

Glimpses of Vancouver

BY BESSIE GADABOUT.

VANCOUVER is sometimes called the 'jumping-off place.' I think the 'gathering-up place' would be an equally appropriate title, for truly, here we have a mingling of all nations.

And often as I stroll down Cordova street, — the main thoroughfare of the city, and rub elbows with Singalese, Japanese, Russians, Danes, etc., with a very slight effort of the imagination I can transport myself once more to the Midway Plaisance, with its motley throng, and live again the happy days that have flown.

My first impressions of Vancouver, when I arrived here a year ago, were not very favourable. Fresh from the older civilisation of the East, the city's crudeness and incompleteness jarred upon me at every turn; for it is full of incongruities, and a funny mix-up of Queen Ann, Mary Ann and Chinaman. The majority of the houses are constructed of wood, and built on stilts without any foundation, so that a cellar is somewhat of a luxury.

However, this is not as great an inconvenience as might be imagined, owing to the cool nights—which necessitates in the heat of summer a covering of at least two blankets—and the fairly cool days.

On account of so many of the houses having been erected very hurriedly, some humorous soul has dubbed them 'mushrooms,' a name which impresses one as being peculiarly applicable, particularly on a windy night. The climate, especially during the rainy season, is extremely enervating, and most of all in Vancouver. As a result, stimulants are used pretty generally; the women take tea and Pink Pills, the men drink, well, ginger-beer—with variations. They are specially fond of the variations.

The feeling of disappointment referred to earlier in this article has changed to one of unbounded admiration, as I have been led to realise that this city, with its unlimited resources and undoubtedly great future, is but a child-city after all.

Ten years ago it was a mass of smoking ruins; a picture of utter desolation. To-day it is a city of at least fifteen thousand souls, with splendid electric light system, electric street railway, fire department, unsurpassed water supply, six Public Schools and one High School, and last, but not least, one of the finest harbours in the world.

The old-timers who came to the city ten or twelve years ago seem to have a very kindly regard for each other, even though their relations in days of yore were not always of the pleasantest nature.

I saw an amusing illustration of this a few days ago whilst engaged in making some purchases in the store of a merchant whom we will call McDonald. The day was sultry for British Columbia, and Mr. M—, minus his coat, had seated his portly form in an armchair in the inner office; his good-natured face turned meanwhile towards the gentleman with whom he was conversing. Suddenly a coloured man, dressed in railway uniform, rushed into the office, and slapping Mr. M— upon the back, exclaimed dramatically, "McDonald!" For an instant Mr. M— gazed at him in a bewildered manner, then with a look of joyful recognition shouted, "Glory Hallelujah!" and

jumping to his feet shook the new-comer's hand in the most cordial manner possible. Then turning to the friend at his side he said, "This fellow used to be in the laundry business here, ten years ago. I knew him well; he stole a pair of red socks from me."

I have also observed another amusing characteristic with regard to old-timers; namely, the gusto with which they regale new-comers with tales of earlier days. You must know that there is not any copper coin in circulation here; nothing less than a nickel. If you were to present a copper to anyone, he or she would probably smile significantly at the nearest bystander and whisper, "He came from Bruce," meaning that you were decidedly backwoods. As I was riding in the street car one day I overheard the following dialogue between an old-timer and new-comer:

O.T.—"You know they won't accept any coppers here."

N.C. (with a look of great surprise)—"Is it possible?"

O.T. (scornfully)—"You are astonished at that. Why, man, I've seen the time here when they wouldn't take even nickels. A man might starve to death right on this hill (Mt. Pleasant) with his pockets full of nickels. Couldn't get anyone to take 'em!"

(Collapse of new-comer).

The burning question of the hour here is that of Chinese immigration, and it is one that demands the attention of every thoughtful person, not alone in this province, but in Canada at large. It is not simply a question as to whether we will allow John Chinaman to sell his vegetables in Vancouver, but how long before he will be selling them in Halifax. For they are coming over from China, per Empress, at the rate of from 600 to 1,000 per month; are working in stores, laundries, canneries, mines, ships, boats and houses; also as fish, wood and vegetable vendors.

Charity begins at home, and a our own countrymen have the first claim upon us, we should endeavour to regulate the influx in some way or other. John is not as guileless as doth appear, and under his bland exterior there lies concealed considerable of the old Adam. It is astonishing how little he 'saveys' (understands) if you want him to do something for you that is not congenial. But if, on the other hand, you proffer him a kindness, his knowledge of English is really remarkable.

The Chinese have a way of communicating with each other, something similar to that in vogue among tramps in the East.

To illustrate—a lady living in Vancouver had occasion to dismiss her Chinaman. He said, "I belly glad to leave you." "Why, Sing," was the indignant response, "you are the first Chinaman that ever said that to me; they are always so sorry to go." "No," was the grim reply, "they all belly glad, they all say you belly cross woman," with a wave of his hand towards the pastry-board; "you look on board and you see." Sure enough, on examining the article referred to, she found a number of Chinese characters inscribed thereon. Whether the lady ever summoned courage to have them interpreted I cannot say.

The American and English press have for some time past been suffering from an acute attack of 'inflammation of the imagination'

regarding the dearth of marriageable women in British Columbia, and have drawn heartrending pictures of lonely men perched disconsolately on doorsteps and fences with their eyes turned longingly towards the East. As a result of this mental aberration, the mayor and postmaster of Vancouver have been flooded with a shower of letters and photos from the would-be married. One individual, moved with a tender compassion for the unmarried, kindly volunteered to send out a car-load of women—for a consideration. They have not reached here at time of writing.

Now, as far as my observation extends, the supply is quite equal to, if not in excess of, the demand, and in my journeyings throughout the province I have met with any number of good-looking, amiable, intelligent girls who are eminently qualified to make any (reasonable) man happy.

The newspapers wax eloquent over the large majority of men in British Columbia, but fail to mention that a large percentage of the aforesaid majority are composed of Chinese, Japs and other ineligible. True, there may be, and doubtless are, some ranchers who find it hard to procure suitable wives. But let me tell you that ranch-life, in a land of weeping skies, is anything but a rosy existence. Many ranchers have been obliged to give up their homes on account of their wives, for the rainy season in British Columbia is unutterably trying to women, even under the most favourable conditions.

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I do not think that a Ruskin could do justice to the scenery of this wonderful country. One could fill reams of paper with a description of the mountains alone, with their snowy peaks and ever-varying tints. Stanley Park, with its colossal trees, covered with mosses and ferns, its exquisite views of mountain, sky and water, is an Elysium for all beauty-loving natures, and owing to the hard-shell roads, the paradise of cyclists. Last evening as I wheeled leisurely around—a distance of seven miles—my soul was filled to overflowing with the loveliness of it all, for the recent rains have given to it a fresh baptism of beauty, and the grass and foliage are as green as in May. As I stood upon Prospect Point, with the waters of English Bay lying three hundred feet below me, and watched the sun sinking to rest behind the Cascade mountains in a glory of crimson and gold, I felt for a moment as though I had reached at last a spot long dreamed of, far removed from the earthly ways with their heritage of pain.

The people here have a saying that one year spent in British Columbia forever spoils one for life in the East. And, verily, I believe it to be true in the majority of cases. For in spite of many discomforts there is a charm, a fascination, about life out here, that one cannot fully understand until under the spell. Owing to the coming and going of ships of all nations, and the continual influx of tourists from every clime, one feels in touch with the whole world. As I was being rowed across the harbour a few days ago, glancing about me I saw the Danube from Alaska, the Empress of India from China and Japan, the Wanimoo from Australia, the new flagship, H. M. S. Inperieuse, lately arrived from England, and felt a nearness to these distant lands never before experienced.

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The eyes of the whole world are upon us, the gold of many nations is flowing into our land, and to the seeing eye and the understanding heart, there awaits this fair young country,—whose feet are shod with gold and whose head is snow-crowned and glorious,—a future brighter and more dazzling than the world dreams of.