

For Her Children's Sake OR A MOTHER BRAVING A WILDERNESS

(CONTINUED.)

CHAPTER 3. IN A STRANGE LAND

When we arrived at Rosthern, it was already quite dark, but it so happened to our great joy, that the Rev. Father Alfred Mayer, O.S.B., and Mr. Britz of the Settlement Society were at the station and met us. Father Alfred was the Prior of a small monastery of Benedictine monks at Cluny in Illinois. This Benedictine community had offered themselves to the Vicar Apostolic of Prince Albert for the care of souls in St. Peter's Colony, where they hoped to meet with conditions that were ideal for establishing anew their monastery. Father Alfred and Mr. Britz directed us to the Queen's Hotel. The town had two hostels and this was considered the best one, but it was very much overcrowded. After having appeased our hunger with the first warm meal in more than three days, we were shown to a medium sized room, perhaps the same room in other days. It was already occupied by a family of six. The furniture consisted of a camping cot and some mattresses placed all over the floor. Lest he or she appear selfish, nobody wanted to occupy the cot, so that in the end everybody sought rest on the mattresses, without taking off the clothes to sleep. As the next day was a Sunday we went to Holy Mass which Father Alfred said in a big ware-house, back of the hotel. There were quite a number of prospective settlers present at this Mass. Some late sleepers were still lying on cots crouched under their blankets in this same building while Mass was going on. After dinner Rosa and Anna went in search of other quarters and found a restaurant and boarding place, conducted by a family from St. Paul. We went, then, to this place, where we found out that the Settlement Society had put up a number of temporary shacks for the accommodation of settlers. We looked up these places and found that all were occupied with the exception of one room. This room we claimed for our shelter, while waiting for the arrival of Henry and his car of freight.

One of the best impressions that the settlers received during their enforced stay at Rosthern came, no doubt, from the long string of grain elevators and the flour mill that stood alongside the car tracks. As I still remember there were seven or eight elevators, each one having a capacity of from forty to seventy thousand bushels of grain, thus giving certain proof of the great productivity of the surrounding country. (By the way, I may here also mention that Mr. Seager Wheeler of Rosthern has taken the highest prizes for the world's best hard wheat for a number of years past now.)

On that Sunday Anna procured some writing material and wrote a long letter to our brother in far away Nebraska, telling of our safe arrival here. On the following morning mother, Rosa and Anna went into town and bought a small camp stove, a few wheelbarrows full of wood, cooking utensils, food, provisions, and a lot of materials for quilts and blankets. That same afternoon mother and the sisters were as busy as they could be to turn the materials into bed coverings. Towards evening we were settled in the rough shack and sitting around the fire: We were eating once more of our own, ever so frugal, home cooking.

Our new habitation was a long, low gabled and flat roofed affair. The shack was built of a single thickness of shiplap full of knot holes and wide cracks affording

more than the needed amount of ventilation. The roof was covered with tar paper and leaked in a thousand places. Along the two longest sides the shack was partitioned off into rough rooms, measuring about 14x16 feet. There were about ten such rooms opening out from each side and every one sheltered one, and, sometimes, two families. These people had arrived from all parts of the United States. Some had come directly from Europe. Among our neighbors there were also boys, and as boys are, it did not take us long to get acquainted with each other. The days passed quickly whilst scouting around and playing. During these days my eleventh birthday came and passed without any one giving it the least thought.

Week after week passed and Henry had not yet arrived. It hardly needs telling that we all were worried and exceedingly anxious, and Rosa more than all the others. How we watched and kept a lookout for that big Illinois Central freight car which contained Rosa's husband and all our earthly possessions. Every incoming train was mustered, and every morning Mary or I had to go to the station and ask about the night's trains and arrival of settlers' cars. Mother and Rosa tried to have the car traced repeatedly by wire, but without success, until, at last, it was located about 40 miles down the line. On receiving this news our joy was unbounded and we gave thanks to God.

CHAPTER 4. AT THE CONFINES OF CIVILIZATION

During one of the first days after we had arrived mother and Rosa went to the office of the Catholic Settlement Society and sought information about the location of our homesteads, the distance and direction from Rosthern, etc. Mother namely had thought that it would be a good plan to walk out to the claims and look them over before Henry's arrival in order to be better able to speed up the unloading and transferring of the chattels and get settled down, as soon as he reached Rosthern. It is difficult to describe their astonishment and dismay, when they learnt that: 1) Our land was somewhat over 100 miles away toward the east; 2) that no roads led there, but only trails which were almost impossible for passage in spring; 3) that if we should succeed, more by a miracle than otherwise, in getting there, we would not have a neighbor within a radius of 75 to 100 miles, and 4) that the Saskatchewan River must be crossed at Fish Creek on an ancient ferry boat which was not making crossings at the present time on account of danger from floating ice cakes. Therefore, mother and Rosa came home thoroughly discouraged. There was nothing left to us, except to await Henry's coming.

At last, after having spent more than three weeks "en route" Henry and the car showed up. After a most joyful welcome from us all, and especially from Rosa and their little girl Cunigunda (Albertina?) mother had the car spotted for unloading, paid the freight bill which amounted to \$113.00 (which came near to taking all her funds). We began unloading and released in haste our long imprisoned, dear animals. First came the team of horses that had lost much flesh. Then, the good black cow which must for yet a while continue to eat hay, there being no green grass. Then, the chickens which were liberated at the shack and commenced at once their duty of supplying us with food. Lastly, there was Anna's dog, a great Dane which my brother reluctantly was forced to buy for Anna, a few days before we left Nebraska. However, this dog proved to be a nuisance and a

good for nothing thing, as I will mention later on. The dog's name was Fortuna. She had broken loose in the car and devoured Rosa's cat. All in all, Fortuna was not what her name signified. Anna refused a very good offer for the dog. If only she had sold Fortuna, when she was chained down at the shack. Rosa was severely disappointed, when she found that her pet house-flowers (a large and beautiful collection) had been completely frozen en route. After having them hauled 1500 miles, she had to throw away the pots of earth and all. The potatoes and a lot of home-canned fruit were, however, in prime condition.

Henry hitched the team to the wagon after it was assembled, and we unloaded the furniture, etc., and removed it to our temporary home. What we could not make use of in our small room, we put in one pile on the outside of the shanty. To insure the furniture against loss and damage from various causes we raised the pyramid tent over the pile. Mother has since realized and often said, that it would have been better to have left all the stuff in Nebraska; horses included. Considering that the furniture had to be carted farther than a hundred miles across marshes, swamps and sloughs without any road whatsoever, it was not worth it, while the horses, coming from a southern climate, could not become acclimatized without good feed, water and protecting shelter; all succumbed sooner or later in making the prairie trips. It would have been much better to have gotten rid of everything in Nebraska and come to Canada only with the money that we could have realized by having a sale. Here, then, it would have been better to buy only a yoke of oxen, a plow and wagon, and as many cows as possible, in addition to only such other articles of housekeeping as were most necessary for pioneering. If mother could only have known all this before, she could have saved herself and us all the trying experiences, associated with that pile of encumbrances. There were many other settlers, however, who had made the same mistake and who later said, how much better it would have been, if they had set fire to their stuff, or thrown it into the river.

During our stay at Rosthern there were many men who lost their courage when they heard that their land was a hundred and more miles from the nearest railroad point. They fled south again, because they had not the stuff in them for pioneering. They would not have been any credit if they had stayed, nor were they missed, when they had departed again. On the other hand, there were many others who would have done likewise, if they could have commanded the necessary money, with which to buy their return passage. These men and more often yet the women lost no chance of abusing the Settlement Society and good Father Alfred, or to heap the vilest charges and curses on Canada in general, and the Colony and Saskatchewan in particular. I know of one man, living near us in the shack, who threatened to shoot up the office of the Settlement Society, if they would not help him out of this accursed country again. Such were the dark pages of history that could have been written about many discouraged beginners in St. Peter's Colony. Some of these men are still living in the Colony today, after sixteen years, and they could leave with thousands of dollars to the good, if they took a notion to sell out. But they think different now and remember their former discouragement only with shame.

When Henry learnt of the state of local affairs and that the homesteads were far out in the hinter-

land he was anything but enthusiastic about the future. However, mother and Anna screwed up their courage to a point where it was well nigh impossible to attempt discouraging them. Nothing but a great disaster could overthrow their will, and where there is a will, there is a way. This gave again new courage to Henry and Rosa.

CHAPTER 5. MORE HARROWING EXPERIENCES

Day after day more men arrived from the south, some bringing their families along, too. People were beginning to pitch tents all around the shack in which we were living. The tents were small round affairs with a single center pole. One day the news spread that the whole community of the Benedictine monastery had arrived from Illinois, and that they were camped a little south of us. The business men of the town were beginning to reap a golden harvest, as the settlers stocked up heavily in making ready to go on their land. Now and then word came back that the river was still impassable and those that had tried came back for a longer wait.

Most of us boys were very busy during that time killing small harmless snakes of which we found a large number along a creek and under a railroad trestle. Each boy strung his catch on a stick, and the one who had caught the greatest number was considered the champion of the day. Perhaps I should have gone to school, but as we were transients and not rate payers, the school authorities might have objected. At any rate mother did not inquire about the whereabouts of the school. We boys also improvised rafts and went sailing down the creek which was still running high with water. Once the raft capsized and made us jump, but the water reached only to our knees. Not wishing to come home wet and for fear of punishment, we dried our stockings and shoes at a small campfire, before we left. We boys, too, had a mighty respect for the red-jacketed soldiers, or the Royal N. W. Mounted Police whom we saw occasionally riding or walking on the streets.

One day Henry met a man on the street in whom he recognized a Mr. Buchmann from our home town in Nebraska. As we all knew him well, he brought the gentleman along home, who wanted to know how in the world we happened to find our way up here, as he himself got mighty near to being lost. He was very enthusiastic about land and farming here, but after having made an unsuccessful attempt to reach that part of the Colony, where his and our land was to be, he left in company of Henry and another man some time later on. But I am getting ahead of my story.

This was the situation, when shortly after Henry's arrival the word passed around that people were crossing the Saskatchewan river at Fish Creek, a French-Canadian village. Henry got the smaller tent ready and also a full camping outfit. Likewise he drove to a farm and bought a supply of oats to be taken along for the horses during the journey through the wilderness, in locating the claims. The oats cost more than they were worth on the market.

CHAPTER 6. IN QUEST OF THE HOMESTEADS

Bright and early on the following morning Henry and two other men—one being John Cales, a Luxemburger like Henry—started out with the horses and the outfit to traverse a roadless and unsettled country with the intention of finding, beyond Fish Creek and Leopold, the two homesteads which the

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