

ANOTHER INTERESTING LETTER FROM THE NORTH WEST

John W. Young, of The Planet Staff, Tells of Some of his Experiences While Travelling Through Edmonton and Vicinity.

Banff, Sept. 14, 1901. Certain interesting experiences sometimes befall travellers and they never come singly. The stage drive from Edmonton to Fort Saskatchewan proved interesting. It is not exciting. Owing to the frequent rains of the past two years, the road in many places was and is under water. Prior to this time, owing to the undulating nature of the country and the many natural water courses, the roads and trails were always dry, but the two rainy years have spoiled many of the roads and the country is confronted for a minute with the question of road-making, strange to say, the easiest method of road making is just to make ditches. The fall to the Saskatchewan being much more than sufficient to drain all the water.

In the early morning, I left Edmonton on the stage, which proved to be a two-horse democrat made by Wm. Gray & Sons. There was only one seat large enough to hold two, and behind was a rack such as the butchers use for carrying lambs. This rack was used for holding the mail bags, and in with the mail bags I was bundled, as meek as any lamb. Somebody has been kind enough to insinuate it was a black sheep, but never mind. This all happened and I was the poor victim of such unkind jokes because some young lady had been engaged to teach school somewhere, and was to occupy the seat of honor with the stage driver, an old-timer, named Charles Stuart, and in whose honor several songs have been written, including "Bonnie Prince Charlie," and others.

The road along the south Bank of river ascends and descends several hills and then runs along past some of the finest farms you will see anywhere. Although the country has only been settled about ten years and less, it would surprise you to see how the land has already been cleared and fenced and the splendid farm houses to be met with everywhere. There is one thing that makes all visitors open their eyes and that is the grain fields. The farmers here all practise mixed farming, and as you pass the fields of wheat and oats, you wonder how they can grow so. I was at a loss for a word to describe the grain fields of the Edmonton District, and would have been yet in all probability, had I not come to Banff and seen the mountains here. They have suggested a word, the word I wanted—Massive. When you see fields of grain with the straw nearly six feet long, and the heads so close together that you can look across the acre. You do not do here, and see nothing but heads, and when you learn the fields will thresh from 30 to 60 bushels to the acre, you can well believe it and you, too, would want to call them massive. The oat fields, too, are a revelation and I don't suppose you could see anything like them anywhere. Where in the world would you hear farmers grumbling if their oat fields didn't turn out 50 bushels to the acre. You do here, and see nothing but heads, and when you learn the fields will thresh from 30 to 60 bushels to the acre, you can well believe it and you, too, would want to call them massive.

The land is very undulating and hilly around here, and therefore a number of small lakes. Owing to the past two wet seasons many of the hollows in the hills have been filled with water. As an instance, I may say that the hay field of George Gould some 35 acres in extent, is now under water. There is no necessity for the water to be there, as there is a small fall, and a little ditching is all that is necessary. But here the farmers don't seem to realize the value of ditching. In one case they spent about 80 days putting a piece of corduroy along to low place in the road, where half that time spent in digging a ditch would have made a permanent improvement. Of course the country is young, and as yet the farmers need the help of the law. The breaking is a great deal easier than in Kent. The farmers first burn over the land and kill the bushes. The grass grows the next year and again the ground is cleared and leveled over in the fall. In the spring or early summer the land is ploughed, the roots and sticks picked up and burned. The land is then harrowed and cultivated and next year a crop is growing on the ground. The farmer, George Gould, has about 100 acres under cultivation and he has about 30 head of cattle. The cattle feed on the wild grass and pea vine, the latter of which they are very fond. They make outside all winter for their living and do exceedingly well. Only the milk cows come to the stack in the barnyard at night. The country in the vicinity of Fort Saskatchewan is peculiarly settled. Across the river is a large French settlement, northeast is a settlement of Russians, southeast is a German settlement, and south is a settlement of Parry Sounders, and all are doing well. The Germans are credited with being the best class of settlers and their neighbors say that they are prospering greatly, or as one man put it, "I would like to own a farm in the German settlement because I didn't like to see my neighbors sell to my neighbors." Plainly, the Germans, by carefulness and frugality, are becoming able to purchase the farms near their own, and will soon be wealthy and prosperous farmers, with good big farms.

The Parry Sounders, too, are proving good settlers, and the shrewdness and good judgment of the C.P.R. in furnishing the farmers who were unable to make a living in Parry Sound with transportation, allowing the men three years to pay for their tickets, has been demonstrated and all are proving a good class of settlers. The town of Edmonton secured this concession from the C.P.R. by sending delegates. There are a few ex-residents of Kent county settled near Partridge Hill besides George Gould. Just across the road from the last named farmer is Robert Houston, one of Dresden, Ontario, who later of Turtle Mt., Dakota, but now of Northern Alberta. Mr. Houston

owns 180 acres of land. I asked him how he liked his adopted home of "Oz," very well," he replied. "I suppose we have got to like it." I might say that Mr. Houston is erecting a large two-story frame house and that he purchased 320 acres of land this year. John Whetson, once a farmer near Dresden, told me that he had left Kent county over twenty years ago and gone to the Red River Valley. He sold his farm there for \$5,000, when he got to the Red River Valley he had to drive all the way to the north of his present homestead and bring his family in a couple of wagons. All he had was some farm machinery. He, however, built himself a log house on the homestead and he has since purchased and chased another 160 acres. Mr. Whetson is much taken up with his farm and he says that there is no more fertile soil anywhere. James Whetson has a quarter section near by, which he works. Jim is a bachelor and he says he doesn't eat any more meals at home than he can avoid. Duncan and George Cranston two brothers from near Brigidon, are working 320 acres which they have rented for this year. They had an about 125 acres of wheat and expected to have about 4,000 bushels of wheat. In addition to this rented land, Duncan and George have a 160 acre farm of 1900 acres. Everybody says that the Cranston boys will make lots of money this year. Robert and John Hare, formerly of Euphemia, township, have 160 acres each, and are doing well. Then there is Henry Burns, who came to this district about three years ago. He already has a half-section all paid for, and nearly half of it is under cultivation. Richard Gordon is another of the typical settlers. "Is this a good country," I asked him. "Why, certainly, man, surely surely," said Dick, as he is familiarly called by his friends. "Where will you find a field of wheat like that?" continued Mr. Gordon, pointing to a field of wheat a neighbor was harvesting. "Well, I did hear him say he expected to harvest about 30 bushels to the acre off that 25 acres," he said. "Well, you can just bet that that field will yield 50 bushels to the acre. I know because I have seen it. I wouldn't believe that the land here would be so good if I saw it, and I don't suppose you could convince any man from Ontario without showing him," said farmer Gordon. "Why I have seen fields of oats here yield 125 bushels to the acre and a yield of 100 bushels is common." The farmers were just in the midst of their harvest, about Sept. 5th. Donald McEachron bought a C. P. R. ticket for 200 acres, last spring for \$1 an acre. He planted wheat this year on about 50 acres and the crop will pay for the place. He figured that he used eight pounds of wheat to the acre and a yield of 100 bushels is common. The farmers were just in the midst of their harvest, about Sept. 5th. George Gould, who has been all over the country around Edmonton, told me that there were no homesteads left within 20 miles of Edmonton, and the only vacant lands were school sections and police reserves. The pasture was the best in the world and farmers should practice mixed farming, but should have enough land to pasture a good herd of cattle. That is certainly the case in the West that the Government should have given the Ontario young men the same inducements they gave the Quebecois and Gallatians. They say that the best of the West would have been settled now. It would surprise you to see how many Ontario people are scattered over the West and the fact that one is from Ontario is a passport for a good time all through the country. Roots and vegetables all grow well here except tomatoes. George Gould stated that he had raised 250 bushels of potatoes from about an acre. The Russians, as a class, are doing well. Their neighbors say that the reason for this is their modern methods of agriculture. They say that these people sell all they can, feed the pigs what they can't sell and eat themselves what the pigs won't eat. Wild ducks are plentiful, and this is proved conclusively when I saw that I got 25. Teal, mallard and big grey ducks seemed to be the most common. I saw a coyote and had the pleasure of shooting at it. These animals are a cross between the timber wolf and the fox and are destructive to sheep and poultry. They, however, are getting killed off and are becoming scarce. There was only one incident at all out of the ordinary that befell me during my life on the farm of a northern Alberta pioneer. In this country everybody rides horseback and everybody keeps a riding pony. The main reason for this is the need of ponies in locating and bringing the cows home at night. Then, too, the saddle horses are useful in going to church and to town. Well, I wanted my mail from Fort Saskatchewan so I borrowed the Indian pony belonging to the lad where I was staying. Now I never graduated as an equestrian but I had, when a boy, ridden a rocking horse, and I flattered myself that I could do it pretty well so all undaunted I mounted the Cayuse. The animal was small even for an Indian pony, so diminutive was it indeed that a young fellow once threw it under a barbed wire fence rather than take the trouble to go around by the gate. So you can imagine the position I made when mounted on my gallant steed. The pony was almost concealed by a huge Mexican saddle, just enough of the animal showing to prove that I was not riding a St. Bernard. The Indian ponies are peculiar, like carpets the more you beat them the better they are, and the alleged horse that I rode was no exception, only more so. I felt sorry for the Cayuse, thinking it had about all it could carry. I managed to reach the Fort about six o'clock p. m. and beat out a thunderstorm by about half a second. My rapid speed had covered the distance of about four miles in three hours. (Concluded to-morrow.)



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