

A VALLEY FARM

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SPRING

ON the first day of February the woodchuck comes out of his hole to make his annual survey and, failing to see his shadow, prepares for an early spring. Gradually the days lengthen, the sun on his northward journey, like Fama of the Aeneid, gains strength in advancing. Soon the eaves begin to drip and the snow on the sunny side of the house and stable is soft enough to make snowballs. By the end of the month the damp roofs are steaming and the melting snow trickles into the hollows of the barnyard path and splashes the unwary foot. In the orchard the sun has melted a bowl-shaped hollow around the trees and the brown of last year's grass shows at the bottom. The chickadee, in his slate-coloured frock and white vest, feels the warmth of the sun and the disconsolate little chirp changes to a glad ringing call.

February goes, and March comes in like a lion with a roaring southwest wind bringing a warm rain from the Gulf Stream. In a night the snowy hills are changed to a dull brown and the path is a glare of ice. The untidy North Mountain with its patches of snow, grey bare hardwoods and green spruces, sends down a torrent of yellow water like the Tiber and the brook overflows the meadow beside the house.

The lawn in front of the Homestead, with its low pitched roof and cosy Boston ivy, is strewn with last year's leaves from the old chestnut and maple and dead twigs from the ash. Around the border of the flower beds, and from among the rose roots, the first green blades appear; and gaunt ranks of hollyhocks, blown by westerly winds, still lean toward the house as though stricken while imploring shelter from the relentless frosts. Beyond the pale green of the Arbor Vitae hedge, the Highway stretches East and West, a grey strip of gravel bordered by withered brown fields and neatly ploughed orchards where the crows, at this season, come boldly to pick the seeds from last year's rotted fruit. Under the little wooden bridge, with its whitewashed railings, the swirling waters of the brook race across a bit of meadow in front of the Homestead and, gurgling around the piles of the railway bridge, rush on to the flooded marsh where curious bits of flotsam go sailing past.

Beyond, where the river curves to the foot of the South Mountain, grotesque shapes of ice, their tops reared above the dyke like polar bears sporting in the water, glide swiftly down to join their fellows in the Annapolis Basin. The flood surrounds the knoll with its ancient oak and mossy stones that mark the place where

“The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep”,

but feel not the urge of Spring.

With the coming of the pussy-willows, the sawyer and his helper make their annual round. The visit of the rotary-saw marks the beginning of spring work. It is the link between winter chopping in the woods and the varied activities of March and April in preparation for planting time. The saw, with a buzz like a big bee, merrily converts the spruce into lengths for the stove and the shining disc gives a musical ring as the sawyer draws the wood away from the flying teeth in order to turn the stick. Across the river another sawyer is working. It is too far away to hear the hum of the idle saw but as it eats into a stick of mountain beech a burst of song, accompanied by the ‘bark-bark’ of the engine, comes clearly across the marsh.

Next to his cows and horses the valley farmer’s orchard gets the most attention. Before the sap begins to run, the trees are pruned that all their vitality may not go to the growing of wood. Many are the points to be considered, for, besides cutting out the old wood and trimming to allow close cultivation, the tree should be open to sunlight and at the same time well balanced. If the day is stormy, work in the orchard or splitting at the woodpile ceases. But there are some pieces of ash and maple stored under the work bench in the carriage-house and the list on the slate says “Whiffle-tree for horse-rake”. And so the month passes. The prunings in the orchard dwindle as windless days afford opportunity for small fires which will not injure the trees, and the pyramid of fragrant spruce in the woodpile daily grows higher.

March goes out like a lamb and April with its showers and sunny days is redolent of Spring. The ground is water-soaked and soft, but that makes fencing easier. The picturesque old ‘snake’ fence of pioneer days has almost disappeared and the rail or wire fence has taken its place because less material and space are needed in the building. The pasture fences are of the greatest account, for, if a cow strays into the neighbour’s corn field or the young cattle break out of the back pasture, it may mean hours of search—after a toilsome day in the fields—not to mention the damage done or the ‘words’ of the wrathful neighbour. The tongue in the cart is

changed for the shafts, the gear loaded on and the expedition starts for the pasture. As the horse slowly draws the wheels through the clinging mud in the lane the first strawberry blossoms are seen lifting their shy blooms above the withered grass. Just outside the fence, at a spot where water seeps from the higher land, is a cluster of blue violets that droop their shapely heads. At the top of the lane the rhododendrons brighten the landscape with a blaze of purple, the narrow cow paths winding to right and left like neatly edged garden walks. A lichen covered stump on a grassy mound stands sentinel over a patch of mayflowers like some hoary crag overhanging a convent, and the blooms of delicate white and pink, from the protection of evergreen leaves, give forth their pure fragrance to the world about them. As the cart passes last year's potato patch, the crows strutting sedately about among the bleached and twisted vines with a warning cry take flight to the far side of the field, and lined upon the top rail of the fence join in a raucous protest against the intruders. Beyond the rhododendrons the track is lined with evergreen lamb-kill, bare blueberry shoots and budding sweet fern. On the other side of the clearing the hardy alders along the brook are hanging their golden-brown catkins out to be dusted by the wind. 'Jenny' pulls the heavy cart and its load down to the bridge of poles laid across three steel stringers bought from the railroad. She refuses to proceed until some one walks ahead to demonstrate its safety, then she gingerly crosses to the middle but makes a bolt for the other side when the rear wheel snaps a projecting knot.

The fence between the open pasture and the wooded and swampy areas of the back pasture is so rotten that a sheep could push through almost anywhere. The old rails are knocked from the tottering posts while the new stakes, hauled to the spot on the last snow, are being sharpened into big pencils. When the old fence has been cleared away the posts are set and the cart is driven close to the line as a platform from which to swing the apple-wood maul. Dinner time sees a long line of stakes, with one side barked, ready for the rails to be spiked on. The stiff westerly wind carries the sound of a whistle and a glance at the sun proves that it is twelve o'clock. The gear is left behind for the afternoon work; the cart is loaded with old, dry rails for making quick summer fires in the range; and some of the green sharpenings and bark are stowed in one corner of the body to be used for a particular purpose later.

With the first rumble of the cart as it rounds the corner of the big barn a whinny of greeting from the stable is answered by the

team mate outside and almost as soon, the workers, their hands covered with balsam, are greeted by the nonpareil aroma of a nicely browned pork cutlet stewing in onions and gravy. The cows hear the rattle of the harness and the falling shafts, and bellow for their hay. Just as the cheery call for dinner sounds from the kitchen door a flock of geese overhead goes honking north in regular "V" formation.

Work on the farm is never tedious, for it changes with the seasons. When fencing and ditching are done there is the roof to patch where the winter gales tore the shingles from the big barn, or perhaps the mossy north side of the stable roof needs to be re-shingled. Down at the mill the unseasoned shingles and planks, sawn from last winter's logs, wait to be hauled home. While shingles are being 'laid', a long process, begun months before, is completed—the curing of hams and bacon. It is not an arduous process but it calls for some skill and a nicety of judgement to produce that delicious flavour of which none but farm-cured hams can boast. From the big pickle crocks on the duck-boards in the cellar, the hams are changed to a cask of clear water and, after soaking and washing, are carried out to the smoke-house by the woodshed. The smell of the tent shaped structure, with its brown and smoky walls, stirs the imagination. Pictures of Micmac wigwams with their circles of sullen, squatting figures, traders' shacks with a stack of skins in the corner and traps and guns hung about the walls, the first log cabins of the pioneers, their great hearths piled high with snapping pine billets, and the camp fire of last year's fishing trip, move in quick succession across the screen of fancy. The vision ends with a brown and green dinner plate and a slice of savoury ham still hot from the frying pan. The hams and bacon are hung on hooks near the peak of the smoke-house and a slow fire is kindled beneath. It is here that the bark from the fence posts plays its important part, for the green bark produces clouds of thick smoke which impart a flavour to the hams that only spruce can give. The shingling hatchet is dropped every hour or two and the fire carefully watched. When the depth of colour satisfies the critical eye of the expert, the fire is allowed to die down and the hams cool; then they are covered with cheese cloth and hung from a beam in the woodshed where they keep perfectly all Summer.

In an early season the rule may still hold true that

"March winds and April showers
Bring forth mayflowers";

but often by the first of May they are almost over. Then the buttercups in the damp ditches and in the meadow along the brook

burst their yellow balls and open a golden cup to the sun. Below the pool where the horses drink, the rocky shallows are thick with lily flags, their sombre blooms unvisited by the bees. The lawn is covered with clusters of dandelions like daubs of yellow on a painter's palette and a robin hops about in search of lining for her nest. The first gay red tulips sway in the breeze that stirs the rambler rose at the corner of the veranda and the daffodils hang their heads still heavy from the rain. The maple by the pasture gate is shedding its tufts of red, twig-like flowers and the wild pear, blooming triumphantly among its leafless companions in the coppice, heralds the swelling buds and welcomes the new grasses with a shower of white petals. Toward the middle of the month a new softness pervades the air. The last rays of the sinking sun cast a glimmer on the cranberry bog and, stealing gently across the field, rest for a moment on the graves under the old oak. Then, as the swelling buds of the tree top are bathed in the fading light, from the gathering dusk of the bog below rise the soft trillings of an invisible choir and a tremor of the inmost heart strings responds with an emotion inexpressible.

The sandy ground next to the paddock, and the young orchard with its south-easterly slope, are dry enough long before the last patch of snow disappears from the mountain ravine at the back of the farm and spring ploughing begins. The steaming horses, as though sharing the exhilaration of Spring, pull steadily. The call of the grackles, like the grating of a rusty hinge, is drowned by the cheery rattle of the plough wheel. The ploughman, with reins about his neck, whistles blithely as the polished share turns a rolling sod and an earthy smell rises from the furrow. As the sun climbs, the chill of morning is dispelled, and a neighbouring post is changed to a fearsome scarecrow by the shed coat of the ploughman warming to his work. At the end of the morning, as the team with clinking traces passes the barnyard fence on the way to the stable, three moist, pink muzzles and three pair of inquisitive eyes appear between the rails for a moment; then, as a trace strikes the fence sharply, there is a sudden flourish of gawky legs and the calves rush across the yard scattering the frightened hens in the dust-bath like dandelion fluff in a gust of wind. From the far end they view the team with mixed curiosity and apprehension, their ears pricked and heads high, while the hens return hesitatingly to their dusting. Well satisfied with his morning's work, the labourer, his blood quickened by the exercise and the prospects of the work before him, sits down to a savoury board and no meal ever tastes so good as dinner prepared by a cheery housewife for a hungry ploughman in from the field.

Whether the days are warm and sunny or damp and cold, no one of the white Wyandottes will 'sit' till she feels like it and no amount of coaxing or coercion will make her. There is much secret rivalry in the neighbourhood for the distinction of having the earliest brood of chicks and the least ill-luck with later settings. As soon as a hen shows signs of being broody she is carefully watched for a day or two, and if she remains on the nest consistently a barrel and run are placed ready for her under the plum tree. In the dusk of late evening thirteen eggs are carefully placed in the straw and stealthy hands, reaching into the nest, transfer the drowsy hen to the new nest in the barrel where she may hatch her chicks undisturbed. After three weeks' patient sitting the old hen is rewarded by a brood of twelve chicks which gladden the motherly heart of the farmer's wife. It is one of the priceless joys of the farm to feed the fluffy balls of yellow down and watch them answer the 'cluck-cluck' of the mother and gather around the cornmeal for a lesson in pecking or snuggle under her with muffled peeps, an occasional yellow beak poking out from among the feathers of her breast.

Between spring ploughing and planting time there are days when the land is not dry enough to be worked; this is the dyking season. One of the doors in the sluice needs to be repaired and there is a break in the dyke where the ice, with frosty grip, tore the sward from the thawing bank and left the bare earth which the floods widened to a deep, gaping hole. The Dyke Master summons the marsh owners, allots to each his special task, and oversees the work. Sods, cut from the narrow flats outside the dyke, are passed along the line of 'fork men' and neatly built into the gap with layers of brush for strengthening. Dyking is the farmer's 'quilting bee' where work is made pleasant by an exchange of harmless gossip and farm talk. Here the new neighbour makes his debut into the life of the district and by the time dyking is finished everyone has formed his impression of the newcomer.

With dry fields come the busy days of preparation for getting the crops in. It is also time the cows were let to pasture, for already the grass is long enough for grazing. For days past, they have been bellowing discontentedly in the shed, loath to return to the stanchions after their morning drink. Once more given the freedom of the pasture they strain eagerly, with curling tongues, toward the green blades along the lane fence or fall to sham battles with horns interlocked. Last year's root fields are harrowed, sown with oats and 'seeded down' with timothy and clover. The ground for the potatoes is prepared, litter hauled from the barn and harrowed

in; then rows are made with the plough. The seed is cut in the cellar where the odour of apples and celery fills the air and a cloud of grats dance in the sunshine that pours through the open hatch. Only the best potatoes are selected and each cut must have at least two eyes. The planter measures the distance by placing one foot directly ahead of the other and drops a seed at his toe. Before the furrows are covered in, hills of squash and pumpkin are often planted in some of the rows. To avoid frosts the beans are planted later, then turnips and buckwheat are sown.

The long June evenings are spent in the garden and every member of the household takes an interested part. Rows and beds are plotted and sown with great care and plants transferred from their tins in the sun-porch to protecting corrals of shingles in the garden, the strawberry plants are hoed and the weeds pulled from among the young hollyhocks and sweet peas. As the daylight fails, the frogs' soft piping and the friendly hum of the June bug outside the window invite refreshing sleep.

Next morning with the rising sun the household is astir. Oh, the joy of the dewy morn when Nature is unfolding, to young and old, a new Summer. One June morning sees more resolutions made than a whole Summer of New Year's Days. The song sparrow pipes his sweet reveille and all the birds twitter as the first beams, penetrating the grey mist, strike the tree tops and glisten on the tender leaves still rounded from the bud. The swallows are at work under the stable eaves building their home of clay like the Chaldeans of old. Soon the busy bee goes humming to his work, the dragon-fly flits to and fro across the pool and a Tiger Swallow-tail floats gently in the growing heat or resting on a thistle bloom, lazily fans her beautiful wings. The maples have lost their 'keys' and the golden splendour of the early dandelion floats off on the breeze like little grey parachutes with a brown seed for a burden.

SUMMER

Summer is heralded by a burst of glory in the orchard. Blooms of soft pink and white almost hide the grey and brown of limb and twig, scarlet-tipped buds peep from among the new leaves and throughout all the orchard the air is heavy with the fragrance of apple blossoms. The bees, gathering a rich harvest, fill the air with a sleepy hum and from a limb the robin calls cheerily to his mate on the nest. Warm showers and a bright sun have covered the oat fields with a mantle of green spears, the potatoes are several inches above the ground and already the turnips need hoeing and

thinning. The hives by the gnarled and crooked quince bushes at the edge of the orchard are humming with industry. Already new colonies have been hived and the keeper, warned by the excited bees circling fiercely over the hive, prepares to 'take' another swarm. The new queen comes out of the hive and flies to a nearby limb where the others collect and hang around her like a huge bunch of grapes. Protected by a veil and gloves, the keeper carefully saws off the limb or gently brushes the bees into a large pan, then quickly deposits the seething mass on a white sheet spread before the new hive. Scouts find the entrance and the bees crowd in as subjects thronging a palace gate. If the queen is missing, her faithful followers will rise and seek her out, again clustering on a limb or disappearing as a thin black cloud into the blue sky.

Haying is an epic task which taxes the energies of the whole household from the end of June well into August. It is the gateway at the turn of the road leading to a new year. On one side is Spring with all its promise and anticipation, on the other side harvesting and the glories of Autumn when ambition has mellowed to quiet contentment. The tedder and mowing machine are wheeled from the implement shed to be oiled and put in order and the new whiffle-tree is fixed on the horse-rake. The plank body is taken off the cart, the wheels are greased, and the old Dutch rack put in place. The rack consists of two sections, like wide ladders, running the length of the waggon and sloping over the wheels. These sides are supported by four arms which reach down to the 'longwithe' and a cross piece at each end keeps the top rails from spreading. A wide plank runs along the bottom and an upright pole with a peg through the top makes a convenient cross upon which to hang the reins while loading. There is as much difference in hayracks as there is in styles of architecture. Some racks look as though they had been carved from the forest by primitive man, others are mended and patched with boards and wire. One farmer has collected broom and tool handles for 'rounds' and the high, straight sides of his rack suggest Georgian elegance and simplicity, while another man has ripped up the oak staves of an old cask which give the rack distinctly Gothic lines.

On the upland the grass heads are turning brown—it is the sign for haying to begin. Careful observations are made of the weather and if the sunset foretells a fine day haying begins on Monday morning. The long knife, with its triangular sections, is fitted to the mower, the horses are harnessed and driven to the field, the gear is 'thrown in' and with a clatter of the machine the keen edges bite at the stems and the grasses stagger and fall. Haying has

begun. When the mower has cut a back-swath as near the fence as possible the trimming is done by hand. The man with the scythe is a little 'soft' at first and his back and muscles are sore but he is often rewarded by a bed of luscious strawberries in the tall grass or rests for a moment to examine a thrush's nest in the bank by the ditch. As he leans on his snath for a brief respite the 'phit-phit' of another trimmer, dexterously whetting his scythe in a neighbouring field, comes clearly on the breeze. The air is filled with the scent from the clover fields where brown-winged Dianas and red and black Monarchs feed on nectar and laze among the flowers. A bobolink skims over the daisies across the ditch, searching for a fly, then alights and pours forth a gush of liquid notes like the murmur of a tuneful brook.

The new mown hay is turned and shaken out by the tedder with its flying forks, so that sun and wind may 'make' it. Soon after dinner the horse rake makes long windrows across the field and if the hay 'rattles' it is bunched ready for hauling. In the high side of the field the raker has stuck a branch into the ground to mark a bumble-bee's nest and often when bunching is in progress birds' nests are discovered or a little brown jumping-mouse hops fearfully away.

Usually one man builds the load while two pitch on. The rack soon fills up and then the builder, keeping the corners high, fills in between with a wall of hay and tramps the loose ends along the middle of the load. The length of the hay makes a great difference, yet if the wind is not too strong a skilled man can build a solid load that the team can hardly move; but a wise horseman never overloads his horses. The first neat load, with combed sides and rounded top, is stowed in the big barn, the horses trot smartly back to the field to munch at the sweet hay and the workers feel pleased. Upland hay makes quickly and it is all fit to take in; but already the cows are down, sniffing at the new mown hay through the lane fence, and there is time for only one more load. The rest is put in cock for the night and then it is supper time.

Appetites are never poor on the farm and the meal at the end of the day seems unusually good. Welsh rabbit on toast, whole wheat bread with plenty of sweet butter, hot muffins and maple syrup, fresh strawberries with cream, hot chocolate and cake compose the meal. What more could be desired? When supper is finished the cows are milked and work ends for the day.

Next morning at six the cows are milked and turned out to pasture before breakfast. Dew has left sparkling drops on the spider webs in the grass—an assurance of fine weather. After

breakfast various chores are done, hand scythes ground and another mower knife 'touched up'. When mowing is over the cocks are turned and the load in the barn is stowed in the big bay. If there is time a load is hauled before dinner, for the morning's cut will be ready to haul in the afternoon. The thick and juicy clover from last year's oat fields takes longer to make, but at the end of the week all the upland hay is in the barn.

The meadow along the brook is next in the haymaking itinerary. It is harder work here, for the winding brook makes many bends and corners where the machine cannot venture, and besides, a bridge has to be built to get across; but it is far more interesting. At the first 'clack' of the mowing machine a black duck and her brood, surprised in their shady pool, head toward the alders in the pasture. The old turtle slides off his log into the slimy water of a stagnant pool and the trout hide under a rock in the bottom of the brook. As the shadow of the trimmer advances, with a 'swish-swish' of the scythe, a frog dives from the bank with a musical 'plink' and swims into the weeds at the margin. A Mourning Cloak hovers above the sparkling water, displaying her black and gold against the whiteness of a cluster of 'turtle head', then floats off across the field. In the tall grass not far from the barn the trimmer has discovered a hen's nest with eight eggs. As he stoops to gather them in his hat the cat passes with a mouse for her kittens in the barn.

The haying season is well advanced now and everywhere the brown of mown fields is changing to the green of new grass. In the early morning the 'clack' of the mowers, now reduced to a dull rattle by the thick grass on the marsh, sounds in all directions. Everyone is taking advantage of the fine weather and long stretches of marsh are being cut. There is a lull at the noon hour and some who come from a distance to make hay are eating lunch in the shade of a partly loaded waggon. The horses stand reversed, pulling wisps of hay from the front of the rack and tossing their heads at intervals when a fly stings them under the chin. After dinner workers seem to spring from the earth. All over the marsh they are turning, raking, cocking and loading hay. Before the close of the afternoon's work the rest of the hay is neatly cocked and, as the rim of the sun touches the cross on the church spire, the last load bumps over the railway track.

The cows are waiting in the barnyard licking each other's ears or pensively chewing the cud. Milking is finished, a laggard bee drums his anxious way homeward and the sun, sinking behind the hill, leaves the dusk of a summer evening. In the gathering

darkness the hay cocks on the marsh loom like a forest of tents and the fireflies are little twinkling lights. The frogs one by one take up their trilling. A warm breeze, like a gentle breath, carries the smell of new mown hay. The bat wings its noiseless flight about the hollow tree and a moth brushes the cheek. A last drowsy rattle sounds from the barn and it is night.

All days are not fine days but a change of weather gives a respite to the haymaker. When the cows are turned out in the morning the air is warm and close; not a sparkle comes from the dewless grass. In the orchard a blue-jay screams and the infallible couplet warns against cutting more hay:

“Hear a blue jay
See a wet day.”

For an hour the sun is hot, then dark clouds gather, big drops begin to fall and everyone makes for shelter from the downpour.

Someone in the milk-room is churning, for the ‘splash-splash’ of the cream as the churn is revolved by a steady foot on the tread sounds through the open door. For some time the sounds continue, till the ‘plop-plop’ of the cream is scarcely audible above the patter of rain drops on the roof; then with a watery ‘swish’ the butter comes. The thick buttermilk is drained off and the butter washed with a pail of cold water. When the salt is added the tune changes to a ‘bump-bump’ as the gathered butter forms a golden ball. Moulded in a print, with an acorn and wheat-sheaf design, it is covered with a wrapper and piled on the butter-board in the cool cellar.

The pageant of Summer moves on. The kitchen garden has been yielding its increase for weeks. In the field the potato vines so completely cover the rows that horse-hoeing is no longer possible. New potatoes will soon replace the last shrunken and wrinkled survivors in the cellar. The oat fields promise an early harvest and the apple trees bow under the weight of the colouring fruit. There is one more load to be hauled from the meadow at the head of the pasture; then haying will be over.

In the back meadow the odour of dried mint fills the air. Where a little trickle of water forms the humble source of the winding brook a profusion of ‘touch-me-not’ grows, and a touch on their ripened pods sends a shower of seed in all directions, startling the nimble grasshoppers. The last load comes slowly through the gate and the cows, feeding in the tall grass of the swamp, raise their heads for a moment then return to their grazing. The wheels cut into the soft ground and a boggy smell comes from the black earth.

The horses rest for a moment at the border of the wood. The odour of sweet fern, crushed by the heavy wheels, reaches the nostrils and Tithonus, from a lifeless spruce, shrills his eternal note to the blue sky above. The load jolts slowly along the narrow track, overhung with trees, and emerges on the cleared upland. From the top of the load the countryside is visible for miles. To the West the smoke of the busy town rises above the hill; East, a lonely spire, reared above the rolling green of the elm tops, marks the site of a village nestling around it. Over the alders and birches in the depression of the brook the big barn is clearly seen. A patch of red house-roof shows through the trees, and beyond, a stretch of the river gleams like a bit of polished nickel dropped on the marsh. The cart rumbles over the little bridge and a young rabbit bounds across the track. The load reaches the barn in triumph. There is just room between the hay and the sloping roof, and by the aid of the 'horse-fork' the load is safely stowed. The last load is in and a feeling of satisfaction settles down upon the farm. Haying is over.

AUTUMN

Summer is drawing to a close. The robins are making a last raid on the cherry tree and the young kingbirds have learned how to fight the cowardly crows. Far overhead, in the heat of the drowsy noonday, the chimney swifts circle and mount out of sight then dive into view again. Toward evening the swallows gather on the telegraph wires and a night hawk flies low over the close-cropped fields. Fairy wands of cotton grass wave over the red cranberries of the bog, but the pipers are silent now.

September, with its equinoctial gales, is a month of harvest. The grain ripens soon after haying is over and it is cut and hauled to the threshing floor or stowed on the scaffold in the barn till the thresher makes his rounds. Then the Gravensteins are ready to be picked and the Dutch rack is enlarged by a superstructure for hauling new apple barrels from the cooper's shop. The potatoes are dug before the fall rains cause them to decay. They are sorted and hauled to the cellar where they are spread on the sandy floor. The field beans are pulled and made into little stooks with the roots uppermost. When they are dry a pile is made in one corner of the barn floor where they may be threshed and winnowed at leisure.

Apple picking is the last big task of the year. In June the blossoms opened faded and dropped, but the orchard is again glorious with a wealth of rosy fruit. It is September, and the blushing apples weigh the limbs down until they touch the weeds

under the tree. All the orchards of the Valley are dotted with white barrels like fat sheep lying on the ground. The early Gravensteins have been hauled to the warehouse to be packed and shipped. Then picking begins in earnest, for as soon as the Kings and Wealthies are picked other varieties follow in quick succession. There is not the same haste to take advantage of fine weather as in haying, but the apples must all be picked before the heavy frosts come.

The picker carries his ladder and baskets to the tree then goes to the pile of 'empties' and opens two barrels by removing a hoop and knocking in the head. These he carries to the tree, with their chines resting on his hips and arms extended from the shoulders like a milk-maid's yoke. Picking begins from the laden branches near the ground but when they are bare the pointed ladder is cunningly placed where the higher limbs can be reached with safety. The basket he uses is made of long strips pounded from a piece of ash by a skilful Micmac and a 'crotch', cut from a fallen limb, makes an efficient hook by which to hang it on the round of the ladder. When the basket is full, it is lowered to the bottom of the barrel and carefully emptied so that the fruit will not be bruised. As each basket is emptied the barrel is jolted back and forth to settle the apples so that when the head is put on they will not be loose in the barrel.

To the novice, apple picking looks easy enough; but it is not simply pulling the apples off. A straight pull may leave the stem on the tree or break off several inches of twig. An experienced picker knows just how to take hold of an apple and where to put his thumb or finger so that a deft turn will bring it off quite easily and leave the twig, with next year's buds, on the tree. He leans against the ladder and uses both hands at the same time, sorting as he picks, and throwing the gnarled and blemished apples to the ground.

Like a dying tree that gathers strength and bears its last fruit, October comes in a blaze of colour. With shades of red and yellow and brown, copper and green and gold, elfish painters have transformed the mountains. In the rushes close to the turtle pool the bittern drives imaginary stakes and the white-throated sparrow sounds his melodious call across the pasture. The marsh in front of the Homestead is dotted with mushrooms like spectres of the early dandelions. A great blue heron, stalking about like a cogitating philosopher, is disturbed by a vicious mink and flies off across the river, trailing his long legs behind him. In the orchard a belated catbird gives a plaintive cry as if mourning the departure of the other birds and the glad days of Summer.

It is November, and a frosty chill is creeping into the air. Apple picking is over and long loads of creaking barrels go past the hedge on the way to the warehouse. The loads are heavy, for the hubs strike the axle-shoulders with a dull knock as the wheels glance from the loose stones in the road. The driver walks beside his cart to lighten the load and keep himself warm. When the last barrel is safely housed, the turnips in the field are pulled and the tops are cut off with a long knife made from an old scythe. The turnips are put in a cellar under the barn floor and the tops are fed to the cows, now content to stay in their comfortable stanchions, protected from the cold rains. Ditching and ploughing occupy the shortening hours of daylight between morning and evening chores. The ploughman no longer whistles at his work for the wind is cold and the horses are tired. He is glad when it is finished.

Back in the pasture there is little 'feed' left; it is time the young cattle were driven to the barn. They are timid at first and many a rabbit and partridge breaks cover when the animals charge through the undergrowth. Finally, quieted by the presence of one of the staid old cows, they follow her lead across the pasture. As they enter the lane the woodchuck is surprised on his annual migration from his hole in the clover field back to winter quarters in the woods.

The old oak has laid a fresh covering of leaves on the grassy mounds beneath it; another year is passing. The leaves of the ivy have fallen and some have collected in a corner by the veranda steps where the bitter wind is tossing them back and forth like a cat playing with a mouse. The hives at the edge of the orchard are protected for winter and a last harvest is gathered from the bees. At the end of the day the farmer and his household sit before the open fire while outside the winds moan through the leafless branches of the orchard. He is thankful in heart, for

“Happy the man, whose wish and care
A few paternal acres bound,
Content to breathe his native air
In his own ground.”