

A PEEP AT THE PRAIRIE.

BY REV. W. S. BLACKSTOCK.

The grand prairie of the west is rapidly becoming a thing of the past. As it appeared to DeSoto, when he discovered the Father of Waters, or even to the gold hunters, who crossed it at a much later period on their way by the overland route to California, even now it exists only in history. It is no longer the "Illimitable Wilderness," or "The Great Lone Land," nor is it any more the home of the "crooked-backed oxen" described by the Spanish explorer. It, like everything else on this continent, is in a state of rapid transition. The characteristic peculiarities of its primeval condition are passing away like the snow beneath the summer sun, and the "crooked-backed oxen" have already become virtually extinct. In order to find any considerable stretch of primitive prairie one has to go into the Canadian North-west, and even there the tide of immigration is setting in more and more strongly every year, and the advent of civilization is producing the same changes that it has wrought farther south. Anybody who desires to see the prairie of the North-west in anything like its primitive condition, even without the Buffalo which once was one of its chief glories, must make haste and use present opportunities.

It is not, however, about the primeval prairie that I am about to write. That must be left to the earlier explorers, or to those who have pushed farther into those vast solitudes than I had done at the time to which this article chiefly refers. What I have to say refers not so much to what the prairie was when it was only the home of wild beasts and of nomadic tribes of uncivilized men, but to it as it is, or rather what it was twenty years

ago. It was not until 1872 that I first saw the grand prairie, and then I was only permitted to touch the border of it, that portion of it in which civilization had made the greatest progress. My experiences and observations were all comprised in what at the time was described as, "A Raid into Indiana," and "A Run through Illinois."

Of course I had been hearing and reading about the prairies from my childhood. It was when I was a boy that the tide of immigration fairly began to flow in thither. Then a man who had gone as far west as Chicago, and as far south as St. Louis, had enough to talk about, in the way of adventure, the rest of his life. But, unfortunately for me, the mystery and romance that once belonged to a journey of this sort, and to the country itself, had ceased to exist; and, though I had no reason to find fault with it, I found a somewhat extended trip in luxurious coaches over the Grand Trunk, the Michigan Central, the Panhandle and the Illinois Central railroads rather a tame and matter-of-fact affair. But for the presence of my fellow travellers, all of whom seemed disposed to converse, and some of whom did so with intelligence and interest, I fear I should have found it positively dull.

Even the prairie itself was disappointing. It would, no doubt, have been more so had I not been forewarned concerning some of its peculiarities. A Yankee, who happened to "live right there," as he said, gave me a suggestive hint as I was leaving home, which I found of use to me. "Take plenty of reading matter with you," said he, "for you will have plenty of time for reading and meditation. There is no other part of the