

SASKATCHEWAN (and ELSEWHERE)

ON THE WAY

The trip from Boston to Winnipeg was uneventful, except that I learned certain facts about railroad construction and maintenance of way from two gentlemen in the employ of the road over which I travelled. The first of the two was Superintendent of Telegraph Construction. I found him seated on a camp stool on the rear platform of the train when I went out to get a breath of air. He was to all appearances doing nothing more important than counting telegraph poles and making notes in a small leather-bound note book. He looked bored. I began to ask questions. After a few minutes, he said: "How do you think I can talk to you and do half a dozen other things at the same time?"

"Nobody asked you to talk to me," I answered. "I'll do the talking, and all you have to do is to say yes or no." He was silent for a few seconds, and then said, squinting one eye toward the rocky ledges on each side of the track, "Fine farming land this." "Really," I answered, "that isn't what we call it in Massachusetts." Ominous silence again, and then he went in to get his "dust coat." It was certainly very dirty on that rear platform, and the sun was very hot. When he returned he was trying to pull on his linen duster over his serge coat.

"Why do you wear both coats when it is so very hot?" I asked, solemnly. "There are so many things that I want to use in the pockets of the cloth coat," he answered.

"I suppose you couldn't possibly transfer the things from one coat to the other?" I ventured.

"That ain't a bad one," he answered, brightening ever so little,—and immediately the suggested transfer took place,—pencils, notebooks, pipes, tobacco, wallet,—handkerchief,—everything useful and otherwise except Savings Bank Insurance literature. And thereupon he settled down to smoke contentedly and to answer all my questions, and parenthetically to make further notes in the little leather-bound note book. Before the day was over he had become so far humanized that he insisted on gathering specimens of wild flowers for me every time the train stopped.