

Life on the Prairie.

BY THOS. MORRIS, JR.

Out of Humanity's Reach.

When I went homesteading in South-western Manitoba, I left behind me friends, society, and civilization. I was almost as much isolated as Robinson Crusoe on his Island of Juan Fernandez. Frequently the hymn which he sang came unconsciously to my lips:

"I'm monarch of all I survey;
My right there is none to dispute;
From the centre all round to the sea,
I'm lord of the fowl and the brute."

You would understand the similarity of my position if you could picture to yourself my surroundings. I was six miles from the nearest settler. My shanty was situated on a slight elevation or knoll, while the Prairie, covered with long grass swaying to and fro in the wind, with ducks and geese and other game flying overhead, extended as far as the eye could reach on every side, resembling nothing so much as a vast expanse of water. I often fancied that I was living on an Island.

How I got my Homestead.

I was employed in a real estate office in Winnipeg as clerk, and the proprietor, the late Rev. E. Morrow, was anxious that I should take real estate in exchange for my services. I took, in the first deal, three town lots in Nelsonville, (now defunct), and fortunately for myself sold them soon after for twice what I gave for them. Next he wanted me to take the claim of a homestead and pre-emption which had been abandoned by some one who could not withstand the loneliness of the situation. As I was thinking seriously of taking up a farm at the time, I also accepted this proposal, and at once made up my mind to go and see it. There happened to be another half section of land adjoining, which was offered to a friend of mine, C. F. Bridgeman, so together we started to hunt up our farms.

My Diary.

MAY 20th, 1881.

Camp on the west bank of the Red River, five miles south of St. Norbert. We left Winnipeg this morning at 9.30 o'clock with horse and buckboard, provisions sufficient to last a week, a tent, cooking utensils, etc. After crossing the Assiniboine River on the ferry, we found it bad travelling. The mud is black and sticky, apparently a mixture of glue and molasses. At one place our poor old horse sat down, utterly exhausted, right in the middle of a nasty looking mud hole.

We could not budge him, he was so thoroughly used up and discouraged. We were forced to get out into the mud up to our knees, and it was a pretty mess. We unloaded the buckboard, unhitched our horse, who seemed loth to be disturbed and then by fastening one end of a rope to the front axle and the other end to the whiffle-tree, which we unfastened from the buckboard and attached to the horse's harness, we got the horse, now standing on firmer ground, to draw the buckboard out.

We afterwards met many bad places, sometimes the road being entirely submerged, and some of the bridges had been carried away by the spring freshets. Soon St. Norbert was reached, a thriving little place, with a fine grist mill, an elegant Roman Catholic church, and a large number of neat log houses, thatched in most cases with straw. The inhabitants we found were for the most part French half-breeds. We crossed Stinking River, a large stream emptying into the Red River, by means of a new bridge, although we had some difficulty in getting on because of the approaches being under water, and travelled on until about two o'clock in the afternoon, when we approached a neat cottage, with a carefully kept garden, and everything around denoting taste and thrift. We decided to stop near by and lunch. C. F. Bridgeman tethered the horse, while I went towards the house, with a tin pail in my hand, to get some hot water. A large shaggy dog announced my approach, and before I reached the door, a stout, good natured looking woman and a younger woman, extremely pretty and vivacious, stood at the entrance. They were both dark, half Indian, half French, fond of bright colors, as I could see by the ribbons and shawls which they wore, and I could also tell at a glance that they were hospitable, and would supply me with hot water if I could only make them understand what I wanted. They greeted me pleasantly with, "Bon Jour, Monsieur." I replied, "Bon Jour, Madame. Voulez vous, s'il vous plait, donnez-moi"—And then I paused, my French vocabulary being very limited. I could not think of the words for hot water. They smiled assuringly, as if to say, "certainly sir, whatever you ask for," but I could not go on, so I entered the room and took hold of the kettle, and motioned that I wanted some hot water. They at once understood, and filled my pail.

I now wanted some eggs. I said, "Madame avez vous des poulets?"

"Oui! oui!" they both said at once.