



HAYING ON THE PRAIRIE.

plunged into a fierce, omnivorous course of reading. We devoured everything that professed to contain any information about the Red River of the North, from Mayne Reid's *Young Voyageurs* down to the latest reports of the Canadian Immigration Department and the railway companies. What was the result? It worked like madness in the brain. For how was it possible, we reasoned, with the feeble incredulity of effete Eastern minds, that the same country should be at once a fertile garden and a howling wilderness; that it should be the happy hunting ground of the Indians, and the home of a large and industrious population; that the climate should be temperate and agreeable, while the mercury was frozen in the bulb, and the wind blowing at the rate of fifty miles an hour? These things puzzled us.

When we turned to our travelled acquaintances for enlightenment and help, we were baffled. For if the person questioned had heavy investments in the Red River Valley, we found that he had seen only those portions of it which were like paradise in summer weather. But if his interests were in Texas or Kansas, he had been impressed chiefly by the desolate aspect of the Red River country, the intense cold of the winters, and the enormous

size of the mosquitoes. All this was confusing to the mind and perilous to our faith in human veracity. So we packed our trunk with sketch-books and note-books, bought a supply of ammunition and a patent filter, and set out to see for ourselves.

On the westward journey we found many of our fellow-travellers bound for the same region. Some of them were going out as new settlers; some of them were "old" settlers who had been on a visit to the East, and were returning. They entered readily into conversation. It seemed to be a pleasure to them to talk—as, indeed, it is to all rational beings except Englishmen. They were frank and communicative in regard to their personal history. They were also given to large stories. It was sometimes a terrible strain on the listener's imagination. On one occasion I incautiously said to a loquacious old gentleman that I supposed they had some quite big farms out on the Red River.

"Big farms!" said he. "Great Scott! Why, there's farms out there bigger'n the hull State o' Rhode Island. A man starts out in the mornin' to plough a fur-rer, and he ploughs right ahead till night, an' then camps out, an' ploughs back the nex' day."

The expression of child-like innocence on Gad's face was sicklied o'er with a pale cast of thought, and he silently felt for the filter.

We left St. Paul by the St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Manitoba Railway, and rode all night in a northwesterly direction across the State of Minnesota. About