

St. Valentine

It is a very fine custom that the school children follow of sending to one another and to their parents on St. Valentine's day little messages of love. The custom might well become more general. Those who are particularly interested in our Correspondence column need no instruction and no suggestion. What the bookstores will not supply in the form of gilded color-plates, the fond imagination of young lovers will invent. The expressions of devotion need not be limited to this class. Many a tired wife will be glad to receive from her husband a message which will remind her of her younger days, and even the prosaic father, if he is surprised, will be none the less pleased by a reminder from his wife. This is the suggestion of a valued contributor to these pages, and it will be interesting to know how the suggestion has worked out. But every reader of The Western Home Monthly knows that nothing is more out of keeping with St. Valentine's day than the sending of ugly caricatures. Cupid may be mischievous but he is never vulgar.

The Optimist

If there is one person more than another who is a blessing to his country, it is the man who does not hesitate to express his gratitude for all he enjoys, and for all the benefits he has received. It does one good to read the words of appreciation sent in by an esteemed correspondent. Let us read them over and take them to heart—lest we forget:

"As a well-known writer asks in the opening chapter of one of her novels: 'Have you ever known what it is to be poor?' While I was not perhaps reduced to the depth of poverty from which her hero was then suffering, I was perilously near it. For when I stepped off the train at Ottawa one sultry August night a few years ago, it was with a very, very light purse and a heavy heart. Behind me lay the grey seas and green hills of the land of my birth, tugging at my heart strings, while before me lay—what? I did not know. Health, I hoped. Wealth I did not even dream of, would have thought it folly to suppose my broken-down strength could wrest more from life than my daily bread, if that. I had one foot in the grave, or trembling on the brink of it, and no longer early youth's high hope to welcome each succeeding day and spur me on to fresh endeavour. But in my veins ran the blood of the hardy North, and given health, I felt, I knew that somewhere in this vast Dominion was a place for me. I would make one, find one, somehow, somewhere, if determination counted for anything. So a stranger in a land, I set out on my quest.

"Looking back now, the thing that stands out most prominently, in these first days, absurd as it may appear, were the interminable stairs I had to climb, either looking for work, or after obtaining it. Perhaps I ought to say 'seemed to climb,' as my imagination probably magnified them. They were a nightmare. A few steps tried my already overtaxed heart sorely, and it was with a piteous prayer that I started each painful ascent, where there was no elevator. The top appeared some far-off elysium to which my laboring heart could never carry me. A wasted figure, with shorn locks and hollow cheeks, I tottered up those stairs, thankful if no one were in sight so that I could pause and rest very frequently. Those first days are a confused recollection of aching body and wearied mind, when I worked blindly through the hot August days, grateful if I got through my daily work, and was able to crawl to bed after a hardly touched meal. Days there were when my throbbing eyes saw nothing but a blur, and it seemed as if nature could stand no more. But will was there, a sentinel at his post.

"August passed, taking with it its enervating heat, and September merged into October, painting the maples with its gorgeous hues, and bringing a breath of winter. Soon a mantle of snow lay everywhere, and Jack Frost drew his icy fingers over the rushing Ottawa, stilling its waters. And one day I awoke, awoke to a realization that my tortured body was at peace, that the sleigh-bells around me were chiming merrily in the frosty air, while out of an Italian blue sky the sun shone brilliantly. I looked around and saw that the earth was very beautiful. I was well!

"With returning health came a renewed zest in life, and the desire to wander further afield took possession of me, to see for myself the wonderful West of which I had heard so much. One sweet spring day I left Ottawa, counting myself rich indeed this time, in that I had health, if nothing else. That I had but the wherewithal to carry me to Winnipeg, I cared not a jot. I was going to the Golden West, and out of her bounty she would provide for me.

Strathcona's Message

Every reader of The Western Home Monthly will give heed to the wise message of Lord Strathcona in the January number. Surely he is our finest optimist. His optimism is of the kind that does good. Any temporary financial stringency is but an evidence of our phenomenal progress. The future has for us unbounded promise. All we have to do is to exercise good Scotch caution—to follow his own safe motto, "Steady and Sure". It cannot be too often stated that in all our undertakings we must so conduct ourselves as to command the confidence of the financial world. Every individual and every community has a responsibility beyond the financial obligations assumed. The country's good name is at stake in every venture. In an age when there is every temptation to wild speculation, the words of the oldest and wisest of our great Canadians is very necessary and very welcome.

"My trust was not misplaced. She has given with both hands, generously, freely. As to wealth, that is yet on the knees of the gods, but a more than adequate return for my daily toil, and health in abundance, are mine. Tonight, as I look out into the violet shadows of an autumn evening, my memory goes back over the intervening five years to the day when I first set foot on the soil of Canada, a wretched fever-shaken creature, sick in body and at heart. Mine is but a halting pen to record my gratitude, 'for I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,' but such as it is, I use it. Never will I forget the debt I owe to its health-giving air and overflowing plenty, nor, while memory endures, will I forget its kindly people. Wherever these words are read, may they stand as a monument from an appreciative woman to the unfailing courtesy and kindness of the chivalrous Canadian. There are probably exceptions—nay, must be; human nature being what it is—but I have not encountered them. Nowhere, not even by the legendary American, are women treated with more consideration, and I have pitched my tent, so to speak, in many lands.

"Yet, down in my heart is hid away the hope of a return to the misty isles, for kind as another land may prove, it is not my own, my first love, the scene on which my eyes first opened, and on which I pray they will close.

Who will chide a child for not loving its own mother less because another has proved more bounteous?

"What the future holds for me I do not know, but if under other and more familiar skies, it will hold in tender and grateful remembrance the land where the maple grows."

The Pessimist

He sees only the hole in the doughnut. He hears only the buzz in the gramophone. He tastes only the acid in the orange. And he is with us perpetually—growling, fault-finding, exaggerating imperfections. Have you heard him?

He is discussing high prices. He paid so much for a small packet of oatmeal. He forgot to mention the fact that by taking ordinary every-day oatmeal of equally good quality, in an ordinary paper bag, he could get two or three times the weight for the same money. He complains of the price of pickles and olives, but nothing short of the highest priced variety will suit him. As for lettuce—well, the old-fashioned kind may have suited his father, but it will not suit him. He must have the cabbage variety or nothing. So he growls incessantly, while all the time he is his own worst enemy. No doubt prices are high, but there is a lowest level even in high things. The pessimist never seems to find it. It is more pleasant to him to complain about paying the highest price than to exult at having found how to pay the lowest. Some people are happy only when they are miserable.

So in politics: The world is going to the bow-wows. Both parties are rotten. There isn't an honest politician in the lot. Nor is there a competent one. "When Gladstone and Dizzy died there were none left." We have in Canada nothing but ward-healers. The country is going so fast to ruin that in a few years there will be nothing left but a memory of our greatness. No one will deny that politically there remains much to be desired, but the thing for a pessimist to do is to quit his growling and to pitch in and work—and work so hard that he hasn't time to growl. It is nonsense to expect heaven to send leaders, or to expect the newspapers alone to bring about a better state of affairs. No one should see a wrong without hastening to remove it.

The greatest field of all for the pessimist is that of religion. How he glories in accounting apostasies and in exposing heresies! Surely faith has departed from the earth, and the Christian virtues are no longer exemplified. There is nothing for it now but the "desolation of abomination," and we may as well sit with hands folded awaiting the coming doom, for we cannot escape the evils of the last days. And all this in spite of the fact that there is more love and altruism in the world than ever before, more regard of man for his fellows, more respect for the lives of women and children, less injustice and tyranny, more freedom of conscience. What are we to do with religious croakers anyway? Why keep right on. Do you remember that story a Western farmer told about his dog, which barked the whole night long at the moon? "Well, what of it?" asked some one. "Oh, nothing much," said the farmer, "only the moon kept right on shining." So that is what Christian people must do, in or out of churches. There is no darkness so dense, no pessimism so crass that it will not be dispelled by the sunshine of love and ardor. Even pessimism has its good side. It serves as a background for the display of Christian action. Just as evil seems greater when found in a righteous community, and as righteousness shines the brighter when found in an evil community, so the cheerfulness and hope of the optimistic spirit glow with greater brilliancy in the presence of those who see nothing ahead but gloom and disaster.