

THE HOUSE OF TROUBLE

MRS. NELLIE L. McCLUNG

Bill Cavers was a very poor farmer, as one look at his abandoned homestead would show; that he was not a success as a husband no one would doubt after seeing Mrs. Cavers; and that he was a conspicuous failure as a father, Elizabeth Anne Cavers, his daughter, with her frightened eyes and sad mouth, would abundantly testify. But there was one capacity in which William Cavers was a spectacular success, and that was in maintaining the country's revenue from malt and distilled liquors, for Bill was possessed of a thirst that never faltered.

Bill was quite different from the drunkard who consumes and never produces, for he would work and work hard; and he was strictly honest with every one except himself and family. Sandy Braden was not afraid to trust Bill with all the whiskey he wanted, for Bill would surely pay. His wife might not have respectable clothes to come to town in, and Libby Anne knew what it was like more than once to go hungry to bed, but Bill always paid what was chalked up against him at the Grand Pacific without question. All the neighbors called Bill Cavers a good, straight fellow.

Although Mrs. Cavers now lived a life of poverty, she had once known a happy home where plenty abounded and she often told Libby Anne about it.

One spring Mr. Cavers promised his wife and child a three month's trip to Ontario in the fall. All summer long they worked and saved; making butter, gathering eggs, tending fowl and even doing the work in the fields to save the wages of a hired man. Oh, how Libby Anne's little arms did ache as she carried the sheaves! But she never complained, for were they not going to her mother's wonderful home!

At last the grain was marketed and they had decided to leave on December the first.

The day before they were to start, Bill went to town to cast his vote; the Provincial elections were held that year on the last day of November. There was a good deal of excitement over the election, for Sandy Braden, the popular proprietor of the Grand Pacific Hotel, was running against a Brandon man, and Millford was standing solid for their own man. The bar could not be opened until after five o'clock, when the voting was over, but after that there was nothing to prevent good-fellowship abounding.

It did abound all night. There was a bonfire in front of the hotel when the returns began to come in, for Sandy was winning easily, and Sandy certainly showed his gratitude for the way the boys had stood by him.

Mrs. Cavers and Libby Anne waited all that long night. They tried to keep up each other's courage, making all sorts of excuses for Mr. Cavers's absence. Mrs. Cavers knew, but she did not tell Libby Anne, that he was going to cash the wheat-tickets that he had saved for the trip, for the train went so early in the morning he was afraid he might not have time then.

Libby Anne went again and again into the little bedroom to look at the trunk already strapped. Surely people always went if the trunk was strapped, and she tried and tried to feel what it was like yesterday.