

BETWEEN THE CHORES

JOTTINGS BY A RANCHER

Written for The Western Home Monthly by S. P.

Passers-by.

We live in a small intervale on the banks of the Bow. The wooded bluffs touch the river to the east and to the west of us, thus forming a sylvan arc with a silver chord. It is a lovely spot—an ideal setting for a western home. Our little secluded intervale lies "far from the maddening crowd;" but in days long gone by it was a favorite camping ground of the aborigines on their way to dispose of their collection of pelts to the white traders at Fort Calgary. The day of the buffalo and the Indian is gone, but the trail remains and traverses our homestead. The passer-by still claims, when so inclined, the time-honored right of hospitality and we have thus frequent opportunities of entertaining the stranger. After supper a pleasant hour's chat gives me what may be called a cross-section of many a private history. It is like intercepting for a moment the flight of a bird of passage. It is like Burns' "Snowflake in the river: a moment white, then melts for ever."

I carefully avoid rude inquisitiveness, so that sometimes my guest de-

duced to join the ill-fated "Barr Colony" expedition. He had suffered much privation, had spent his little all and was now on the lookout for a job. He spoke of going back to England as soon as some money he was expecting arrived. I advised him to think carefully over the matter before he decided to leave this country. He had a homestead and had built a shack and with the money he expected and perseverance I felt sure he would do well to stay here. He thanked me and passed on.

"Poor lad," I thought, as I looked at his slender figure on the trail: a bank clerk can ill compete in the search for a job out here with the sturdy, handy lads that Canada is rearing."

I wonder what he decided to do when his money arrived!

Shakespeare makes good old King Duncan say—just before he rushes into the arms of Macbeth—"There's no art to find the mind's construction in the face." With all due deference to the Bard of Avon, I believe there is; but it is a fine art, requiring careful cultivation. One can,

He was so voluble and seemed so anxious that I should see for myself the wondrous effect of this great invention that I took him round to the lamp-room where, with the air of a professor of chemistry preparing some elaborate illustrative experiment for his students, he produced from a small handbag a pair of scissors, a box of matches and "the greatest invention of modern times." This was a piece of perforated tin about 1 inch square, folded into two halves. Carefully trimming the wick, he fitted the tin on to the end of it and then a lighted match was applied. Of course the flame produced was better spread out and probably clearer than that of the naked wick.

But there did not seem to me enough in the thing to make it worth the while of two men to tour our province in its behalf.

"How much does it cost?" I asked, merely with a desire to be polite.

"Twenty-five cents," was the prompt reply.

For bare-faced impudence I think that takes the cake. If he had said five cents per dozen or even thirty cents per gross (like trouser buttons), I would probably have taken him for a reasonable man and suggested that his talents were being wasted canvassing so unremunerative an article. As it was, I merely said:

"That seems a very high price."

"Not too high for the article, I assure you. Besides our expenses

unwittingly repaid me amply for entertaining him. Before leaving he helped me to separate from the herd and to place in breeding pens two sows about to litter. I remarked that looking after a number of pigs added considerably to one's daily chores. His reply was truly hibernian and not over polite:

"Them as keeps pigs didn't ought to without they have a proper place to keep them in." He passed on, but his remark has stayed and has been absorbed and has become part of my philosophy of life. "Them as keeps pigs ought to have a proper place for them."

How true, and how universally applicable! One keeps a small flock of sheep without proper fences and life becomes a burden. One keeps hens without proper arrangements for the "departments" of poultry-keeping, and laying hens get hopelessly mixed up with sitting hens so that one runs the daily risk of having boiled chicken for breakfast instead of new-laid eggs. In business generally it is as true as in farm work, "Them as keeps pigs ought to have a proper place for them."

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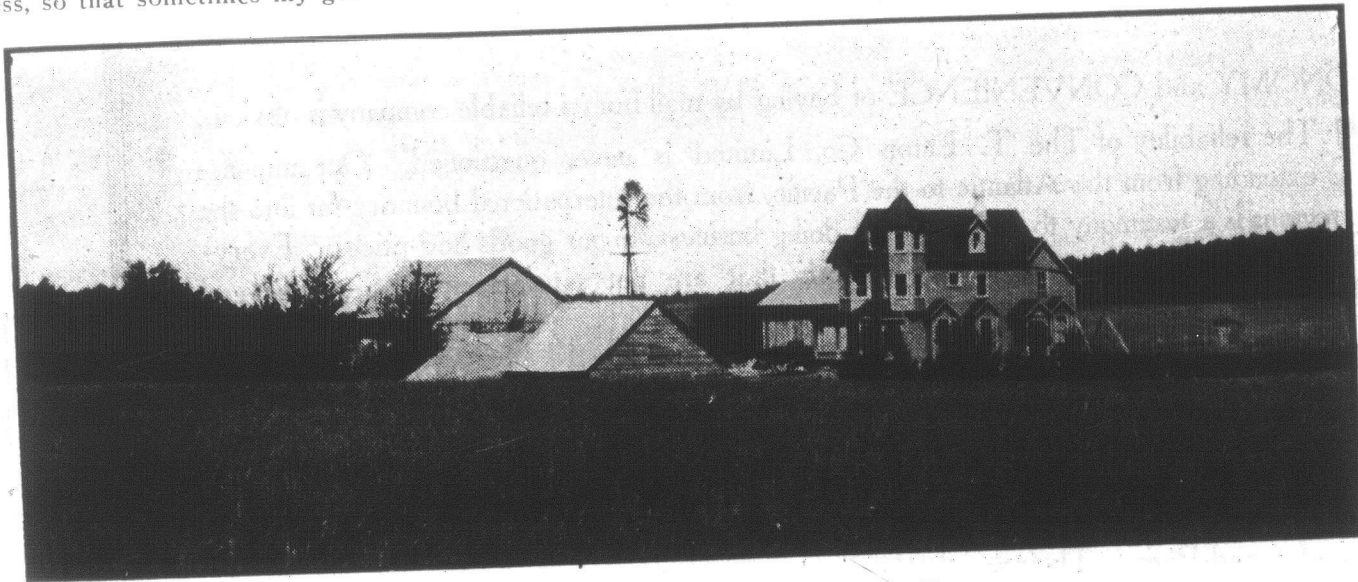
We sometimes entertain angels unawares. A runaway team galloped furiously along the trail and were stopped near our gate by a neighbor who happened to be passing. Several hours afterwards a portly figure on an undersized cayuse hove in sight. I was on the lookout for the owner of the team and went out to meet this stranger. As he approached slowly and, as it seemed to me, sadly, I tried to locate him. He and his cayuse were ill-matched. The pair reminded me in an absurd way of a definition of wit: "The juxtaposition of incongruous ideas." Neither seemed at his ease. The steed was unmistakably of this country—a born cayuse in every line and movement; but the rider was neither of the country nor of the city, as far as I could make out. "He must be a tenderfoot," I said to myself, and I had visions of a pleasant chat about the old country and of still more pleasant opportunities of airing my knowledge and experience of life in the wild and woolly West. Having inspected the horses (a hire from a Calgary livery stable), we adjourned to the house. He deposited his ponderous frame in an arm-chair, and, resting his elbows, he placed the finger-tips and thumbs of his podgy hands together, forming a sort of gothic arch which had a curious effect. Then he spoke:

"Since you have been so very kind—in fact I have experienced nothing but the greatest kindness and hospitality since I arrived in the West—allow me to introduce myself. My name is _____; I am a professor in _____ college."

He paused and looked around to see what effect this awful intelligence had produced on his audience. He certainly was "the cynosure of wondering eyes," for all our youngsters had gathered round and were taking stock of this curious person who called himself a professor. As is the wont of the species, the professor spoke ex cathedra; and much as I should have liked a talk with a university man on academic topics, I saw that it gave the learned gentleman more pleasure to patronize and to play the part of Sir Oracle. I accordingly, in my role of polite host, followed the bent of my guest's genius and when he "oped his mouth" this little dog refrained from barking.

We had a real live bishop for half an hour as our guest—the cheeriest, most delightful little man I have ever met. His democrat luckily broke down at the bridge and His Lordship had afternoon tea with us. I wish he would call again. If all Roman Catholics are like this bishop, then they are a most lovable people.

A man who sells English sparrows coated with yellow paint and calls them canaries has been working with success in Chester, Pa., recently. He sells the birds for \$1 with the promise of the buyer that if the birds sing he is to be paid an additional dollar on his return to the city in two weeks.



Farm Buildings of J. P. Shycock, near Russell, Man.

parts without my knowing whence he has come or whither he is going or what he is going to do when he gets there. In other cases where my guest is communicative I get a peep behind the scenes—just a peep—a passing glimpse. He is off by daybreak and probably our tracks through life will never again meet.

One morning about 10 o'clock I saw a person coming towards the house on foot. The "rule of the road" in Western Canada is the reverse of what it is in the old country. To see a pedestrian here is as exceptional as to see an equestrian there. I therefore went to the gate to see what this "tramp" wanted. He was very young; not over twenty, I should say, honest looking, but tired and travel-stained.

"I called to ask if you would sell me a loaf of bread," he said abruptly. "We don't sell bread here," I replied, also abruptly.

"Oh!" That is all the poor lad said and he turned to go away.

"What do you want it for? To eat it?"

"Yes."

"Have you come far?"

He mentioned a place some six miles south and added that he was on his way to Calgary in search of work.

"We don't sell bread," I said, "but if you come in and rest I'll see what we can do for you in the way of refreshment."

While having lunch he told me his story. He had been a clerk in a London bank. (He showed me the "testimonial" he got from his employer.) He had a little money and was in-

by practice, come to learn enough in a brief interview to enable him to decide whether he has any use for the man interviewed or not. One can train his powers of discernment to distinguish the honest and reliable from the fair-spoken humbug. Truth will out, as well as murder, and character is "writ large" if only one can read what is written.

A smart turnout pulled up at our gate one forenoon in the fall. I happened to be nearby fixing up a fence and waiting for dinner to be announced. The two occupants of the rig were evidently "city men" from their get-up. They were, of course, clean shaven, and their countenances were "sicklied o'er with the pale cast" which to me betokened something more than hard thinking.

"Good morning, Colonel," airily cried No. 1, as he jumped out and proceeded to tie up his horse to the gate post. "This is fine weather for stock, eh?"

"You bet," added his companion. "You have a lovely place here," went on No. 1, without waiting for me to speak.

"Yes," I replied. "The autumn tints are exceedingly fine just now. Are you travelling far?"

"We are on our way to Calgary. We are making a tour through the Northwest introducing a new patent for vastly improving the light of kerosine oil lamps. It has been highly approved of by every one who has seen it. While giving a light five times more powerful than the ordinary wick, it is the means of saving at least half the amount of oil."

are very heavy. Last night our stay at _____ cost us nine dollars."

"I don't doubt it," I replied, as I gazed at their "pale cast" countenances.

I am fairly expert at mental calculation and while the above scene was being enacted I made up an account as follows: If I parley much longer dinner will be announced and I shall have such a strain put on my patience and politeness if I have to entertain these gentlemen so long that I shall be quite unfitted for my afternoon work. It will be cheaper for me to buy a dollar's worth of their perforated tin and get rid of them.

They magnanimously gave me six for the dollar and took their departure. Our lamp wicks are still as naked as the day they were bought, but now and then one or other of the family, with a funny twinkle in her eye, will fetch me a bit of perforated tin picked up from some rubbish heap and seriously ask me what it is and where it could have come from!

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Our reward for any kindness shown is the sure and certain happiness that follows "as the night day" every good deed. "Curses like chickens always come home to roost"—and so do blessings. Sometimes a parting guest will put his hand ostentatiously into his hip-pocket and ask how much he has got to pay for his bed and breakfast. I am sorry when this happens, for it implies that I have acted the part of "mine host" in a clumsy manner and have given the impression that we keep a sort of unlicensed hotel and expect payment in cash. One of my migrant friends