

A Prairie Easter.

(By May Kingsley Bradley in 'Wellspring'.)

It was nearing Easter time. On the broad rolling prairie of south-western Nebraska, where the low sod houses of the new settlers alone broke the monotony of the landscape, it mattered little.

Corn shelling had been late that year. Plowing for corn planting came early, and Easter was early too. But the plowing had crowded all thoughts of Easter out of mind, if, indeed, there had been any thought upon the subject.

Probably not one of the fifteen or twenty settlers' families of Pleasant View but what had heard of the risen Lord and the day that celebrated the event, but hard work, an endless, weary struggle of every member of every family to earn enough to 'prove up' on their claims and keep body and soul together prevented the keeping of either fast or feasts days, unless, indeed, every day might be considered a sort of fast day.

An Easterner has little idea of a Western settler's life. It is easy to imagine a large ranch, herds of roaming cattle, acres of corn, milk and cream and eggs in quantities, a rustic sod house, and plenty.

In reality it means hard labor to pay for the claim, long days of exposure in herding cattle, the exchange of every spare ounce of butter and of the carefully hoarded eggs for the plainest necessary clothing, low prices when crops are abundant, and when hot winds scorch and crops fail mayhap a diet of baked squash, starvation, or return to the old home 'down East.'

Mrs. Goodspeed, sitting by the window in her comfortable sod house, thought sadly of the approaching day. There was a look of peaceful resignation on her face that told of trials met, of troubles overcome. The coming day brought to her mind a Vermont graveyard where one April Eastertide her bonny, blue-eyed boy was put away from her sight until the final resurrection. But thoughts of that time were not the only cause of sadness. She felt keenly for her neighbours and longed to bring them more closely to the knowledge of Christ, and a strong desire to make the approaching Easter a day of joy to the surrounding community took possession of her.

The ill-health of Mr. Goodspeed had caused the family to move from their Vermont home to try a Western climate. They had sufficient means to buy a partially improved claim, and their 'soddie' was the most luxurious in the vicinity. Its mud walls were plastered and papered within; it had board floors instead of hard dirt, its furnishings were comfortable, and its big bow window filled with many plants, though built of sod, was the envy of the neighboring women.

Though Mrs. Goodspeed had lived but a short time at Pleasant view, her tact and kindly sympathy had easily won her way to the hearts of her neighbors.

A little knowledge of medicine learned from her father, who was a physician, enabled her to use the more simple remedies; and this, combined with her skill as a nurse, caused her to be a sort of local doctor for the families around, when calling a physician in case of illness meant fifteen miles of travel to the settlement and back, and a bill that most were too poor to pay. All that she could do Mrs. Goodspeed willingly did, and she was loved and respected accordingly.

The sod schoolhouse at the crossroads boasted of a Sunday-school, and an occasional Sabbath service when some travelling



preacher passed that way. And, although Mrs. Goodspeed thought lovingly and longingly of the ivy-covered church at her old home, with its soft light from stained-glass windows, its pure, sweet music, and its solemn service, she could feel God's presence in the little school building with its rough seats, unplastered walls, and small windows, and knew that a few earnest hearts were among the worshippers there.

Mrs. Goodspeed thought of those around her, many of those toiling lives were a continual sacrifice of all of comfort and of beauty for the sake of others. And this March day she decided to make their lives brighter if she could. If possible there should be a happy Easter for all, and smiling at the tall lilies she had brought from the old home, and which were just bursting into bloom, she softly said, 'Yes, you shall help me.'

You may say it was fate or chance, but I am sure it was God that sent Miss Selby en route to Denver at this time.

Mr. Goodspeed, coming from the office that night, handed a letter to his wife. Opening it, among other things she read:

'I am about to start to Denver and find that I go within fifteen miles of your prairie home. I shall stop off and spend Easter with you. You have told me so much of your surroundings and your neighbors that I want to see my old friend whom we all loved and whom we so much miss. Perhaps Nebraska needs you, but we want you back.'

Mrs. Goodspeed handed the letter to her husband. 'That solves part of my Easter problem,' she said. 'Helen can sing.'

Three days before Easter, Helen Shelby came. She readily consented to contribute what she could to the Easter service, and