

GOSSIP

THE LURE OF CANADA

BEN HUGHES in Toronto Saturday Night.

A sparrow he was; blood brother to the little brown bird so noisily discussing house furnishings with his mate in the roof of the ignoble union depot. As voluble and chirpy as that garrulous bird, as homely, as light hearted and careless of the morrow as long as the crumbs for to-day suffice for to-day. The cheeriest of grumblers; the most gregarious of his kind; the plain homespun worker of the Empire. At home in the grime and squalor of the town he mates early and is hurried with ever-increasing brood from one precarious nesting place to another; ever at the mercy of the landlord. He loves the garish light of the music hall and the bar. He has dropped his litter on the shores of Lake Athabasca as he sweats under the tump line, and the wanderlust lures him to racking fever and a hastily dug grave in the tropics. He is the pigmy of the British race; the nomad Cockney.

Egged on by pure devilment I asked him that question so idiotic in its comprehensiveness: "What do you think of Canada?"

He shied like a city horse at a pig in the road and threw up a grimy hand in comical self-defence.

"No yer don't—not if I knows it. I've 'ad some. I 'ad just been dumped at one of them New Ontario towns where they build the suburbs first an' forgets to fill in the town. A feller wif his feet in rubber boots an' his head six feet in the air comes up and asks me, 'What do you think of the city?' I says, 'A bit of alright, mite, but a little sketchy yet ain't it?' A knocker are yer?' says 'e, 'take that,' an' I took it, an' a fine black eye it was. No yer don't; try agen, Johnnie."

He cocked his hat on one side and squinted at me out of the corner of his eye so like the chatterer overhead that involuntarily I looked up in the roof to see if that feathered father of many families was listening too.

"Ain't 'e inquisitive? An' like as not 'es thinkin' I ought to be deported. No offence, mister, but that's 'ow many of yer looks when yer see a cap with an English face under it. Canada! If you only knew what poor folk in England thinks o' you! The doctor an' the lawyer an' the brewer tell their sons when their feet begin to itch for the road that so many Britishers 'ave trod around the world. 'Canada! My dear boy—Canada is quite overdone these days. You would have to do all sorts of queer work with all kinds of weird people. Now I have a friend in the Straits Settlements and I'll write to him for a place in his office on his rubber plantation. You will be with nice people there, if you must go abroad."

"But to us, the common 'erd, we thinks of Canada as a place where a workin' man can make as much as three quid a week, 'ave a little piece of ground 'e can call 'is own an' take a tripat week ends without thinkin' of the work-house every time 'e spends a shilling; a place where 'e doesn't 'ave to wipe the smoke out of 'is eyes every time 'e wants to see the sun."

"I'd the same notions about yer when I left 'ome two years ago. I goes to a lecture on Canada in Southwark Town 'All. Millions o' acres of free an' fertile land for the settler waitin' for the plough an' the harvest—160 acres for nothin'; a freer an' larger England across the seas under the old flag. But 'e could spout! It was the colored pictures, 'e me 'ardest."

"'E taps the map of Saskatchewan an' the lantern feller switches on a bloomin' great field of dry, yellor lookin' grass. Lonesome it looked. I've bin on it since an' it is. 'The boundless an' untrodden prairie known only to the 'buffalo an' the Red man,' says the lecturer, touchin' the picture wif his bloomin' wand. 'E taps that an' 'e brings a picture of a fine little wood-lane made o' logs wif flowers stick all over it an' the misses an' kids teelin' the fowl at the door. That's the place

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