Tales of the Road

No. III.

By E. Cora Bird

Christmas 1913
New Year 1914

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In 1907 an attempt was made in "Tales of the Road" to share with my friends some of the amusing, sad and dramatic incidents which occur so frequently in travelling over the western prairies. Friends were more than appreciative, and like the immortal Oliver "asked for more," so in 1911 "Tales of the Road No. II" found its way to Christmas parcels, and I still cherish the many kindly letters received on that occasion. Since 1911 I have become a camera fiend, and, like so many who take to crime late in life, am an "incorrigible." "Tales of the Road No. III" is mainly told by reproductions from snap shots, taken on various journeys of business, and one of pleasure. The pleasure jaunt was the Triennial Meeting of the Canadian Women's Press Club, and the mountain scenes were all taken either on the line of the G.T.P. or near the C.P.R. at Banff, when the club members were happy guests of those great roads. Much of the travel this year was done by motor, and in looking over my notebook there are very few stories from these trips. A motor is a good means of getting over the ground but is wholly lacking the social and human interest that comes in a long day behind a good span of horses. Nine times out of ten the chauffeur knows little or nothing of the country through which he drives day after day; moreover, he is almost invariably sulky at being required to stop so frequently to permit of grain being examined. Pictures and stories gave me much pleasure in collecting, and if they afford my friends a few moments of interest and amusement they will not have been gathered in vain. They are sent with the time-honored wish

"A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year."

E. CORA HIND

34 Preston Court
Langside Street, Winnipeg
December, 1913

Tales of the Road

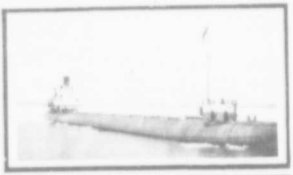
A Rose of Provence

She was an old woman, in the quaint garb of the Mennonite women of the earlier generation, who have never in any sense been Canadianized. She spoke little English, and I, alas, no German, but we had a mutual bond, love of a garden. Up and down the walks we went and looked at fine vegetables, heavily laden currant bushes and raspberry canes, and with many gestures eked out a means of communication. There was an air of mystery about my hostess as we penetrated further into that wonderful garden. Presently we came to a little arbor, and there "sheltered from every wind, except the soft," was a rose tree in full bloom. The real "Rose of Provence" blooming in all the prodigal luxuriance of its native clime. My hostess touched the petals tenderly and then, in spite of protest, cut one perfect rose and handed it to me, with the air of a queen. It was truly a royal gift. She made me understand the many attempts that had ended in failure. She showed me how year after year the shoots had grown more hardy. This was the second year it had bloomed. Love of the beautiful had triumphed over the cold and frost of the great north land. This quiet, patient soul had given to her neighborhood a thing of surpassing beauty and fragrance. Tears were hot under my eyes as we shook hands, and, though she could not understand, I involuntarily repeated "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose." How many of us who are native-born have given Canada anything so beautiful or so fragrant as a "Rose of Provence."

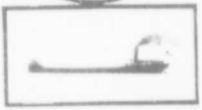
An Easy Fortune

A crisp April morning and the level rays of the sun turning the great chunks of broken ice in Thunder Bay into masses of moving opals. "The Sleeping Giant" was wrapped for the nonce in a crimson robe. It was the opening of navigation, 1913, and the good tug "Edward Fiske," with the moving picture apparatus aboard, called at Dock No. 5 for the newspaper woman. As early as 6:30 the first steamer was away, ploughing a course amid the great blocks of ice; another had started but could not get underway, and the tug "James Whalen" was puffing and snorting to her rescue. The moving picture folks were anxious to get everything and the Fiske chased hither and thither at their behests. The operator was a Frenchman of true Gallic intensity, and shouted and gesticulated like a madman whenever we came in range of one of the great grain boats. The scene was glorious, the light and color wonderful. The great white gulls sailed and dipped and for a time I was oblivious to all but the wonder of the picture. Presently I noticed the Frenchman when not winding his picture machine was figuring rapidly with a very stubby pencil on a very dirty notebook. Thinking these figures had something to do with the pictures, I asked what he was doing. "Madame," he exclaimed, waving the note book, I figure the colossal fortune I make, had I but this ice in New York in July—oh, the sad waste of it, thousands of tons, such so beautiful ice."

Three Jolly Travellers
The McClungs at Matlock
In the Prize Ring
The Papsoonge



A Canadian Whaleback
Beautiful Brandon
Building Scows on the Fraser River, B.C.



Waiting for Daddy
Imported Bull Pups
First Outward bound, 1913
Prize Ayrshires

It was a golden September Sunday morning at Indian Head. I had arranged with the livery barn the night before for a team and driver, and when notified that my team was ready, was surprised to find in the driver's seat an extremely spruce little man, with enormous driving gauntlets and a pronounced Lancashire accent. He was an accomplished driver, and complimenting him on his horses and method of driving them, I gradually got his story. He was a cotton spinner, had got as high as he could get, and had his certificates as a "master spinner." I wish it were possible to reproduce the Lancashire dialect, but that is beyond my powers.

The Call of the Land

He had come out a matter of eight years ago. He was doing all right in the Old Country, getting a good wage, but the Missus, she were always sick. They had lost two kiddies, and the doctor said "she mun have a change," so they talked it over and decided they would try Canada. The Missus, she was a good cook. He had applied at the Immigration Office in Winnipeg and told them that he wanted to go on some one's farm and learn how to do farm work, and the Missus, she would be willing to go and cook. They had sent him up to a farm Strassburg way. No, he hadn't taken the Missus with him, he wasn't going to take her till he found out what like place it was. It was two bachelor brothers. He stayed a week and showed that he was willing to work. The house was pretty comfortable, but aye, it were dirty. The brothers said they would keep him if he would send for his wife; would give them their food and lodgings and thirty-five dollars a month for the two, for a year. I privately wondered how much the attraction of a woman who could cook had weighed in the balance.

They got along famously. He stayed with the brothers a year and a half, and did so well that he had been offered the management of a nearby farm at a greatly increased salary, both for himself and his wife.

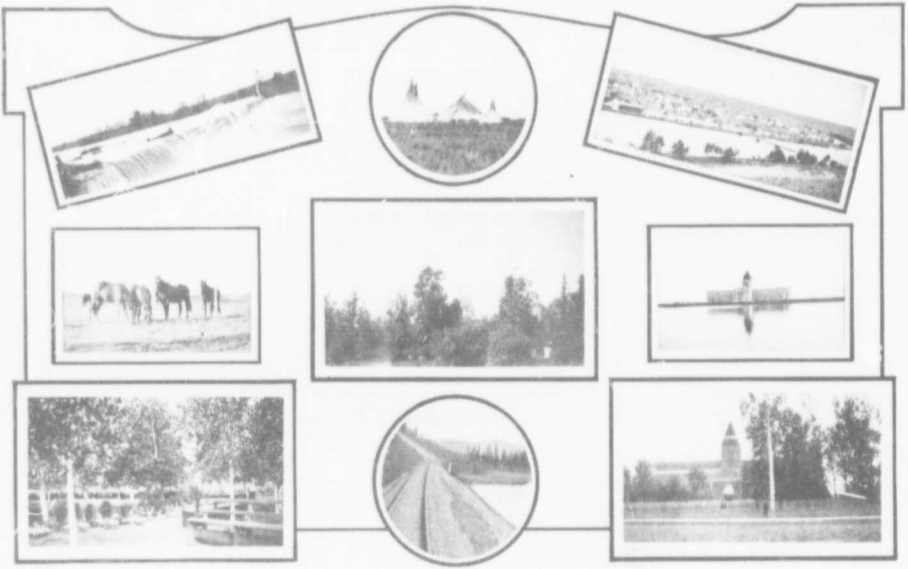
The next step had been land of their own, and the Missus no longer worked for others. There were a couple of kiddies now, Canadian born, fine strappers they were too. Last winter, the Missus thought she'd like to go home and see her mother, so he rented his own farm for a year and had gone home for Christmas and stayed until the end of March. Yes, it had cost, with the passage money, traveling around a bit, clothes and things they had bought, nigh onto a thousand dollars, but it was worth it. He would never go in winter again (it seemed a foregone conclusion that he would go again). He could not spend a winter over there; the next time they went it would be in June.

He had a bit of a knack with horses, and as his farm was rented for the year he had taken a job with the livery barn for the time being, using one of his own teams, but he was going back on his land in a week.

He was absolutely and perfectly satisfied with his venture; wouldn't go back to live in the Old Country under any circumstances. By the time the kiddies were ready there'd be money to send them to college. They would have the best.

I asked if he ever had anything to do with land or horses before. No, he had been born in Manchester, but his mother's people were on the land, and when he was a little chap he had gone sometimes to see his granny, who lived in a little cottage on a big farm, and there he had been allowed to help the plow-boys to harness and unharness the big horses, and had always thought he would like to "muck about on the land, it seemed so clean like." He had achieved his heart's desire and in his case at least, it had not brought leanness into his soul.

It does not need much vision to foretell that the "kiddies" of men and women such as these will rank high in the life and progress of their generation.



Spillidam on the Bow
Sask. Horse Farm
Medicine Hat Gardens

Indian Teepee, Calgary
Experimental Farm, Brandon
Moose Lake, G.T.P.

Bird's eye View of Calgary
Parliament House, Regina
Presbyterian Church, Lethbridge

While driving north of Swift Current in 1910, we had been fortunate in securing luncheon at a little roadside house, with a beautiful garden on one side and a tiny blacksmith and repair shop on the other. The local post office and a dimunitive general store occupied one room of the house and in the remaining three rooms the owner—a fine young German—his wife and a bonnie baby, made their home. The wife cooked and served the luncheon, making a most delectable salad, of all kinds of good things gathered fresh from the garden. The refreshment of a meal well cooked and well served, together with the unusual beauty of the garden, made a lasting impression, so that when motoring on crop inspection in the same district with the Secretary of the Swift Current Board of Trade in August of this year, it was a natural suggestion that we make this point for luncheon. The chauffeur looked shocked, and declared that he knew the place, "but they never sold meals now." The day was hot and dusty, and I was hungry, so I volunteered to do the asking. When we arrived I inwardly repented my own temerity, but determined not to give in. The tiny blacksmith shop had grown into quite a large motor tractor repair and machine shop. The general store and post office were housed in a separate building; the house proper was enlarged; the garden was more beautiful than ever, and rows of thrifty young trees were beginning to make a shelter belt around house and garden. On all sides swept splendid fields of ripening grain.

Prosperity and Progress with a Capital "P"

Taking my courage in both hands, as it were, I entered the store, and as the proprietor stepped out of the post office section, proffered my request, reminding him of my former

visit. He was as kind and genial as ever. Said he: "We don't give meals any more, but the maids shall get you one." Two fine rose-cheeked German girls got us a comfortable meal very quickly. A peak into the kitchen revealed a gasoline range and a fireless cooker.

There was no sign of the wife, and my curiosity was at bursting point. Just as we were sitting down to the table she came down stairs. She was dressed in a smartly tailored suit of blue linen, a snug blue motor bonnet partially covered her flaxen braids, and over her arm she carried a grey silk motor coat. She was daintily shod and was drawing on a very smart pair of gauntlets. Her greeting was entirely cordial, and free from self-consciousness. She hoped the maids had made us comfortable, and was sorry she had to go into Moose Jaw to shop. A fine car drew up at the door, she stepped in, took the wheel and whirled off along the prairie road, the very embodiment of "Prosperity" and "Progress" with a capital "P."

Alameda, Sask.
G.T.P. Express at Robson
Entrance C.P. Hotel, Banff

A Prairie Road
At Brandon Plowing Match

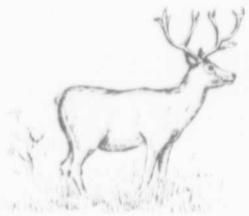
When the grain goes out
C.W.P.C. at Banff Station
C.P.R. Publicity Agent Rankin and
Mrs. Rankin

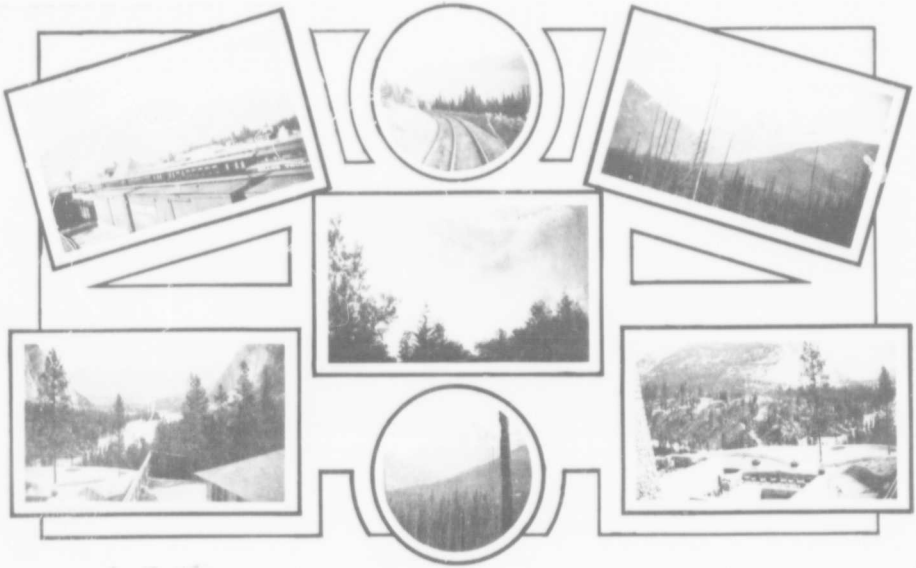
Humors of a Dining Car

He sat at the opposite side of a table for four, fat, pussy and still with a lingering military air about him and a "Grand Army" button in the lapel of his coat. He first attracted my attention by the profusion of food ordered for his breakfast: ham and eggs, toast, sausage, griddle-cakes, followed one another in rapid succession. Just as he had called for a second order of griddle-cakes, a widow and daughter were shown to the vacant seats at the same table. The widow on the right of the old soldier and the daughter on my left. The mother was fat and forty or more without being the least fair. The daughter slender with a fair complexion and pretty coloring, was sufficiently like the mother to make one tremble for her future.

The dining car conductor came along and asked the old gentleman after his wife, upon which he immediately burst into tears, mopping his face vigorously with his table napkin. The conductor drew back rather dismayed, and the old man turned to the widow and apologized for being overcome. The last time he travelled that way his "dear partner" had been with him. She passed away a few months before. The conductor had meant well, but he had spoiled his breakfast. The widow was most sympathetic; she too had lost a "dead partner" within the last year. He had been an army man and had lost a limb in the service of his country. It presently developed that the limb was his right arm. Mutual reminiscences of a most gruesome and harrowing kind followed, which included every detail of the last illness of both of the "dear partners," and tears mingled with the food of both of the bereaved.

I was extremely sorry for the daughter, and carefully avoided looking at her for fear of adding to what, I felt must be her intense mortification, as the conversation was carried on in high pitched tones. Finally I stole a side glance at her and found that, with a practically unmoved countenance, she was partaking of a hearty breakfast, composed of wheat-cakes swimming in maple syrup, with an accompaniment of "Little Pig" sausage. My sympathy was entirely wasted.





Jasper House
Bow River at Banff

30 miles an hour on G.T.P.
Cloud effect at Brandon
Mount Robson

Mount Robson
At Banff Hotel

This sign which appeared in large letters of blue and gold over one of the stairways at the International Live Stock Show in Chicago; and it seemed to be a very attractive sign, for the stairs were always crowded with people going up or coming down. At the head of the stairs was a large room, lighted from over-head, and in the centre on a raised platform were very primitive looms, and these were operated by women of a type wholly new, to Western Canadians at least. They were women from the remote mountain homes of Georgia and Tennessee, and until they started on this journey, one of them at least, had never seen a railway and to all three electricity was a wholly new experience. They were weaving rag carpets, blankets and wool hangings, which correspond very closely to those which are woven by the habitants of Quebec.

The "Weaver's Loom"

The oldest woman of the three plied her shuttle and her corn-cob pipe with equal vigor. She was taciturn and seemed in no way disturbed by the novelty of her surroundings. It was a picture which might have been taken bodily from "The Great Smoky Mountain," "The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come" or "The Trail of the Lonesome Pine." Somehow, with all their beauty and vividness, these books never came home to me with real force until I saw these women.

The dame of the corn-cob pipe was, I imagine, pretty close to eighty. She had no cap on her thick grey hair. When she stood for a moment to adjust something about her loom, she seemed to be nearly six feet high, spare, tanned to an almost Indian brownness, but with an air of alertness and vigor that many a woman half her age would be very glad to possess.

She confided to me that "us folks thought it was a queer do, but he," pointing to the superintendent, "pays us well." I think, as a matter of fact, she surveyed the curious crowd with a feeling very closely resembling contempt. She was doing what she had always done, and if this curious crowd had never seen it before, it was because they were ignorant. She did not seem in the slightest degree interested in any other part of the show, and when I told her I came from Canada, she said "seems to me I've heard of that-away-place before," but she asked me no questions about it. She was the embodiment of content. I could not help wondering whether her tales when she returned home would stir the younger generation to move.

The exhibit was put on by the American Wool Growers' Association and was used to contrast the primitive methods with those now in vogue in the wool business. All around the room were cases containing wool from every part of the world where sheep were raised. Every grade of wool, and wool under every process of development, from the most crude to the finest finished product. I fancy few of the thousands of visitors saw anything in the room but the weavers' looms, with their unceasing flying shuttles, or got away from the fascination of the rapidly developing pattern. After all it was an epitome of life.