

STORIES
POETRY

The Inglenook

SKETCHES
TRAVEL

THE WILD WEST.

By Annie S. Swan.

He came and squatted on the deck beside my steamer chair, and began to talk. The young face looked out so seriously from under the brim of his weird-looking slouch hat, reminded me so much of one I knew and loved in the long ago time, and who has passed into the great silence, that my heart warmed to him. I said what a thing it must be for him to be going home after so many years, and what a joy his coming would make in his mother's house.

"Yes," he supposed it would. "But things would be different, perhaps. He himself had changed quite a bit. Five years he had been out on the ranch. It had seemed to be the only thing to do at the time when things happened at home, and he could not go on with his college career owing to lack of funds. He had tried the city, but quickly discovered that there is little prospect there unless one has powerful backing. Besides, he hated the life, it was so confined. So he had pulled up stakes and gone West.

"Yes, he had been fairly successful, and on the whole liked the life. It was rough, of course, but he had been very lucky in striking a good boss, a Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge, who had had the ranch ten years. Oh, he had done all right, made a good bit of money, and could afford to come home if he liked, only he didn't care about it now, his heart was all bound up in the ranch.

"Yes, the boss was married, and his wife was of his own station and had been brought up as English gentlewomen are, without a notion of anything outside the sheltered walls of their own home."

"Was she happy?" I asked.

"She was all right with him, but she didn't like the life, though he had built a fine stone house for her, and it was filled with every comfort—a piano and heaps of books. The boss himself was a first-rate musician, and it helped him a lot. But she had no help in the house, and it was hard on her, of course. She was very lonely, and always tired at nights, and they were forty-seven miles from a town and railway station, and only got their mail about once a month. But she never complained. She was not that kind of woman.

"No, they did not all live in the house. The boys, there were seven of them, had a sleeping shack outside, and sometimes they would be away six weeks at a time on what they called the round-up. They drove with a team, accompanied by a cooking wagon and a sleeping wagon, to the utmost limit of the ranch, miles and miles, inspecting the stock. The round-up was pretty good fun, and they lived on the fat of the land, first-class grub all the time, killing their own fresh meat as they went, and shooting birds. The cook had as much as sixty dollars a month, twelve pounds of English money. All sorts of men were to be found in the cook wagons. Once a professor from New York, who had had a nervous break-down, came out to recuperate, and that was what he did. He was shocked at the manner of the boys at first, their thunder and lightning horrified him. But he soon got used to it, and annexed a good deal of their language.

"Yes, he got quite well, and went back to his university. He had never heard whether the Wild West had unsettled him permanently. Perhaps it might have done.

"Drink? Yes, there was a pretty fair amount, likewise gambling. It was their only recreation. When a boy gets down to the little town after, say, five months up on the ranch, he is inclined for a burst. And there isn't any outlet except the hotel bar, and the drinks; not a rational amusement of any kind, and all the loafers on the look-out for him, the remittance men, and the sharks. He didn't care for that sort of thing himself, and seldom went in; it was all a matter of temperament. But he never blamed the boys, nobody could if they knew. When you are absolutely cut off, life is not the same, the whole standard changes. Lower, of course, that is inevitable. There is no brake on the wheel. A Church service once or twice in a year, perhaps, and no companionship of women; that was the worst of all. It soon knocks away a fellow's refinement.

"What did he think of chaps marrying and taking girls out from England to such a life? Well, everything depended on the girl, of course, but he wouldn't do it himself; thought it a beastly shame." He reddened a little and threw away a half-smoked cigarette, as if it had lost its flavor.

"It wasn't so bad for a man, of course; a good horse and a free gallop over these fine plains compensate for a lot; but with women it is different, quite. And nobody could tell them just how it would be till they got there, and found it all out. It was calculated to knock the bottom out of romance.

"Yes, he had always kept up with his people and answered letters regularly. Some of the boys did not, but let themselves drift from the beginning. They had a boy on the ranch once, who never wrote home, and after six years one of his home people got his address somehow and sent him a letter. When he started out to answer it, he could not remember the names of his brothers, he said, and so sent love to 'all the rest.' But he was Irish, so they did not believe him.

"Yes, he thought he was glad to be going home. It came upon him all of a sudden, the longing that would not be crushed. He just rose up and told the boss he must go, and he had been very good about it and made everything easy. But now, when it was coming so near, he was not so keen. He had changed a lot, and he was afraid things would worry him. A little pert English girl travelling on the train from the West had made a great fuss in the dining-car because they did not provide fish knives for her to eat fish with. He had never eaten any fish for months, and was thankful to get it with or without the proper knives. When a chap lives on salt meat for six months he gets like that. Those were the sort of things he had not much patience with, and his English clothes might worry him, too. It would take quite a while to get shaken down.

"Yes, he expected to go back in spring. There was nothing else to do.

"His mother did not know he was coming. He had started out so suddenly there was no time to write. He would wire a brother to meet him first, so that there might not be any shock."

There was a sort of pathos in the smile with which he got up and walked away. My eyes grew a little dim as they followed the straight, clean figure, and noted the fine, strong outline of his well-used English face. When one is forty-seven miles from anywhere, spending one's days breaking broncos and rounding up cattle, is one doing much either to build up one's own character or to weld an empire together? I wonder, and I have my doubts.—British Weekly.

MISS MATTIE'S BIRTHDAY GIFT.

The Third Class was going up to the well in Miss Mattie's yard for a pall of water. Not that it needed the whole ten of the Third Class to do this; Teddy Raglan and Gobby Foster, who were the only boys in it, carried the pall and headed the procession, and behind them came four pairs of little girls, arm in arm, and each little girl wore a gay print sunbonnet and had bare plump feet.

The Third Class was always glad of an excuse to go over to Miss Mattie's. Miss Mattie lived in a little brown house just across the road from the schoolhouse. It looked like nothing so much as the bird's nest, a little larger than common, among its apple trees and lilac bushes.

When the Third Class was recrossing the yard after its visit to the well, Miss Mattie came to her gate and called to it. She had two jelly cookies apiece for each member of it, and, besides, she gave each of the little girls a bunch of lilies of the valley from the bed under the lilac bushes.

"Isn't Miss Mattie lovely?" said Rosella Brown, as they went down the lane.

"I wish we could do something real nice for her to show her how much we like her," said Tessie Baker.

Everyone looked at Nannie Millar. They were sure Nannie would have an idea if anyone would. Nannie was famous in the school for her ideas.

Nannie felt that the occasion called for reflection. She thought very hard all the way back to the schoolhouse, and the others were careful not to disturb her.

During the afternoon she continued thinking hard to the neglect of her fractions and spelling. She lost five marks in dictation, but she had her reward elsewhere. By the time the school was out Nannie had her idea, and the Third Class, understanding this by reason of her triumphant expression, surrounded her on the playground.

"Let us make Miss Mattie a jar of potpourri," said Nannie.

"What on earth is that?" said Teddy.

"I know," said Rosella, nodding sagaciously; "it's a rose jar."

"Yes; and this is my plan," said Nannie. "You know Miss Mattie is always so good to us. Well, every time she gives one of us anything, or does anything nice for one of us, let that one give a big handful of rose leaves for the jar as long as the roses last. Then, when her birthday comes in November, we can give it to her and tell her it's just all the nice things she did for us coming back to her in a rose jar."

The Third Class beamed. Nannie had sustained her reputation. Little Ruth Clark sighed privately with relief. She had been so afraid that Nannie's plan might call for some money, and she was so very poor. She was all right now. There were ever so many big pink cabbage rose bushes in the Clark yard.

"Of course, we must keep it a dead secret until the time comes to give it to Miss Mattie," warned Tessie.

It was agreed that the jar should be in Nannie's charge because she lived in a central place. Mothers and sisters, being told of the plan, approved of it. Mrs. Brown said she would give them a jar, and she sent one over to Nannie, a quaint, dainty, old-fashioned one of blue and gold. And Nannie's big sister, Jessie, said she would give the necessary spices and oils, and attend to the curing of the rose leaves as they were gathered.

The roses were just beginning to bloom when the rose jar started, and from that time for the next two months scarcely a day passed that a chubby little fistful of rose leaves, rich