between all those able, excellently organizing Lady Abbesses of the past and whatever future offices of administration women of this type may at once serve and govern and adorn.

I have dwelt on this woman because she was such a queer phenomenon in the wilds of which St. Aniel was only a tiny corner. But was she any odder than Marion Ellbank or myself? I don't know. Miss Ellbank represented an old layer of English life. I represented heaven knows what—a mixture anyway that never could be brewed among those mountains. This Mother Superior represented not only France but a Faith, which also, I think,

could never have been evolved spontaneously from these hills. She *was* something as she stood there, a symbol that it will be impossible, I imagine, to uproot from this earth, no matter what efforts are made to do so.

2

I find—and greatly to my own surprise—that in describing the effect made upon me by the Mother of the Convent I have really reached the culminating point of my experiences at St. Aniel. Funny! But I never thoroughly realized until now that the whole of St. Aniel was contained in what that Convent, with the great Church on one side of it and the priest's house on the other, stood for—as if it were a piece of very delicate machinery enclosed in a box and sending its energy abroad. Nor was this a question of denomination or even of belief. It was something deeper than that—something that, in spite of every appearance to the contrary, did away with distinctions and brought home to us that we were all children together under that blue sky, essentially helpless, yet interdependent and capable of mercy to one another if only we tried to be merciful. I cannot at all put into words what I felt then and feel now about the box that held in control the lives of those who dwelt among those hills. But they were secure. We all, I suppose, only see the truth about anything in a flash, and then the vision is withdrawn. I see that woman now, so poised and full of dignity. It seemed to me that she carried the tradition of centuries on her strong and ample shoulders and that she was ready to hand it on when the time came. She was curiously associated in my mind with the Marie Brassard who lay in the iron bedstead under the window with little Joseph in her arms. The two women seemed symbols of their sex, each in place, each doing her duty in her own way, both bound for the same goal, and both content. I do not think I have ever had quite the same feeling anywhere else.

If I never became intimate with any particular nun, which would of course have been impossible, I grew to have a very neighbourly feeling for the Convent. It was so simple, so clean: it was ordered, and yet the Sisters did not seem to be under any constraint. They did not, I think—and I judge by the expression of their faces—lead stunted lives. Doubtless they thought of France: all immigrants think of their Motherland and they all too have a peculiar fellow-feeling for one another, approximating perhaps to what women, irrespective of "liking", feel for one another. These nuns and I were immigrants; we recognized the fact, as Marion Ellbank and I and Joan too recognized it. I wonder if birds in their migrations, meeting their compatriots as distinct from the citizen birds of the land they come to, do not feel something of the same thing. I should not be surprised if they do.

This recognition of our fellowship with others, whatever the differences, gives us a feeling that we are all bound for home, and I regard it as perhaps the supreme gift bestowed on us by emigration.

I went once to the annual breaking-up ceremony at the Convent and listened to the classic periods of Racine and the lovely Fables of La Fontaine being recited by the prize boarders and one or two of the more talented farm or village children, while the clear air of Canada lighted the view I sat looking at through the window. What kind of Fable would La Fontaine have written about the dear little Canadian marmot, I thought; and what material would Racine have found in Madame Goyette up the road and Monsieur Bonenfant and his wife and daughter of the post-office in the village. Of Canada and its lights and shades of climate, its hills and lakes and trees and animals, it is easy to make a background, and a lovely one at that. But out of that background a new art must emerge unlike what I sat listening to that morning at the Convent. I have no idea what this art will be but I can feel there is something there which someone will some day draw out. I always remember that funny morning with pleasure, though Marion Ellbank virtually refused, by her irresponsive silence, to hear anything about it when I got home and we were sitting together at our mid-day meal. I don't know why. She was always in sympathy with the Brassards. She shared their life in a way I never managed to do. But she didn't want to hear about the nuns. Perhaps I didn't tell the story properly or perhaps she felt I shouldn't have been there at all. These changes of key between two human creatures are very subtle. I have said that she and I were not written originally in the same key. Occasionally we modulated into harmony for a moment and then drifted into opposing keys again. Our relation was like some of our "modern" music—disturbing; and no melody ever grew out of our being together.

While I am on the Convent side of the St. Aniel life I would like to relate another incident that comes into my mind. It will suggest perhaps both how sequestered the life of those hill people is and how it rests upon an ordered discipline.

One day Marion Ellbank and I were driving home again after a morning of "messages", as they are called in Scotland. We had been shopping down at the Irish-Canadian store at the station for the general needs of the shack personnel—woman and beast and bird—and it was the last of these that called for the heaviest expenses. What those white hens ate! We had also been to the Bank.

On our way back, already in sight of the steep bit of hill that led to the shack and the farm opposite, we stopped at the Bonenfants, the post-office. It was on such occasions as this, when one of the rare cheques had come from the one remaining aunt she had in England, that poor dear Marion Ellbank replenished her stores in every direction; and she loved doing this, for by nature she was a spendthrift. I daresay it was in her family to be so. At any rate we are all born with a certain attitude to money, and her attitude was to spend it. Cash slipped through her fingers as if it were liquid, and if she had had thousands, she would still have been impecunious. She was thoroughly generous but she was extravagant too.

We dismounted and went into the post-office and had only been there for a moment or two when she remembered that she had left her purse-bag in the buggy. She ran out to get it. It was gone.

We drove gravely home and I need hardly say that our lunch was spoiled. There was in that purse all that remained of the cheque she had cashed at the bank. What to do?

Later on in the day, I think it was in the evening, we went across the road, and there M. Brassard listened to what Miss Ellbank told him. She was excited and revengeful. We all know how an atmosphere, like an orchestra under the hand of a conductor, responds to moods, and the air in the simple Brassard kitchen vibrated, as it seemed, with atoms in active conflict, while Marion Ellbank told her tale. What a passionate woman she was! The moment she finished speaking, M. Brassard without the slightest hesitation said: "Consult the priest." (Madame Brassard and the children, usually participators in any family conclave, had, as soon as Marion Ellbank began her tale, withdrawn themselves, as cattle or sheep withdraw themselves from a storm under the shelter of a tree. This was a matter for the Master of the House.) With his "Go to the priest! Consult Monseigneur!", M. Brassard had said his say, and I remember well the assurance in his voice as, saying good-night to us, he added: "He will give you back your property." There was no recrimination here, no malediction on the thief. I doubt if the Brassards discussed or even spoke of the matter when we were gone. He had not so much given us his advice as told us what to do. So, I imagine, might a M. Brassard of ancient Greece have directed us to the oracle. I myself do not know anyone among my friends who, if I applied to him or her in my trouble, could answer me like that. I think it may have been at this moment that I realized that the St. Aniel life had a background.

When we went to the priest's house next day and informed the excellent, middle-aged, hard-working woman who opened the door to us that we had

come to ask Monseigneur's help and advice, she at once showed us into a small clean room, as clean as the Convent parlour had been, and when we had waited there a moment the "Curé" of St. Aniel came in.

He was an old man, spare and with much experience of life written on his face. His manner was quiet and distant. He did not sit down himself or ask us to be seated, but we felt, or I felt, that he was in no way inimical to us. He had simply, I think, learned to wait. Marion Ellbank again told her story, but this time without heat. "Who sent you to me?" the old man asked us, and when she replied, "Joseph Brassard", he pondered for a moment, asked for a description of the bag, and then said: "Come to me on Monday morning." The interview was over. This may have been Thursday: at any rate it was about the middle of the week. When we went again on Monday, Monseigneur handed Marion Ellbank her bag. Its contents were intact.

This incident made a great impression on me. The first thing that struck me about it was that these people had learned to put language in its place, or had never unlearned, perhaps, in Joseph Brassard's case, its primary use. With how few words was this disaster (for a disaster it is to have all your money taken away from you) repaired! From M. Brassard we had had three words: from the old priest less than a dozen. He handed the purse back to its owner without a word.

And the second thing that struck me was the attitude of all of them to the act itself. Theft had been committed; a thief was in their midst, but they made no comment on the fact. Marie Brassard, with her children about her, withdrew even from the contemplation of the deed. She looked—frightened I think is the word. Not afraid of the tangible consequences of the crime but of the crime itself. One felt in that whole environment what has perhaps become rare, at any rate in the "civilized" quarters of this world, that there is such a thing as right and such another thing as wrong, that you must pray not to be led into temptation, and that, once fallen into evil, you must pay the penalty. I do not think the culprit, whoever he or she was (for we never heard more of the matter from anyone; M. Brassard received the news of the restoration of the purse-bag in silence) was treated with anything but mercy; but I think he was made to feel that he had broken the law, God's law as well as man's, and that he had "sinned". Might he learn from his repentance!

In all the times I visited St. Aniel I only heard of one other—what am I to call it?—outbreak of the lawlessness of wrong-doing. A girl of the village who had gone to work, I think it was in the very city in which I lived, had, without the concurrence of church or state, got herself with child. In her despair she murdered the baby at its birth and hid it in a suit-case, which she

took with her when she started—as soon, I suppose, as she was able to travel —for her native village. At night when the train was crossing a bridge under which deep water flowed, she left the compartment in which she was seated, and in the darkness edged her suit-case furtively through a window of the corridor, and watched the fruit of her body swirl and toss in the eddying current below. She was quite young. Which of us can know what thoughts passed through her mind as she stood at the window, intent on getting rid of the tangible evidences of her "sin", or how she felt as she came back to take her seat in the car? What a tangled chaos of relief, hope, fear, agonized remorse (for she was devout) and what a sense of loss to come!

When this girl was sentenced by the law of the land for what she had done, there was in her native place the same silence about her that there had been about Marion Ellbank's stolen purse. I heard from Marion how Marie Brassard had told her the incident in whispers, once. It was as if such acts were cast into the space round about St. Aniel, there slowly to disperse or transmute themselves into repentance. How it was in the village I cannot say, but in the lonely farms bordering the King's Great Road and right to the hills beyond, there seemed to be no individual censure of wrong-doing. Can it not be said that those people were remembering something that most of us have forgotten—as, in a time of barbarism, an artist here and there keeps hold of what we have learned from tradition and works by it and carries the memory of it through to a brighter era when it may sprout and blossom again?

I don't suppose, of course, there was any less wrong-doing at St. Aniel than there is in other places. In this world we sin. What struck me was the attitude to sin that I met there. I have never met anything like it anywhere else. It was—what shall I call it?—an acceptance of sin, with reservations.

3

I suppose it was this conscious recognition of the faith in which the St. Anielites were wrapped that drew my attention to our own, or rather Miss Ellbank's, strange home-coming amongst them. *Had* she come home? She seemed to be living amongst them, as one of them, but was she? She did share their lives, in a sense; she worked as they did and was poorer than they were, but down below that surface which most of us are so loth to break she was essentially different from them. She didn't *really* share their lives: she was profoundly alone. Yes, even though a part of her responded to the life in those great spaces in which St. Aniel lay, she was really and truly as alone among the kindly people surrounding her as Joan was among the farm-dogs

of the neighbourhood who ran out at her when in our drives she was put down for a little run, and at whom she showed her teeth.

I was a visitor at the shack and didn't really count; but take us immigrants, Marion Ellbank and Joan and me. What had we to do with our surroundings? The more we tried to amalgamate ourselves with them, the more we stood out as something unalterably different. (Joan didn't try, and therein showed her sense.) It is true that we are all children of God but it seems to be also true that we are divided into families, and one family never quite fits into another, or there wouldn't have been so many stories about mothers-in-law and step-mothers down the ages. The more definitely you would like to be a member of one great human family, with no distinction of family, race, creed or colour, the more definitely it is borne in upon you that one community can never be the order of things here below. With angels it may be different but I fancy that Swedenborg was right and that there are groups and societies among them too. We shall have to wait a long time before we can shed that troublesome thing, individuality. We have worked long to get it, and I imagine we shall have to work quite as long to get rid of it. Miss Ellbank, Joan and I were strangers in St. Aniel, and Miss Ellbank, Joan and I are therefore the only things that I can speak about in these pages with that assurance which springs from at least a partial understanding.

As money is really what calls the tune even among the St. Aniel hills, the fact that Miss Ellbank was miserably poor counted for something. She had, it is true, sporadic bursts of getting cheques from England and she had had the legacy which enabled her to buy the shack and provide herself with the hens and Nellie; but the legacy was soon exhausted, and once she had cashed the intermittent cheques and immediately spent the money, she was back in the dregs of poverty again. And what a horrible thing poverty is!

It would be impossible to say that the St. Anielites were poor. They lived, in a sense, a hard life, but really a comfortable one, with good wholesome food and plenty of fuel to keep out the cold. They were essentially thrifty folk. They never had that truly dreadful experience of worrying over a bill that is falling due and wondering how on earth they could ever meet it; nor, worse still, did they ever *have* to make themselves agreeable, as I have seen poor Marion Ellbank having to do, to someone whose bill they knew they couldn't pay and from whom therefore they would have to beg for "time". The St. Anielites lived a solid, self-respecting life on what they brought out of the land that was theirs; and the land responded by yielding ever more. But Miss Ellbank—what did she do? She alternately hoped and despaired. Neither land nor hens respond satisfactorily

to this way of dealing with them; "art" is the only thing that occasionally thrives on it, and I have already said that there was no art at St. Aniel. Joan responded to it, but then everything that her mistress did was perfection in Joan's eyes—not but what she was quite capable of deceiving this perfect mistress of hers on occasion. My belief is that Joan had been the one thing that had enabled Miss Ellbank to bear her immigrant's lot. The bond between these two was very close. You had only to compare it with the bond that united the Brassards to their red-haired mongrel to see that Moose was an unconsidered adjunct to the farm or considered only in so far as he made himself useful. He was a worker, in or out of employment as the case might be; Joan was an essential in the life of her mistress and indeed, because of Miss Ellbank's loneliness, occupied too important a place in it.

There was always to me something faintly pathetic about Joan. I do not mean this in the sentimental way but rather as one may feel an only child to be, unconsciously, a little pathetic. A lonely child is a thing slightly out of place, made to occupy too conspicuous a position, cut off from the natural education that brothers and sisters give, and induced, unconsciously on everyone's part, to adapt itself to what should be foreign to it—the manners and ideas of grown-ups. This may not be so in the case of modern only children who are sent to day- or boarding-schools (though school companions are a poor substitute for brothers and sisters): I am thinking more of the only children, and especially of the only girls, who were brought up at home in the older fashion and about whom, interesting and charming as they often were, there was apt to hang a slight suggestion of—"pathos" is perhaps too strong a word, but you felt a little sorry for them just because they were so interesting and nice. They were a little too good.

So with Joan. She was without exception the best-behaved dog it has ever been my fate to meet. She *always* did what she was told, as she was told to do it: you touched the spring of her obedience, and the instrument of her nature responded. She had, poor beast, developed a "conscience". If she were sitting beside me in her mistress's absence, watching me with adoring eyes as I cut the beef (she was inordinately greedy and had been sternly trained not to beg) and she heard Miss Ellbank's step or voice, she was off like a dart and lay stretched out before the stove or, in summer-time, stood at the open door and, with tail wagging, was ready to welcome her home. These were her innocent deceptions, and when I put myself into Joan's place, I find the state of mind that induced them pathetic. She was the last thing that Miss Ellbank had snatched up out of her father's kennels, when, doubtless in one of her gusts of rage, she had left home for Canada. Her "points" were unquestionable: she was exactly what she should be. But what

is the good of being aristocratically perfect in the wilderness? There was no one within Joan's radius, except her mistress, who cared what shade her eyes were, or whether her moustache stood out crossways against her muzzle in the approved fashion. She was not admired. The St. Anielites thought her odd, and the highest compliment she ever received came from the miller, who observed on one occasion when Miss Ellbank went to pay a bill, that perhaps—and he strongly emphasized that "peut-être"—she was handsome "dans son genre". If Joan did not resent this remark, I fancy she may have been aware that her mistress did, for, with the acquisition of a conscience perhaps, this "only" dog had become over-sensitive and always knew when her goddess was put out. On such occasions she either obliterated herself wholly—and no one could disappear more expertly than Joan—or, if the tempest was not too devastating, did her best to ward off the gusts of rage; she often stood between Miss Ellbank and the many vexations that beset her, and with beseeching looks and propitiatory movements of the body coaxed things round again. Yes, I have often felt very sorry for Joan, and though she didn't really "take to me" any more than I instinctively took to her, still she accepted me on a friendly basis and was always ready to give me a welcome. She got bits from me on the sly, and I was aware anyway that her moustache ought to point in the wrong direction. I have seen Miss Ellbank groom her as if for a show: hours she would spend on doing so, Joan lending herself to the procedure and "standing" for a non-existent prize; and I have looked at the tangled and tossed-looking country, visible from every door and window of the shack, and have felt sorry for them both.

Joan was the one thing that connected Marion Ellbank with the old life of top-boots and well-cut breeches (which had looked so incongruous in conjunction with Nellie) and the long days of her centaur-activities in the hunting-field. She had for horses that feeling which a musician has for sound and which is rather different, I think, from what a painter feels for colour or a born writer for words. She *wanted* horses, and had perhaps come out to Canada with a sort of ridiculous vague idea of galloping over plains on broncos or mustangs swifter than Pegasus. She thought of Canada in that fanciful way as of a country where all sorts of things—steeds and gold and what not—could be picked up. What a mistake! Now she was left, among rugged hills, in a place where nothing really ever happened, with a handful of hens. If she had escaped from a step-mother younger than herself, what had she gained? Nothing. Her clothes were sometimes almost in rags. When a cheque didn't come, she was often something very like hungry. Joan was really the one thing left her: Joan looked a lady, to anyone who had the slightest knowledge of how an Aberdeen ought to look, and even when Miss

Ellbank herself went hungry, Joan's bit of meat was never wanting. This was affection for Joan but it was also the feeling that she was a pedigreed bitch and *must* have her bit of meat.

The two had shared their bad times together, and if it had not been for the knowledge of Joan's companionship awaiting her at home in the worst of those periods, I doubt whether Marion Ellbank could have "seen it through", as the phrase goes. She did not speak to me of those bad times: she was, again like Don Quixote, excessively proud and passed over the unpleasant episodes of her life as far as possible in silence. But occasionally, as a flash of lightning illumines a dark night, she would drop a sentence or a word that shed a gleam upon her past and let one see what she had been through. There are lots of pains in this life of ours, and one of the bitterest is surely to wander about in a strange land, looking for work, and day by day to sink inevitably in the social scale and in the scale of efficiency too, as the body grows hungrier, the mind more embittered and revengeful, and the clothes—so easily kept in order with only a very little money to spare upon them—shabby and soiled and unfit for decent wear. My hostess was not in paradise in the shack, but at least she had a house of her own; and if she went hungry at times, the St. Anielites saw more than you might think they did, and charity—can I say more for them than this?—was easy to accept at their hands. There was no standing on someone else's door-mat, fearing, yes and half hoping too, so disagreeable was the business, that you might not get in. What a host of bad times Marion Ellbank had determinedly *not* to think about!

Those times, as I have said, were wrapped up with Joan. I remember Marion saying once that on one of her squalid jobs she had taken some attic or back-room or other where Joan was shut up all day. "When I got home," she said, "Joan was always waiting; she had heard my step. And when we had had our supper, I used to go to bed and hold her in my arms. She licked my face. She seemed to understand." I think this was the greatest confidence I ever received from my hostess, or was it a confidence addressed to me? She was speaking out loud to herself. Here was a woman—and how many of them there have been in Canada!—who was "there", ready to do anything, as they all say, and capable, in the commercial sense, of nothing at all. What is one to do with them? How are such people to be helped? Well, the Depression has more or less done away with the tribe; and this one escaped for a while to pure air and kindly people—by the way of an aunt's legacy. She was lucky.

I found Joan, on this spring visit of mine, in a new rôle, that of a little mother. She had a basket in the living-room, not far from the stove, and from it, but without offering to get out to welcome me, she thumped her tail. She looked complacent and serene, with that undertone of worry which is so apparent in the eyes of her particular breed; proud too and willing, though not eager, to show off her treasures—four of them. To me there is always something touching in the willing and yet half-reluctant way a tamed domestic animal-mother—dog or cat or whatever it may be—will lift a paw or leg to abet you, as it were, in your wish to take her nurseling in your hand and scrutinize and pet it. "Take care," that movement, and still more the glance of the eye that accompanies it, seems to say, "I like you to have my babies. I am sure you will treat them well. More, you will see for yourself how lovely they are. But for goodness' sake, take care!" Joan lay there looking quite unlike herself; she had nearly died, bringing the puppies into the world, and was still weak. But she was exceedingly happy: one could see that. She had forgotten herself. She was absorbed. And if she licked a recovered puppy with an air of saying "Now I have got my own again, and it is better so," she still accepted pliantly and with a sense that this time all was well, the help of her goddess in supplementing what she had to give, with artificial food. For poor Joan was, like the hens, a victim of civilization and specializing. The hens were lovely and so, in her *genre*, was Joan, but both were on the road to becoming so "lovely" that they would be unable to propagate their kind. And what then? I may remark parenthetically that one of these puppies of Joan's, the only daughter amongst them, became mine, because she chose me for her own, and I shall have a word to say about Judy before I end. I was fonder of her than I ever was of Joan or perhaps of any other dog.

In telling an animal's history one becomes aware, however much of the history one may be unable to enter into, of the essential simplicity of such a life as compared with ours. Joan had three main interests in her life. She had her love for her mistress, whom she adored and worshipped. Even when Miss Ellbank was unjust—and in the gusts of passion to which she was liable she did do unjust things—Joan accepted what might come very much, I suppose, as we accept the wreckage that comes in the wake of such dispensations of Providence as floods and thunderstorms. This was, of course, an induced emotion in Joan. Hence her "conscience", which worked so haltingly and to which she owed her sense of "sin". You never could imagine Nellie in a nervous break-down: she would have scorned the act. But it was easy to think of Joan in the throes of not knowing what was right and what was wrong, and breaking down in consequence. I don't know

whether animals like her are on the upward path or not, but I know they pay for every step they take. You can't become "civilized" without paying for it.

It goes without saying that underlying this "induced" part of Joan—this belief in and devotion to a being really of another *kind*—were the primal forces of her nature. She wanted a male, at the right time (and when it wasn't the right time, she didn't: what she wanted then was a beefsteak) and also, now and again, she wanted what we call "a family". Joan was a dear little mother, and if she couldn't quite manage all the duties of a mother, which are arduous, she was in this not unlike many two-legged members of her sex at the present time. As for the dog in the picture, *he*, whoever he might be, presented as yet no difficulty to her. But if she were to go on developing on "related lines", as we may say, the dog difficulty too would not be very long in coming.

The one real "sin" committed by Joan arose from the fact that at the time I knew her she did quite clearly know her own "dog-mind", if I may put it so. She had been shut up in a room to prevent her from working out the dog-destiny to which her desires prompted her, and she was, naturally, restless and unhappy. Left alone, a prisoner in solitary confinement, she set about seeing what she could do. Miss Ellbank, thinking the height impossible for Joan to reach, had left the window of the prison-cell about a couple of inches open. Joan, no climber, clambered on the bed, up to the bedrail, and, precariously balanced there, contrived apparently to edge the window up and up with her long and expensive nose until she could squeeze herself through the resulting aperture. She was no jumper either, but she jumped, or fell, out, and when she had recovered her breath she fled up the road, and up and up (one of the Brassard children watched her from the yard) till she met *him*. When Miss Ellbank returned for evening tea, Joan was on the gallery, waiting, with her conscience the most conspicuous thing about her. She *knew* she had "sinned" but, like Eve after the apple was eaten, while she was acutely sorry, she was glad too of the results of this encounter. I brought Tony, the only result who wasn't drowned, to town and gave him to a friend who didn't want him, and a very ugly and most intelligent dog he grew up to be. But he couldn't cope with modern city conditions and was finally killed by a motor, to everyone's satisfaction. He really may be called Joan's "petit accident".

I don't know if I have succeeded in making it at all plain why Joan was, at any rate to me, faintly pathetic. It was because she was, in a sense, a little out of her place. She wasn't in the least pathetic as a mother: in that rôle she was rather nice. And in what may be called her "dog-race" I find her attitude

from one point of view human and amusing and from another quite pleasant and natural. Why shouldn't she make a *mésalliance* if she pleased? Her faintly pathetic flavour only came out in her attitude to her goddess. There she definitely wanted to be something she couldn't be, and even the indulgence in a morning-snack became a "sin". Think of a life in which almost everything you want to do is "wrong"! Nothing is really "right" except to be what you were never quite meant to be. Joan's sense of smell was starved: she could never pick up those delicious bad smells of which every road must be full; she couldn't even trot along after the rig because Miss Ellbank was afraid of her heart; she couldn't "hunt"—though I am glad to say that later on her daughter Judy led her into temptation and they hunted together. She had none of her own kind, nobody really to talk to; showing her teeth at Red Moose wasn't heartening. She could do nothing but adore her goddess, and she did adore her. But, unregenerate as we perhaps all are, we must either keep ourselves adoring all the time, without intermission, or else "sin". Possibly the white hens, who hadn't mind enough to evolve a conscience (for a conscience is, I suppose, a by-product of mind) were better off than Joan. There was nothing pathetic about *them*.

4

I do not see why Nellie in her stable should be wholly left out of this picture. She was one of the appurtenances of the place, and indeed if her circumstances had permitted her to retire into private life, as we say, I cannot imagine how the business of the shack could have been kept going at all. How useful she was, that mare! She hauled hay in summer and root-vegetables in autumn; she conveyed Miss Ellbank's egg-crates to and from the station; she did odd jobs, saving porterage and carriage, by drawing a rig full of the most oddly-assorted contents; she took us on our excursions and even, when the wind blew that way, carried a mistress in full riding kit round and round a Canadian field. These things she did sometimes willingly, sometimes reluctantly, sometimes sullenly, and sometimes in a tearing rage. I have seen her, hitched up and waiting for us in the yard, crush with her hoof the life out of an unoffending chicken that in its innocence had run across her path, and this for no reason at all, just out of pure spite. I really couldn't mention all the things that I disapproved of in Nellie's nature, the list would be so long; and yet I liked her. Yes, I liked her, and though it was plain to see that she had had a hard and often suffering life, I never felt sorry for her as I did for Joan. I suppose I must have felt that she was captain of her soul, and Joan wasn't.

The first thing to bear in mind is that our race in general—the human race, I mean—had on Nellie the effect that a cat has on some of us. The very sight of us evidently made her hair rise. That is a painful position for a horse to be placed in. Imagine someone who hates and fears the feline tribe under the domination of a cat, claws and all, and compelled to do exactly what it wished. This was, roughly, Nellie's situation, and it was the harder to bear because she was so intelligent. I have made it clear, I hope, that Joan was no fool, at any rate where her own interests were concerned. But she was hampered by a conscience which both enlarged and reduced her intelligence. Nellie didn't know that such a thing as a conscience existed, and if you had tried to explain the matter to her, the only sentiment you would have evoked would have been a desire to stamp on you or kick you. You see her strength and Joan's weakness.

She worked well. She had been born to work, like the Brassards and Goyettes and, like them, she never expected anyone to get her dinner for her until she had earned it. She had been accustomed to spare feeding and ate little. Thus when we took her on our excursions, it never entered her head that she would be taken care of, though she accepted philosophically anything that came her way. I do not know what she thought about during the long hours when she waited for us in some strange barn—nothing very pleasant, I fear. Had she really anything very pleasant to think about?

One could tell from the look of her strained hind-quarters that she must have spent her youth in "clearing". How many tree-stumps must have been hauled out of stony and uncompromising soil by the exercise and over-exercise of Nellie's muscles! Nor had she, probably, any "company" to speak of: French-Canadian farmers, hard-driven themselves, have no time to spend in cultivating equine sympathies. Nellie had lived a hard, lonely life, and nothing had kept her up but her own endurance.

Miss Ellbank had met her at conservatories where both had been employed, Miss Ellbank as a rose grader; and since I learned of her experiences there, I have always wondered, when admiring gardeners' roses in shop-windows and contrasting the exquisite blooms with the conditions in which at least one grader worked among them, whether the commercial rose game is worth the candle. It is a question. At any rate it was in this glass-house that Marion Ellbank and Nellie met. They had something in common: they shared that stubborn determination, unconscious in both of them, to endure, and neither was sorry for herself. When people are not sorry for themselves, I will defy you to be very sorry for them: your pity will be extinguished in a queer sort of admiration, and this admiration I had for both

my hostess and Nellie. I felt that they had come through bad times—worse times than I could have endured without my spirit giving way; and I had for both of them a somewhat grudging respect that was seasoned with good-will. I wished that Miss Ellbank should do well and at the same time I had a feeling that here, on this earth, in this life-round, she would never do any better, and might be on the road to worse things. And if I had much the same feelings about Nellie, in her case they were happily tempered with amusement. Miss Ellbank's gusts of passion alienated me: they seemed to come from something far back that I had no connection with; but Nellie's fits of wilfulness, yes, even to her wanton stamping on the chicken for stamping's sake, entertained me, though I am aware that this does not redound to my credit. There is no accounting for our likes and dislikes: I just did like Nellie. I liked her habit, in our drives, of coming to a halt at the foot of every small hillock, so that I might get out and lighten her load, all because, in one of my early excursions with her, my English training, re-inforcing an imprudent desire to relieve her when we were about to climb a steep hill, had made me descend from the rig and walk. I liked her when she looked sullenly round as if to say: "Another of these horrible creatures in sight!" I loved her when, hearing a horse behind her, she gathered herself together and raced to beat him, whoever he might be. And I loved her best of all when yearly—and this was her chief asset in the commercial world—she foaled. Then, through her deep distrust of the human race something else would burst—love: it was like the breaking of the ice at the end of the long winter in some great river of Canada. The sullenness was gone, and the real nature that she had been endowed with came pouring through as the water comes tearing in between the blocks of parted ice. Poor Nellie was herself.

I always remember one drive that we took—too long a drive for the nursing mother that Nellie then was, for at our turn in the direction homewards my hostess had to descend from the rig and milk her. Our drive had been too long for the foal too, and as we came to the end of the village street we began to hear his cries of hunger and distress. I shall never forget how Nellie suddenly halted. She came to a dead stop in the middle of the road. Then, bursting into cries herself, whinnying, giving voice (and it was not difficult to understand what she said) she made for the hill leading to our shack and tore up it, as if the wolf had been behind her, comforting her nurseling all the way. What a meeting that was! Miss Ellbank unhitched her with some difficulty and then, opening the stable-door, she let me see the final break-up of the ice-jam. The foal rushed at his mother, who stood ready to receive; and with comforting noises from her and recurring complaints from him of how lonely he had been, they came together. There was a great

deal of good in Nellie, and if she did view the human race as some of us view the feline species, she had, to my way of thinking, more reason on her side than we. It is possible that in her intelligent but necessarily somewhat confused mind she made some sort of exception for her mistress, from whom she had at least never experienced unkindness. But it was really too late for her by that time to begin to modify her views. They had been formed and had found a lodgement within her, and now they could not be displaced. Humanity could be cruel and we were human; such was Nellie's philosophy of life. But it was when I saw and felt her tearing up that hill which led to the satisfactions of motherdom that I *knew* why she often amused me. I liked her: certain chords in us harmonized. Twice I felt her galloping home with an impetuosity that made Miss Ellbank's practised hand on the reins seem non-existent. In the one case she was driven by fear along the level road, but it was love that drove her uphill like the wind, crying all the way. As I have said, it was not difficult to understand her then. What she was saying was: "Oh, my darling, I am coming. I am coming. The cruel creatures have kept me away from you. I couldn't help it. But I am coming now. Wait just a minute and I shall be with you. Be comforted, and do not be afraid."

I may add perhaps that to me Nellie was wholly indifferent.

5

The tie that I have spoken of as attaching all immigrants to each other, no matter from what diverse countries they may have come, evidently stretches so far as to make a bond between the human and the animal world also, for I have written to little purpose if I have not shown that my feeling for Joan was radically different (quite apart from personal affection or esteem) from what I felt for Minou or Josaphat or Nellie. Joan was an immigrant like myself and therefore our intercourse began on a plane of its own. One cannot regard a fellow-immigrant objectively. With all my liking for the Brassards, I did regard them objectively—as people of a different race. Nothing is more surprising than this bond of nationality. We know that, however much we may dislike our family, it cannot be just the same to us as what I may call outside folk. And we recognize sooner or later, sometimes while we are still in our own country and sometimes only when we have left it, that it is the same with people of our own nation: no one of any nation, again irrespective of any personal bias of sympathy or antagonism, feels *quite* the same to a "foreigner" as to a compatriot. Go far enough away from your country and you find your sympathies towards it enlarging: you will now have the family feeling to anyone who is a stranger with yourself in the country where you may happen to be, and this expands to a family feeling

for the *creatures* who have come there from home; and doubtless gardening people experience it for such home plants as consent to grow in the gardens of a strange land. I suppose it is the sense of an enlargement of our consciousness of what is (as opposed to what our intellectual selves would like it to be) that makes travel the educative thing it well may be. If a long residence in a country that isn't your own does not teach you something, there is nothing in this world that will.

My little picture of St. Aniel, or the little "exhibition" of pictures that I collected there, hangs all by itself in one small room or hall of my mind. Probably most of us are aware of our minds—which are, I take it, the houses of our inner life and built slowly by ourselves—being divided into sections or, as I prefer to think of it, arranged into rooms of different sizes—with a hall or two perhaps and connecting corridors or staircases for the additions we have made, both consciously and unconsciously, to the tiny fabric we must all have started with. Unconsciously for the most part, I fancy; at any rate I have been surprised in writing these pages, first at discovering this little St. Aniel apartment in my building at all, and then at finding so many pictures of what I saw and felt hanging on its walls; for in this fourth-dimensional domain where we hang our reminiscences even our feelings may present themselves pictorially, and it is then that we can put them into words.

Have I in any way succeeded, I wonder, in passing on my little "collection"? The Brassards, for instance, as I see them, stand out as clear as can be, and yet has anyone else any idea of them? In my conception of them they symbolize the family and all that is good in that institution. They were entirely a whole. I find it impossible to think of Marie Brassard (who was, to me, the radiating centre of that family life) without also thinking of her husband Joseph, of his father Josaphat, of Mé-mère Stéphanie Brassard, who, in her time, had been the centre of radiation in a harder and more difficult family life; and along with these figures come irrepressibly Albert, so stolid and strong, little Jeanne, the embryo nun, Gervais, who would always play his part in the Brassard life even though he would not be visible in it, down to sturdy little Joseph, who would grow out of his mother's arms, to wrestle with the soil as his father and grandfather had done before him. Past, present and to be, *all* were members of this family group, and into the picture must come Red Moose, so proud to do his duty, and the cows trailing up from the pasture to be milked—yes, even such an incident as that of Marie Brassard standing with blood-bedabbled hands over the inwards of a pig, about to make the black sausages that were so relished by her husband and Miss Ellbank too, forms to me an integral part of that family life. The

very vegetables, guarded by the family in common, enter into the picture, each precious plant—for all is precious in that hard and ungrateful soil—sheltered under its individual tomato tin, and the tobacco plant on which M. Brassard bestowed his personal attention and which in its later development was to prove the pivotal pleasure of his life, for surely to smoke your own tobacco leaf after a day's labour is one pleasure that is *sans peur et sans reproche*. The winter days with the wild snow tempesting past the window-panes, the hills, forbidding, infested with wolves, quiet as death; within doors, the mother of the family at the hand-loom her husband had set up for her in the beginning of the winter, hard at work, providing clothing for her little troop or weaving coverings for the floor out of rags and strips which had done their turn in their first original form and were now to be fashioned by her into a fresh "creation". This family life—and it repeated itself, of course, in every family up and down the rugged vale and from one end of St. Aniel village to the other—rooted itself in the soil, shot upward and branched out like a forest of trees. The families were individual, each of them not so much taking into its own care as including in itself all that appertained to it of animal and vegetable too. And the whole—the varied and variegated farm and village life, and the mountains surrounding this—was nested and held firm in the faith that had its visible embodiment in the great Church, built out of the *habitants'* hard-won offerings, in the Convent next door, with its band of devoted nuns, and in the priest's house, where the old man lived who wandered among his parishioners and dispensed the daily bread by which their souls grew strong.

One of the St. Aniel pictures which hangs on the wall of my mind and which I very often look at—it is a favourite of mine—is that of the entrance of this old man to the farm opposite on the occasion of his annual visit. Once a year the priest dined with each of his parishioners, and if I can judge by the only family I was in touch with, this hospitality was offered, and its acceptance acknowledged, with humility and gratitude. How well I remember Marie Brassard's attitude to it—her sense of the privilege granted to her husband and herself in entertaining as their guest one whom they loved and revered! The Brassard homestead was always clean but it was scrubbed and polished still cleaner for this occasion. The best hen was killed (something must always be "sacrificed", no matter how holy the feast). Miss Ellbank and I had offered to take the baby for the duration of Monseigneur's visit, and very anxious and inept nurses we proved ourselves to be. It is so much easier to talk about children than to take care of them. Albert and Jeanne were allowed to be "on tap", if I may be allowed the expression; and I never saw Albert cleaner or Jeanne's ringlets more shining and impeccably

in place than on that day. Madame Brassard did not go to the church; she stayed at home and she and the cooking of the dinner had it out between them. But when Joseph Brassard and Monseigneur approached, she was standing on the threshold, as lovely as a picture, and welcomed them "home".

How is it possible for me to give any idea of this scene which seems to me so gracious and so touching, a sort of symbol of what our life here might be—and is so far from being—on this beautiful earth of ours? It was a lovely day in autumn. There was in the landscape and in the clarity of the air and in the brilliance of the foliage that *singing* quality which I have already made an attempt to suggest. The farm was enclosed in beauty. It was like a little edifice that had been set there not by chance but for some purpose which it was not for us to seek to fathom. Marion Ellbank, with Joseph in her arms, and I were in the shack, looking on. As Joseph Brassard and Monseigneur came up the pathway, the mistress of the house sank to her knees upon the door-stone, so that all that belonged to her, and all that was in her too, might be blessed. Her two first-born children knelt behind her, and the old man, lifting his hands, commended the family to God.

I cannot say how this scene moved me nor how often since, sometimes in difficult hours, I have seen it with my inner eye. The whole history of this part of Canada seemed to me to be written there: the perilous journey out, four centuries ago, the roughness of the virgin soil, the labours of the Jesuits, the slow emigration, the hard lives of the early immigrants, yes, and of their present-day descendants, still struggling and still in the difficulties of this world (as indeed we all are), and this benediction from heaven and the pursuance of daily life. Doubtless too the beauty of it all moved me: it is not easy to look, unmoved, on anything that is beautiful. But even if it had been one of Canada's worst days (and Canada's climate can be very bad indeed), even if Marie Brassard had been a plain or an ill-favoured woman, and Albert and Jeanne had looked far less immaculate than they did, and Joseph Brassard had been a much rougher man than he actually was—yes, and even if the old man who asked that blessing upon them had been, not simple and yet deeply-read in the book of life, but hard and full of unction, as I have known some of his profession to be, I should still, I think, have found what I looked on, moving. The very hills seemed to have a different aspect, as if they were included in this human faith.

What then took place within the house was, I believe, that the hostess brought a prepared tray, with glasses and home-made wine, and offered this refreshment to Monseigneur and to her husband. Then, seating the men, she

waited on them, serving them with her best. Some may take exception to this ritual, feeling that the woman should have sat at her own table. For my part I find something beautiful in this too. Whatever we may say and however feminist we may become, it is woman's nature to serve, and I think we are never happier than when we are doing so. This woman would serve deftly, for she combined surprisingly in her nature the qualities of Martha and Mary. I regard Joseph Brassard as happy in such a wife, though probably she *would* put doyleys on the table for the priest because they did it at St. Gervais, and Joseph would consider that unnecessary; and I regard Marie Brassard as happy with such a man. This marriage was not "marriage" in our modern sense of the word, which has turned something that was once of universal application into something highly individualistic, and which is, I take it, on the way to disintegrate still further the conception of a union among human creatures that none the less must always persist. This scene, so moving to me, could not have happened had Marion Ellbank or I been where Marie Brassard stood. It is true that we had gained a great deal that Madame Brassard was ignorant of. We knew much, of the very existence of which in the world she was entirely unsuspicious. *Had* we gained? was, I suppose, what I was asking myself, unconsciously of course, as I looked on. When we are moved, there is always some reason for it that we often do not suspect. *Had* we gained, or had we (but, even so, not irrevocably, I hope) lost something that we women will have to find again before we can ever be happy? I don't know. I merely put the question—to myself—and find no answer.

Later that afternoon, when Monseigneur had left and the dishes were washed and the kitchen was in order again and Madame Brassard had no doubt had a cup of tea, the mother in her hurried across the road to fetch the baby. "Has he been good?" "Yes, a very pearl."

She took him and held him to her bosom. She looked tired but oh, how satisfied! And Joseph senior, already seated on the gallery in his Sunday rocking-chair, in company with his father and mother, who had joined him, would also feel that all was well. The family *was* a nice thing, and I suppose one reason why I liked going to St. Aniel was because I could see it there in its entirety, as I may say. The other bits of me liked what was provided for them in the city and found it difficult to shake off the emotions that are generated there. I presume a great part of the load that Christian shook off his shoulders was composed of these. Women have always wanted things

both ways and the best of two worlds to be their very own, and I am no exception to the rule.

6

It was on a visit of mine to St. Aniel in 1919 (I cannot say precisely in what month but it must have been in that season when it is no longer quite winter and is still hardly spring) that Monsieur Brassard invited Miss Ellbank and myself up to his bit of sugar bush when the sap was running in the trees and he was making his year's provision of maple syrup and sugar for the Farm.

I have always said that if I were designing a coat-of-arms for the Dominion—or should I rather say the Province of Quebec?—I would choose for my device a sugar maple tree. It is a beautiful tree all the year round, and it provides a sustenance for Canada. As I think of fields of corn in England, and no doubt would think of vast wind-blown spaces of wheat if fate had placed me in the Canadian West, so to me the Province of Quebec is represented by the sugar maple. I once watched for years a maple tree that grew outside my window. It was lovely in spring when its blossom preceded its leaf; it was stately in summer when its thick foliage clothed it; clad in its crimson and gold, it "sang" in the autumn even near a city; and in the winter it stretched its bare limbs to the sky and was beautiful yet. The maple tree and Hope (Hope for what will never be) are to me the two distinctive things that the Canada I know has to offer. It is redolent of them both.

We accepted M. Brassard's invitation, and one clear morning set out to climb the hill on the slope of which his bit of sugar bush was. The path was steep; it was all white and hard with snow in some places and with slides of ice, and in other places we plunged into slush or water-puddles which splashed water up beyond our high-boots, so that the melting winter-stuff trickled down and lodged itself in our shoes. Miss Ellbank was accustomed to this and tramped along easily enough, but it was new to me and I followed, sliding and stumbling, very cold as yet and wondering why I had come. It *was* uncomfortable and our goal seemed to me a long way off.

Joan and Judy, who accompanied us, cantered in front and behind and dashed now to the right of us and now to the left, diving with short sharp barks of delight into the more or less cleared bush that bordered each side of the narrow track uphill. It was on this occasion, I remember, that it struck me (as the same thing sometimes unexpectedly strikes one in the case of a human friend) that Joan had—may I put it "passed her peak"? She had climbed the ascending hill of life to the top, had rested in the plain of middle

age, and now, slowly for the moment, was beginning to descend the hill on the other side. We are all, I think, man as well as beast, unconscious of the beginning of that descent. But it is discernible from the outside, and others know before ourselves that we have turned westward. Joan's breath was short when you compared it with Judy's. It is true that she still leaped and turned in circles, but her daughter leaped with an agility and lightness that does not belong to middle life: *she* barked in the very act of leaping and running; *she* careered to right and left and was happy in the sun.

As I toiled behind my hostess I continued to be sorry and became more and more sorry that I had come. I, too, like Judy, took pleasure in the sun, and the bit of me that loves "art" could not help revelling in all that was round us—nature or, to me, perhaps, "art" in the raw. That sky, how translucent and beckoning, the air how dazzlingly clear, and the trees on either side of us, each maple with its pierced trunk and tiny pail hanging from the inserted cleat, how straight and how *alive*! The very earth seemed to be moving its burden of winter snow from off itself, as we push away an extra coverlet when we feel it to be too warm. It was lovely; it was lovely. But I hated the slush, the patches of clinging black mud, the occasional slides of ice that had to be manoeuvred gingerly by feet that travelled awkwardly in the wake of my hostess's swift movement; and my breathing apparatus rebelled at the strain of climbing perpendicularly up. Joan and I made a couple; and before so very long Miss Ellbank would reach the level stretch, the "divide", and have to regulate *her* pace. Judy alone of the four of us was young. And perhaps I alone of the four of us, or something in me, rather, savoured the scene, put it away and stored it up for future consumption. And while this mysterious something in me was so engaged, quite on its own initiative, and "I" was unconscious even of its presence, the rest of me was very disagreeable and grumbling. "What a journey!" All but the very tiniest scrap of me (yet that scrap was possibly destined to outlive the rest) stumbled and panted its way uphill. But I do not forget the scene that greeted my eyes when we reached M. Brassard's "camp", which was our goal.

On a plateau, not far from the brow of the hill—a low hill, one of the foot-hills of the mountain range that encircled St. Aniel—M. Brassard or his father had erected a wooden hut where he came each year at "sugaring time". When the sap began to rise in the trees till the very twigs seemed quivering with life, it was time for him to be "off". From the hillock one looked down, straight down at the Brassard farm; and our shack over the way was visible too.

On this occasion M. Brassard was accompanied by Albert, and the two lived up here, working all day long from the silent dawn to the silent dusk, Albert collecting the running sap and his father converting it from its natural state into syrup and sugar for man.

How pretty it was! I think this was the most charming thing I saw at St. Aniel. The day was so lovely and everything so completely in tune. Nothing in this whole world jarred on me. On the level bit of ground M. Brassard had two great black cauldrons, arranged gipsy-fashion on metal tripods; in one of them there was maple syrup preparing and in the other, sugar. From time to time he fed the fires that blazed under the cauldrons and shot out circling flames which licked and partially encircled the great metal bowls. He cut down the younger trees, pruned away the branches with his sharp woodman's axe and hewed the trunk, with resounding blows, into symmetrical logs. Sometimes he threw these logs on to what quickly became the red ashes of a living fire, and the fire crackled and blazed again.

A rough bench, made perhaps for our coming, was set in the lee of the hut, for, even with the sun striking down, it was cold. And Marion Ellbank and I sat, looking about us, watching. She had often been up before, but it was my first experience of "sugaring", and I watched with interest. Joan and Judy lay at our feet.

It is a very queer thing that happens when something becomes "your own": possession is not only nine points of the law but something more than that. I have said that I liked Joan, but for her daughter Judy I had a quite different feeling, and this was partly, I fancy, because she was *mine*. I think I became hers before she became mine, for it happened in her early puppyhood that I twice saved her from death and on the second of these occasions (when I rescued her from the disused well in the shack-yard into which she had fallen) she recognized me as her deliverer and claimed me for her own. Later on, when, as sometimes happens in Canada to the second generation of an imported stock, she had grown too large to satisfy the standard set by dog-fanciers for her particular breed and Miss Ellbank was proposing to do away with her, I intervened and in my turn claimed her as mine. She became the beneficiary of a sum that I paid for her keep and was allowed to enjoy life as she liked and for as long as Nature might allow; and with that, our feeling for one another changed. This may sound ridiculous as related of a dog, but the fact was as I have put it down. As Judy, then, lay at my feet up in that bit of sugar bush, the sense of her warm, breathing body near me and the sight of her muzzle by the toe of my boot added, imperceptibly perhaps, but still it added, to the pleasure I felt in the scene.

There is something very fascinating in seeing people *do* things, and it was nice to sit there and observe M. Brassard's deft movements. At intervals he would take a ladleful of liquid from his cauldrons, as a housewife takes a modicum of jam or jelly from her preserving-pan, to see if his sugar or syrup had "set". And it was odd to see him drop that sweet, amber-brown mixture dexterously, in little runlets that twisted themselves into sugary figures-of-eight, on to a layer of flattened snow spread out upon a piece of planking, precisely as the housewife pours her jam or jelly thinly on a plate or saucer and anxiously awaits the result.

It was all very quiet, as I have said. Joan and Judy, tired with their run, were glad to rest and my hostess was in one of her silent moods. M. Brassard, after welcoming us, had returned to his task. Albert came and went, also silently, carrying the tiny pails of gathered sap very carefully and, after his father had tipped their contents into one or other of the cauldrons, leaving us, still silently but briskly, as he swung the empty vessels in his hand. He was up here with his father for a week or two. They slept in the hut at night on couches made of fragrant spruce boughs. It was cold: it must have been *very* cold at night, but no doubt M. Brassard or sometimes Albert would rise at intervals and replenish the fire, as Marion Ellbank and I always had to do during my winter visits to the shack. Yes, it must be cold at night. But it must be fascinating, too, to lie for a minute when one got back to bed, gazing out at the bright fire, at the tree-trunks lit up round about, and at the patches of snow that would look eerie in the dark. The farm below would seem far away. It would seem impossible that little Jeanne would come in the early morning sunlight, toiling up the hill with the day's provisions.

One had "got back" now. What life could possibly be more—not so much primitive as simplified than this? And certainly there was something beautiful about it. Here, straight from nature, Joseph Brassard was collecting what, for his race, is a necessary of life. Out of sweetness comes forth strength. It was no commercial affair, this; none of this syrup or sugar was to be sold. Pé-père Brassard, like the other hill farmers about St. Aniel village, had sought for a little bit of sugar bush on his government grant of land; he had made the clearing; probably it was he and not his son who had built the hut. He, and heaven knows how, had transported the cauldrons to their present place. They would be stowed away in the closed-up hut except at sugaring time. It was a sort of ritual that I was present at, that morning. For those citizens of a New France, which has known no Revolution and has its history yet to make, this maple-sugar signifies what the grape-vine signifies for their brothers across the sea. As the harvesting of the grapes in the months of autumn is regarded by the French of Old France, who have

known and suffered so much, so is the running of the sap in the first bright months of the year regarded by the French of Canada. Then, in that brilliant sunlight which, to a European eye, strikes down with a queerly trenchant slant, they pierce the maple trunks, fill their tiny buckets with the clear white sap and boil it down into sugar and syrup which their housewives put by. Thus in those hilly parts of Canada (as distinct from the industrial cities with their great factories) the ritual of maple-sugar making may fairly be compared with that of the vintage in the older lands.

All this I thought as I sat on the rough but solid bench that M. Brassard had set out for us, with the piercingly brilliant light shining through the bare branches of the trees. "You," I thought, looking at Joseph Brassard and at Albert, "you are immigrants too—you are like us, only immigrants of a longer growth." In the complete stillness of that wooded hill (for surely nothing is so still as a wintry wood in Canada) it quite suddenly seemed to me that we all—all of us there—were picnickers in a land that didn't belong to us. I can't explain it. But up from that soil on which my feet rested and out of that circumambient air, so it felt to me, came something else—a sense of the *possession* of that land by something earlier than any of us. Was it the Indian I was thinking of? Or was it something even more primitive than that? Was this land that we were camping on not meant for us, and was it still held by forces that none of us would be able to control? Most of us have experienced some such feelings with regard to some place or other; but I felt that day as if something quite unknown to me, unimaginable by any portion of my being, might be master in the place in which I sat and, possibly, inimical.

I glanced at my companion. She was sitting forward, her face shaded by her hand, gazing at nothing, not so much pensive as lost to the world. I thought: "Perhaps *you* have something in common with this soil. Perhaps that brought you here and keeps you here." She looked as she had looked that day when Nellie turned the corner which led from the wilds back to the Convent in front of us: her face had taken on the same stony look. She was lost in some dim past. "Yes," I thought, "St. Aniel is nested in faith, but it will be a long time before this wildness is out of the ground." I felt afraid of that desolation: I thought: "Oh, how long before *this* nature can be hewed into art!" And then, even while our fellow-immigrant Joseph Brassard was pursuing his quiet way to and fro, chopping logs, feeding the fire, peering with expert eyes into first the one and then the other of his cauldrons, to see how his brew was progressing, I felt: "We must go. Let us get down, get home to the shack!"

When I touched Marion Ellbank, she started and visibly came back into the present—out of what past? For a moment she looked blankly at me out of her black eyes and then she came to. "Yes," she nodded and smiled, "we will go down."

She rose, and the dogs, who had sensed my changing mood in their sleep and were already on their feet to accompany us, began to leap and canter. We told M. Brassard, no, we must get back to lunch, and left him and Albert to the meal of eggs poached in the boiling syrup which they begged us to stay and share. It was not till we were seated at our deal table under the long window and I was looking out at the now familiar hills, that I said to myself: "No, I couldn't live here as Marion Ellbank does, alone." It seemed ridiculous to say it, even to myself, but I added: "I should be frightened." Not of any tangible thing—for what, in a chaotic world, could seem a more secure, a more tolerant refuge than St. Aniel?—but of something to which I could give no name and which, as I have said, seemed to emanate from a soil and an air not alien perhaps but absolutely unfamiliar to me. I did feel an immigrant, a dweller in a strange land, up there in those woods, beside good M. Brassard and his eldest boy. They too, for that moment, seemed fellow-immigrants, far from their home and merely endeavouring to adapt themselves to new conditions. Their farm-house, as I, not glanced at, but was conscious of it in the hollow below, no longer seemed the hardy homestead that I looked out at from our shack but a mushroom or fungus growth sprung from that strange earth and liable to disappear again with all its inmates, leaving its substance—what can I say?—to those to whom it belonged.

Canada is a strange land. Once you leave the cities and go even a few hours away you feel the power of its earth. The people are nothing. In a sense you scarcely take them into account. Think how hardly-won were the personalities I have mentioned here—Savard the baker, the Bonenfants at the post-office, Madame Goyette up the road, the very Brassards with whom I was, so to say, in touch! All these, as I think of them, grow faint against that insistent earth. Pé-père with his axe, and Mé-mère hardly stand out at all: they are only just emerging from their surroundings, and even the Mother of the Convent and her nuns only stand out—as Marion Ellbank and I and Joan stand out—because they are strange in their environment. So, I suppose, Pé-père, when he first broke into that great quiet with the ringing blows of his axe, must have seemed strange—but to what or to whom? He and his were protected not only by their faith but by their serene unconsciousness of being intruders. They thought the land was *theirs*. The nuns were perhaps semi-conscious. It seems odd, but out of all the people

that I saw and conversed with at St. Aniel, one on whom I set eyes only twice, and then for little more than a moment, and to whom I never spoke at all—Monseigneur, the old priest—struck me as the single mortal who would have understood if I had stammered out to him what perhaps can hardly be expressed in words. I have an idea that Monseigneur knew there were forces working against him, and that he combated them by faith. I do not think he would have discussed the subject with me if I had mentioned it.

It may seem a far cry from Marion Ellbank's white hens and the tossed-looking bit of ground that lay outside my bedroom window to this. I can only say that if I started my connection with the shack on a light note, I ended it on a graver one. It is, I think, our usual practice in life.

V

Far back in these pages I said that when I first saw the shack, it gave me a sense of security; and I have told how on another occasion the thought came to me that, if I wished, I might retire to it for life. But what a wild idea! I had come fresh to St. Aniel from what I can only call the *transitory* aspect of a new-world city, and something or other, I suppose, gave me a feeling of stability among those hills. But it was the hills themselves that were stable—they and the faith that bound the inhabitants of those uplands together. I must have caught the stable elements of their existence at my first coming amongst them and missed the fact that their lives were no less unstable, no less liable to change, than the lives of all of us. At any rate the shack, when I first set eyes on it with Miss Ellbank and her household gods in it, would have been an insecure asylum for me to spend the rest of my days in.

Not long after our expedition to Joseph Brassard's bit of sugar bush I got a letter from Marion, saying that she was clearing out of the shack and making for the West. She had often spoken of the West with a sort of longing—it had even more "space" to satisfy her than St. Aniel—and now she was turning a shadowy, long-cherished hope into execution. She was going out West, she didn't know where. But her home would be further than ever from "home": she would put more thousands of miles between herself and England, and in this new home, wherever it might be, she was going to "raise hogs". She "hoped she would never see a hen again".

I was not wholly unprepared for such an intimation. On our way up to Joseph Brassard's sugar bush she had told me, in her queer, abrupt way, quite suddenly and apropos of nothing, that the only remaining sister of her dead mother (a sister too of the aunt with whose legacy she had bought the shack) had died and left her all she had. On the spur of the moment, and most unwisely, I had said to her, "Marion, hadn't you better go home?" I have never disguised the fact of my thinking it unlikely that such a one as Marion Ellbank would ever prosper in Canada, and this seemed to me a god-sent opportunity for her to go back to where, after all, she "belonged". But she had only said sullenly, "I shan't ever go back to England," and our conversation had ended there; nor had she referred to the matter again. On thinking it over later on, I had been sorry I had spoken: it was silly to upset

her, and besides, though she might not be exactly happy in Canada, how discontented she would certainly have been in England! For, however immigrants may feel about their step-country while they are in it, nothing is more discontented, as a general rule, than a repatriated immigrant. I fancy Marion Ellbank was one of those people for whom there really seems to be no clearly marked "right", and who can therefore only choose for themselves the least wrong way of life.

She might not, perhaps, have decided to abandon the shack so quickly had it not been that, as this surprising letter of hers also informed me, the Brassards had already left their farm. They had received a good offer for it; the purchaser had wanted instant possession, and Joseph Brassard, without warning and without hesitation, had determined to move farther north near where a brother of his had a farm, and there to take up new ground and begin again. I don't know why this should have so astonished me. Joseph Brassard had every right to make a profit on an investment the value of which had been so increased by his own labours. That farm had been made by his father and himself, and now they were turning over their money, if one may put it so—doubling it. When Albert's time came, he too would no doubt double his money on the farm the family was now bound for, and would then track still farther north with *his* wife and children. There was nothing to be surprised at and yet I was surprised. It had never occurred to me, when I crossed the road in the morning with the milk-jug in my hands or set down the pails of water to rest for a moment on that winter night, that before long the Brassards might not be there at all. I suppose I had thought of them as I did of their field of chalk-white buckwheat—as a "rotating" thing, for all families must change and turn and present a slightly different appearance outwardly. But I had thought there was a thread of continuity in that farm life over the way, just as, on my first seeing it, I had thought so of the shack. The farm life would go on, though differently, strung now on a new thread, but the shack—what would happen to *it*? It would disintegrate, sink bit by bit into the tossed-looking land it had come out of. It was not a property that Miss Ellbank would be able to sell. Who would buy it? Not old Josaphat Brassard. Why should he wish to resume possession of the home of his youth which he had so unexpectedly got rid of to the "foreign lady"? And not any city dweller desiring a country cottage—it was too near the road for that—nor yet any sportsman, for neither partridge-shooting nor lake or river fishing was to be had in its immediate neighbourhood. No, the first result of Miss Ellbank's second legacy would be that she could leave the shack behind her with the money from her first legacy buried in it. And I, who could have had the shack for a song, did I wish to buy it? No. When it

came to the point, the primitive woman in me shivered and drooped and the sophisticated bit of me had its way. I never saw the shack again.

I wrote to Miss Ellbank, asking her to spend a day or two with me in my flat on her way west, and telling her to bring Judy, for whom I would find a home somewhere. When she arrived, she was full of the future. Like most of the rest of us she was getting the best out of a thing in anticipation. She saw the West with eyes that sparkled with hope: it would be grand out there. I was loth to bring her thoughts back to St. Aniel but there were some things that I wanted to know, and I must say for her that she was pleasant enough about answering my questions. I suppose she was so happy for once that she could afford to indulge an animal like me. It struck me on this visit of hers—somehow I had never thought of it before—that really and truly I did not exist for this cross between Don Quixote and Christopher Columbus. She knew I was there, of course, but she took absolutely no interest in me, or indeed in anyone else. To her we were all as trees walking.

The Brassards, it seemed, had got out of their farm almost as precipitately as she had got out of her shack. Marie Brassard and young Joseph and Jeanne had spent their last night at St. Aniel in "my" room at the shack. Marie Brassard had been tired but composed: even from the cemetery she had come down with no traces of tears on her face. And next morning at the station, seated on some box or packing-case, she still seemed quite tranquil with Joseph on her lap smiling and calm and looking before him, as babies do, with an air of seeing something invisible to the rest of the world. They made a peaceful picture in the morning sunshine.

Suddenly Madame Brassard put one hand before her eyes and burst into tears. Everyone was completely taken aback, and Miss Ellbank, running to her and bending over her, asked her anxiously what was the matter. "What is it? Are you in pain, Marie?"

Madame Brassard was silent for a moment and then in a tone of anguish she said:—"Nous n'aurons pas de lumière électrique par là," and after an instant, feeling, I suppose, that she had not made her meaning clear, she added in broken gasps, so that it was difficult to follow her words, something that sounded like:—"Il va falloir se servir des lampes à l'huile de charbon dans le nord."

Poor soul, what was she thinking of? Was it of the refinements—the semblances of "progress" rather—that she had enjoyed in her girlhood days and that were now receding from her forever? Or did a picture rise before her of the winter evenings at the St. Aniel homestead, when Miss Ellbank,

bringing with her some relic saved from her school-room days, would come across the frozen road and "read aloud"? There she would sit, with her attentive audience gathered round her, and the light from the unshaded electric bulb that hung from the ceiling over the stove falling full on her page. The hum of Marie's wheel made an accompaniment to the sad tale of Graziella—that vanished type of femininity—or to the smooth and gliding stanzas of "Le lac", or once in a while to one of André Chenier's tender lyrics. Marion, as she read aloud, would recall perhaps her school-room days in Northamptonshire, while Madame Brassard, hardly listening at all in the proper sense of that word, would have her real attention fixed on Gervais, the only one of her children who had a soul in his head. How he had loved those readings and what questions he had asked! And now here they were, trekking away to the North, where everything begins again and the land belongs to the moose and the caribou. For a moment she must have felt that she could not bear it.

All this of course passed in a flash of time, as "scenes" usually do. Joseph, turning on his mother's knee to find her in tears—a sight he had never beheld before—and consequently feeling that his world was rocking on its axis, after a moment's stupefaction burst into a roar of protest. Mothers don't cry.

Madame Brassard instantly pulled herself together. "Voyons, mon p'tit," she said, bending over the weeping Joseph, "ne fais pas le méchant, ne pleure pas. Regarde! Ton papa s'en vient."

And indeed, as she spoke, said Marion, Joseph Brassard and his father and Mé-mère and Albert, with Red Moose in tow, appeared round the corner of the station. Momentarily withdrawing a hand to obliterate the traces of tears on her cheeks and then wrapping Joseph more closely in her arms, Madame Brassard continued in the mother's tongue. "Bon, bon, mon p'tit haïssable," she said coaxingly, "ne fais pas le mauvais. Maman te tient dans ses bras et ton papa est arrivé."

Joseph's roars subsided. Feeling that his world was steadying again, he glanced up and met his mother's rainbow smile. His face changed, said Marion, laughing, from December to June. And all at once, I think, Madame Brassard, seated on the hard packing-case in the bare station, experienced one of those moments of deep contentment that come to us all now and then in our lives. She had her youngest-born, her nurseling, in her arms: the terrors of an unknown North faded away, and whether she had coal-oil lamps or electric light seemed, I am sure, not to matter at all. She was at rest. Close physical contact with those we love goes farther than anything else in

this world to give us this happiness, for touch, if the most elementary of our senses, is also the most deeply responsive. Yes, for that moment Marie Brassard was at rest.

It may be asked how I know this—how I could reconstruct this scene from the meagre details which were all that Marion Ellbank had to give me. Well, to that question, if it were put to me, I should reply:—"There is one universal language and only one—universal, I mean, to women of all sorts and kinds—and that language is not Volapük or Esperanto: it is the mother-tongue." What Marie Brassard said to her boy was as I have set it down, and what prompted her words and lay behind them I know as if I had said them myself. It is this mutual understanding that makes us sisters under our skins. We all understand the mother-tongue, though naturally the range of our capacity for understanding it varies. Some women are mothers born and some are made mothers by the experiences of life. Marie Brassard was a mother if she was anything and she was, I know it, for that flash of an instant completely happy in St. Aniel's dreary station.

I can fancy Jeanne standing silently beside her mother during this little scene and saying over and over again to herself, "I shall come back and be a nun." And I can fancy Mé-mère, as she saw the last of her brood depart from her in the train, tightening her old lips and saying a prayer. After all, she would not have long to wait.

This really sums up Miss Ellbank's tale and the deductions I made from it. I have never heard of the Brassards again. But the breaking up of their home brought to me a thought that has often come to me—that Canada is a man's country, as perhaps all "new" countries are. Men really like, I imagine, to *make* things, and they also get a queer kind of pleasure out of a rough, a "camping" life; the primitive creature is stronger in them than it is in us. Men track farther north or farther west and like to do so, but the woman often go only in order to be with their men. Once there, they help. They make some sort of a home, and in it the family grows. It is the history of the human race.

Of the shack there was not much to tell. The white hens were scattered, for no one would buy the flock and so the snowy drive was a thing of the past. Nellie, when she had taken her mistress to the station, had passed into the keeping of a farmer up the road. He was new at St. Aniel and had taken up uncleared ground, so Nellie was hauling stumps again. I think the most unlovable bit of herself that Miss Ellbank ever showed me was her complete unconcern about the futures of Nellie and Judy; now that she had done with them, she apparently didn't care what became of them. "Oh, they'll be

happy enough," she said, and turned the conversation. I don't know whether she was hard or whether she had no imagination or whether she simply didn't care. At any rate she sold Nellie into slavery again without a tremor; and Judy, *my* Judy, she had, quite nonchalantly as it seemed, handed over to an old travelling pedlar whom she didn't know. She had seen the poor beast being hauled down the road at the end of a rope, striving to escape from her new master's hand, barking and whining and turning towards the home that she was never to see again.

"But Judy was mine," I said, after a pause. "I asked you to bring her here."

"Yes, I know," Miss Ellbank answered, "but you were too late. I had already given her away. Oh, she'll be all right," she said again, struck perhaps for the moment by my expression. "She'll like the old man when she gets used to him, and she'll like watching his bundles when he's at the farms. You know Judy wasn't any good for breeding: she'd grown too big," and here the conversation ended. What was the use of arguing about what had been done; and what can one make of a nature like Miss Ellbank's—except leave it as the mystery it is? This betrayal of Judy is the one thing in her that I find it difficult to forgive, and yet for Marion Ellbank it was no betrayal. I doubt if she perceived it.

At the station next morning, when we were waiting, as people at such times always do, for the appropriate thing to say, I looked up from the station-track at Miss Ellbank who was standing on the little platform or landing outside the car in which she was to take her long journey west. I don't know what made me think of it unless it was our relative positions, but there came into my mind a night at the shack, a late October night, when she had called me to the door that led on to the yard to see a sky flashing with Northern Lights. This sight always has a great effect upon me. I know nothing that so moves me in that great Dominion overseas. I passed her as she stood there and went down into the yard. The sky was white with the intermingling flashing streaks of light, and on that frosty autumn night the white ribbons were intertwined with changing strips of green and brilliant red, as if streams of molten emeralds and rubies were running in the heavens. I turned to say something to my hostess. She was standing there, her head up, her figure outlined in the doorway. How can I say it? She seemed transformed, transfigured, a being not belonging to this earth. All the littleness was out of her. I said to myself: "I will never criticize you again." And then, suddenly, she shivered and said: "Let us go in," and that spectacle was shut out.

As that scene came to my mind there in the station, I wished I could think of something to say to her—something that would match that night. While I hesitated, the train began to move. The train-man came along, shouting "all aboard!" and pushed me back on the station platform. There was no longer an opportunity to say anything. I waved my hand. She stood, very still, regarding me, and half raised her hand in return; and Joan, under her arm, nervously licked her nose and made little ineffectual gestures towards me in the air with her paws. The train was going quickly now; it disappeared into the tunnel, they were gone. So we parted.

I turned and went home—to that flat in which my sophisticated self and the little bit of the aesthetic me belonging to it felt at home. The primitive woman in me, and that other, more deeply-seated and unconscious aesthetic bit of me which belongs to *her*, loved the shack and the mountains, the great sky, the stark simplicity of the life of St. Aniel. The primitive woman in me still longs for those mountains and that life, yes, for the very pails of water that I had to carry across the frozen road. Yet, were the shack to be offered me again today for an old song, I should still refuse it. It is this split in virtually all of us—this impossibility we find of satisfying the two sides of our nature at one time—that lies, I believe, at the root of much of the violence and anxiety in the world today. Those who are primitive want to become sophisticated (and a certain amount of opulence is necessary for sophistication) while those who have achieved sophistication (which is mostly followed by disillusionment) long to be primitive again. I returned, then, to my flat; and now I have resurrected the primitive woman in me by writing about St. Aniel. I have been happy in doing so.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *In a Canadian Shack* by Jessie Georgina Sime]