

A VISIT TO A PRAIRIE SCHOOL

THE visitor knocked rather timidly at the door of the little yellow school house. Eleven o'clock of a busy morning seemed an inauspicious time to intrude upon the young idea. However, the pleasant-faced little schoolma'am swept all lingering doubts aside by extending a ready welcome.

"I'm going to stay till four o'clock," announced the visitor. "So just put me in the dunce's corner and forget about me."

"Oh, dear, we haven't got such a thing! But do come in."

The first sight to greet a newcomer upon entering that scrupulously clean room, with its bowls of spring flowers in every window, was a large Canadian flag done in colored chalk on the blackboard.

"Wasye Kropotki's work," whispered Miss Smith. "He's our champion draughtsman."

From the teacher's platform one saw three double rows of smiling faces, about thirty in all.

"What do you do with that very tiny chap while the rest are studying?" asked the visitor, indicating an Indian baby boy of three years who sat at a kindergarten table nearby.

"That's our Tiny Tim. Oh, he generally builds block houses. He's awfully good—never crying or making a noise to disturb the others. Three days a week his mother goes out washing and so his two sisters bring him here. Tiny Tim behaves like a little gentleman. Big Bear was his great grand-daddy, but there's nothing of the rebel about this papoose!"

This particular country school had a reputation. Its teacher was known as a girl with ideas of her own, so the visitor watched with considerable interest the methods she employed. School-teaching being the more or less thankless job it is, it was exhilarating to find a teacher so thoroughly in love with the work that she was not afraid to expend some original ideas upon it. The junior oral spelling class came up.

"Spell 'busy,'" said the teacher to a small chap who was very evidently of Russian descent.

"B-i-z-z-y," he answered glibly.

"Wrong!"

"But it does spell it," he protested in surprise.

Another pupil gave the correct spelling.

"But that spells 'bewsy'!" exclaimed the child.

The teacher was equal to the occasion. In a few words and gently, she explained that we were not responsible for the eccentricities of the English language as handed down to us.

At noon the teacher lighted an oil-stove, the presence of which had been puzzling the visitor.

"Katia, Mary and Olga, will you get the cups and spoons and pass them," she ordered. "And, Axel, please fetch me some fresh water."

By EDITH G. BAYNE

She took from a cupboard a large saucepan, a can of cocoa, a bottle of milk and some sugar.

"Do you always have hot cocoa for lunch?" asked the visitor.

"Yes, or else soup. Once or twice we have had malted milk, but the children don't seem to care for it as well."

"Doesn't this work encroach on your noon hour?"

"Oh it does of course. But then—" she shrugged.



"I suppose the pupils clean up."

"Yes, and they seem to enjoy it. Two of the girls have charge of the cupboard, and in winter two of the boys look after the box-stove. The quality of the pupils' work has gone up fully fifty per cent. since we instituted this wrinkle. A cold snack, you see, is a rather miserable preparation for the afternoon's lessons. Oh, I had some kicking to contend with at first! One German parent took the trouble to call on me and say: 'Maype you tink I don't feet my Kit Lena, eh? Lots to eat she gets at home.'

"It was worse when I first introduced the thin edge of the wedge in regard to our Friday afternoon 'politics' space. (By the way, this is Friday, so you

will be able to hear us.) One of the chronic kickers came around and told me that I would be reported to the board if I didn't remove Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Sir Robert Borden from the curriculum. 'Is dot vot you call school-teaching?' he snorted. 'My Kit, Mary, comes home and tells me already how she is going to vote!'

"You see, that hour from three to four on Friday used to be given over to a concert or a spelling-match. So I just told the board that I intended to utilize it in a better way. And what better than to teach these boys and girls something about our Canadian statesmen? You would be surprised, too, how they look forward to the lesson!"

When three o'clock came round the visitor could indeed observe a subtle excitement in the school. The children sat up very straight and waited with ill-concealed eagerness for the opening of the proceedings.

"Now I'm going to try Benny and Myra first," announced Miss Smith. "They are our two newest pupils and this is their first Friday at school."

She pinned a large picture of the Premier of Saskatchewan on the blackboard with a glass-headed tack, and turned about inquiringly.

"That's Mister Martin," said Benny at once.

"Premier Martin, Benny. Now, Myra, do you know who this man is?"

MYRA smiled agreeably. She evidently believed in putting in a good word for everybody.

"Yaw," she said. "He ban nice fella."

A ripple of merriment passed over the class.

"Dmitri will stand up and tell us something about our Premier," said Miss Smith.

Dmitri was about ten and he was bashful, but he rose and obeyed. His knowledge was accurate, even if his delivery was quaint and halting. Following him, Axel (who had brought the water from the pump) got up and discoursed upon free wheat. He told us just what benefits would accrue from it, and he side-stepped the subject a moment or two to give us some facts about mixed farming and the marketing of cattle. It wasn't just patter. The boy was hugely interested in his subjects, as of course he was himself a potential (and intentional) farmer.

A map of the western battle front hung on the wall. The pupils had made it themselves, with a row of red-headed pins to represent the British lines. The so-called Hindenburg line was picked out in black pins, while our Allies' trenches were shown in blue, yellow, white and green. The pupils were required to gather a sort of war summary or review of the week's war news so that on Friday these pins might be moved forward or backward as the case

(Concluded on page 24.)

PERSONALITY AND PHILANTHROPIST

By MADGE MacBETH

FIRST Jewish settler in Ottawa was Mr. M. Bilsky. His wife, who is still living, deserves especial mention. . . . undaunted by the responsibilities of rearing her own large family, she adopted five other children, all in a lump! And this at a time when considerable pulling was necessary to stretch the housekeeping allowance from one week to the next. The young Bilsks were taught at an early age the joy of giving and they formed quite a creditable benevolent society amongst themselves, caring for the Jewish immigrants who were finding their way into the city. These foreigners, Russians and Poles, were generally in desperate straits, ignorant as to language, lean as to purse and utterly without an idea as to the best way of earning a livelihood.

The Bilsks fed and clothed several families, but even their generosity could not compass the ever-growing need. So Lillian, then a girl about sixteen, decided to broaden their activities, and band together all the Jewish people in moderately comfortable circumstances for the purpose of looking after those

in need of assistance. Under her youthful leadership the Society flourished, its efficiency is proven by the fact that never since its formation, has any outside charity been called upon to help the Jewish people. Even the city charity organizations have been relieved of this burden.

Miss Bilsky did not look upon her marriage with Mr. Freiman as an excuse for dropping her philanthropic work. On the contrary, she made it the means of performing added charities. For instance, she adopted a little girl who had been receiving ill-treatment in the family where she had been placed; she made work in her own home for women whose capabilities did not quite equal their willingness and who could not keep situations elsewhere. And the people she fed.

Mrs. Freiman's enormous connection, her personal knowledge of so many of the city's poor, brought her in close touch with the Children's Aid Society, and that in turn with the Juvenile Court, where her

attendance is frequent. It is quite the ordinary thing for her to be summoned to the Court, for her to "get the children off," after which she exacts a promise that they report to her every few days. This seems to satisfy all concerned—the officers, the parents, the children. The reforms which have resulted from her gentle methods of dealing with delinquents are too numerous to mention. Boys who apparently had made a habit of stealing, now hold positions of trust in large institutions; girls whose feet slipped from the difficult moral path, are now happy wives and mothers. And it is worth recording that when, owing to some one's dark record, a position could not be found elsewhere, that person was always sure of being given a trial in Mr. Freiman's mammoth store.

A few years ago, when the Freimans moved into a new home, their neighbours exhibited quite a little pardonable curiosity and puzzlement in regard to the procession which flowed to and from their door. The neighbours, risking an eye from behind the front bed-room window-curtains, did not know about