

A Strange Warfare

In which Cattle are both Victors and Vanquished

Written for The Western Home Monthly by Mrs. David H. Williams

COTTONWOOD farm, where dwelt the Camerons, formed one of the numerous homesteads, situated in south-eastern Alberta in the waning days of cattle ranching.

Four or five years previous, vast herds of cattle, numbering many thousands, with their attendants, the cow-boys, roamed over the great prairies, or among the foothills of the Rockies further west. No smoke from a settler's shack curled upwards, nor were there extensive ranges obstructed by fences, or other indications of the immigration that was soon to invade their solitude. As the buffalo period passed, so was rapidly drawing to a close the era of ranching on the boundless plains of Western Canada. Land-seekers from the East, and across the border to the South, trekked over their territory; viewed with favor the rich soil, flowing streams, and liked well the sunny Alberta climate. They took up homesteads, pitched their tents, built

from the farmers, but poisoned their dogs, broke down their fences, left open their gates, and by many petty annoyances told the newcomers they were unwelcome. They ridiculed the idea of grain-growing in that vicinity. The soil was not suitable. Crops would be frozen before the grain ripened, or cut down by hail. If they escaped these calamities, they would probably be burnt by the fierce sun in a dry season.

To this list of woes the tillers of the soil paid little heed, though the ranchers' predictions were verified. The first year's crop was destroyed by hail; the second by an early frost and snowstorm. The following year the scorching sun burnt them into mere stubble before the dog days of August. The ranchers were jubilant, and expected the settlers to abandon their visionary schemes of grain growing.

The farmers, discouraged and financially poorer than when they came to



Camping by the River Bank near Winnipeg.

their shacks, and settled by the side of a small river known as Cottonwood Creek; the name being derived from a bluff of Cottonwood maples fringing its banks. Others followed their footsteps. Little by little they encroached upon the prairie, bit by bit was wrested from the wilderness, the days of its virginity gone forever. The homesteads were fenced with wire, trails made, and in course of time the air vibrated with a new song, the whirr of machinery. East of the creek was left in its wild unbroken state.

The Cameron family consisted of the father, a man of sixty years; one daughter, a fine looking girl of twenty; two grown up sons and a boy just entering his teens. They had received what in those days was called a fair education. Capable described Stella and the sons were fine strapping fellows; the right kind of settlers to form the foundation and backbone of a new country.

Unfortunately, and unknown to them, their choice of location was one that was particularly favored by the ranchers and their cattle. The banks of the stream here sloped gradually to the water's edge. Always flowing, in the driest of summers, the cattle found their way hither, over trails the buffalo had made in a by-gone age. Nearby, the cowboys had erected their largest round-up corral. The creek was also a convenient stopping place on their way to town, twenty or thirty miles distant. Their wrath was great on finding this district invaded. They could no longer dash to town over unobstructed prairie, and their cattle were scared away from the best watering place in the country by the farmer's dogs and unfamiliar sights and sounds. They accepted no friendly overtures

Alberta, were determined to test fate, or Providence, another season. No homestead was vacated.

The fourth year—ah! that glorious fourth year—repaid the unrequited toil of former seasons. The weather, upon which the crops depend, was perfect. Early rain, long sunny days, balmy atmosphere, with no suspicion of frost. They rejoiced in their labors and waving fields of grain. A thrill of excitement permeated the settlement, men, women and children, when the first golden tinge appeared. While they rejoiced and prepared for harvesting, far out on the open plains, revelling in luxuriant grass, wandered the ever restless cattle, needing little care. To the cowboys the fast ripening grain and prospects for a bountiful harvest, was a source of consternation, but they were divided in their hostility. With some the fleeting years had partially obliterated jealousy and enmity. To them the farmers were not such a bad lot, the prairie was wide enough for both, immigration was sure to come, it was in vain to stop it, besides, there were "enticing Delilahs in the camp of the Philistines" who were not averse to bestowing smiles and friendly greetings to them as they passed on their way to town, or took their cattle to the creek. Others, and by far the larger number, argued differently. The farmers must not be allowed to reap their harvest. Already the outside world was commenting on the success attending the grain growing. Next spring the country would be flooded with settlers, and ranching be put clean out of business. They would not leave their territory, the cattle knew every slough in the vicinity, the large rocks worn smooth by the rubbing of countless buffalo. They needed no guiding to the fattest, richest grass and flowing



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