

WHY I WAS NOT ASTONISHED

An Eastern Newspaper Man's Impressions of the West

By T. W. KING



EVERYONE who visits the Canadian West seems to have an obsession that he has discovered the country. This is quite trying to our friends who have to listen to us upon our return. Indeed, no one, not even the volunteer who fought in South Africa, or the man who once lived in the Yukon is so liable to take the floor and keep it as the traveller returned from the West. But published accounts are apt to be somewhat uniform in expressing astonishment and admiration. Much as I admire the West I cannot say that I was greatly astonished. I think before going West that I had a pretty fair idea of its condition and prospects. I was not stunned by the sight of Winnipeg, having been long familiar with the city of Toronto. I was not amazed by the great fields of grain on either side of the railway track because I was quite prepared to believe that one hundred and twenty million bushels of wheat produced in three provinces must naturally grow in the fields and be quite visible to persons passing through that part of the country. I think I had a fairly accurate idea before leaving the East of the size of the various cities and towns between Winnipeg and Vancouver, although I had lumped Regina, Edmonton and Calgary in my mind as being about the same size, which was quite unfair to one of the three. I will not say which, as I may have occasion to go West again. I can quite understand that people who have seen a town founded must exult in its growth and returning after a time be astonished to find a substantial city of twelve or fifteen thousand where they had left a few straggling houses. But the traveller who arrives for the first time at Saskatoon or any other "toon" sees only a city of so many people neither larger nor better although younger than many other cities which he has visited.

CHARLES DICKENS was probably unfair to the United States of his day in "Martin Chuzzlewit"; but the field was ripe for a satirist, and there are features of life in the Canadian West which invite some kindly, even though it may be an unwelcome criticism. One encounters, for example, what may not unjustly be termed a "pose" among certain Western people. Because they are in the West they feel that they must affect what might have been racy of the soil in either Canada or the United States fifty years ago. The pioneer who lived with his family alone in the forest, fought Indians, killed bears, and was only overtaken in old age by people and civilisation, had a certain contempt for some refinements of life and a rugged independence, almost indifference, bred by his lonely life of hardship, adventure and privation. He was a type and more or less a law to himself and he had a certain right to be "wild and woolly" in the midst of civilisation, if civilisation insisted upon overtaking him. But can we look with favour upon anything crude or crass in people who "pioneered" not by blazing a trail through the forest but by buying tickets and sleeping-car berths from the railway companies; who have never spent a day or night outside of a well populated town; who have never been in a house not equipped with plumbing and hot water, and who have found absolutely no difference in their comfort or environments by moving from Ontario to Saskatchewan or Alberta?

I MUST also protest against the affectation of "hustle," about which we hear so much from the West. I think that people are less inclined to hurry up the farther West you go. Certainly the service found in shops and hotels would not be tolerated for an hour in the East. One is uncertain whether to be angry or amused. At a good-sized town I went into the barber shop of the principal hotel quite early in the morning. There was a

gentleman ahead of me, a rather portly, fine-looking man, and in reply to his good morning I said, looking around me, for apparently no barber was in sight: "I wonder what chance I have of getting shaved?"

"You are after me," he said laconically, removing his coat and collar. No one appearing, he then proceeded to shave himself. When he had finished and wiped his face he stepped to the back of the chair and motioned me to get in. The portly gentleman was the barber and he naturally shaved himself before attending to a customer. At Moosejaw I asked a bootblack to shine my boots, at the same time mounting a chair which stood on the sidewalk near a barber shop.

"All right," he said, "just wait there a few minutes, I am going in for a shave."

Military fever is quite acute in the West, and amusing stories are told at the expense of the newly-fledged officers. One gallant major at a church parade is said to have marched his battalion into the wrong church. But a few moments later, although the sermon was well under way, he re-formed his soldiers and marched them out again.

PEOPLE undoubtedly have made money in the West quickly, and the opportunities there are better for many people than they are in the East. I do not doubt that some men are doing well in the West who would starve to death in the East. For a time I laboured under the impression that anybody who came West and stayed long enough would automatically become a millionaire. I inferred it must be automatically because I could not see that the men who lived by their pens were any better paid—or taking everything together were as well paid—as their brethren in the East who usually fall short of acquiring an even million. Still it is disconcerting to be told "if you had been here three years ago you could have got that lot over there for three dollars and a half, and to-day it is worth three hundred and fifty thousand dollars." You feel you would certainly have been there if you had only known it. One Sunday we were at Battleford, the old capital of the Northwest Territory. It is situated in a beautiful country, but for years had no railway connections, and meanwhile a new Battleford—North Battleford—has grown up on the other side of the river. Well, here at old Battleford we were shown the first issue of the first paper printed west of Winnipeg. It preceded Hon. Frank Oliver's Edmonton *Bulletin* by three years. It was not a large paper then, and it is not a large paper now. It is still in possession of the family of Mr. P. G. Laurie, the able man who founded it, but other papers founded by him, in Ontario for example, proved better money-making ventures than this first newspaper of the Canadian West. Even Mr. Oliver would probably have done as well in a financial way had he never gone West. The man who walks in midwinter from Edmonton to Winnipeg will not long remain a poor man in any part of the country.

ONE drawback to the Western visit is the obligation the visitor is under of looking at wheat fields and giving an opinion as to how many bushels it will run to the acre. I was honest enough to admit that I did not know wheat from oats or oats from barley, but it availed me nothing. I was called upon to hazard guesses until I was driven to frenzy. Sometimes I would guess two bushels to the acre, and if this seemed too low I would guess two hundred the next time I was asked. What I most objected to was getting out of the automobile in the dust, climbing fences and standing in the growing grain looking at it in a vacant manner and trying to be enthused. It was a great relief to strike British Columbia, where they did not seem to have any grain. I also became somewhat nervous on the sub-

ject of real estate values. When a man would say: "Do you see that corner lot over there, it was sold for two dollars and forty cents two years ago; what do you think it is worth now?" I would be at a loss what to say. If I guessed five dollars or some like amount my interlocutor would become indignant, and yet he would seem disappointed if I named a figure like two million dollars. I finally hit upon the expedient of always saying "one hundred thousand dollars." Sometimes it seemed absurdly low and sometimes a little high, but I positively refused to become excited when a different amount was mentioned.

But the Western people are all right. If they did not boom their country, no one else would do it for them. It may not be a get-rich-quick proposition, but it is surely a get-enough-to-eat proposition, which, after all, is what we are all of us after.

Crown Jewels

A WRITER in *The Bystander* tells us that already, with a view to the Coronation next year, ermine and red velvet have gone up in price, coats of the former being now only within the reach of those ladies of the musical-comedy choruses who also own cars. Very busy indeed, rendering an account of their stewardship, are also those most useful avuncular custodians into whose safe keeping baubles such as coronets, strawberry leaves, antique family jewels, and the like are given over in times of peace. It was Madame de Lieven, Russian Ambassador to England, who, writing to Paris on the accession of Queen Victoria, declared the English crown to have "no diamonds." Such a lot disappeared during the Georgian era, and most of those that remained were the property of Queen Adelaide, and came to her from her mother, who had bequeathed them to the Crown of Hanover. "As this crown is now separated from the English crown," so wrote the gossip, "the Duke of Cumberland reclaims the diamonds. Thus Queen Victoria has none, and although she is in no hurry to send back the jewels, she can, of course, not wear them."

It is a very different state of affairs that Queen Mary succeeds to-day. Her Majesty herself has a magnificent collection of jewels; as the bride of the son of the heir-apparent most of her thousands of wedding presents consisted of jewellery, and, thanks to the passion of Queen Victoria for the acquirement of precious stones, the British Crown Jewels rank now among the finest in the world. The greater part of the late queen's jewels went, of course, to members of her own family, Princess Henry of Battenburg especially. But a large number were assigned to the crown, among them some of those most wonderful ones of which we have despoiled India. Queen Alexandra, too, has an enormous amount of jewellery. She inherited a good deal from the Queen of Denmark, and all her life has collected and is always buying it, while all her jewels are set in the latest "Cartier" fashion.

The Women in the Forge

FIVE hundred women blacksmiths are idle in Cradley Heath, England, because they will not agree to work for the next six months for four or five shillings a week. The women, who operate forges in their own homes, are engaged in making chains. Their wages have been so low that a commission, after an investigation extending over seven months, decided that they should be increased, although the old rate might continue for six months if the women would consent. About half the women agreed to work for the old pay. The rest have been locked out.