

Life on the Prairies.

By Thomas Morris Jr.

PERHAPS some of my readers who have not had the pleasure or misfortune, as they may please to term it, of "baching" would like to know how it goes. If you care to look up your map and find section 12, township 4, range 8, west of the principal meridian, you will see exactly where I was situated. Human society being represented by but one individual; there was no such thing as division of labor, I was at once farmer, carpenter, blacksmith, joiner, housewife and washerwoman. I built my house, made the chairs, shelves, table, bedstead, manufactured rivets, bolts, nails and ox-harness; sharpened the saw and fixed the machinery. I mended my shoes, patched my clothes, washed my shirts (I did not use any "boiled ones"), baked the cakes, churned the butter, washed the dishes, darned socks, looked after 100 hens, raised chickens, milked the cow, fed the calf and pigs, took the eggs to market, and exchanged them for groceries; dispensed hospitality to strangers (often angels in disguise), and in addition worked 100 acres of land.

I was very hospitable to visitors and gave them the best I had. One of my standing courses was bean soup; another was oatmeal porridge. A pot of bean soup was always on the stove, and every time the fire was lit it was subjected to fresh boiling. As there was always more or less waste in cutting up meat and bread, and milk left over, the pot was constantly receiving contributions, and by the end of the week the contents were extremely various, savory and inviting.

Sometimes I entertained an itinerant minister, or a benighted traveller, at other times a French half-breed or a band of Indians. My door was never locked against anyone. I treated the Indians so well that they never forgot to call when passing my way. I set before them an abundance of bean soup and fat pork, and the way they relished the feast delighted my heart.

The shanty which I built was 10x12 feet on the ground, and 9½ in front by 7½ behind in height (this was in the year 1882).

To my surprise I found on looking around that many settlers lived in "dugouts" or holes in the prairie, rooted over with poles and clay, and built up around with rods. They had to put up with these because they were either too poor or unwilling to pay from \$40 to \$50 per thousand for common lumber. Before going down to my farm I lived a year in Winnipeg, and had saved \$400. With this amount I felt quite wealthy and thought I

could afford something better than a "dug-out." I got oak studding which I used for the frame, boarded it around with undressed pine lumber, and roofed it with oak boards. I was sorry afterwards that I had put the green oak boards on the roof because the sun warped them so that the nails were drawn, and my roof resembled in curvature somewhat a hog's back, I had no board floor, and but one small window in the shanty. I could not get the cracks stopped very well and the mice and gophers were constantly boring under the walls. The elements were rather too freely admitted for comfort.

My furnishings consisted of a small No 8 cook stove, a table, 3 feet square, a number of book shelves, sundry pans and dishes, a bunk 6 feet long, 2½ feet wide, and 3 feet deep, with a cover which formed a convenient seat in the daytime, a variety of musical instruments, a concertina, mouth organ, violin and flute, a double-barreled shot-gun loaded and hung over my bed ready for instant service, two or three files of weekly newspapers and an easy chair made out of a barrel.

As I had no stable the first year, I used to let my pony, Barney, come in on cold nights, and he behaved himself like a gentleman. Barney had the greatest affection for me and I treated him like a prince. Then I had a dog, an English collie, with a glossy coat that was the admiration of 'I who saw him. Poor fellow! his beautiful coat, tanned and trimmed, now adorns the easy chair of a settler, who valued his hide more than his services. The fourth member of my family was Tim, the cat. I had to get a brand new cat every spring, for, notwithstanding the proverbial "nine lives," my cats could never withstand the temperature of the shanty during the winter. First the tips of the ears would drop off, then the whole ear close to the head, then the tail would be missing, and after an extremely sharp night I would have to carry the body of poor Tim, stiff and cold, to his last resting place.

In the cold weather it was almost impossible to raise the temperature in the shanty above 30° Fahrenheit, while often the mercury in the bulb was frozen solid. In the coldest weather I did not pretend to undress at night before going to bed. It would have been dangerous in the extreme. Instead of taking off, I put on clothes. I slipped on a couple of extra pairs of stockings, put on my mitts, pulled my fur cap down over my ears, then lifting the cover of my bunk I got down snugly under the soft, thick blankets, pulled the cover down again, and thus protected, generally passed a comfortable night.

(To be continued.)