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The Wizard of The West

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few weeks spent in this wonderland; wherein the restraint and trammels of society are nonexistent; where each succeeding day reveals some fresh charm scenery and environment; wherein a profusion of natural attractions abound as will for countless ages inspire and impress posterity. The ear is not the only entrance to the soul, and inspiration is drawn momentarily and unconsciously from the pine-laden air, the unsullied beauties of Nature, undisturbed by the hand of man, the vast solitudes and the unmistakable evidence of antiquity which pervades and stalks both mountain and valley.

Someone knew nothing about this Western Wonderland or the Wizard of the West. Someone from force of habit—and a mighty bad habit, too—was convinced that it was the correct thing to ignore the pretensions of their own country. Someone was convinced that the fashionable way was the best and that the intrinsic merits of a country should be gauged by that country's remoteness. So, reasoning in this ridiculous and illogical manner, someone audaciously concluded that Western Canada was not remote enough to possess the attractions they deemed so necessary for their self-gratification—and glorification. It did not represent sufficient mileage nor so much ostentation and, what was more convincing with them: "A prophet could not have honor in his own country."

Someone was accustomed to paying his tribute together with the additional price, for the attractions presented by far less favored climes. Someone has contracted ennui in its worse and most insidious form, and was despondent, worn-out and demoralized. Individually, these ailments are to be feared, but combined, they are to be dreaded with the utmost apprehension.

Canada's Western Wonderland was suggested and, strange to relate, there was something in the sound of the words that appealed to him. He might have been "caught napping," but there was something in the simplicity of the suggestion with which he was quite unfamiliar, something in the sound of the words that drew his tired-out soul as far as the shimmering lakes of this West Country, just as the far-off glassy river draws the thirsty deer. Someone packed his grip, a deep sigh was the legacy he vouchsafed to leave behind him, and he went. Two weeks elapsed, but never a word arrived; another and another slipped into the mysterious river of years, and word came that he was returning.

The friend who met him on his arrival had some difficulty in recognizing him: he looked like his own youngest son. "What have you been doing?" asked the friend. "Visiting that Wizard of yours, and I wish I hadn't," he replied, "for I shall always be wanting to go back again," concluded the rejuvenated one somewhat ungratefully. And this is true, for the price of a journey into this delightful country is not always covered by railway fares and hotel bills. To these, the delighted visitor must be prepared to add a little heartache, a little longing paid down on the counter of life

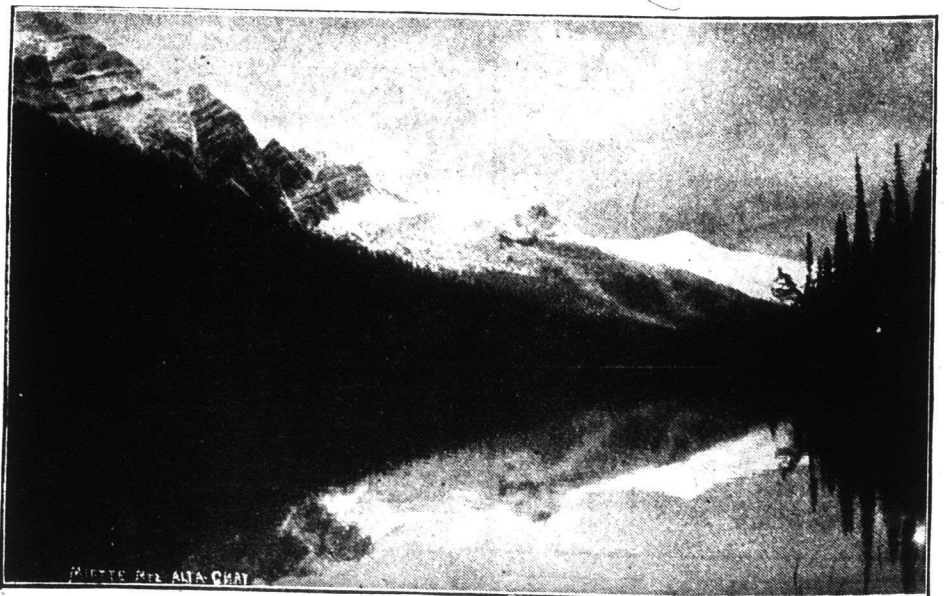
for long months and perhaps years afterwards, when his visit has become but a happy memory of the past. And there are no spots in America's wide domains that hold the heart so strongly; no beauties in the whole continent that haunt and return and call again, like this wonderful Western Wonderland, this Paradise of the West.

It would be interesting to learn just exactly what proportion of the visitors to this charming country come from other lands, and the distance they have to travel in order to glory in the attractions she offers. For it must be reluctantly admitted that the greatest tributes paid to this enchanting West Country are paid by those who travel furthest. Against this, it would be interesting, even if it might be sadly disappointing, to learn exactly how many of those who have the unquestionable privilege of calling themselves shareholders in the scenic charms and the infinity of other attractions of this glorious playground, know anything whatever about it, and why it is left to strangers in far too many cases to popularize and worship at Canada's shrines of beauty.

If the scenic attractions of a country must be deemed one of that country's financial assets, who can attempt to compute the wealth of that vast stretch of mammoth mountains and impressive valley-lands; of foaming rivers and placid lakes through which the Canadian National Railways passes on its way to the Pacific Coast? Yet one is compelled to leave this alluring land impressed that Canadians—the owners and inheritors of it all—do not believe one half of that which is told and written about it.

Night-time in this Western Wonderland appealed to the writer with unusual force and impressiveness. The day had been a glorious one, the sun had shone brilliantly all day, and the air had just that bracing touch that whets one's appetite and speaks of health and vigor. The lingering afternoon sun had at last touched the mountain tops and the golden glory of twilight presaged a clear and star-lit night. Trembling on the verge of one particular white-capped giant, and diffusing the whole with a blend of violet, orange and crimson, the god of day silently and reluctantly dropped over the seeming chasm beyond. Sombre, secretive shadows began to stalk the valley land, and the giant crevasses of the shadowy mountains deepened and darkened in the waning light. The first star rose radiant in the East, and speedily his understudies and myrmidons peeped through the purple vault beyond. Silence and mystery seemed to have suddenly overspread the valley, and the outlines of the sturdy fir trees assumed the most ghostly forms. Turning toward the glowing camp-fire to throw another log into the brilliant blaze, darkness seemed to have suddenly enveloped the entire world, and the mountains, distant before, seemed to have crept closer and closer as though desirous of imparting some of their secrets of ages or partaking in the sociability of our little camp. The cry of an owl in the bush hard by, contributed an air of weirdness to the impressiveness of the scene, and recalled many a long-forgotten memory of childhood's days, when, in some obscure picture-book, we had witnessed just such

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Miette Mountains, Alberta, Canadian National Railways