

Life on the Prairies.

By Thos. Morris, Jr. (Continued from last month.)

OCASIONALLY you hear people remark that the extreme cold in Manitoba is no harder to bear than the moderate cold in Ontario, they invariably explain it in this way: "the air you know is so much clearer and drier so rarefied and invigorating that 20°, 30° or 40°, or even 50° below zero is really not so severely felt after all."

Well I suppose these people know all about it, and have had abundant experience, possibly they may have lived in Manitoba a season. Yet after roughing it five winters on the prairie, all I have to say is, that to me 1° or 50° of cold is the same in either province. Zero at Lowestoft, on the prairie, is much the same as zero at Hamilton, under the mountain with this difference, however, on the prairie there is no shelter of any kind, no elevations of land, no clumps of trees to break the wind, or temper the storm. I am prepared to admit though, that it is not at all difficult to winter in Manitoba if one has a comfortable home in the town, a cosy office in which to work, and warm furs to protect oneself in going from one to the other.

But to the hundreds of settlers who live in shanties and dugouts on the bleak prairies, and who are obliged to team their grain to market and draw wood from the bush, a distance of thirty miles, you can easily understand that the cold must be intensely felt by them and the long winters justly dreaded. I remember well the last experience I had in going to town with a load of wheat, not only on account of the cold, and the snow-drifts which I had to plow through, but because the remuneration which I received for the load of grain was so small. I left home one afternoon, the thermometer registering 20° below zero and a pretty stiff breeze blowing, I had taken my oxen because the trail was heavy and oxen are much better in breaking through the snow than horses, I got six miles that afternoon and remained over night with a neighbor. Next morning I started many hours before sun rise and by pressing my oxen and not stopping long enough even to feed we got into Morden some twenty miles further by nine o'clock that night, I had gone without any food myself and I assure you that I was tired and hungry and nearly stiff with cold.

Of course it was too late to sell the grain then so I put up for the night. Next day I went to the elevator and the buyer told me he had all the wheat he wanted but to oblige

me he would take it in and give me twelve and a half cents per bushel or twenty-five cents per bag, you can imagine my feelings perhaps as unconsciously my mind ran back over the cost of plowing, seeding, harrowing cutting, binding, stacking threshing and marketing. Why the last item alone I felt was worth far more than the amount I was offered, but I could not help myself, it would not pay to take the grain back home, so I must submit. I received from the buyer just \$4.00 in exchange for my load of wheat. Out of this amount I had to pay travelling expenses, I was three nights away from home, I had travelled fifty-two miles, it did not require much figuring to find out that I had less money after paying my expenses than when I started.

Settlers are necessarily so much exposed in Manitoba that it is no unusual thing to hear of them losing their toes or their fingers or hands or legs by frost. The general hospital in Winnipeg is generally filled in the winter time with unfortunates who have lost some of their members. The second winter I was in Manitoba I worked beside a tall, raw boned, simple Scotchman, just out from the old country. I noticed that he wore ordinary leather boots at which I was surprised. I told him he ran a risk of having his feet frozen and that he should wear moccasins with three or four pairs of stockings and a wad of hay or straw inside. One morning Duncan did not come to work as usual and on inquiring I was told that he had been taken to the hospital and that both of his legs had been amputated. On going home after an extremely cold day Duncan found it impossible to get his boots off and it was found necessary to get a knife and cut them to pieces, then his friends attempted to take off his stockings but the skin and flesh stuck fast to the stockings and came off in such a sickening manner that a doctor was sent for and poor Duncan was taken to the hospital.

One other case comes to my mind, though the circumstances are not so sad. I had a young Englishman by name Thomas stopping with me one winter, I had no particular use for him but he had no home and he asked to stop with me until spring, so I consented. I was taking my grain to Morris that winter, and I usually got up about twelve or one o'clock in the morning, fed my team, got my breakfast and was on the road by two, and reached town by nine. By the time I sold my wheat, bought my groceries, etc., it was noon and it took me all my time to get home before night.

(To be continued.)