

HOLIDAY READING

A WESTERN IDYLL.

It was long ago, and far away. The buffalo roamed the plains, and the reindeer was not even harnessed to an Esquimaux sleigh. The arctic fox and the polar bear, the moose and the wapiti, the beaver and the otter, wandered at will, their only foe, the Indian, for the white man and his "fire-tube" had not reached these great wastes. Neither for food nor for furs were these animals chased, since man, proud man of the civilized sort, was yet far away from the region.

Half way from Hudson's Bay to the Pacific—half way from the "Mexic Bay" to Arctic waters—in the great territory between the Rocky Mountains, Lake Athabasca and Lake Winnipeg, stretched the great territory that so lately was made a state. Summer bloomed and died; Winter came and went among the quiet lakes and rivers, and still the hardy European explorers who searched the ocean on either side—the interior sea as well—and who crossed the continent farther south from the Ottawa to the Mississippi and beyond, had failed to visit this great interior land, and left it to the habitation of animals.

But the civilizer was coming; the explorer and trader would not be denied. Scientist and priest in one, he sought the secret of the Great West. In 1776, we are told Hearne planted a fort on the lower waters of the Saskatchewan river. Not long afterward Edmonton House was placed near where Edmonton now stands, and became, we are told, the central post of a district extending 200 miles north and east, and almost to the Rockies on the west. Up from the south, to look for quarrel with their foe, the Cree, or perchance to trade for furs, came Blood, Piegan, and Blackfoot Indian. "Many were the alarms and excursions which startled the pickets of the lead-bespattered old stockade, many the successful ambushade along the winding trail of the river, many the long-drawn skirmish which flickered and crackled fitfully among the wooded slopes back of the fort." These savages gone, life went on quietly enough with the Hudson's Bay Company folk, carpenters, blacksmiths, boatmen, traders, the great event of the calendar in this far outpost of trade and civilization being the arrival of the "brigade" of boats and later of the annual steamer with the year's supplies.

In the early sixties came the miners, from far Montana, Kootenay and Cariboo, looking for placer gold on the banks of the great river, and a dozen years later the Mounted Police to establish Fort Saskatchewan. And in the hope that the Canadian Pacific Railway would take the northern route, which two lines its successors are now exploiting, came in 1880 settlers to Edmonton. "Their arrival," writes Mr. G. E. Grogan, "was the first beginning of things in Edmonton as a town, as distinguished from a trading post. Traders, missionaries, miners, soldiers, are all necessary as pioneers of a new country, but it is the settler, the man of cows and crops, who really counts." "Presently," he adds, "a little irregular cluster of log shacks and small frame buildings began to rise on the bank of the river, where now stretches the east end of Jasper Avenue. There was another small business centre on the hill just west of the fort. Along the trails, through the woods between, one came upon a church, a saloon, a store, as the chance of the road might happen."

But a railway was to come. George M. Grant and Sanford Fleming made the trip from ocean to ocean and told the people of Eastern Canada what English hunters and explorers had already told the world of the vast possibilities of our North-West Territories. The Calgary and Edmonton railway was built and immigration into what is now Northern Alberta began. And the growth in the neighborhood of Edmonton, plus its splendid position on the high bank of the great river led to the choice of that place as the

capital of a province destined for a great future. Already the Canadian Northern Railway track runs into Edmonton, and soon it will be connected by the Grand Trunk Pacific with the far East and West.

Not to deal too much in figures of distance, startling as there are, we come to Edmonton of to-day, stirring, picturesque, modern. Ten years ago it was the merest village, the black mud of the prairie forming its streets; and nearly three quarters of it have been built during the last four years. The census of 1901 showed a town of 2,652 people, while to-day it has 8,000. The assessable value of the town in 1901 was \$1,395,912, and the assessment figures of the city for 1905 will approach \$6,000,000. From this point can best be reached the distant regions along the North Saskatchewan, the mighty Athabasca, Peace and Mackenzie Rivers, their numerous tributaries, and the great northern lakes. Says Mr. F. T. Fisher in a recent pamphlet: "The changing of the creaking cart, and canoe and York boat for railroad and steamer; the retirement of the red man to make room for his white brother; the replacing of the buffalo, which once made the prairie resound to the thunder of their hoofs, with the more useful, if less picturesque, Shorthorn and Hereford; the exchanging of the trap and rifle for plow and self-binder; the transition from tent and wigwag to comfortable farm house and stately city home, all this has not discredited the judgment of the early traders. Edmonton is still, and will remain, the gateway of the North-West. Edmonton is still one of the greatest primary markets for fur on this continent, and the volume of its trade with the great north is very large."

Nor are the ranch, the farm, and the fur trade the only features which must make this district rich. Among the potential elements which at first were likely to upbuild the town, coal was not thought of; but coal lies in plenty in the very streets of Edmonton, whose residents can place it in their cellars at \$3.00 per ton for grate bituminous, while factories can have "slack" for half that price. Sewerage, water-works, electric light, fire-fighting appliances, the telephone—all these are undertaken by the city. More than this, a dozen villages are already connected by wire and there is a farmers' telephone line through Clover Bar and Agricola settlements, so that these Western agriculturists and merchants have "bettered the instruction" of their Eastern exemplars.

Nothing that a vigorous, enterprising community needs for comfort and convenience has been neglected by this modern town, whose residents wisely have supplied themselves with means of education and social advancement.

The scale upon which all this development has been launched, the rapidity of its extension, the romantic character of its transition, the extraordinary confidence of its people, justify us in calling the conversion of this distant community from a mere stockade into a prosperous city, An Idyll—or, better still, A Matter-of-Fact-Romance. Not a creation of the imagination, but the construction by strong minds and willing hands of a great and interesting reality out of what was for long a prairie dream. The possibilities of that wide Canadian West are immense. Its wonders are untold. Its interest is endless.

ALEX.

TWO CHRISTMAS LETTERS.

Both of them were young fellows, twenty-three or thereabouts, and both had been brought up in the quiet old English town of Medland-on-the-Marl. Both also had experienced the difficulty of finding the opportunity which makes the man in that old land, where opportunities are so few, and the men waiting eagerly to seize them, alas! so many. When, therefore, some pamphlets telling of the