

The Telephone in the Rural Home

By A. M. Bray.

HELLO! Is that you, doctor? Well please come out here right away if you can. Jim's had a run-away accident and broken an arm and a rib."

"All right, I'll be out there in a couple of hours. Just make him as comfortable as you can; and don't worry."

How easy it is to deal with an emergency in the rural district through-out which the telephone is installed, and how difficult when the only communication between neighbors is by actually paying a visit.

Had the accident taken place a few weeks ago, previous to the advent of the phone, it would have seemed a far more serious calamity, for someone would have had to ride the twenty-five miles into the nearest town to fetch the doctor, whilst neighborly assistance could only be solicited by the laborious and time-wasting method of a personal visit, which would perhaps necessitate leaving the injured man by himself for some time. However, as it is, Jim's wife has phoned to four neighbors and also the doctor, and within a very few minutes of the accident they are all on their way to the scene as fast as their horses can take them.

It is in just such an emergency as this that the utility of the rural telephone is most clearly demonstrated; but perhaps the long distance talking machine is of still more importance in our rural homes because it extends the social life of the settlement enormously, and this is what will keep the people in the country, especially the younger generation.

It is true that the pioneers of the settlement realized when they first moved in to their land over trails of their own making, that it would be several, perhaps many, years before they could expect to have either phones, railroads, or even passable roads; but the telephone is none the less appreciated by them when it is eventually installed after the long years of waiting. Because these empire builders have lived in the country for seven or eight years without any other means of communication than by horseback or shank's mare, it does not follow that they will always be content to do so.

After the first adventurous spirits have penetrated the virgin brush and prairie and made their homes miles from civilization, the still adventurous but more timid are content to follow. Shacks are built and clearings come into being as axes wage war on the timber and brush, and in a short time it is a land of homesteads. Three years more and there are some real farms and the district is well settled. By this time the social life of the settlement will be a feature which must be taken into account, for if there is a lack of social entertainment one may be sure that it will be hard to hold the younger generation who are growing up there, on the farm, as they will want to be off to the city with its social pleasures. If, however, the settlement is deprived of all its young blood it cannot advance but will more likely be retarded, and thus the telephone is an indispensable asset to a settlement at this stage of its existence.

With a telephone in the house one is not cut off from the outside world no matter how far one may be from civilization. That simple looking box with a bell on top and a handle at the side changes the whole outlook for the family in whose houses it is installed. Before the miraculous but familiar box was attached to the wall, the house was an isolated thing; but now it is linked with other homes, whilst the far away city can be brought to its door—for converse at least—for the insignificant sum of fifteen cents.

Father phoned over to Lee Smith, twelve miles away, this morning, asking him to come over and help put up a new barn next week. Mother called up Mrs. Brown and at the range of three miles had a good gossip about the prices of eggs and butter, what to give a baby for colic, how to make a certain kind of cake and the latest tit-bit of harmless

local scandal. A few minutes later daughter Bessie was called up by her young man Frank, and spent a mutually delightful ten minutes exchanging sweet nothings, after which brother Bert found a very inadequate excuse for ringing up Frank's younger sister, and the phone being still a novelty to her, she quite forgot to snub him as usual, whereat he was so elated that he refused a second helping of meat at dinner and only drank four cups of tea.

So very different to three weeks ago when it meant a day's ride to ask Lee Smith, or else wait a week to get a reply by mail; when mother only got an opportunity to gossip with Mrs. Brown once in two weeks, and when Bessie and Bert were lucky if they caught a glimpse of the object of their affections except on a Sunday or at a dance.

"That all sounds very nice," says the "kicker," but there are a few flies in the ointment. First there's sixteen dollars a year to pay, and then the everlasting ringing of other people's bells is enough to send a fellow crazy. Again there is no chance of doing any important business over the phone as half the neighbors in the district are "listening in" and everyone always knows a little too much about his neighbor's business so that there are constant quarrels.

Undoubtedly there are drawbacks to the telephones on the rural lines, but then how often do we experience an unmixed blessing? And what are such trivial objections as compared with the saving of one human life. And who can say how many lives have been saved which would have been lost had it not been for the speedy communication which the phone makes possible.

A Galician who had a long standing quarrel with one of his neighbors, a Scotchman, went into town and, as the neighbors would put it, "got jagged" and returned home armed with a bottle of fire water and a large sense of grievance against the world in general and the Scotchman in particular. Evidently he drank and brooded most of the night, and when daylight appeared he took down a .44 Winchester and hiked over to a bit of trail across which he knew the subject of his hatred must come.

When he did come at length, the hands which held the rifle must have been affected by fear or drink or perhaps both, as the bullets whistled past the intended victim's head harmlessly, so that he merely thought that someone was out hunting deer a little previously, and had shot near him accidentally.

Seeing that he must get closer to his victim the Galician went to an old disused barn past which ran the only trail by which the Scotchman could leave his homestead towards neighbors, and over which he knew he must travel to get his cows home.

The assassin removed the chinking between the logs as a loophole, and waited.

Presently there was the sound of hoofs spurning the hard dry trail, and a cautious look showed him that it was his enemy on horseback. When the rider was directly opposite the barn, he fired.

At the sound of the shot the horse turned and bolted down the trail towards home and the Scotchman remained in the saddle, though the large soft bullet had torn an ugly furrow in his left hand, eventually burying itself in the thick leather of the saddle crutch, which saved his life.

When the horse reached home the Scotchman explained to his wife what had happened, after which he fainted from pain and loss of blood. She at once saw that assistance must be fetched without delay or her husband might succumb from loss of blood, but her only way to fetch it, lead directly past the hiding place of the would-be murderer. However she did not hesitate to mount into the saddle covered with her husband's blood as it was, and gallop straight past the building where an armed and drink crazed enemy lurked. Luckily she got past without being fired at, and was able to

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soon procure the assistance of men working on a bridge in the vicinity, some of whom returned with her, whilst one was dispatched to fetch medical aid, and also to inform the Mounted Police.

A few days later the Scotchman had sufficiently recovered from the effects of the affray to be around again, but the Galician was found by one of the settlers, lying in the bush with the top of his head blown off, he evidently having done the deed himself.

Had the telephone been in at that time, how much easier it would have been for the Scotchman's wife to summon assistance. But then an act of heroism would probably have remained undone, for there is nothing heroic in calling up neighbors.

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