



A FAIR HARVESTER DRIVING A BINDER

Some Aspects of the Harvest in Western Canada

The Consideration of an Interesting Field

By W. J. J.

IN the days when I was very young, schoolmasters used to teach geography categorically. One place was noted for its manufactures, another for its mineral wealth, and in this way I learned that "Western Canada was noted for its wheat." Having missed the fervid enthusiasm of the boom days, and descended on the Slough of Despond that succeeded, this made up the sum total of my, and most people's, information. Since that time the great region beyond the lakes, with its immense resources has forced itself on the notice of every intelligent human creature in Eastern Canada, and forced itself entirely through the medium of its harvests. The great fact of monumental harvests has stood behind and supported all the advertising and the big words uttered about it, and the school has now become a very minor avenue through which knowledge of Western Canada is conveyed. It is in the air everywhere; the Eastern press is full of it, and the subject is often on people's tongues. Children prattle of it, and mothers feel a vague disquiet when they see their older nestlings stir their wings restlessly whenever it is mentioned.

As long as harvests endure, the West will go ahead. It is the one dominant fact that underlies, interpenetrates and explains all others. The harvest has planted cities and towns all over Western Canada, and has supplied the means of subsistence to close on a million people. The tales of men who have homesteaded in the West, founded comfortable homes on no capital but industry, and attained prosperity, are stories indissolubly connected with the harvest. Fairy tales of advances in real estate values are made possible by it, and indeed, the whole business organization of the West depends mainly upon it. The history of the West in the supreme analysis is a succession of harvests, and the fat years and the lean years trail along for better or worse behind them.

The story of Western harvests has been often told, and yet, like a certain other oft-told tale, it never grows stale. It is too vitally connected with the means of subsistence of millions of people, both in this country and the old. On both sides of the Atlantic the amount of grain produced in a harvest, and the price paid for it, is a matter of breathless interest, because, to some extent, it influences life wherever lived. Take the 120,000,000 bushels of wheat, which was the amount of the Western wheat crop last year, and realize that on a sober estimate if two-thirds of it reached Great Britain, this would

supply every man, woman and child in the British Isles with three loaves of bread. Three loaves now, and the surface of Western Canadian possibilities has been scarcely scratched! Does this not justify optimism? In addition to this the flour mills of Western Canada are kept busy, and every resident supplied with bread the year round. But wheat is by no means all, and on a conservative estimate the harvest last year comprised as well upwards of 160,000,000 bushels of oats and 30,000,000 bushels of barley. The aggregate area sown to all grains last year was 12,161,348, of which only 6,859,608 acres was devoted to wheat, or over 12,000 acres less than the previous year. In both oats and barley, the areas sown show heavy increases, and they will probably be greater still next year.

The work of gathering in the harvest on a Manitoba or Saskatchewan farm consists of cutting and stooking the grain and then threshing from the stook. In Northern Alberta, after stooking, the grain is stacked, and threshed from the stack whenever a threshing outfit can be obtained. Saskatchewan is the greatest wheat producing Province, and a description of the life on a typical farm there would be most representative of the West; but, on many Alberta farms conditions are much more on the pioneer order, and so they offer more picturesque material for journalistic purposes. There, too, one can see better what part the woman bears in bringing in the harvest each year.

For the purposes of this article I engaged a farm laborer on a farm a short distance from Edmonton, rented by two young Englishmen. They both had been used to considerable ease and comfort at home, and so the conditions of living to which they have been accustomed here is the more surprising. Those who have seen the inside of the average shack in the West, run by bachelors, will know that the following is a cheerful picture of comparative comfort alongside many of them. The shack was divided off into three sections, the larger section in front being a general utility room, fulfilling functions usually belonging to a kitchen, dining-room, sitting-room and drawing-room. For the piano there was—luxury of luxuries—a gramophone, from which, whenever the yearning for the delights of "dear old London town" grew too strong, they could hear "Stop Yer Ticklin' Jock," some music hall hits of last year, songs by Caruso and others. For furniture there was a table littered with dishes—not always clean—and the re-

mains of the last repast. The average male mind, even when of fastidious taste, soon gets to consider the frequent cleaning of dishes and their storage in a cupboard, as useless labor. "They would only need it again after the next meal," is the inward comment, and so things go from bad to worse inside of the house because of this application of a principle which in the stable and on the farm the same men would not tolerate for a moment. Two wooden chairs, more or less uncertain on their legs, two rocking chairs and a dilapidated sofa, tool boxes, a worn out broom and six shelves of well-worn books by the best and better authors, completed the tally, with the exception of a small cooking stove, a coal stove and fragments of charred wood lying by them. The windows were curtainless, the floor was swept once a week, on Sundays, the well-water, undrinkable until boiled, and, except for the books, there was nothing cheerful about the place. No wonder its occupants, after a hard day's work, would grow grumpy, retreat into sour silence to mentally contrast their hard days and lonely nights with lively times they had been accustomed to, the one in Birmingham and the other in London. There is little room for surprise that when their reflections found the level of speech it should take the form of uncomplimentary references to the country. "It is a dog's life," "There is no society worth the name around here," "This is a country for hard work and no enjoyment," "Make a success here? Of course a man can, but at what a cost! It isn't worth while to cut yourself off from all that makes life worth while, simply to be well off when you're about fifty years old."

I suggested to one of them that all these things would undergo a marvellous change if a woman's hand entered into the work of the farm. But this brought only an oblique answer to the effect that he would consider himself a callous-hearted scoundrel to bring his mother and sisters out to such a place. Marriage he scoffed at. His ideal was an English maiden, unversed in the ways of the world and men, soft-hearted and feminine throughout.

"These women around here know too much," he told me. "They can harness a horse, drive, or use an axe as well as a man. They know all about the work on the farm, and, if you go there, will talk about chickens, cows, horses and crops just like a man would. They can talk prices, and know all about market conditions. Now who would want to get married to a woman like that. If you did marry



BLOWER FILLING RACK WITH STRAW



STUFFING STRAW INTO THE ENGINE



BAGGING THE WHEAT FROM A SEPARATOR