

veloped contrariety, but not violently. Walter Nichol is a Liberal, but the Vancouver Daily Province is not obnoxiously Liberal. In one of the provincial elections about ten or eleven years ago the triumph of McBride and Bowser was almost wholly credited to the fact that the Province led their fight. As against this, however, must be taken the fact that the Province fought hard against features of their railroad policy.

The Vancouver Province is one of the four or five best paying newspapers in the whole Dominion. That is because Nichol learned to devote more time to the business end of newspaper management than to the editorial end, though he keeps a close eye on that also. When Nichol worked in the east he found it difficult to suppress a certain love of versifying which he had inherited from some ancestor—not his father, for his father was a lawyer. He mixed verse with prose and did it well, though not at any great profit. Under the famous "Don" Sheppard on the News he did some really capital writing and later, when Sheppard took over Saturday Night he expanded the range of his writing fancy. Once Nichol was sent to cover a ball at the old Pavilion. Instead of writing the usual society rubbish he described the whole affair from the standpoint of a young girl debutante. Sheppard was not the type of man to understand that sort of writing. He tore up the copy and bade Nichol write nothing more like it. Good critics knew, however, that Nichol had probably done an excellent story, in spite of Sheppard's dislike. He had more scope on his new paper "Life." It was better than fifteen dollars

a week from Sheppard, and Bill Caiger, Nichol's partner in the affair, stood for poetry.

But "Life" languished and died chiefly for lack of capital. This dampened Nichol's ardour slightly, and his venture with the News in London, though it lived for some time after he quit it—convinced him that the newspaper game was a hard one. It had brought him so far only a modest home up on Cecil Street in Toronto with his mother, and no joy more hectic than reading poetry and picking our good verses from bad in the Anglican hymnal. Friends of Nichol in those days recall his summary of the situation when he announced to them that he intended to quit journalism. "There's nothing in it!" he said, and went west to British Columbia.

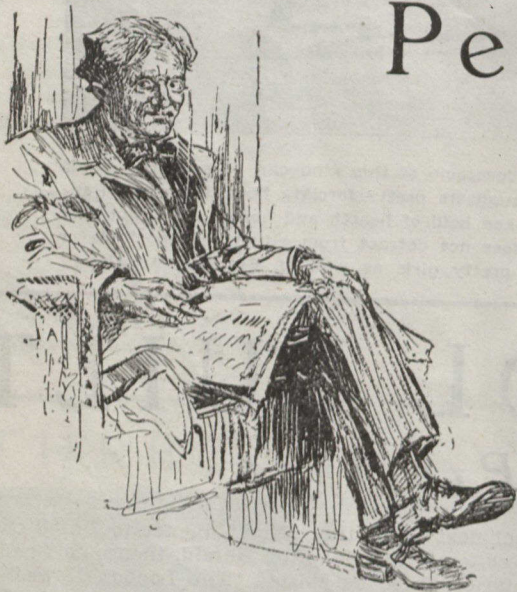
Nichol was running an obscure sheet in the B. C. hinterland, when Bostock asked him to take charge of the Weekly Province, which though nominally founded by Bostock, had been brought into the world by an Irishman named Shafe—who had gone back to Ireland. Nichol believed the Province would find its proper field in Vancouver, and moved it across accordingly. He was given a third interest in the paper to begin with.

As evidence of the fact that the paper thus taken over by the man who said of journalism "there's nothing in it," this story may be cited. The Liberals who founded the Vancouver Sun recently, first made overtures for the purchase of the Province, the Province being too independent-minded to serve as a party organ under Nichol's proprietorship. Nichol was approached and asked to name a price. He wished time to consider the matter, and then named

what seemed a colossal sum. The would-be vendees were aghast, and yet, when one of them, a well-known Irish wholesaler in Vancouver, examined the books of the Province, he found it was paying—well, something like ten per cent. per annum on a capital of \$750,000! Yet it is harboured in a mere shop.

The curious thing about Walter Nichol is the lack of any obvious reason for his success. It is always easier to grasp success when the man wears, so to speak, a placard showing that his achievements are due to this or that certain quality. No such card appears on Nichol's face. The primary key of his success is to be found in his office. There is probably no better news editor in the country than Roy Brown, and for business management Frank Bird, in his little dug-out on the ground floor would be hard to beat. For a long time Nichol himself wrote the editorials, but he has since learned to depute even this work. His aggressiveness shows chiefly in business policy along with that of Bird. Nichol is impulsive, and to those who serve him well, generous. He gives big rewards. He "drives"—never. He looks for good men, and when he gets them treats them—it is said—better than well.

So quiet is Nichol than many people formed the opinion that after all Nichol was only the hirer and firer, and that the success of his paper was due to bought talent. This story died when Taylor of the World, who used to be Nichol's business manager, left the Province to start the World. The wisecracker said the Province was now to wane and the World to wax. Everybody knows what really came to pass in that case.



# Peregrinations in Potash

## My First Glimpse of the Under-World

By JACOB HOLDFAST

price for a stroke-measure bushel of ashes measured in any farmer's half-bushel was exactly one-half of three and a third cents, which as near as I could figure it out with a carpenter's stub pencil on the side of his waggon-box was one cent and three-fifths.

I told him so—first morning he hired me to haul in his ashes from the ends of two townships to that ramshackle old log-sided ashery back by the spindle-leg pump in the old bull-frog pond.

"Durn your eyes, Skeesicks," said he, rubbing the hairy back of his hand over one eye, as though he had a tear to wipe, "if you know so much about 'rithmetic why don't you go up fer a school teacher? This ain't vulgar fractions, Jacob. It's makin' potash. Two years ago it was black salts, three dollars a hundred. Consarn yeh! it ain't figgers the folks want. It's soap. And looka here," he added unto me as he centipeded me on the left arm, "when you git ashes that's too dusty dry and light, you tromp'm into the basket when the ol' woman ain't lookin' out the winder. If yeh get'm more'n nicely damp they're part leached already and you gota knock off on the tottin' up to break even.

"Mr. Bump," I asked him, with businesslike acumen, "what's a standard weight for a bushel's ashes? Potatoes are sixty pounds, apples are fifty, oats thirty-four, barley forty-eight—"

"Keep y'r shirt awn," he growled. "You ain't be'g hired to run no flour an' feed store. There ain't any avordupois fer ashes. Coz why? Don't I tell yeh that if they're too pledged dry they're short-weight, and if they're too wet y're payin' out y'r good brown soap fer a hull lot o' water?"

I have always regarded that compensatory discrimination of Ezra Bump as a masterpiece of applied mathematics. The possibility of being bamboozled buying by measure a commodity whose density is increased by moisture—could have been thought out only by a self-protecting genius like Ezra Bump.

"Awright," he subjoined, as he saw me struggle with the idea. "You wrap that up in a wet burdock leaf and stick it in the crown o' y'r hat. If yeh don't, this potashery business that I'm makin' you a pardner of will be nuthin' but a heap'v leached ashes and a choir o' bullfrogs."

"Oh!" I queried him. "Be I a pardner? How?" Bump didn't answer me direct. He wanted to impress my imagination. So he conducted me on a personal tour over the ashworks.

As I remember that ashery now it was one of the queerest places I have ever seen. There were two buildings. One was a log pen behind the other with a driveway for the waggon between. It had a clap-

board roof. Bump himself had dovetailed the logs and had riven the red-oak clapboards with a tool they used to call a frow—now defunct. That log pen held about 3,000 Bump bushels. When I saw it that November morning it was clean empty from the summer's run in the leaches.

"Have I got to fill that?" says I.

"You hev," he echoed.

"Jiminy jump! At sixty bushels to the full load, that'll be—fifty loads. Glory hallel—"

"Drop them figgers," he abjured me, as he led me into the next department of the factory. This was a grey waste of heaped-up dead ashes that extended out to the edge of the rotten logs in the bush pasture.

"Mr. Bump," I gasped, "how many thousand bushels of ashes are there in that graveyard?"

"Skeesicks," he said unto me. "I don't know. But it's tuk me fifteen years to put'm there. If you c'n guess the number'v bushels—you can have 'em."

He led me along, this time to a double row of curious wooden structures as high as his own head, each of them the length of a man, as wide at the top as I was long and tapering down to the width of a man's foot at the bottom. These were all sloped down to small pole troughs that ran along the front.

"Them's the leaches," he said. "There's six of 'm. I built 'em myself. The hull of 'm holds enough ashes fer a batch of potash."

He waved his hand at the spindle-leg pump that stood propped up in the beer-coloured pond with moss-green logs up the sides.

"Waterworks," he said, tersely. "Run by elbow-grease."

There was a boot-leg hood over the pump snout and a series of small slab troughs running from that to all the leaches.

After that Bump conducted me into the boiling-house, which was a frame building with no battens on the cracks, a clay floor, a large hollow-log trough in one corner for the lye to dribble into out of the leaches; a huge stone and clay fireplace, in which hung two big potash kettles one behind 'tother, backed up by a higgedypiggledy old chimney. On the top of the arch were two or three large iron pots which he said were coolers; a grim iron spud, a long-handled dipper, a lye bucket, and down at the fire-hole an old axe with wire toggles on the handles.

"Now," he said, grandiosely, "that's the plant. I guess you'll learn how she runs in a little while. And you're a pardner—this way. I'll pay you ten per cent. o' the total proceeds o' the potash fer haulin' the ashes and makin' the potash. And if that ain't a bargain—then I'm a double-barreled saphead."

(To be continued.)

**I** NOW shift my outlook to tell about a new business I got into at the age of coming seventeen under a new boss whose name was Ezra Bump, which name he wholly deserved. Bump was a potashmaker. He was skinny, toad-eyed and without intention as warped in his business dealings as an elm board in a midsummer sun. He could taste a barrel of hardwood ashes and tell the woman who owned them how miserably weak they were, all the while calculating that three hundred bushels of such No. 1 ashes would make one barrel of potash, weighing without the barrel 700 pounds, saleable twenty miles away at seven cents a pound in a barrel that cost one dollar.

"Sell'm er let'm leach out, mum," was his ultimatum over the soapbox on the hickory spring seat to many a soapless house-dame on his numerous beats. "This soap's the clear whack. Makes washin' a—"

Bump could have written soap ads good enough for any street-car. And he was a dogmatic and intuitive scoundrel who meant harm to nobody, but never bought an honest bushel of ashes in his life. I never knew what lurking iniquities lay coiled up in human nature till I knew this potashmaking Bump. He always looked like a scarecrow in duds that were eaten into holes by ashes and potash, boots as red and hard as a pair of old bricks, and a hangchop look on his lugubrious face that made his voice like the low string on a cracked violoncello.

Bump's nominal standard price for ashes was five cents a bushel. But I know from experience as his disciple that he paid ten cents each wholesale for the bars of his brown resin soap; that each of these bars he snicked into three cakes, each representing a bushel; and that the basket in which he measured the ashes was a two-bushel corn basket made by the Ojibway Indians out on the back of his own lot. So that by my arithmetic Ezra Bump's ultimate cash