

Her Second Chance

By Mrs. NELLIE L. McCLUNG

Is a sequel to "Sowing Seeds in Danny." Publisher, Wm. Briggs, Ltd., Toronto

"The Second Chance" presents a protracted, enlarged and progressive history of Pearl Watson and family in the changed environment of a deserted "homestead." Up to this time Pearl's father has been sectionman on the C. P. R., her mother general washerwoman to the more moneyed class of Millford village, her several little brothers embryo criminals perching for Brandon jail, and her younger sister and most especially herself, the ministering and guarding genius-in-chief to the household at large. At this critical cycle in the moral welfare of her undisciplined brothers, Pearl opportunely becomes the recipient of a money-laden English letter sent her by the grateful parents of a young Englishman whose life in a serious illness, had been saved through Pearl's effective nursing. This unexpected favor from a hitherto niggardly Fate made it possible for her to rescue her erring kindred from the many pitfalls that invariably await the shuffling feet of the town-bred idler and set them firmly upon the highroad to fortune and virtue, even into the newly turned furrows of "summer fallow or breaking," so Pearl after a silent but heart-breaking renunciation of her own deeply cherished hope of a school teacher's qualifications for herself decided beyond recall upon a farm for her brothers. Her father promptly accepted the heroic sacrifice and made entry for an abandoned homestead in the neighborhood having a few improvements, unavoidably left behind by the former owner, among them being a little house made of logs, plastered with mud, settled down on one side looking as ungainly and tired as an old horse when he rests on one leg. The proposition "on" is doubtless a vagary of the typesetter who is frequently found to have ineffaceable predilections, favoring his own ideas of syntax and interpretation.

In due time Pearl and her father move out to this farm with the first load of household effects, and while sizing up the possibilities of the tumbledown dwelling Pearl also notices the trail of abortive efforts at satisfactory housekeeping that the cabin's former mistress left behind, and meditating orally and with wonderful understanding for a girl of thirteen: "If people just set round and let things go to smash and don't care, that's too bad; but there's nothing sad about it. But to try your livin' best and still have to go under—that's awful!" This nice ethical discrimination would do credit to a moralist of three times Pearl's years. Certainly Pearl was not an average ordinary thirteen-year-old girl. Had she been so this story would not have had her for its special character. Pearl was surely a forceful as well as sweet and womanly character who naturally abounded in good works. She blazed a broad trail up to the heights of meritorious endeavor for the guidance of her household with her own small hands. She fitted through the district school curriculum with a wand of optimistic faith as to the values of history and geography for her fellow pupils in one hand, and a red and gold "Excelsior" banner for her teacher in the other; her bright hopefulness rescued this numbed, desponding pedagogue from the rock of pessimistic stoicism and landed him "his own man again" on the fair wharf of revived confidence. She entered the minister's study and induced that worthy to open up and operate both Sunday School and church service in the district schoolhouse, and, what was infinitely more difficult, persuaded the minister's somewhat obtrusive better-half to let him go. She importuned the hotelkeeper to refuse liquor on the 1st of July to a hard drinker, whose wife and child had set their hearts on having a family group photograph (to send "down East"), because Bill's lower lip in "liquor" precluded all desirable possibility of achieving this worthy intention should he get drunk. Of course Bill obtained the liquor just the same, but not from the hotelkeeper, and died from its effects. She heartened up young Bud Perkins' tottering religious faith to its fall over the frequent snags of parental insincerity, by a prompt and decisive prayer meeting of two members, herself and Bud, held out in the summer meadow, kneeling one on each side of a division-line wire fence. She did

all the grayer herself and approached Diety with awful but characteristic directness and made her exit with a brevity, force and dispatch that is most commendable, not to say excellent.

She organized a household brigade on Arbor Day, and repairing to the adjacent woods dug, carried home and planted an area with shade trees that were to encircle the anticipatory new dwelling home and nearly all the trees grew. She takes the otherwise exemplary young, old neighbor girl, Martha Perkins, under her busy, all-embracing little wing and transforms her through the artifices of "beauty" devices, correct breathing and hair and body dressing, into a wonderfully improved specimen of her type; she then did her capable best in arranging a marriage between the now really attractive Martha and a young man with whom Martha has been solemnly but hopelessly in love for some years; she even tenders her own services in the capacity of bridesmaid and actually brings the ceremony to a satisfactory conclusion. She has the weniest, shyest, prettiest little "affaire" of her own—so very much her own that even the village doctor, complement of the idealized figure, seems almost an intruder. She entered the W. C. T. U. medal contest at the eleventh hour, and without either training or experience except the apparently unerring instincts of her own bright common sense, won the temperance elocution medal from four carefully trained contestants. She wrote out on behalf of her own rebellious young brothers a magna charta for their despotic aunt to sign in hopeful emulation of that noteworthy document so productive of benefits to the historic barons, who compelled their king's signature so many years ago, and with equally successful results. She acted as emergency secretary and "took the minutes" of the Ladies' Aid Society, reducing to paper verbatim, as much as one pen could handle, of the gossip that precipitated itself pell-mell from lip to ear at the tumultuous gathering, and in the subsequent reading thereof caused as much chagrin in the Aid as the farmer felt when he found his name attached to a bona-fide note instead of the "promise-to-buy-it-if-satisfactory" document he credulously presumed he was signing. She ushered in the redeeming qualities of repentance and confession to Bud Perkins' wily old father who had "plugged" the wheat and let Bud to sell it unwittingly, and be the scapegoat of the neighborhood's contumely when the plugging was discovered. She converted the hitherto unconvertible hotelkeeper to abandon the sale of intoxicant fluids and close his den of iniquity permanently. Indeed from the cradle to the grave there did not seem to be an emergency contingent to humanity in the neighborhood that Pearl could not alleviate by her whole-souled and active concern. Everybody's troubles were her troubles, yet treated not as troubles but as stepping stones to higher ground. With all her bright cheerfulness, intrepid perseverance, engaging wit, motherly kindness, vivacious philosophy, unflinching ingenuity, stout loyalty and religious fervor, Pearl Watson is still easily a possibility. Given the setting her counterpart is attainable to anyone wishing to reach her level. Throughout the whole story which sparkles with quaint Irish wit, light dialogue, and highly amusing incidents, the reader's interest has never a moment to falter.

Mrs. McClung gives a few sudden sharp stabs at the Highland Scotch, but as though in tipical compensation she credits a Scotchman with the liveliest sentiments of charity toward his fellows and places him next the minister in genuine sincerity.

From the doughty old man Perkins who "always kept his religion in his wife's name," "plugged" his wheat from conscientious motives, he being under obligations to himself so to do because "a farmer has to hold his own against everybody else"—versatile Perkins who coolly credited his neighbor with two pair of twins, without which padded census the school grant could not be obtained, nor did he fail to supply sex, age, names and other incidental particulars, as the deputy educationist's growing suspicions seemed to necessitate—who could spin

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a variety of wedding yarns of the drollest and most ingenious patterns—who was in short a good neighbor without a troublesome conscience—from him down to the smallest individual in the story, every figure is consistent and well rounded out. Sprinkled throughout the book are the daintiest little touches of vivacity, pathos and philosophy, some merry, some sad, and all the overflow of an understanding heart.

To one of the small Watson's who asked her where her dead husband was, Aunt Shenstone, who lived with them, absent-mindedly replied: "If there's a quiet field up in heaven with elm trees around it—elm trees full of singin' birds, a field that slopes down maybe to the River of Life, a field that they want plowed, Bill will be there with old Bess and Doll, steppin' along in the new black furrow in his bare feet singin' and maybe the marsh marigolds and buttercups bloom all the year and the plowing is good—that'll just suit your uncle Bill."

"The Second Chance" is a book that deserves great favor. It is a clean book with a strong tendency towards temperance, and it carries a message of cheer to industry trying to "make good" in a new land.

"The Second Chance" will be sent to any reader of The Guide for \$1.45 post-paid. Apply to Book Department, The Grain Growers' Guide, Winnipeg.

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