

A Lady's Life on a Farm in Manitoba

Mrs. Cecil Hall

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A LADY'S LIFE ON A FARM IN MANITOBA.

BY MRS. CECIL HALL.

PREFACE.

These letters were never intended for publication, and were only the details written to our family of an every-day life, and now put in the same shape and composition; not as a literary work, but in hopes that the various experiences we underwent may be useful to future colonists intending to emigrate and farm, either in Manitoba or Colorado.

M. G. C. H.

A LADY'S LIFE ON A FARM IN MANITOBA.

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Queenstown, April 14th.

What joy! four hours in harbour given us to recruit our emaciated forms and write you a few lines of our experiences and trials. You wished us to keep a diary with every detail, which we will try our best to do, beginning by telling of the cheerless journey to Liverpool in rain, the elements even seeming to lament our departure. The bad weather has lasted more or less ever since, just one gleam of sunshine brightening us up on leaving the wharf, but we saw nothing of the Mersey or the surroundings. The only thing that struck us most forcibly was the smallness of our ship, though it was 6,000 tons. It has just been re-docked and overhauled, and still smells horribly of paint and full of workmen, whom, however, we drop here, in exchange for 1,200 emigrants. These, with about sixty first-class passengers and a hold full of potatoes, form our cargo. We began life bravely last night, enjoying a very good dinner, and after playing a rubber of whist retired to our berths congratulating ourselves on what excellent sailors we were going to be; but alas!... Dressing this morning was too difficult, the ship rolled fearfully, even the friends who came with us thus far, and consider themselves first-class sailors, think that it will be more prudent to go by train through Ireland home, instead of waiting for the return boat of the same line which calls here on Sunday and is to take them to Liverpool. We almost wish we could turn tail; the prospect of ten days more of the briny ocean is not what at this moment we most fancy. However, in the short time we have been in harbour we have been recruiting to start afresh, and hope for better weather.

* * * * *

Mid Atlantic.

Dearest M.

I sadly fear I must have contributed more paving-stones for a certain region; for many good resolutions did I make in starting, and not one of them has been kept, not even so much as writing daily a portion of a letter to be sent home from New York. And now my long story will have to be cut short, and the doings of the last fifteen days will have to be crowded into a very limited space; for we are in sight of land, and our excitement can only be compared to that of school boys the last day of the term. The joy of landing will not be unmingled with regrets in parting from our fellow-passengers, with whom we have become fast friends; and we are inclined mutually to believe in transmigration of souls, and that we must have known each other in some prior state. Some are going into Minnesota, three of them having bought 13,000 acres in the Red River valley, which they are going to farm on a large scale, and hope in four years to have made fortunes, another owns mines in Colorado, having been one of the first pioneers of the San Juan district; he is in a fair way to a princely fortune. I fear golden apples will not be strewn on our paths, even though we are bound the furthest west. Fifteen days have we been out of sight of land; two days out from Queenstown we broke a piston-rod, which obliged us to lay to, in a fearfully rough sea, for five hours. Next day one of our four boilers burst, and again another piston-rod; which accidents, combined with contrary winds and heavy seas, reduced our speed to nearly half for the remainder of the journey. Our spirits have not flagged, as, thanks to various small games such as pitch-and-toss, running races when the ship was rolling, quoits, and cards, we have not found time unbearably long. The last few days we have had big sweepstakes on the run of the ship; but, unfortunately, none of our party have won them. One evening we had a concert; but you may imagine the talent on board was not great when they had to call upon one of us to accompany the _prima donna_, and the other to sing a second in a duet; another evening we danced--or rather tried to--our band consisting of a concertina and a flute, played by two of the steerage passengers, but the vessel rolled so persistently that we often lost our equilibrium and reeled like drunken men and women.

I must stop: curiosity bids me go on deck. We shall shortly be in the quarantine harbour, the entrance of which is said to be very fine; though I very much doubt our being able to see anything, as, in spite of being in this much boasted climate of the new world, it is raining and is dull enough to rejoice the hearts of true John Bulls like your daughter's.

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NAVY YARD, NEW YORK, April 30th.

I hope you will have got our letters sent off by the ship's boat the night before we were allowed to land, as, though we arrived in the quarantine harbour at 7 o'clock, it was too late for the Custom-house and medical officers to inspect us; we therefore had to lay to, and only moved up to the wharf about 8 o'clock the next morning. We were greeted by a most kind letter of welcome, and the first thing we saw as we got to the dock was the Navy Yard Tug with the Commodore and daughters on board to receive us; and, thanks to them, we had no difficulties or bothers. The Custom-

house men went through the form of opening two of our boxes and inquiring into the age of our saddle, which had been used but looked terribly new, hardly as if it had been in wear six months, which is the given period for things to pass in free of duty. We then steamed round New York through much shipping and under a most marvellous new suspension bridge, which is to join New York and Brooklyn, to the dockyard; where we had another most hearty reception from our hostess. They had all been in a fidget at our being so many days late, and directly the ship was telegraphed off Sandy Hook the last night, in spite of the pouring rain, the Commodore had gone down in the tug to the Quarantine Harbour to try and get us off.

Since our arrival we have been "doing" New York, and are woefully disappointed in the size of the streets. Fifth Avenue I expected to find a Parisian Boulevard with trees lining the "side walks," instead of houses of all shapes and sizes, which are good inside, judging by one of the large ones we went to see, but nothing much from the outside. Day-light in the streets is almost shut out in the "City" part of the town by the endless telegraph wires and advertisements hung across, to say nothing of the elevated railroads built on iron girders, which circulate round at the height of second-floor windows. We have made a good deal of use of the railroad; it is pleasanter than our under-ground, the atmosphere being "rather" clearer, though at first it is startling to see the twists and curves the trains give to get round the corners of the streets, and to watch the moving of objects at about forty feet below you.

I am not at all surprised people do not care to drive much, as tramways pass through every street almost, and all are so badly paved that paint and springs would suffer. The ferry-boats which ply between the cities, starting every five minutes from different wharves, astonished us most; waggons, carriages, &c., all drive on twenty at a time, and three or four hundred foot-passengers, the latter paying two cents per passage.

On the whole I think we have seen almost everything that is to be seen. We spent an afternoon in the Central Park, lunched at both of Delmonico's restaurants, dined at the invitation of our banker at "Pinards," where the roses were lovely, the centre bouquet measuring two feet across, and each lady having different-coloured bunches on her serviette; a play at Walleck's, theatre both pretty and well-ventilated, and a most splendid exit, the stalls on the same level as the street--the whole place seemed to empty itself in about five minutes; and a day's expedition to Statten Island, from which we had a lovely view of New York, its surroundings, and the whole harbour. To-morrow we are to go for three nights to Washington, returning here to start westwards on Monday, though everybody tells us we are going too early in the year. The spring in Manitoba has been very late. A----, writing on the 26th of April, says they are just starting work, but cannot do much at present on account of the water from the melted snow not having run off. The rivers have broken up. The Red River carried away one of the two bridges at Winnipeg. He happened to be in town at the time, and although he didn't see the bridge go, saw it afterwards and the jam. The ice was blocked for about a mile above, tumbling all over the place, making the river rise about ten feet an hour, washing out all the neighbouring houses. It lasted about ten

hours, then crash it all went, floating quietly down the stream, the water receding at the same time. There has been so much snow this year, which makes everything backward; but it has all gone in a week. It must be quite marvellous how quickly it disappears, as, going from one farm to the other, distance about seven miles, starting at 4 o'clock A.M. with the thermometer showing twenty degrees of frost, when the sun got up it was so hot he, A----, couldn't get back. Next morning, starting equally early, he only travelled two miles; the snow was so soft the horses sank at every step above their knees. He was trying to take a sledge-load of hay over to his "Boyd" farm. The cattle there having run very short lately, they even had to take some of the thatching, which was of hay, off the roof of the stable to feed the animals. We may have difficulty in getting up to Winnipeg, as the railroad is washed away within about eighty miles of the place, and the passengers are transferred to a steamer, which takes them twenty miles to another train. There was a fear of famine in Winnipeg, as no provisions could be got up. Lots of emigrants, when they saw the water, turned back. Good-night, we have packing to do to be off early in the tug which takes us over to Jersey city to catch our train to Washington at 10 o'clock on the Pennsylvanian Railway. The Commodore's son, who is home on leave, goes with us, and we have many introductions. We are bidden to a reception at the White House, and have been vainly endeavouring to get into some of our hostess's smart gowns; but, alas! they are all too short, so we shall have to be content with our own black foulards.

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RIGG'S HOUSE, WASHINGTON, May 2nd.

We had our first experience of drawing-room cars coming down here, with very comfortable arm-chairs, and one seems to do the journey of 200 miles easily, in about six hours, through very pretty country. I never saw such people as Americans for advertising; all along the line, on every available post or rail, you see, "Chew Globe Tobacco," "Sun Stove Polish," &c.

We enjoyed the reception at the White House. Our invitation was from 8 to 10 o'clock P.M.: we arrived before the doors were open, and had to wait some few minutes in the entrance, which is glazed in, and where the drums of our ears were sorely tried by a noisy military band, which when you get into the rooms and at a distance sounded well, but not just alongside. After depositing our cloaks, we filed by two and two past the President, shaking hands with him and the wife of the Secretary of State, who receives when there is no Mrs. President, and then wandered through the six remaining rooms, being introduced to several people as Mrs. H---- of England, and Miss W---- of England, which we thought would not convey much to their minds excepting that we were two very un-smart Englishwomen; though we were much consoled about our clothes which did not look so peculiar, every sort of costume being worn, even to bonnets. No refreshments are given, so that we were glad that supper was included in the "Menu du jour" at our Hotel.

I shall not pretend to describe Washington to you. Any guide-book would give a more satisfactory account, but it is much more my idea of a city of the New World; the streets are well paved, are nice and broad; then the houses are generally standing in their

own grounds, with trees and flowers; altogether it may be called an "elegant" city. The people were most kind and civil to us. One afternoon we made two "cabinet" calls on ministers, but the other afternoon we went for a drive across the Potomac to Arlington, the ancestral place of the Lees, which was confiscated after the war and is now a soldier's burying-ground. It has an exquisite view across the river. The only thing that distressed us was the bearing-reins on the nice little pair of chesnuts in the buggy. The reins are crossed over their nose, passed between the ears, and fastened tight to the saddle, which forces the head right back and nearly saws the mouth in two. We never rested until we had loosened them, which was supposed to be the reason why the horses broke in their trot afterwards, as they were supposed to require a support.

The weather has been quite delightful, bright sunny days but not hot; and if only the houses and hotels were not kept at such a suffocating temperature, we should be very happy both in and out of doors. The artificial heat has completely knocked us up in Brooklyn. We had a lovely big room with a large bay window besides another window, where we often retired for a blow of fresh air; the result has been that we both have had bad crying colds.

* * * * *

CHICAGO, May 11th.

We are now half way to Manitoba, and have really done the journey thus far so easily that it seems nothing of a drag; and if it wasn't for the Atlantic, A---- would not seem to be at the end of the world, which we fancied whilst in England.

We left Brooklyn on Wednesday morning, very sorry to part from the Commodore and his family, who have been most kind and friendly, trying their best to make us feel at home. Unfortunately, having only just got the appointment and lately taken up their residence at the Navy Yard, they could do no entertaining. Anyhow, we have had a very pleasant insight into the home life of America, which differs in small ways a good deal from ours, and in character, habits, and everything there is a widish gulf between the two races.

Our train here was a splendid one, stopping only about sixteen times, and doing the nine hundred miles in thirty-six hours. We had a section in the Pullman, which makes a double seat facing each other by day, and at night the two seats are converted into a bed, with the second bed pulled down from the roof, on which mattresses, blankets, and sheets are all arranged with a projecting board at the head and foot, and a curtain in front, so that one is quite private, and we slept like tops. We had also a dining-car on, where every luxury of the season, to strawberries and cream, were served by the blackest of niggers in the whitest of garments, for the sum of a dollar a head per meal.

Only fancy our delight, after leaving Harrisburgh about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, to find friends in the train, people from an adjoining county in England who knew all our friends, and with whom we had much in common. I need hardly tell you that we did "chin" it until our ways parted at this station, they going to the

Grand Pacific, we to the Tremont which had been recommended to us as being a quieter hotel for ladies alone.

Men make these hotels their club, where they smoke and lounge all day; but as there is a second door for ladies, one is not bothered in any way unless you want to go to the office for information.

We are astonished at the enormous piles of buildings in this city; land, one would think, must be cheap. All the shops cover an equally large area, though, in many, several offices are on one floor. It is too marvellous to think, when one looks at this place, that three and a half square miles in the centre of the town, which is now in regular handsome broad streets, the fire of eleven years ago should have so completely burnt everything to the ground, though now not a vestige of the conflagration is left. The houses have even had time to get quite blackened with the smoke of the soft coal they use, which is found in great quantities all through Pennsylvania; the mines and furnaces we passed on our way up.

The country the whole way was very pretty. We crossed the Susquehanna river, which is grand in width and scenery, and started the Juanita through a chain of mountains turning in and out with every bend of the river, so that one felt always on the slant and could generally see either end of the train. Unfortunately it poured with rain the whole way, so any distant views or tops of mountains were invisible. Some of the country is like England, undulating, rolling, well-cultivated fields, enclosed with railings which overlap each other and would be awkwardish obstacles in a hunting country; but one misses, like abroad, the cattle--we saw one or two stray cows, but little else. Around Chicago it is a flat plain, and, as there has been a good deal of rain lately, water is out everywhere. For the last hour of our journey we came through the suburbs, and, as there is no protection whatsoever to the line, we had to come very slowly (about seven miles an hour), ringing a great bell attached to the engine to announce our arrival, as children, cows, vans, &c. go along the line in the most promiscuous way; it is extraordinary that more accidents do not happen. By law, I believe, the train ought to go very slowly wherever lines cross each other; anyhow they must ring the bell, the result being that the bells seem going all day when you are anywhere near the station. We were given introductions to one or two people here, one gentleman putting himself at our disposal to show us "around straight away;" and we visited the principal shops, streets, park, which is land reclaimed from the lake, and the tramways, which are worked with a pulley from a centre about six miles off. A Chinaman in San Francisco was once heard to describe the said tramways as "No horsey, no steamy, go helly."

The weather has, unfortunately, been wet and much against sight-seeing, the streets in consequence are too indescribably dirty, mud inches deep, and everyone is so busy making money that they have not time to pull up those who are responsible and insist on the streets being cleaned, though the money is yearly voted by the municipality, and generally supposed to be pocketed by the authorities. We leave this to-night for St. Paul, much impressed on the whole with Chicago. There are one or two more sights I should like to have seen, such as the two tunnels under the river,

but I fancy one leaks and the other is unusable for some other reason. I should also have liked to have been to one of the Niggers' revival meetings; but not to the pork manufactory, where pigs go in alive, are killed and cured ready for exportation in less than twenty minutes. Our friends went there this morning, and the descriptions they gave were not particularly inviting. The lady hadn't been able to touch a mouthful of food all day afterwards, and declared it would be years before she could eat pork. I also have been dying to see a house on the move, but had to content myself with looking at a large brick house, which not three years ago had been moved back 150 yards bodily. Chicago is getting too old a city, and ground is too expensive, for people to be able to change the sites of their houses when the fancy takes them; in St. Paul or Winnipeg we may have the satisfaction of meeting one coming down the street.

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THE MERCHANT'S HOTEL, ST. PAUL, May 16.

We left Chicago Friday night for this place at about 9 o'clock, and, thanks to a letter of recommendation to the conductor, two lower berths were assigned to us, and we even had the privilege of not having the uppers pulled down. It is a curious regulation in the Pullman cars, that should the upper not be tenanted it must be opened or else paid for by the occupant of the lower; so unless one takes a whole section one is bound to have a great board just above one's head, which in nine cases out of ten prevents our sitting up in bed, and one never can have much ventilation.

We were awoke earlier on Saturday morning than we either of us quite appreciated, to be in time for breakfast at La Crosse at 7 o'clock. La Crosse is a large settlement of sawmills on the banks of the Mississippi, for cutting up the wood brought down by the curiously flat-bottomed steamers worked by a paddle in stern the same width as the boat, and which push innumerable rafts of wood before them. We saw several of these steamers, and were detained for a long time on the bridge which crosses the Mississippi, said to be a mile and a quarter long, whilst the farther end of it was drawn aside to allow of two steamers passing through. Our railroad skirted the banks of the river, and we were very excited at seeing an Indian and his squaw in a canoe going down stream. The conductor of the car conversed with us a good deal the whole way, was most anxious to know all about our comings and goings, and told us he would be glad to "learn the train by which we returned, as no ladies would ever be allowed to leave Manitoba." Unfortunately we took his advice about the hotels in this place, and on arriving came to the wrong inn. This one is the most frequented, being close to the station, but certainly is not as pleasant, either as regards company or situation, as the other, the Metropolitan. We found one of our fellow Atlantic passengers at the last-named, and I never saw anyone so genuinely glad to see friends. He is one of the three men we told you about, who have invested in thirteen thousand acres in Minnesota. He is down here trying to hurry the contractors who are to build their houses and stables at Warren; also to buy farming implements and lumber. His horses and mules he intends buying at St. Louis. He gives a most vivid account of all the roughing they have under gone. They are living in a small way-side inn, nine men in one room with no

furniture. One of them managed one night to get hold of a stretcher in lieu of a bed, and just as he was settling down to his first beauty-sleep a carter came and told him to move on, as the stretcher was his. He suggested that as we are to pass Warren we should pay them a visit on our way up; that he would take up a tent and furniture, besides provisions; but I do not think it sounds inviting enough, as, though I do believe we should do the community a good turn, besides the pleasure of our company, they would have a tent and a few luxuries after our departure, instead of feeding, as they daily do, on beans and bacon, living in a filthy hotel and having had nothing to wash in until they bought themselves a bucket. Last night, just after we had gone to bed, a loud knock was made at our door, and a man asked "if we intended getting up to-night," at which we were furious; but he persisted in the most determined way in questioning us as to whether "it wasn't Mrs. H----'s room," and we had time to get more than angry before we recognised A----'s voice and simultaneously both jumped out of bed to receive him, en deshabelle. It is very nice of him coming all this way, four hundred miles, to meet us. He looks much the same as ever, only as brown as a berry from the reflection of a fortnight's sun on the snow. He is wonderfully cheery, seems glad to see us, has so many questions to ask of you all, and swears by the healthiness of the Canadian climate and the life they lead at the farm. We are none of us ever to be sick or sorry again!

We have been a long drive to-day, starting at 11 o'clock, and only back just in time to do our last packing, send off this letter, and dine before we go on to Winnipeg at about 7 o'clock. We drove across a bridge on the Missouri to Fort Snellton, a miniature Aldershot, with huts and tents, and a beautiful stretch of grass for manoeuvres or galloping, on to the Minhaha Falls, where, we stayed some time gazing and admiring and even walking under the falls. The volume of water falling seemed extraordinary, but was completely eclipsed by the falls of St. Anthony at Minneapolis, which we saw later. The latter originally fell perpendicularly; but to utilise them for the enormous saw-mills built at the water's edge they have been under-planked, so that the water goes down in a slant. We were most fascinated by the sight, and watched the torrent from various points of view.

Minneapolis is much like other Western towns we have seen, semi-detached houses standing in their own grounds, the grass in many instances well kept, but utterly destitute of flowers, which one misses so much. This place, St. Paul's, is beautifully situated, built on both sides of the river, the banks of which are very steep. Good-night; in twenty-four hours more we hope to be at our destination in the far North-west. But we are not to go out immediately to the farm, as we are arriving rather earlier than A---- expected, and the men who have been living with him all the winter cannot turn out before Friday to make room for us; so we are to stay in Winnipeg for a day or two.

* * * * *

WINNIPEG, May 18th.

Here we are, and we do feel ourselves really landed in the far North, after a most prosperous journey the whole way. We arrived

"quite on time" last night, rather an unusual thing with these trains, particularly since the floods, when the passengers were dependent on the steamer, we saw yesterday as we passed high and dry on the prairie, which had to convey them from one train to another across the floods close to St. Vincent.

O the prairie! I cannot describe to you our first impression. Its vastness, dreariness, and loneliness is appalling. Very little is under cultivation between this and St. Paul, so that only a house here and there breaks the line of horizon. There are a few cotton and aspen trees along the Red River Valley, but with that exception the landscape for the last fifteen hours' travelling has been like the sea on a very smooth day, without a beginning or an end.

We were met at the station here by one of A----'s friends, who drove us out about a mile and a half from the town across the Assiniboine over a suspension bridge built exactly opposite the old Fort Garry, and somewhere close to the spot where our first English pioneers must have landed from the river steamer some twelve years ago to a very comfortable house belonging to another mutual friend, a dear kind old gentleman whose wife and daughter being away has placed the whole house at our disposal until we can get out to the farm, which we find is sixteen miles off.

It will be very difficult to describe everything to you. To begin with, the depot or station presented a curious appearance, such crowds of men loafing about with apparently no other object but to watch the new arrivals; so different to English stations where everyone seems in a hurry either coming or going. And then the roads we had to drive along defy description. The inches (no other word) of mud, and the holes which nearly capsize one at every turn. Even down Main Street the roads are not stoned or paved in any way. We bumped a good deal in our carriage, and for consolation at any worse bumping than usual were told, "This is nothing, wait until you get stuck in a mud-hole out west." Then our route, thanks to the floods which have been very bad this year and are still out enormously--the upper floors of two-storied houses only being visible in many places,--was most intricate. We had to be pioneered over a ditch into a wood, supposed to be cleared, with the stumps of trees left sticking about six inches out of the ground for your wheels to pass over, on to a track, and then through a potato garden to the house.

We were quite ready for our supper, it being about 8 o'clock when we got here; and the food at Glyndon, where we stopped twenty minutes in the middle of the day to "put away" the contents of sixteen dishes of some various mess or another, had not been of the most inviting of meals; and though the chops here were the size of a small leg of mutton and had the longest bones I ever saw, hunger was the best of appetisers, and we did credit to our meal, which had been cooked by our host.

This morning we were awoken by the same kind person depositing a can of water at our door for our baths. He gets up very early, as he has to fetch the water, milk the cow, feed the calf, etc., all before breakfast and starting off for his office.

There is a man-servant here who gets 5 to 6 pounds a month, apparently

to do nothing, as he is the only one on the premises who can afford to be idle and smoke his pipe of peace; but servants are so difficult to get in this country, and our host being on the move, having got a better Government appointment at Perth, is anxious not to change now, so, like everybody else, puts up with anything. The last servant they had in this house was the son of a colonel in the English Army, who was described as "a nice boy but very lazy"; but this man-servant hasn't even the recommendation of being nice. He was out at the farm working for his board and lodging, and no wages for some months, but A---- could not stand his idleness.

We all had to cook our breakfasts this morning, and as everyone was, by way of helping, either making toast, poaching the eggs, cooking hunks of bacon, or mending up the fire, the stove was pronounced much too small. The moment we had finished our meal we had to retire upstairs and make the beds and tidy up a little; a half-breed woman living about half-a-mile off is supposed to come in for an hour and wash up and clean the house, but if it is bad weather she is unable to get through the mud; therefore when the ladies of the establishment are away the house is left a good deal to its own devices, the dust and cobwebs not often disturbed.

* * * * *

C---- FARM, May 21st.

Our last letter to you was written with the first impression of our colonist life whilst in Winnipeg, where we had a very good insight of the way English people will rough it when they come out. It would horrify our farmers to have to do what gentlemen do out here. They are all their own servants. That lazy servant in Winnipeg, we were told, gave notice to leave, because one night he was requested to keep the kitchen fire in so that we might have a kettle of hot water when we went to bed.

We spent as little time as we could at our suburban residence, so as to save him any extra trouble, always lunching and sometimes dining in Winnipeg; and though all the restaurants are bad, still the food was almost as good as what we cooked ourselves. Our chief mistake for our first meals was that we put everything on the fire at the same time, and, funnily enough, our fish boiled quicker than the sausages, and they again much quicker than the pudding. Once there was a bread-and-butter one, about which there has been a good deal of chaff, as it was supposed to be first cousin to bread-and-milk!

The weather was very bad, constant rain, and we had a fair specimen of Winnipeg mud. To these buckboards (which is a buggy with a board behind for luggage), or to any of the carriages, there are no wings to protect one from the mud, so that we always came in bespattered all over, a great trial to our clothes. But in spite of the rain and bad weather we were determined to come out here on Friday. We hired a democrat, a light waggon with two seats, and started during the afternoon in the rain, hoping it might clear which it eventually did when we were about a third of our way. It was awfully cold, and the jolting of the carriage over the prairie so fearful that our wraps were always falling off. I had always understood the prairie was so beautifully smooth to drive over; but found it much resembling an

English arable field thrown out of cultivation, with innumerable mole-hills and badger-holes, and natural cracks about an inch wide, which drain the water off into the marshes. If your carriage is heavily weighted it runs pretty easy; but woe betide you if driving by yourself--you bump up and down like a pea on a shovel.

We nearly upset, shortly after leaving Winnipeg, as a house was on the move, or, more properly speaking, had been, as it was stuck in a mud-hole; a load of hay, trying to get round it, had stuck as well; and the only place given us to pass was fearfully on the slant down to a deepish dyke, into which a buggy had already capsized. We caught the first glimpse of our future home eight miles off, the house and stables looking like three small specks on the horizon. It is very difficult to judge distances on the prairie, and the nearer we seemed to get to our destination the further the houses were removed. The farm had an imposing appearance as we drove up to it. Mr. B----, who met us at the gate, was most anxious that on arrival we should be driven to the front door and not to the kitchen one, which, being the nearest, is the handiest. He, poor man, has given up his bed and dressing-room to us, and we find ourselves very comfortable.

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C---- FARM, May 24.

The two young men, Messrs. H---- and L----, who inhabit a tent about two miles from here, and who are building themselves a stable, are going into Winnipeg to-morrow for more lumber; and as I don't know when I shall have another opportunity of sending letters in, I send you a few lines. These two men have been living with A---- all the winter, and only turned out for us the day we arrived. It was such bad weather they hoped and speculated on our not coming; so that when we were seen in the distance there was a general stampede to clear out. I must say I should have been very loth to turn out, during this cold weather, of a comfortable house into a tent, and, had I been they, should have wished us somewhere. We have already had a taste of the cold in these regions. Friday, when we drove out here, was bad enough; but on Saturday, when E---- and A---- went into town again to take our carriage back, they were nearly frozen with the biting wind and sleet they had to face the whole of the sixteen miles home. On Sunday the thermometer was down to 22, or ten degrees of frost, with a bitter north-west wind, and we had an inch of snow on the ground; and though the sun melted most of it, the thermometer at night went down again to 24. I don't think I ever felt so cold in bed, in spite of a ton weight of clothes. Luckily the stoves are still up in the house--in summer they are generally put away in the warehouse to give them room--so that we have been able to make a light both night and day. We are told the weather is most unusual; anyhow, it is mighty cold. Those poor men in the tent have suffered a good deal; one night the pegs to the windward gave, and the snow drifted against their beds as high as their pillows. They luckily have got a stove, but are obliged to leave their door open to allow of the pipe going out; unfortunately they have no extra tin or iron to put on the canvas round the pipe, which is the usual way to prevent it catching fire.

To describe our life here will take some doing, and, after the novelty has worn off, it will not amuse us quite so much; nor shall we be so keen of helping our Abigail, who is the wife of the

carpenter and maid-of-all-work, in everything, excepting that she must always have a great deal to do for a large household like ours, consisting of four men and our two selves, and we shall always want employment, and I don't think we shall either of us care to ride or drive much.

We have fallen into it (the life) wonderfully quickly; completely sunk the lady and become sort of maids-of-all-work. Our day begins soon after 6 o'clock by laying the breakfast, skimming the cream, whilst our woman is frying bacon and making the porridge for the breakfast at 6.30. Mr. B---- and A---- are out by 5 o'clock, in order to water, feed, and harness their horses all ready to go out at 7 o'clock, when we get rid of all the men. We then make the beds, help in the washing-up, clean the knives, and this morning I undertook the dinner, and washed out some of the clothes, as we have not been able to find a towel, duster, or glass-cloth, whilst Mrs. G---- cleaned out the dining-room. The dirt of the house is, to our minds, appalling; but as Mrs. G---- only arrived a few days before we did, and all the winter the four men were what is called in this country "baching it" (from bachelor), namely, having to do everything for themselves, it is, perhaps, not surprising that the floors are rather dirty and that there is a little dust. The weather is much against our cleaning, as the mud sticks to the boots and, do what you will, it is almost impossible to get it off; not that the men seem to have thought much about it, as, until we arrived and suggested it, there was no scraper to either door. Poor Mr. B---- was rather hurt in his feelings this morning on expressing some lament at the late sharp frosts, that all his cabbages would be killed, when we said that it was a pity he had sown them out of doors, as he might almost have grown them on the dining-room carpet. He also amuses us by lamenting that he did so much cleaning and washed the floors so often; he might just as well have left it until we arrived. Our time is well filled up until dinner, at 12.30, at which we have such ravenous appetites, we are told, no profits made on the farm will pay our keep. At half-past 1 when the men turn out again, we generally go out with them, and some out-door occupation is found for us; either driving the waggons or any other odd jobs. There is a lot of hay littered about, and that has to be stacked; also the waste straw or rubbish which is burnt, and the fires have to be made up. Three-quarters of an hour before either dinner or supper (the latter meal is about half-past 6) a flag, the Union Jack, is hoisted at the end of the farther stable--if neither A---- nor Mr. B---- is about, we undertake to do it--to call the men in; and they declare the horses see the flag as soon as they do and stop directly. The class of horse here is certainly not remarkable for its good looks; but they are hard, plucky little beasts, and curiously quiet. The long winter makes them, as well as all the other animals, feel a dependence upon man, and they become unusually tame. The cows, cats, and everything follow the men about everywhere. They used to have to keep the kitchen door shut to prevent one of the cows walking in. A---- has got a jolly old cat who follows him like a dog, sleeps on his bed, and sits next to him at meals. Mr. B---- has a dear colley with whom he carries on long conversations, particularly on the subject of the coolness of the morning and the water in his bath; so you see we have plenty of animal life about. The men at the tent have a black water-spaniel, which greatly prefers our fare and warm house to the tent, so is nearly always here.

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May 25th.

We over-slept ourselves this morning, it being a dull day and no sun to wake us up, so that it was past 6 before any of us made our appearance. The way we work here would rejoice Uncle F----'s heart and amaze some of our farmers' wives and daughters. My advice to all emigrants is to leave their pride to the care of their families at home before they start, and, like ourselves, put their hand to everything. We have had some funny experiences; but for all our hard work we get no kudos or praise, it is all taken as a matter of course. I would not live in such a place for worlds, but while it lasts it is great fun; and I think we have done good by coming out, if only to mend up all the old rags belonging to these four men. We were much in want of dusters, etc., the first days, and were told that when the three months' wash which was in Winnipeg returned we should find everything we wanted, instead of which there was a fine display of torn under-linen, and stockings by the dozens, which we have been doing our best to patch up and darn, but no house linen. We shall do as much washing as we possibly can manage at home, I expect, as the prices are so fearful, to say nothing of the inconvenience of being ages without one's linen. I will just quote a few of the prices from our bill of the Winnipeg Steam Laundry. Shirts 15 cents, night ditto 10 cents, vests and pants 25 to 50 cents, blankets 50 cents, counterpanes 35 cents, table-cloths 15 to 35 cents, sheets 10 cents, pillow-slips 5 to 15 cents, night-dresses 15 cents to 1 dollar, petticoats 30 cents to 1 dollar, etc., everything in proportion. We thought one dollar per dozen all round was exorbitant, but when hardly anything is less than eightpence (as a cent, according to the exchange, is more than a halfpenny) it seems ruinous.

We get 4 dollars 80 cents only for the sovereign here, being tenpence short of the five dollars.

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May 28th.

Our weather is improving, to-day has been lovely; but alas! with the warmth have come the mosquitoes. I don't believe you will ever see us again; they (the mosquitoes) bite so fearfully, even in the day-time, that they will devour us up entirely. A---- is having wire coverings made for the doors and windows; but, unfortunately, owing to the floods after the melting of the snow, all the stores which ought to have arrived in Winnipeg a month ago have been delayed, and the shops are very short of goods of all sorts and kinds. There are said to be 4,000 cars with provisions, etc. between this and St. Paul. A---- and I spent an afternoon at the other farm, "Boyd," which he rents of a Mr. Boyd, three thousand acres for 40 pounds a year. It is covered with low brushwood with a few trees here and there, and a good deal of marsh, and therefore unfit for cultivation, so they keep it entirely for their cattle and for the cutting of hay in summer. It is a much prettier place than this, the house being surrounded by trees, whereas here we haven't one within seven miles, though last year they did their best and planted nearly five hundred round the house as avenues to

the drive; but only a few survived the drought of last autumn and severe cold of winter, the rest are represented by dead sticks. We tried to see the cattle at Boyd's, but they were away feeding on the marsh and could only be looked at from a distance, as we neither of us felt inclined to run the chance of being bogged or of wetting our feet.

In coming home we called at the tent, and I was surprised to find how quickly Messrs. H---- and L---- were building their stable, which is to be large enough to hold two stalls and a room beyond, which, when they have a house, will make a good loose-box; but for the time being they intend to live in, either sleeping in the loft or tent.

To build a house or stable is not very difficult; but with no carpenter or experienced man to help it wants a certain amount of ingenuity. You lay out your foundation by putting thick pieces of oak called "sills" on the ground in the shape of your house. In town these "sills" are nailed to posts which have been driven eight feet into the ground; but on the prairie are simply laid on the flat; on to the sills come the joists, planks 2 x 6 placed on edge across, two feet apart. Then the uprights, which stand on the sills two feet apart, form the walls. To these you nail rough boards on each side, with a layer of tar-paper in between if building a stable; if a dwelling-house, on the inside you put against your rough board, laths, and then plaster, on the outside the tar-paper and siding.

The floor is made by nailing rough boards on the joists, then tar-paper, and on the top of that tongued and grooved wood fitting into each other, to make it air-tight.

The roofs, which are almost always pointed on account of the snow, are composed of rafter 2 x 4, two to three feet apart, with rough boards across, then tar-paper and shingles; the latter are thin, flat pieces of wood laid on to overlap each other.

We send you a small sketch of our buildings, which will give you a better idea of these "frame" houses than any description. They can be bought ready-made at Chicago, and are sent up with every piece numbered, so that you have no difficulty in putting them together again.

Our own house is twenty-four feet square with a lean-to as kitchen. The dining and drawing-rooms are each twelve feet square, separated by sliding-doors; A----'s bedroom, the entrance-hall, and stair-case dividing the remainder of the house. Our front-door is not quite in the centre; but, thanks to the verandah, one does not perceive it. Above, looking due south, we have a bed-room, dressing-room, and large cupboard for our clothes. There are two other rooms at the back for the men.

The other house is for the labourers, of whom there are eleven, with a woman as cook, the wife of one of them; it is also for a warehouse, where all the spare implements and stores are kept.

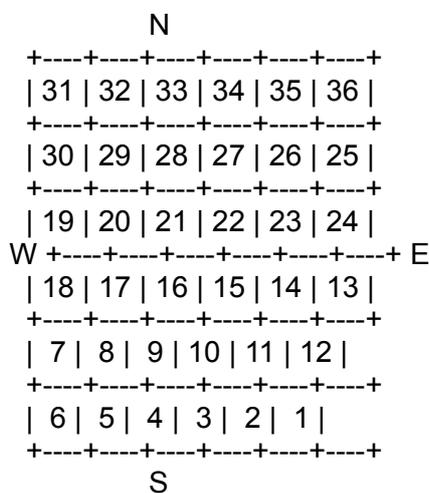
Besides these houses we have two good stables, one holding fourteen horses, the other the remaining six (also the cows, pigs, and chickens during the winter); piggeries; and last, but not

least, my chicken-house. A---- has presented me with a dozen hens, for which he had to pay thirteen dollars, which with the seven old ones are my special charge, and are an immense amusement and occupation.

His farm here, as he has other land elsewhere besides the Boyd Farm, consists of 480 acres; half of one section and a fourth of another.

All the surveyed country in the North-west Territory has been divided into townships thirty-six square miles, and they again into sections of a mile square, which are marked out by the surveyors with earth mounds thrown up (at the four corners) in the form of right-angled pyramids, with a post about three feet high stuck in the centre. The mounds are six feet square, with a square hole on each side. To the marking of sections a similar mound is erected, only of smaller dimensions.

The sections are numbered as shown by the following diagram:--



The Townships are numbered in regular order northerly from the International Boundary line or 49th parallel of latitude, and lie in ranges numbered east and west from a certain meridian line, drawn northerly from the said 49th parallel, from a point ten miles or thereabouts westward of Pembina.

When the Government took over the territory from the Hudson Bay Company in 1870, two entire sections in every fifth township and one and three-quarters in every other, were assigned to the Company as compensation. There were also two sections reserved as endowment to public education, and are called School Lands, and held by the minister of the Interior, and can only be sold by public auction.

The same was done for the half-breeds; 240 acres were allotted to them in every parish. Their farms are mostly on the rivers, along the banks of which all the early settlers congregated; and to give each claimant his iota the farms had to be cut up into long strips of four miles long by four hundred yards wide.

On every section-line running north and south and to every alternate running east and west nine feet, or one chain, is left

for roads. Our farm-buildings are not quite in the centre of the estate, on account of having to make the drive up to the house beyond the marsh on the eastern boundary.

I have drawn you a plan of the farm; the spaces covered with little dots are the marshes: the one on the west extends for miles, and has a creek or dyke dug out by Government to carry off the water. From the drawing it looks as if there was much marsh around us; but this bit of ground was the driest that could be found not already taken up. As it was, A---- purchased it of a man who has some more land nearer Winnipeg, giving him five dollars per acre. The Nos. 30 and 31 mean the sections of the townships.

For emigrants wishing to secure a "homestead," which is a grant of 160 acres given by Government free, with the exception of an office-fee, amounting to ten dollars on all the even-numbered sections of a town-ship, he will now have to travel much further west, as every acre around Winnipeg is already secured, and has in the last two years risen most considerably in value.

The Canadian Pacific Railroad Company, which was given by Government 25,000,000 acres, besides the 25,000,000 dollars to make the line across the country from Thunder Bay on Lake Superior to the Rockies, sell their land (which is on odd-numbered sections of every township for twenty-four miles on each side of the track, with the exception of the two sections, 11 and 29, reserved for school-lands) for two dollars fifty cents, or ten shillings per acre, to be paid by instalments, giving a rebate of one dollar twenty-five cents, or five shillings per acre, if the land is brought into cultivation within the three or five years after purchase.

A man occupying a "homestead" is exempt from seizure for debt, also his ordinary furniture, tools, and farm implements in use, one cow, two oxen, one horse, four sheep, two pigs, and food for the same for thirty days; and his land cultivated, provided it is not more than the 160 acres; also his house, stables, barns and fences; so that if a man has bad luck, he has a chance of recovering his misfortunes.

In one of your letters you ask if a poor man coming out as labourer, and perhaps eventually taking up land as a homestead or otherwise, would encounter many difficulties. I fancy not, as both the English and Canadian Governments are affording every facility to emigrants, who can get through tickets from London, Liverpool, or Ireland at even a lower rate than the ordinary steerage passenger. They can have themselves and their families booked all the way, the fares varying from nine pounds five to the twenty-eight pounds paid by the saloon.

On board ship the steerage have to find their own bedding and certain utensils for use; otherwise everything else is provided, and, I am told, the food is both good and plenty of it. Regular authorised officers of the Dominion Government are stationed at all the principal places in Canada, to furnish information on arrival. They will also receive and forward money and letters; and everyone should be warned and put on their guard against the fictitious agents and rogues that infest every place, who try to persuade the new-comers into purchase of lands or higher rates of wage.

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