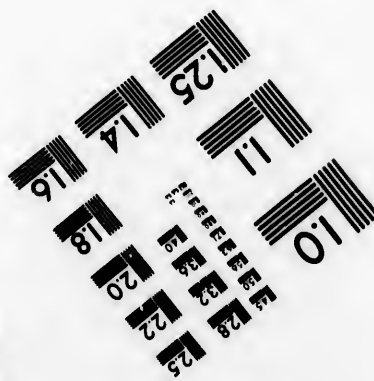
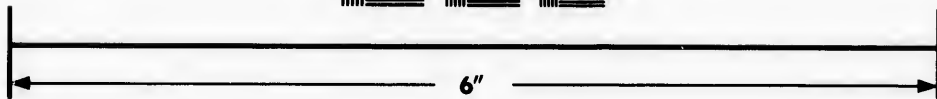
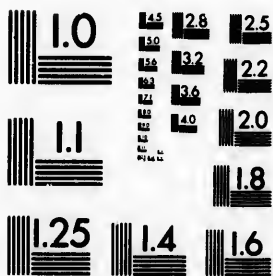


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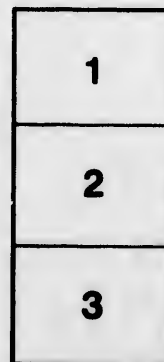
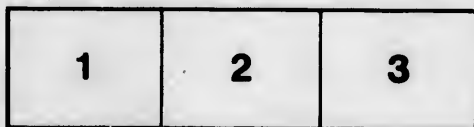
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BLACKWOOD'S
EDINBURGH MAGAZINE.

No. DCCCCLXXXVII. JANUARY 1898.

VOL. CLXIII.

A LADY'S LIFE ON A RANCHE.

LIVING as we do about twenty miles from anywhere on a ranche in the North-West of Canada, we get our magazines rather late, and with more or less irregularity. But we read them attentively, and of course we read anything about ourselves with that absorbing interest which the subject naturally arouses. I was surprised to find myself rather a prominent person in the magazines of last year, and still more surprised to learn that I was a woman set apart, and an object of pity. I learned that "an English lady on a ranche" is a self-d devoted being, a household drudge, to be regarded with respectful admiration and compassion. I learned that I had married a failure, for the young Englishman in the Colonies was set down as hopelessly incompetent, with the best of intentions indeed, but the worst of methods. This part of the history

VOL. CLXIII.—NO. DCCCCLXXXVII.

I particularly resented, for it is so weak to marry a failure. Then I learned what our future lives were to be. He was to struggle hard, and perhaps, if he were very good indeed, to win a bare subsistence. I was to struggle even harder, in a virtuous and heavy-hearted manner; and virtue would be its own reward—perhaps. We were to have no time for reading or amusement, no congenial society, and apparently no sport. We were to linger out an unenviable existence in the bare-handed struggle to make existence self-supporting, and that was all.

Now I cannot answer for all the English wives on all the ranches in Canada. I can only answer for one ranche which is flourishing, and for one small Irishwoman happily situated on it. There is perhaps a good deal of sympathy between Ireland and the North-West. In the old

A

country we are accustomed to disregard appearances, to make all kinds of shifts and laugh at them, to neglect superfluities, mind our manners, follow after sport, and love horses. All that is good training for the North-West. But on coming here one finds everybody engaged in making money, or trying to; and that is a new and bracing atmosphere to an Irish constitution. No one is rich here. On the other hand, hardly any one is distressingly poor; of those at least who live on their ranches like ourselves, and make their money by horses and cattle. As to whether they make or lose most, and how they make or why they lose it, I know just enough to be silent on the subject for fear of making some "bad break." The Western tongue is expressive. This, however, I know, that it is a very novel and pleasant experience to belong to a community of which all the members are more or less equal in fortune; and also that it is the most refreshing thing in life never to look at or handle money from month's end to month's end. Wages and bills are paid by cheques. There is no expenditure of small sums when one lives twenty-four miles from a shop; and the diminution of wear and tear to the brain-tissue when one never has to do the sum of fifteen times sevenpence-halfpenny is considerable. After living here for eighteen months, I realised one day that I did not know the currency of the country by sight. Who ever enjoyed such a blessed ignorance in England for a week?

As to the want of congenial society, that complaint may be preferred from many a corner of the British Isles with as much reason as from North-Western Canada. But one observes that

those who are always complaining of the society round them are not, as a rule, its most useful or brilliant members. Here, besides our Canadian neighbours, who are unfailing in kindness and hospitality to new-comers, there live a fair number of Englishmen, ranchers and others; and some of the more adventurous have wives. What should hinder us from enjoying each other's society? It is true that we do not scatter cards upon each other or make many afternoon calls, for reasons connected with time and space and other large considerations. We do not give each other dinner-parties either; but we give each other dinner, generally at 1 P.M., and beds for the night. People usually come when they have some reason for passing this way; and in a ranching country, houses are so few and far between that hospitality of necessity becomes a matter of course. As a matter of course also, people do not expect to be amused. We have no means of formally entertaining each other, and it is not thought amusing to talk from morning till night. A visitor prefers to smoke his pipe in peace, to find his way out and wander round the corrals, inspect any bit of building that may be going on, or cast a critical eye on the stock. After which he saddles his *cayuse* for himself, and departs on his own affairs.

We are all a good deal taken up here with attending to our own business; consequently we do not see so much of each other as people do at home. Will that be thought unfavourable to friendliness? Personally I incline to the advice given in the Book of Proverbs:—

"Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house; lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee."

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But when people who have like aims and occupations do happen to meet, the converse is particularly interesting, at least to themselves. Of course they talk shop. Nearly all the conversation worth listening to is shop of one kind or another. Prairie shop has a fascination of its own—cattle, hay and horses, timber, grass and calves, weather, Indians and wolves, fencing, freights and the English beef-market. Wherever Englishmen abound—and this is emphatically a Land of the Younger Son—there the talk is on out-of-door subjects, and there is sympathy with all that is doing in all the ends of the earth.

But to come home again, let us give heed to the household question,—that question which is with us all, and always with us. I have seen women in England nearly worn out with their servant-worries, their kitchen-ranges, and their complicated household arrangements. I would not change places with them for any consideration, even to have dinner in six courses every evening. Here we enjoy the luxury of one servant in the house, an able-bodied cook, and I never heard him complain that his cooking-stove had "gone back on him"; nor if he did, should I lie awake at night thinking about it. I made the usual mistake of bringing out a maid from home; but when in course of time the mistake rectified itself, and she went the way of all womankind in the West, I took to the broom and duster, and was surprised to find what a calmness descended on my spirit with release from the task of supervision. An average of two hours' housework a-day, and the trouble of mending one's own clothes, is not much to pay for all the joys of liberty. I keep up a conscien-

tious endeavour to find some substitute for the vanished maid; and still every failure to secure one brings a secret relief, a sense that the days of liberty are lengthened. I own to have been tempted once, when the fascinations of a certain elderly dame very nearly overcame me. She was of striking appearance, thin, and high-stepping, with short grey hair confined by a band of cherry-coloured velveteen, and she wore a profusion of blue bead-work. She told me that she was capable of doing all I could possibly require. Only one thing was beyond her, and that was a particular "kind of a hot cake, one of these regular slap-up cakes, with icing." She took credit for this voluntary confession of her limitations, being, as she said, quite above deception; and then she explained that all she required of me was a candour equal to her own. She "liked that, and she liked her boss to come right in to the kitchen too, and pass a joke with her, and not be stiff." Nothing came of the interview, though I was well inclined to prolong our relations and do my best about the jokes, while the lady of the beads was sure that we should value each other. But it was not to be.

No doubt there is a certain difficulty about household service on a rancho. But then housekeeping is of a very simple kind. There are no elaborate meals, no superfluous furniture or plate to be cleaned; there is no attendance beyond what is necessary: in short, everything that may cause extra trouble is avoided. There is plenty of comfort on a rancho, but very little luxury; and every one must be ready to help himself, and to help others too, when the occasion arises. In case of sudden defection on the part

of the cook, it is well to know how to prepare some simple things; though indeed almost any Western man can fill up the vacancy, so far as baking bread and cooking beef go. Then, in case of being weather-bound or otherwise cut off from a laundress, it is well to know a little of the gentle art of washing. No art is more useful, and none is easier to acquire, in a country like this, where "washboards," "wringers," and all kinds of conveniences minimise the labour.

When I first came here I did nothing at all, and enjoyed it very much. But now that I have a little—a *very* little—daily occupation, I enjoy it a great deal more. The fact is, that in a community where every one else is at work one does not feel quite at home in complete idleness—in riding over the prairie, gathering flowers, writing letters, and reading poetry-books all day long and every day. Abstraction is very pleasant; but it is pleasanter still to have a share in the general life, and by a very light experience of work, to gain some sympathy with those whose experience is of little else but work.

The winning of new sympathies is the chief interest of life. Here you may learn sympathy with lines of life so long and varied that they extend from the Patriarchs to Dick Swiveller's little Marchioness. One might go even farther back—namely, to Jabal, who was

"the father of such as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle."

There is nothing like life in the North-West to give one an insight into patriarchal history. How plainly it makes one understand the strife that arose between the

herdmen of Abram and the herdmen of Lot, when their cattle had increased

"so that they could not dwell together."

I suppose there is not a cow-hand in the West who could not furnish one with some instructive particulars of that strife, or who could not exactly appreciate Abram's generosity in allowing to Lot the first choice of a range, and Lot's very natural mistake in choosing the plain of Jordan because

"it was well watered everywhere,"

though far too thickly settled for a cattle-range.

Of course, when there was no central government that could "reserve springs" in the interests of stock-growers, one is not surprised to find that every watering-place was a source of strife between the herdmen of respective owners. The cowboy is not even yet the most peaceable of mankind, and to see his herd perishing of thirst would naturally exasperate him. Besides, to fill up the wells that other people had dug was "playing it very low down"—as the herdmen of Isaac seem to have thought at the time of the trouble with the men in Gerar.

Among all the worthies of the Old Testament, Jacob is that one who enjoys least popularity at home. His trickiness is invariably objected to, his trials go unpitied, and his talents are disparaged. Now here, having enjoyed the advantage of hearing an experienced cowboy explain the career of our father Israel, I see what injustice has been done to his memory. Jacob was, in fact, a herdman, or cowboy, "from away back," an undeniably smart hand. His guiding principle in life was to forego no advantage; and this is the

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essence of smartness. To outwit his simple brother was an easy matter to him in his youth; in later life his wily old uncle Laban was no match for him, though for twenty years the underhand struggle went on between the two. It is easy for the superficial to say that Jacob lacked a conscience. Nothing of the kind. Like a born herdman as he was, he put so much conscience into his herding that there was none left over for the less important affairs of life. The anxieties and hardships of a Western herdsman to-day were Jacob's too at the date B.C. *cir.* 1745:—

"Thus I was; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes."

He was no ordinary hand who could say to Laban,

"It was little which thou hadst before I came, and it is now increased unto a multitude."

It may be observed, too, that Jacob made good all losses to his employer, even loss from wild animals; and this was pointed out with admiring reprobation by the man who imparted to me the true sense of the narrative. How, he asked, did Jacob make out to replace all losses from the herd of Laban at a time when he had no herd of his own, and was not worth a cent anyhow? The inference is plain. There were other herds on that range, and Jacob must have "rustled" what he wanted from them. You bet your life! our father Israel was a "rustler." Nothing is wanting to constitute him our patron saint of the West.

This excursion into the eighteenth century B.C. is no digression, of course. I have only been showing that we like to connect ourselves

with the dignity of history. But I am glad the connection does not extend to living in tents. A Canadian winter under canvas would probably bring the history to an early close; and even in summer, except for the idea of the thing, a house has many advantages. English ladies are much pitied, I see, for the sad, rough houses they have to live in on these sad, rough ranches, "so different from their refined English homes." As to refinement, of course that is neither here nor there. It belongs to the person, and not to the house the person inhabits, or at least only by communication to the house. But why should there be all this sadness and roughness and pity at all? Of course, a house on a Western rancho is as different from a house at home as it can well be. Still, you cannot judge of the merits of anything by pronouncing it different from something else. A log or lumber house on a site determined by the existence of a spring and moderate shelter, is built in two or three months, then simply furnished, and—that is all. It seems a little superfluous to draw the contrast between this and an English home. But on the other hand, why should one not enjoy all reasonable comfort in a lumber-house? If well built it is very warm and tight in winter-time, of course with the addition of double windows; and if warm in winter, it will be cool in summer. Besides, one can have a verandah on the eastern side, where the little flower-garden will be; and as soon as the sun is overhead, the verandah makes the pleasantest sitting-place with the scent of mignonette and the cucumber-vine about it. If the house is well finished inside, it can be made very pretty in a simple way. A friend once described our

house as "ceiled with cedar and painted with vermilion." Having lived for some time now within cedar-panelled walls, I have come to the conclusion that no other walls are half so pretty. The warm brown-and-gold tints of the wood make a perfect background for water-colours, china, books, and anything else that may be conveniently disposed of upon them. Then at home ceilings are usually a trial to the eyes, but cedar-panelled ceilings add a joy of their own to life. I cannot think that the look of one's rooms is unimportant, for in winter one spends so many hours indoors; and the unbroken whiteness of snow without makes every feature of form and colour within more insistent.

For nearly half the year, however, we can lead a regular out-of-door life here, and that is what makes the real charm of the country. That is what gives the health and brightness and hardness to a life that acts with a kind of slow fascination on us all. Englishmen who have lived here will abuse the country sometimes, go home for good, bidding a joyful last farewell to the prairie—and come back within the year. They profess not to know what has drawn them back to these world-forsaken wilds, and they abuse the country again. But they can't keep away from it. The logic of such proceedings is quite beyond my grasp; but speaking as a mere illogical female, I like the country so well myself that I think it is good to be here. I like the simplicity, the informality of the life, the long hours in the open air. I like the endless riding over the endless prairie, the winds sweeping the grass, the great silent sunshine, the vast skies, and the splendid line of the Rockies, guarding the west. I like the herds of cattle feeding

among the foothills, moving slowly from water to water; and the bands of horses travelling their own way, free of the prairie. I like the clear rivers that come pouring out of the mountains, with their great rocky pools and the shining reaches of swift water where we fish in the summer-time; and the little lakes among the hills where the wild duck drop down to rest on their flight to the north in spring. When the grouse-shooting begins in the autumn,—or, as we say here, "when the chicken-shooting begins in the fall,"—I like to ride with the guns to watch the sport, and mark down the birds in the long grass. I like both the work and the play here, the time out of doors and the time for coming home. I like the summer and the winter, the monotony and the change. Besides, I like a flannel shirt, and liberty.

I certainly never heard of any one who could not enjoy some part of the summer here; but most people are glad to get away in the winter. There seems to be a fixed idea that winter is nothing but snow and monotony and weariness of spirit. Well, I do not deny the snow, but there is even more sunshine than snow; nor the monotony—but then I adore monotony. For the weariness of spirit, that is another matter altogether; and I really think it must be the people who never spend their winters here that find a Western winter so trying. In some ways it is quite as pleasant as the summer; and when one can get coyote-hunting, summer is not to be named in the same breath with it. The fun we had coyote-hunting with our friends last Christmas-time passed all. But even when one can get no hunting, there is riding and sleighing; and always there is the lovely aspect of the

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hills under snow, white against the radiant blue, softened as a face is softened by a smile, every dimple and delicate depression of the ground marked by a transparent shadow on the snow, its sunlit whiteness set off by the dark of leafless willows that trace the windings of the frozen creek. "Fair as the snow of one night," was an old saying in Ireland: it often comes into my mind when I look out on a sunny morning here after a snowy night. Everything seems to be new-made, white and shining, and everywhere the wonderful blue shadows are resting or drifting over the stainless valleys. The sky is a clear forget-me-not blue. The far-off line of the plains is sea-blue against it. Each hollow is pure cobalt blue, and each cloud passing above sends a blue shadow gliding over the earth. Under the log walls of the sheds at the foot of the hill, the shadow thrown on the snow might be painted in ultramarine. Perhaps among the mysterious effects of colour, blue on white has the special property of making glad!—for all through the short, sunny winter day there is a light sparkle and exhilaration in the air which acts on the spirits like a charm. Then when the time of winter sunset comes, there is a half-hour of strange, delicate brilliancy,—a blush of colour across the snow like the flush on the leaves of the latest monthly rose, a dazzling whiteness along the ridges that catch the level rays of light, deepening into a hundred tones of blue and violet between dark stretches of the leafless willow and cottonwood trees, with here and there a gleam like the green light of an opal coming from the ice that spreads upon the overflow round the mouth of a frozen water-spring. In the

beauty of these winter sunsets there is something curiously unearthly—partly by reason of the frozen stillness in the air, but even more, I think, because of the mystical purity of those colours shining on the snow. One can compare them only with the light of gems like the opal and the sapphire, or the bands of pure colour in the rainbow. Are there fountains of these colours springing in Paradise, that they always seem to give our eyes hints of a fairer life?

Such are the still days; but then we have wild weather here in winter, and enough of it too!—days when the north wind blows and the snow flies before it as nothing but snow before the wind can fly, in a blind white fury. All the months of winter are months of conflict between the north and the west winds. We watch the powers of the air fighting over us, and feel as if we lived in the heart of a myth of the winds. The north wind is the destroyer; when

"He casteth forth his ice like morsels:
Who is able to abide his frost?"

While the north wind blows, every breathing thing shrinks and cowers. The mere holding on to life is a struggle for poor unsheltered animals, and the longer it lasts the harder is the struggle, and the less their strength for it. But there comes a change in the air. Some night on looking out we see that the clouds have rolled upwards, as if a curtain were lifted in the west, leaving a well-defined arch of clear sky with stars shining in it. That arch means that the west wind, the preserver, is on his way; and sometimes we hear his voice beforehand in a long, distant roar among the mountains. When next morning breaks, the north wind has fled, overcome.

You may go to the house door in a dressing-gown to look out on the snowy prairie, and the *chinook* blowing over you feels like a warm bath. It seems miraculous. All living things are revived and gladdened. Horses and cattle move slowly towards the sunny slopes, leaving long shining furrows behind them in the smooth snow, and there they stand or lie down, basking in the soft air. It is a kind of brief summer. Even those spiritless things the hens will come out of their house under the bank, where they have been sitting like so many motionless humps of feathers, and scratch about for a while in the sun, as though life had still something to offer in place of the toes they lost in the last frost. The snow-buntings will *whir* past your face in a cloud, with a flashing of little white wings. I am told that snow-buntings, if you get enough of them, are excellent in a pie; but I think they are more excellent in the sunlight. This may be a still *chinook* that has come, a soft warmth in which the snow melts away with extraordinary rapidity, while the sky wears all kinds of transparent lovely hues like an Irish sky; and if you take a ten-minutes' ride to the top of the nearest hill, you may see to the west a whole range of the Rockies, magnificent, exultant—based on earth and piled against the sky like mountain altars, the snow-smoke rising from their dazzling slopes and melting away in the blue, as if the reek of some mighty sacrifice purer than human were ascending on high.

But sometimes the *chinook* is far from still; it blows with soft, steady force, and then the snow, instead of melting, blows away. A most curious sight it is when first the wind sets it moving; it

flies along the ground as fast as flowing water, with a kind of rippling motion, breaking into sudden eddies and puffs of white, the sunshine sifting through it and powdering the whole with sparks of light. Where all this snow blows to is a mystery to me still. I never see it blow *up* from the earth; I suppose it can hardly blow *out*, like the flame of a candle: all I know is, it blows *away*. And then the prairie lies bare, brown and tawny in colour, with stretches of pale sunlit gold; and all life is safe and warm and comforted till the north wind gets his turn again.

It is very reviving to have the tyranny of winter broken through every now and again by the *chinook*. But it is better still when spring comes—not the fleeting but the abiding spring. Some day you see duck flying up the creek, or you hear the weird cry of geese float down from very high overhead. Perhaps some one remarks that the creeks are running, and very soon not only the creeks are full of rushing dark-brown water, but every hill-top is a watershed sending streams of melted snow down into the valleys. Snow-birds vanish, and instead you may see "the hawk spread her wings to the south," whistling over the bare bluffs where by-and-bye a hawk's nest will be. Gophers wake up underground, and stick their smooth heads out of their holes again, with last year's familiar piping; and down by the water-side, where willows are covered with their silver-grey buds, you can watch little blue-tits feeding on them, generally upside down in their own fascinating manner. As soon as frosts cease to bind the earth at night, the longed-for grass

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begins to push up and grow; but before the first green blade has sprung, we are sure to have welcomed the earliest comer of all, the Pasque-flower, which is "merry spring-time's harbinger" in the North-West. They call it the "crocus" here, and *Anemone pulsatilla* is its name among the learned, I have heard; but somehow I cannot regard flowers as belonging to the Latin races, and this one is such a perfect herald of Easter that the Easter name seems to fit it best. Some time in March out of the cold, cold earth it comes up into the light, and you find its buds standing on the prairie, each wrapped up in a furry grey coat against the north blast. Perhaps for a week the shining fur coats are all that can be seen, tightly buttoned up; but one sunny day the furs open wide, and out slip the nestling flowers. Oh, how glad we are to see them! Hans Andersen would have made a pretty fairy tale about the opening of the Pasque-flowers. Their colours are beautiful and delicate—all the peculiar cloudy blues of the anemone, deepening almost to violet, and veined with lilac and grey. Leafless and unattended, they come in crowds, in millions; and gleaming all over the prairie among the withered, tangled grass, they show the fresh young year born out of the old one. Many richer flowers follow in their time, some lovelier; but I think none meet with quite the same welcome as the Pasque-flowers, which answer to more than the pleasure of the eyes.

One of the great charms of the prairie is, that the flowers grow in such masses and myriads over it. Until I came here I never knew what it was to see as many flowers as I could wish all at once. But

here,—say it is the month of May; May with the fleecy blue and white skies, the light-hearted breezes blowing, the sad-voiced plovers calling, when for a short while pools of clear water shine here and there over the prairie, "as if," some one said, "the land had opened its eyes to look at the sky." Beautiful duck are resting on these pools very often, mallard, teal, pintail, and others; or cattle have come for a drink, and stand in groups that call for a *Rosa Bonheur*, making bright reflections of themselves on the water. This is the time when violets blow; blue and grey and golden, they come up by thousands in the short grass, and at the same time the "shooting-stars" make long flushes of crimson where they stand in their regiments, nodding side by side. Sometimes a pure white one bends like a bride among the rest. They are little winged flowers, reminding one of cyclamens, but "American cowslip" is their misleading name.

About the last week in May or the first in June it is worth taking a long ride to find the forget-me-nots which grow in certain high spots. One calls forget-me-nots blue at home, but the bluest would look as pale as skim-milk beside these. Enamel or the deepest turquoise would be dulled by them. They shine from the ground like gems, and you may see them quite a long way off, though they have none of the glisten and transparency of red and white flowers: they shine only from their pure, opaque intensity of blue. The place where we always go to find the first forget-me-nots is called "the Ridge," as though there were no other elevation of its kind in all this mountain country. It is a stony ridge, its top half covered

with dwarf poplars and a little creeping plant with tasteless red berries, the leaves of which Indians smoke for tobacco and call *kinnickinnick*. As you ride up and top this ridge, there bursts upon you quite suddenly the widest and most glorious view that can possibly be imagined. The ground at your feet falls away to a great distance, on your left by a steep slope covered with dark willows; there is a long, wide valley with stretches of willow and a gleam of water, then the ground rises and falls for miles in a succession of high, curving ridges, for all the world as if the earth had broken into billows like the sea. Some of these land-billows have exactly the curve and poise of a sea-wave before it breaks on the shore, but the cliffs they break against are the feet of the Rocky Mountains. Nothing could be more splendid than the immense chain of the Rockies seen from here. They rise and rise against the west, and from their very roots upwards to their shining crowns, you can follow the magnificent lines of their building,—their vast bases, against which the billowing foothills dwindle to far-seen ripples, their towering heights and depths, the clefts and ledges piled with mountainous weights of snow, the jutting cliffs that catch at passing clouds, the great hollows that one guesses at from clear-cut shadows on the snow, and then the final glory of their sun-lit crests. So high and shining they are, they seem like some rampart to the world. If you look for a long while from here, you are seized with a fancy that all the earth is rolling towards the west, and there is *nothing* beyond the Rockies; they end the world and meet the sky. You lose this idea when you

are actually between the mountains, for then you can only see two or three at a time; but looking at them from this distance on "the Ridge," it possesses you for a while. Yet, great as they are, I do not think their size is nearly so amazing as their beauty. Some of these mighty heights are built on such mysterious laws of beauty that they compel the eye to follow and cling to their lines, just as the ear follows and strains after sweet sounds, with a kind of yearning. As to their colouring, it is seldom two days alike. I think it is more joyous than any other mountain colouring I have seen. Though the Rockies have their seasons of rage, tempest, and fury, they never seem to mourn or brood over the things between earth and sky, as some mountains will. Perhaps they are too far away, too near the sun. In full sunlight, when their great fields of pure snow are dazzling the air, shot with silvergleams and crossed by those transparent blue shadows of the slow-sailing clouds, what a stainless splendour is on them! I have seen them scarcely less beautiful on a hot afternoon in midsummer, far, far withdrawn into a silvery haze, baseless, unsubstantial mountains, hanging like a picture in the sky, just made visible by the gleaming of their snows. Another wonderful aspect they wear in thundery weather, when the high-piled, motionless clouds seem resting in heavy, gold-rimmed curves against the very edges of the mountains, which grow every hour more deeply, mysteriously blue; and there is yet another effect, when mountains and sky grow faint and pale together in the noonday heat, till the sky is almost colourless, and the mountains are mere outlines of shining

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lilac and snow. But on the whole, I think the commonest aspect of the Rockies is also the most beautiful—that is, under fresh fallen snow and in full sunlight. It is no wonder that even living out of sight of them, as we do among the foothills here, we seem to be always conscious of the great mountains so close at hand; and the constant sight of them on one's ordinary rides and business lends a kind of splendour to our days. In the sightless hours, too, one sometimes wakes aware of them in their far-off places—

“Oh, struggling with the darkness all the night,
And visited all night by troops of stars.”

But now it is time to ride down from “the Ridge”: we were supposed to have ridden up there only to look for forget-me-nots in June. So many other lovely flowers follow the forget-me-nots that the chief difficulty is to name them; and that is no trifling task when you are without botanical knowledge of your own, and without books of reference. I think the flowers are especially puzzling here, because many of them are so very like some that we know in the old country, and yet not exactly the same. There is one like a white violet, but it grows half a foot high; and one with the smell of a bean-flower, but it seems to be a yellow lupin; and one that behaves like the little pimpernel, but it is as large as a buttercup, and purplish colour. We call it the “coral-flower” for want of better knowledge. The “soldier-lily” was also christened at home—an upright lily of a splendid scarlet that flames through the long grass in June. Here, as everywhere, the month of June is the rose-month.

Then, while prairie larks are piping their short, sweet tunes, the prairie roses blow in their myriads, white and pink, shell pink, blush rose, and deep carmine. The bushes are low and thick—they have no long sprays like the hedge roses at home; but these low rose-thickets spread and run wild over the prairie, and along the edges of the trail you may be driving on, till the horses' feet scatter scented rose-leaves as they pass. The scent is the most perfect thing in the world, very buoyant, very sweet, and just perceptibly aromatic. One little bowl of prairie roses will scent a whole room, and remain sweet after every leaf is withered. So the month of June is very sweet in the house. With July there generally arrives a flood of blue and gold. Lupins in every shade of blue stand thick up the sides of the *coulées*. Blue asters, short and daisy-like, cover the bare and half-grassed places. Golden gaillardias, dark-centred, with brilliant fringes, shine like miniature suns right and left, high and low, everywhere. Tortoiseshell and sulphur-coloured butterflies, and black and little tiny blue ones, flitter about. Then come the “harebells dim.” Instead of being shy and solitary, as they often are at home, they come in their thousands—in their millions rather: acres of harebells and the delicate blue flax wave together in the faintest breeze, and when the low sun strikes over them, if you happen to be riding with your face to the west, you see them like countless drops of light transparently twinkling in the long grass. August withers the faint blue flowers, but brings instead the fireweed glowing on every hill and hollow, and slender sunflowers clustering in the loops of the creek. These

dark-eyed single sunflowers are among the most uncertain of autumn's daughters. One year they are everywhere, the next year hardly to be seen. Then sooner or later comes the inevitable September snowstorm, and after that you may say good-bye to the wild-flowers till next year, and turn your attention to shooting prairie chicken.

August and September are the best months for camping out, first to fish, then to shoot. We like to go up into the mountains then. But camping is such a varied delight, or else such a serious business, that it hardly fits into the space of this article. I mention it because it is one of the chief pleasures of our life here.

"What a primitive life!" some one will say; "all animals, flowers, and open air. No society, no luxury, and no art. It must be stagnation."

Or else—

"What an admirable life!" some one will say; "work without hardship; exercise, and leisure, a civilised yet unconventional life. It must be ideal."

There will always be some people who think that life can be made ideal by its circumstances, and some who think that it can be interesting only by its excitements. *De gustibus*—"the proverb is something musty." However, I am not concerned to prove that there is no life more enviable than this which we lead. I may think so, or I may not. But I am concerned to show that the common belief about a lady's life on a rancho—that it consists necessarily and entirely of self-sacrifice and manual labour—is a delusion. That it does consist of these in hundreds of cases is unfortunately true; and the reason why is not far to seek. Many

people who would think it madness to allow a son or daughter of their own to marry in England without means sufficient to keep a single house-servant, are yet easily persuaded to allow it in the Colonies, because they are told it "doesn't really matter out there." Once convinced that there will be no loss of caste, they are satisfied. They are too inexperienced in the meaning of work, or else too unimaginative to realise that they are sending a son and daughter to live a life of much harder toil than a common labourer and his wife would lead in England, with none of the labourers' alleviations of familiarity and congenial surroundings, but probably under circumstances which cause them to think with envy of the labourers' lot at home, and perhaps in a climate which makes existence a struggle for six months out of the twelve. Every one who has visited an English colony has seen people of gentle birth in this position, and has wondered, more or less superficially, if their life were worth living. I cannot pretend to decide that question. Only those who have had the courage to try the life for themselves can say whether it is a natural and justifiable one or not. There is an obvious difficulty in putting the question to them. But suppose that surmounted, I imagine that their answers would vary in accordance with their conviction of the endurance of love and the dignity of mutual service. Some are but imperfectly convinced. And surely it requires no great exercise of common-sense to realise that life cannot be made easy for people without money anywhere on this globe; also, that however difficult it may appear for a lady to keep house without any servant in

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England, it must be ten times harder in a country where she cannot call in a charwoman to scrub the kitchen-floor, or get water by turning a tap.

But I want to make it plain that I am speaking of a lady's life on a rancho, without reference to those cases in which a pair of young people enter into matrimony with their bare hands and the labour thereof for sole support. Are there not plenty of people with small incomes, living busy lives and not desiring to live idle ones, yet released from drudgery or pressing anxiety, with health and leisure and capacity for enjoyment? These are the people who ought to be able to find happiness on a rancho in a good country; and if they cannot, they must be either strangely stupid or strangely unfortunate. I must be allowed to take it for granted that the rancho-owner is neither a duffer nor a "tender-foot," for the question of his methods and management does not enter into this article; yet a certain moderate amount of prosperity is necessary to happiness. Granted this, what is there to prevent a lady from enjoying her life on a rancho? In England, on a narrow income there is no such thing as freedom. You cannot go where you please, or live where you please, or have what you please; you cannot join in amusements that are really amusing, because every form of sport is expensive; you cannot accept pleasant invitations, because you cannot return them. And I think there would always be a wrangle with the cook, a railway journey, or a dinner-party lying heavy on your mind. But with the same income in a country like this, you can live on equal terms with your neighbours, and all your surround-

ings will be entirely in your favour; you have only to make the most of them. Shooting, fishing, and hunting, just the things which would bring you to the verge of bankruptcy at home, you can enjoy here practically for nothing. You can have all the horses you want to ride or drive. Your harness may show a certain dinginess for lack of the cleaning which no one has time to bestow on it; and the panels of your "democrat" will not be adorned with your worshipful crest and motto. But then—solacing thought!—neither will anybody else's be. Here all our appointments are the very simplest that will suffice. We are too utilitarian and labour-saving to accumulate more of the extras of life than we can help. It is not because we are all devoted to a high-thinking and low-living ideal; I never found, indeed, that our thoughts soared much higher than other people's, though we live so largely on stewed apples. It is because we lack "minions to do our bidding"—a much more credible reason. This is the country in which to find out exactly how deep one's own personal refinement goes, how many dainty habits and tastes will survive when all the trouble of them has devolved upon oneself. At home they are a form of unconscious self-indulgence; here they involve a principle, and an active one.

It may be thought that I am not describing a life that could possibly prove attractive to a woman. I can imagine some one saying—

"It's all very well for a man, riding and sport and waiting on himself—that kind of thing. But a woman can't live without some sort of social amusement, and maids to harry."

Can't she? Well, I suppose women are of different kinds, and in Ireland we like sport. I never went in for maiming rabbits and missing fish myself, but all the same I like an eight-hours' day in the open air; and whether it's afoot on the springy heather of an Antrim grouse-moor, or riding over the slippery long grass of the prairie, still I must be glad when I see the sun glinting off the barrels of a pretty brown gun, or see the point of a fishing-rod dip to the water in that supple-quivering bow which means a lively trout at the end of the line. I think even a woman with no instinctive love of sport might come to care for it if she lived in the West; but, of course, it is not in the least necessary that she should. Be she the most domestic creature that ever covered up her ears "when the gun went off," she would have here the finest field she could desire for the exercise of her special gifts. Nowhere else, I venture to say, do the domestic virtues shine with such peculiar lustre as on a rancho.

Of course the scrupulous housewife must look to receive some pretty severe shocks at the outset. She may chance to find, as I have done, her best salad-bowl set down in the fowl-house with refreshment for the hens, or a white tablecloth flapping on a barbed-wire fence to dry. Breakfast may be late one morning because the Chinaman has taken a knife to one of the "boys," and the boy is holding him down on a chair in the kitchen. But this sort of thing only happens during the first week or month: after you have attained a strength of mind to disregard such trifles, they cease to occur. Then the notable woman begins her reign, and it is

a glorious one. Praise and submission surround her; soap and water scour her path. Rich jams and many-coloured cakes own her hand, and the long-neglected socks her needle. Alas that that woman and I are twain!

Still, besides the idle wife in a riding-skirt, and the busy wife measuring out things in cups, there are other sorts. Some women are studious. If they can indulge their turn of mind at home, well for them; but perhaps it is lucky they do not know how much better they could indulge it here. Not only that the hours are longer and more free from interruption, while the solitude favours abstraction, but that there are so few competing interests, so few and simple duties, and no necessity at all for that daily division and subdivision of time which the making and breaking and re-arranging of engagements entails on the members of society. It is not want of time so much as distraction which hinders half the would-be students; and distraction is far from the North-West!

Last winter I thought how easy it would be to take up a new language here, or a course of moral science, or the study of whist. I meant, how easy to some one else,—for I am too hopelessly devoted to old joys and favourite authors. I have not yet half exhausted the curious pleasures of listening to the old harmonies under the new skies. I read "Romeo and Juliet" with quite a fresh wonder beside a flowery creek where the king-birds fluttered. I read Burns's greatest Elegy by the late light of a winter afternoon, while the snowflakes blew against the window-pane; and the verses seemed to glow, each a coal of fire from

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the poet's heart. The 'Essays of Elia' were sent me last spring in two dainty green volumes by the kind editor who prepared them for issue among the "Temple Classics." I would have him to know that never did the tender-hearted fun, the gleaming, exquisite irony of Elia so play and lighten in my dull wits before. I am sure the long, idle evenings by the lamp, and the indoor atmosphere, helped in the happy effect. Charles Lamb should never be read save by lamplight and in winter. We have so many summer authors. When the weather was very hot last August, and the haymakers hard at work, I used to find great refreshment in the shady side of a big haystack, and Bacon's 'History of the Reign of Henry VII.' That cold-hearted, able monarch and his wives, as described in easy, modulated English by the cold-hearted, able historian, had an agreeably frigid effect that would have been simply wasted in winter. Nicolò Machiavelli describes, something in the same cool way, the riots of his hot and foolish Florentines, in words that hit their mark like pebbles delicately aimed. He too is a summer author. But I may not transgress into the mazy paths of literature. I only mean to say this much, that for reading of books and pleasures of the mind in general, a rancho is the choicest place imaginable.

Still, to every woman there is something more attractive than the gratifying of her special tastes, sporting, literary, or domestic. Every woman seeks her vocation, and, consciously or not, desires a sphere in which to reign and serve, a place that no one else could fill, her own niche among "the polished corners of the Temple." Now the

greatest attraction of the West is that it offers such scope to the woman who really knows her *métier de femme*.

It is hard to say how far social and physical conditions can extend their sway against claims of instinct; but we all know that the present state of things in England is somewhat out of joint. Socially speaking, women are a drug on the market, simply from their exceeding numbers. They feel it too, and try by all kinds of curious means to create to themselves new standards of value, of importance. All this is unnatural and unpleasant, and it makes the change to a country where a woman is, socially speaking, a thing of value simply as a woman, a very welcome change indeed. Of course it may be slightly demoralising too, if the woman's vanity should mislead her into setting down all the warmth of her welcome and the interest she arouses to the credit of her own charms, instead of to the scarcity of her species. But I think the most tough-skinned vanity would not secure her long from feeling the prick of an all-surrounding criticism which addresses itself to take note of her work and ways from very unexpected quarters and from unfamiliar points of view, but with a keenness of interest really less indulgent than the passing comment of indifference which is all we have to expect at home.

I sometimes amuse myself by imagining certain women I have known set down for a time to live and learn in the North-West. Especially I should like to transplant here one of those firm believers in the natural depravity of man and the born superiority of woman. She would arrive—the woman I mean—with a high purpose, and very, very kind inten-

tions towards her countrymen exiled in these wilds. She would be all for touching and softening and civilising them, poor fellows! hardened and roughened as they must be by years of hard work among wild horny cattle and bucking horses. Well, that woman would have a good deal to learn; and the first of her lessons would be, respect for the primitive virtues. She has probably held them very light or taken them almost for granted hitherto; courage, honesty, and sobriety she has supposed to belong to every man of her own class by nature, or at least to cost him nothing in their exercise. Give her the object-lesson of young men in this country with all the desires and tastes of youth, and with recent memories of a life of ease, working with a daily self-denial, working hard and living hard, cheerfully, patiently, and

courageously, yet without the least notion that they are in any way admirable beings, and possibly it may occur to that superior woman to ask herself if her own life can show anything as worthy of honour as this daily courage, industry, and self-denial?—if it might not actually profit by the example of the poor creature man? How delightful it would be to see that woman in the end touched and softened herself, and with a dawning colour of modesty about her moral pretensions! In time she might even come to revise some pretty theories about the nature and habits of men which she has taken on trust from Mrs Sarah Grand and her like, to compare them with living examples, and let experience teach her more wholesome views. That were “a consummation devoutly to be wished.”

MOIRA O'NEILL.

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