MANITOBA CHORE BOY

THE EXPERIENCES OF A YOUNG EMIGRANT TOLD FROM HIS LETTERS

BY
E. A. WHARTON GILL, M.A.
Honorary Canon of St. John's Cathedral, Winnipeg

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS
REPRODUCED FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

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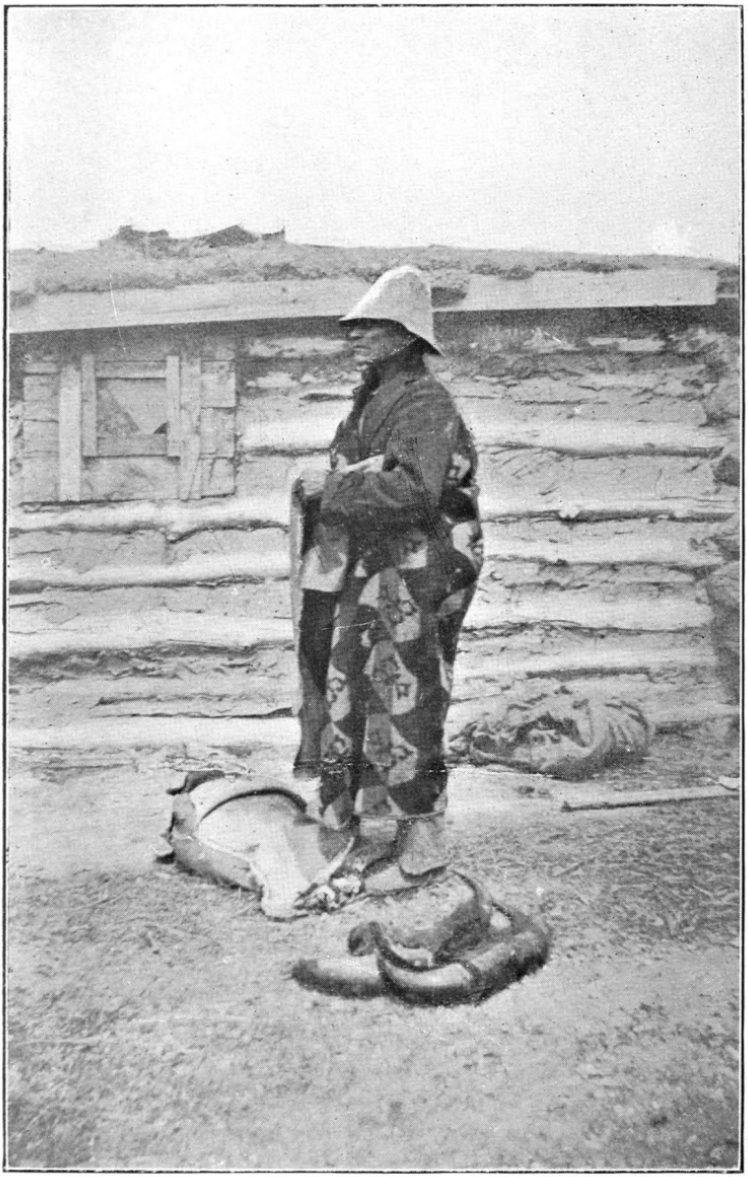
A MANITOBA CHORE BOY



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A BUCK INDIAN SELLING BUFFALO HORNS.

A MANITOBA CHORE BOY

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TOLD FROM HIS LETTERS.

BY
E. A. WHARTON GILL, M.A.,
Honorary Canon of St. John's Cathedral, Winnipeg.
Author of "Love in Manitoba," &c.

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A Manitoba Chore Boy

LETTER No. 1

QUEBEC,
April 13, 1911.

MY DEAR MOTHER,

WE reached here safely at 8 o'clock this morning, and I have an hour left—it is now 2 o'clock in the afternoon—in which to write you a letter about our voyage, and what I have seen of Quebec. I hope you got the postcard I posted at Moville. I am afraid it was not very cheerful, but all the emigrants saying "good-bye" to their friends at Liverpool just when we started made me feel rather queer, and I never knew how much I loved home and England—and mother—till I stood on deck seeing the old land grow dimmer and dimmer in the distance. Neither were many of us very cheerful for a day or two on the open sea. The sailors said we were having a good time, but I thought it was quite stormy; and we left a good deal behind besides the old country. On the third morning, however, I felt quite well, but very thin and hungry; and after that I really enjoyed the voyage very much. I was very glad that I came second cabin instead of steerage, for if it did cost eight pounds instead of five, it was more than worth the difference between the two. There were several hundred foreign steerage passengers, Galicians, I think they called them—some kind of Austrians or Poles anyway; and though these were kept mostly separate from the English, still they were pretty close neighbours, and rather wild and strange-looking, and smelling.

We second cabin had more freedom on deck, besides having good big rooms for smoking and music—the smoking room was always full; the music room was very comfortable, and lots of singing, and some very good singers and players amongst us. We had really first-class concerts on two nights, at which collections were taken up for some homes for sailors' widows and orphans. I sang "Under the old Apple Tree," and everybody joined in the chorus—all very free-and-easy and jolly. After we left Ireland the sailors opened the hatches into the hold, and four "stowaways" crawled out—just like a B.O.P.'s story. They were Liverpool street boys, who had hidden away to steal a passage to Canada. They got a good "going over" from the captain, but they were not unkindly treated; but they had to do what work they could, to make up for their passage, and they were set to keep the decks clear of all rubbish and litter. If any one dropped orange peel or bits of paper on deck, it was their job to pick them up and keep everywhere tidy. On the Sunday we were at sea we had church in the first-class saloon—first and

second-class passengers together. There was no clergyman on board, so the captain read the service and a short sermon in a straightforward sailor sort of way, and the singing was splendid—old hymns, old tunes—and everybody sang. One of the steerage fellows told me that a Salvation Army chap took a service with them—he said it was rather "rummy" after the parish church at his village at home, but very earnest and hearty, and a great deal better than no Sunday service at all.

The food on board was very good, and plenty of it. The three regular meals and some bread and cheese for supper, if you wanted it. I always did—after those three blank days at first.

For breakfast we had porridge, fish, bacon, and marmalade or jam; for dinner, soup, fish, meat, pudding and bread and cheese, and a good English tea, so we did not do at all badly. There was great excitement this morning when we woke up to find we were in the St. Lawrence, and everybody was on deck to catch the first sight of Quebec. The old city looked very beautiful in the morning sun as we slowly steamed up the river, and one of the stewards showed me "Wolfe's Cove," where General Wolfe landed before the battle, and the Heights of Abraham. There is a large house with beautiful trees and lawns near Wolfe's Cove, where the Lieutenant-Governor of the province of Quebec lives.

I have been very busy since we landed, going about with one of the other fellows to see as much as we could before we started again for Montreal.

We got on an electric street car, quite close to the landing-place—down in this part of the city the streets were very narrow and old-fashioned—sometimes only just wide enough for the carts and carriages to let the cars go by. After going some distance, however, the street widened, and we went up quite a steep hill that brought us to the Upper Town, where there were plenty of very good shops and fine buildings. We got off the car here and walked about to see the sights.

The finest sight of all was the Chateau Frontenac—it looks like a beautiful castle standing high on the cliff overlooking the river, but really it is a huge hotel belonging to the Canadian Pacific Railway. There is a terrace walk all along the front of the chateau, and from this you can see a long way down the river, while if you look straight down over the railings you see the roofs of the houses in the Lower Town.

From the "Chateau" we went to the Church of England Cathedral. It is not a bit like what we call a cathedral at home—just an ordinary, old-fashioned church, but it made me think of home. There were a good many marble tablets on the walls, and some of them were in memory of English

officers who died out here, fighting in the old wars. After leaving the cathedral we asked the way to Wolfe's monument, and were told to take the electric street car that went close by the cathedral gates. The car took us down a very fine street, with handsome houses and some big buildings—just as good as we have in a large town at home; but I was rather disappointed when we came to the Heights of Abraham. It was only a biggish, flat-looking field, with some trees in it. The monument was all right—not very big, very plain, and a very simple inscription, just "Here fell Wolfe—victorious" and the date. That single word "victorious" is fine—it tells the whole story. From the "Heights" we took the car back to the Lower Town, where we have just had a very decent dinner for a shilling, and in a few minutes we shall be on board again and on our way to Montreal. You must not expect another long letter till we get to Winnipeg—just a picture postcard, perhaps, posted on the train. I am sending you one or two photos of Quebec. After I get settled in Manitoba I shall be able to send you lots of my own taking, with the camera Uncle Jack gave me. The chap that is with me does not like Quebec—he says it is not his idea of a British colony—it looks foreign, the houses are French, the people are French, and they talk French; but I tell him he need not mind, it is the old flag that waves on the citadel, and that is enough for me. Now good-bye, mother, dear.

Your loving son,

TOM LESTER.

LETTER No. 2

WINNIPEG,
April 16, 1911.

MY DEAR MOTHER,

AT last I am in the capital of the great West, and am nearly at the end of my travels. I am not sorry, for the railway journey is far more disagreeable than the sea voyage, except those three first days; and I was very sorry for the poor women, who had a lot of little children to look after on the train. The first-class people had beautiful railway carriages, with a dining car and sleeping berths, and I daresay were almost as comfortable as if they were in a good hotel; but we second-classes could not expect that, and we did not get it. There was no real hardship, only it was uncomfortable and tiring.

At Montreal I bought a basket of food to last till we reached Winnipeg. I paid six shillings for it. It contained bread, butter, jam, canned beef, cake, tea and sugar; and was enough, for I was not nearly so hungry on the train. The "cars" were rather crowded, and the intermediates and English steerage all came the same class. The Galicians, or whatever they were, were put in two carriages by themselves, fortunately for us. The sleeping accommodation was rough, bare berths were fixed up, each for two, but there were no mattresses, and some of the fellows had brought no blankets of any kind, and with the hardness of the berth and the jolting of the train, were pretty stiff and chilly in the morning. I was very glad of the two heavy rugs that I had with me. As I was in a lower berth, and could see out of the window, I saw a good deal of the country we passed in the night, for there was a full moon, and I woke up a great many times. I must describe the journey as shortly as I can, for I want to tell you most about Winnipeg. The whole journey seems only to have left four or five distinct impressions on my mind, in something like this order—first, a long stretch of country, not so very unlike home, farm-houses, trees and orchards, ploughed fields and meadows, with every few miles a country village, then followed a long run through a hilly, rocky country with fir or pine woods, and for a good distance a wide river not far from the railway. The river—I think it was the Ottawa—was very beautiful, with its high banks covered with evergreen trees, while floating down it were huge rafts of logs, with little huts on them, or tents, and men to pilot them along. At last we came in sight of some part of Lake Superior. We would run for quite a long way in full sight of the lake,

with its waters shining in the sun with here and there little rocky islands, and then we would be back in the forests again. It was beautiful, but there was such a lot of it, and it was so lonely and lifeless—not a bird or beast to be seen. The last stretch of our journey was in the night, but by the moonlight it still seemed to be rocks and mountains, forest and lake, till we got nearly to Winnipeg, when we came into a flat country, with openings in the woods and occasional farm-houses. We got into Winnipeg at about 9 o'clock this morning, and the first thing Jack Dalton (that's the fellow who was with me at Quebec) and I did was to go to a restaurant, where we got a good breakfast for a shilling.

We then went down to the Emigration Office near the station, to try and find out where we had better go to look for farm work. We found most of our fellow train passengers there—pretty thick on the ground too. Emigrants who wish can stay there for nothing till they go out to the country places, and there are berths for them to sleep in, and stoves and things for them to prepare their own food. Jack and I decided, however, that if we had to stay a night we would go to an hotel, as we each had nearly thirty shillings left of the two pounds apiece with which we left home. There is a Government Employment Office in connection with the emigrant building, and there we found a good many of the English fellows who came over with us, waiting till the clerk in charge could attend to them. The clerk was writing at a desk and paid no attention to us for a goodish while, and Jack began to get quite indignant at being kept standing so long. At last he put his books away and turned round to us with a big sheet of paper in his hand. "Now, you fellows," he said, "I have a list here of farmers who want men or boys. I am going to read out who the farmer is, where he lives, what he wants, and the wages he will give, and when any one hears what he thinks will suit him he had better speak up, and I will give him a card of directions how to get there." No one seemed very anxious to take the first places he read out, the wages were so much smaller than they all expected. Some of the grown-up men had letters from an office in London—not a Government office—telling them that men without experience could get forty dollars (about eight pounds) a month as soon as they got to Manitoba. The highest wages the clerk read out was thirty dollars a month for men used to farm work, while for boys, from fourteen to twenty years old, it ran from five to fifteen dollars in most cases.

A good many of the men went away, growling that the whole emigration business was a swindle, and that they could make more money at home. The younger ones however, had most of them only a little money left, and were afraid of being "stony broke" in a strange place, so one by one they took the places that sounded most promising and got their cards of directions.

There were two fellows wanted for a place called Minnedosa, so Jack and I decided to take them and keep together. One was for a stout lad of eighteen or nineteen to do farm work, wages fifteen dollars a month—that's Jack, and the other for a willing boy of sixteen or seventeen, to do the "chores" round a farm, wages ten dollars a month—and that's me. I don't know what "chores" are, and when I asked the clerk if I could do them without experience, he laughed, and said, "You'll be all right; the 'chores' are everything that everybody else doesn't do." We got our cards, found out that there would not be a train to Minnedosa till 8 o'clock to-morrow morning, and then went out to see all we could of Winnipeg. First, however, we went to an hotel, to secure a room for to-night and to have a bath and brush our clothes, for we both looked rather grubby and generally "tough," as they say here, after our long railway journey. By the time this was done it was 12 o'clock, and the hotel bell rang for dinner. It was a treat to sit down again to a table with a nice white cloth, with everything fresh and clean and someone to wait on you. The dinner, too, was a great improvement on the "grub" baskets we had on the train. We hardly knew how to start on our sight-seeing, but decided to take the electric street cars the full length of Main Street, "the" big business street, first, and then to go on some of the branch lines. We had all the afternoon, and each separate trip only costs five cents, or twopence-halfpenny.

Main Street is a very wide, handsome street; there are a lot of old, shabby-looking buildings near the railway station, but farther down the shops and banks and offices are as fine as in the market-place at home, and the windows are full of beautiful things—so somebody must make plenty of money, if I am only to have ten dollars a month. There were a great many people walking along the pavements, most of them well-dressed, and a decent-looking crowd, but in a great hurry, as if they expected to miss a train. The only people not in a hurry were groups of foreign-looking men at the street corners—emigrants, I expect, who had not got to work—and some roughish-looking fellows hanging about the poorer class of hotels, and they did not look fond of work. After "doing" Main Street we took several side trips and saw plenty of fine houses, big public buildings and churches. Our last trip was out to St. John's, to see the Church of England College and Cathedral. The college is a good-sized place, like a biggish school at home, but the cathedral is just a little old-fashioned village church, built long ago by the early missionaries, when there were only a few white people here; but it has a nice graveyard, with plenty of trees, and is close to the Red River.

As our train leaves early in the morning, Jack and I have just paid our hotel bill before going to bed—six shillings each—for supper, bed and

breakfast.

You had better just address my letters to the post-office, Minnedosa, Manitoba, till you get my next letter, where I hope I shall be settled down for a year to the life of a “chore boy.”

Your loving son,

TOM LESTER.

LETTER No. 3

c/o B. Gregory, Esq.,
The Hoe Farm,
Nr. Minnedosa, Manitoba,
April 21, 1911.

My Dear Mother,

YOU will see by the address that I am on the way to be a Manitoba farmer—I am on a farm. I am also learning what "chores" are, though I expect it will take all this letter to tell you about my journey from Winnipeg and my difficulties in Minnedosa. All I will say about The Hoe Farm and Mr. Gregory is that they are both all right, and I think I shall like them both very much.

The day we were in Winnipeg was warm and bright—the next morning it was snowing—on April 17. However, we went to the station in the hotel "bus," and long before we got to our journey's end the sun was shining again, and most of the snow melted. We showed the cards we got at the emigration office to the man at the ticket place, and I think we only had to pay about half fare, as we were emigrants.

The first few miles from Winnipeg was very uninteresting—nothing but long stretches of dull, brown, dead-looking grass as far as you could see on both sides, and it looked as wet and swampy as the Garden of Eden in that book of Dickens you got me to read when I first wanted to go to Canada. After a while, however, it improved, and we could see men working in the fields, and here and there little log houses and farm buildings.

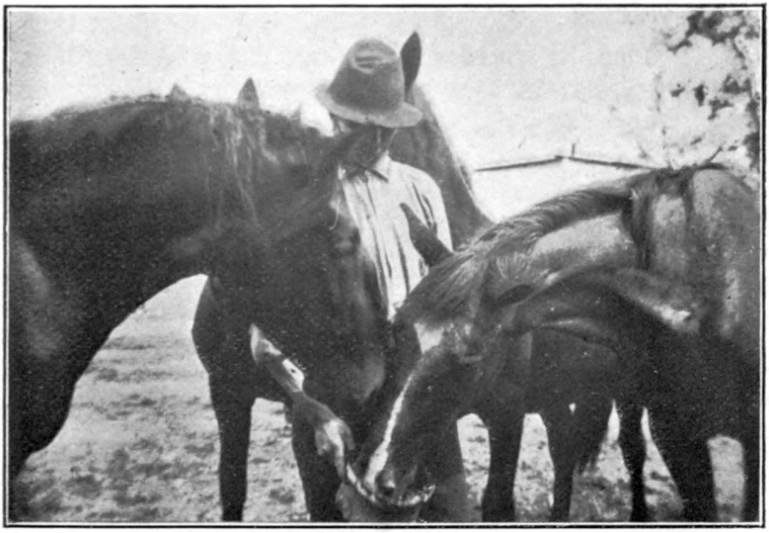
The train did not stop till we got to Portage La Prairie, and there we left the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway, and branched off on to the Manitoba and North-Western. Portage La Prairie looked quite a nice little town from the train, and there seemed to be plenty of trees all about it—though the trees had not a leaf on them; in fact, the whole country has a dead, dull look about it, except the people, and they seem cheerful and lively enough. But you know, mother, everybody seems to talk to everybody else, whether he knows him or not. A man we had never seen before, and who looked like a respectable farm labourer, sat down in the seat facing me and Jack, and asked us when we landed—we hadn't said we were English at all, but he said he knew by our boots! Jack didn't like it, and turned and looked out of the window, and took no notice of him.

However, he seemed to be quite pleasant and kind, so I answered all his questions, and there were a great many of them. Then he started to talk about himself and his farm, and what a lot of horses and cows he had; he wasn't a farm labourer at all, but had a big farm of his own! After we left Portage La Prairie we stopped at stations every nine or ten miles. Most of them were just little places with only a few houses, but two of them were good-sized villages with good brick buildings, and we could see from the train what looked like schools or some kind of chapels, but nothing like a village church at home—for everything looked so new. At last, when we were getting hungry and tired of the train, the "guard" came through our carriage—you know you can walk from one end of the train to the other here—and called out "Minnedosa next station—twenty-five minutes for dinner." Everybody was in a stir, putting on their overcoats and getting their parcels and bags, and in a few minutes the train stopped, and we were there. As soon as we got off the train we went to where they were unloading the luggage, to see if we could find our boxes, and—it was so stupid of us—we had not got the little cards, they call them "checks," changed at Winnipeg, and of course they were not there. The luggage-man said we should get them in a few days, and after taking the numbers of our checks, he told us "to hang on to them" till our boxes came. Mr. Gregory got mine when he went into Minnedosa yesterday, so it's all right now. Just as we got our difficulty settled a rough-looking man in an old fur coat came up, and asked if either of us was for Neil McLush—he was Jack's farmer. He seemed in a great hurry, and said his "team" was waiting, so I only had time to promise to write to Jack at Minnedosa post-office and he was in the waggon and away. I stood about for a few minutes, and hardly knew how to set about finding my way to Mr. Beckster's farm, whose name was on the ticket I got at the emigration office—for it only said "near Minnedosa." In the end I went back to the luggage-man; he was throwing boxes and parcels about in a great rush and sorting them into heaps; by-and-bye he cooled down a little in his energy, and I asked him to look at my card. He read it through, and when he came to the name 'Beckster' he gave a grunt—"You'd better go and see the English Church parson, Mr. Jordan, you had, before you look for 'Beckster' or anyone else, and what he tells you to do, you do it." I wondered why he "grunted," but I took his advice, and he pointed out the rectory and told me the road. It was quite a little distance away, and I had to cross by the bridge over the river and go down the "Main Street," and then on a side street before I came to it. The rectory is a little plain brick house, but the church close to it is built of some kind of granite, and looks like a church. I am sending some pictures of Minnedosa in this letter, so you will see what it is like.

I knocked at the door of the rectory, and it was opened by a stout boy of about twelve. I asked if I could see Mr. Jordan, and he said "Yes," and showed me into a little study. A minute after I heard him say, "Dad, you're wanted—there's a 'green' Englishman in your study."

When "the parson" came in he did not look very like a clergyman at home, he had on an old peak cap, and a little grey jacket, turning green with age and wear, and a pipe in his hand; however, he turned out better than he looked, and was so friendly that I soon felt at home with him.

A TEMPTING DISH.



REAL FRIENDS.

I told him that I was a clergyman's son, but that my father was dead, and you could not afford to start me in life in England, so I had come out to be a farmer in Manitoba; then I told him about the emigration office in Winnipeg, and showed him my card. Just like the luggage-man, he grunted when he came to the name "Beckster." "Look here, Tom," he said (I had only told him my name a minute before), "this man Beckster is a 'dead-beat.' There are a few farmers in Manitoba—fortunately only a few—who will hire English boys in the spring, offer them big wages (ten dollars a month!), work them hard all summer, and then in the face of winter quarrel with them, or make them so miserable that they run away, and never pay them any wages at all. This man Beckster is one of the worst of them, and it would never do for you to go there." All this made me feel rather blue, and I suppose I looked it, for he added, "Don't worry, we'll get you fixed all right." The parson left me for a few minutes, and when he came back he was quite the parson—long black coat, clerical hat, and quite presentable. He took me down to the Main Street to a restaurant, where he asked them to get me some dinner—I was quite ready for it—and promised to call for me in half-an-hour. I had just finished my dinner when he came back. "Now, Tom, come along, and let us see what we can do for you." We went first to a big stable, in front of which a number of waggons were standing, and a big boy was putting the harness on a pair of horses. "Who is in to-day, Bill?" asked the parson; and "Bill," the big boy, ran over half a dozen names. "Thank you, Bill," said the parson, as Bill came to the end of his list, and as we turned away he said to me, "Mr. Gregory is the man for you, Tom, if only he

hasn't got a 'chore boy' already." I wondered how we were to find Mr. Gregory, but the parson's plan was very simple; he just went into one shop after another with the same question, "Have you seen Ben Gregory to-day?" At last we ran him to earth in a blacksmith's shop, where he was having his plough mended. He and the parson seemed old friends, though he looked more like a working man than I expected, after what the parson had said about his being a large farmer and very well off. They talked to one another on one side for a few minutes, and then the parson turned to me—"Mr. Gregory has agreed to take you, Tom, for a year as 'chore boy,' and will give you seven dollars a month for the year, with five dollars a month extra for July, August and September, if you work well." My wages seemed getting less and less—twenty dollars that I hoped for when I left home, ten dollars I was promised at Mr. Beckster's, and now down to seven for the reality. However, I was glad to agree, especially as the parson said a comfortable home and seven dollars you get is better than a miserable home and ten dollars you don't get. Mr. Gregory seemed pleased when I said I would do my best, and that I wanted to get on, and be a farmer some day myself. As he would not be ready to start for an hour, the parson took me for a walk round the little town, and showed me the new church and his pews and his garden. He has a large garden—though it is all bare ground now; but he had a hot-bed full of little boxes, in which flowers and things were just coming up. Only think, he gets all his seeds from Sutton's, where we used to get them when we were at the old rectory at home, and he promised to give me some bedding plants for Mrs. Gregory, if I came in some day in the beginning of June. Mr. Gregory was just ready when we got down to the big stable, so I thanked the parson for his help, and promised to go and see him the first time I was back in Minnedosa. We had a six-mile drive to The Hoe Farm. Mr. Gregory comes from Plymouth, and Mrs. Gregory and the children seemed quite pleased when he said he had brought them a new "chore boy"—just out from the "old country"; but I must keep all about the family and my "chores" for the next letter. You can feel quite easy, mother, that if I am not making my fortune very quickly, I am well and happy, and among kind friends.

Your loving son,

TOM LESTER.

P.S.—The "chore boy" is treated just like one of the family at The Hoe Farm.

LETTER No. 4

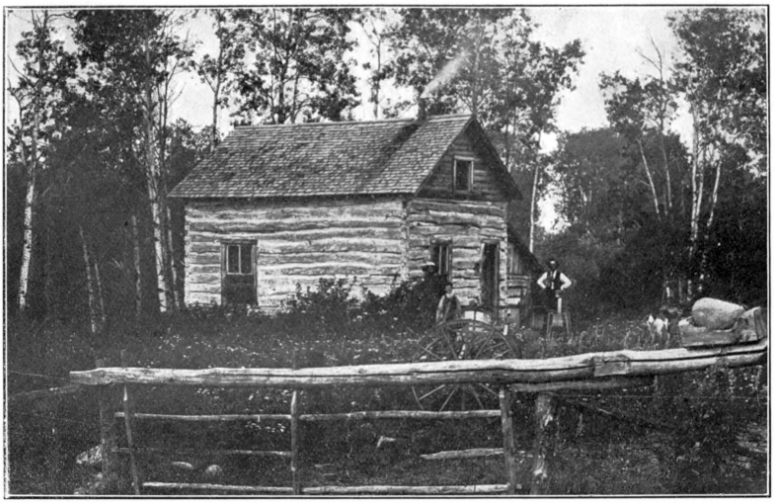
c/o B. Gregory, Esq.,
The Hoe Farm,
Nr. Minnedosa, Manitoba,
May 20, 1911.

My Dear Mother,

I HAVE just received my first batch of letters from home, and glad enough I was to get them. Thank Uncle Jack for his letter, please, and tell him I will answer it as soon as I can; he need not be afraid of my not sticking to it, even if I do find farm life in Manitoba pretty rough. It is pretty rough to an English boy who has always had a nice home and not any hard work to do.

Well, mother, in this letter I am to tell you what my new home is like, and, of course, the first thing is the people. Mr. Gregory is a tall, broad-shouldered man of about fifty. His father was a small tenant farmer at home, but when Mr. Ben Gregory came out here, twenty-five years ago, he got a place in Winnipeg as a policeman. He stayed there for some years, and saved a little money, and then came here and took up a homestead. This was a new settlement then, and from what he has told me they had a very hard time of it, and were very poor for a long time. Several years in the early days he had no crop to sell, as his wheat was frozen before it was ripe, and they had to depend for food and clothing on the little money they got by selling the butter they made from three or four cows, and on firewood that he took to market in Minnedosa. For the last six or seven years they have got on much better, and are now, not rich, of course, in money, but quite comfortably off. Mr. Gregory bought the half section of land next to his first farm four years ago, and finished paying for it last year. This year he will have a hundred and fifty acres of land in crop, and he has a large herd of cattle—nearly forty—and six working horses and some young colts that are not broken in yet. I like Mr. Gregory very much, so far. He is a great worker himself, and very particular about everything being done well, and about great care being taken of the horses and cattle; but he is very good-natured and does not expect me to know how to do so many fresh things all at once. Mrs. Gregory is a very quiet little woman, but quite as hard a worker in her way as Mr. Gregory. She was born in Ontario, her father being one of the early settlers in Muskoka. She looks older than Mr. Gregory, but really she is two or three years younger. She looks as if she had grown old too soon. I

expect it was the hard times and hardships she passed through when they were struggling to get a start on the homestead. There are two children—a boy and a girl—the girl, Regina (such a name), is sixteen, and goes to a country school two miles away every day. She is to be a school teacher when she passes her examinations, and spends most of her time in the evening doing her lessons. The boy, Benjamin, usually called "Little Ben," is fourteen, and is staying at home from school for a month, to help his father in sowing and ploughing till, as "Big Ben" expressed it, I am "broken in to the farm."



THE CHORE BOY'S HOMESTEAD.

So much for the present about the family, now for the house. It is built of poplar logs, and is only twenty-four feet long and eighteen feet wide, and downstairs is all in one big room. Upstairs it is divided by board partitions into three rooms—one "big" one and two little ones. The ceiling downstairs is very low. Mr. Gregory's head is only about a foot and a half from the beams when he stands up, and in the bedrooms the only place where you can stand up without bumping your head on the roof is in the middle. The cracks between the logs are filled with mortar, and the whole wall of the house, inside and out, is whitewashed with lime. Joined to the house at the back is a large shed, made of boards, which is used in winter to store wood and meat, and things that do not hurt with freezing; but in the summer the cooking stove is put out there, and it is used as a kitchen. In the "living" room there is not much furniture—very plain kitchen chairs, a large table and one or two home-made cupboards. However, Mrs. Gregory has a very good new sewing machine by one window, and they have just bought an organ, like the

"American" organ they had in the mission room at home, only with a very ornamental top with a looking-glass at the back of it. No one of the family has the remotest idea of how to play the organ, but from the pride they all take in it I fancy they feel that it gives an air of distinction to the whole family. You know I can't play much—just an easy air in the treble, with an occasional thump for the bass—but they think I am an expert. Mrs. Gregory, asked me yesterday if I would give Regina lessons! I could have roared: Mr. Tom Lester, Teacher of Music! Just fancy me with a pupil in music, and of all creatures the pupil a girl! Horrors! but I could not get out of it, and next Saturday the ordeal is to begin, and Mr. Gregory is to get an organ instructor book when he goes in to Minnedosa to-morrow.

But to return to my "mutton," *i.e.*, Hoe Farm. You will see by the photo that there are plenty of trees at the back of the house. Although these are bare of leaves all winter, they still form a great screen from the strong winds from the north, and they will take away the bare dreary look of the prairie as soon as they are in full leaf. At present they are just beginning to have a green shade from the opening buds. At about fifty yards from the back of the house, and well sheltered by the "bluff," *i.e.*, the little grove of trees, are the farm buildings. These are mostly built of logs, like the house, but the older ones are getting to have a rather tumble-down appearance, and Mr. Gregory is going to replace them by new ones as soon as he can afford it. He built a new granary of boards last summer, and this year a new stone stable is to be built, and I am to have a share in the work.

And now I must tell you what the "chores" are. That fellow in Winnipeg was about right, they are "everything that everybody else does not do."

Mr. Gregory calls everyone at 5 o'clock, when he gets up and lights the fire. Little Ben and I go out first to the stables, and feed the cows and clean out the cows' stalls, while Mr. Gregory attends to the horses. By this time Mrs. Gregory is out, and she and "Little Ben" milk the cows between them. As soon as I can milk properly Little Ben and I are to do all the milking. At present I am learning to milk on what they call a "stripper," that is, a cow which only gives a little milk, and which they will stop milking altogether soon. I am managing pretty well now, but for the first few times I got very tired of the performance, and so did Old Molly, the cow, and there was very little milk to show for it. When we have finished milking we go in to breakfast, which it is Regina's morning work to get ready.

Before breakfast, we (Big Ben, Little Ben and myself) perform our ablutions in a tin basin in the shed, drying our hands and faces on a rough towel which hangs behind the door, and doing our hair with a comb which is suspended from the wall by a long string (a hair brush seems to be

considered a luxury for high days and holidays), while for mirror there is a looking-glass, about six inches square, and which has lost most of its reflecting stuff, so that there is a good deal of guess-work in trying to part your hair.

For breakfast the chief item is the oatmeal porridge, of which everyone has a large soup-plate full, with milk and sugar. There are bread and butter and coffee, and sometimes some cold meat—pork—but the porridge is the "stand by." Everybody eats very quickly, and there is very little talking except from Little Ben, who keeps up a monologue. The little beggar is the greatest chatterer I ever met, but a very decent chap all the same. As soon as the last mouthful has disappeared, everyone gets to work again. Mr. Gregory and Little Ben go to the stables, and are soon out in the fields. Big Ben with the seeder, sowing the corn, and Little Ben with the harrows, covering it over and smoothing the ground. Regina washes the breakfast things, and then starts off to school, while Mrs. Gregory and I attend to the milk. All the new milk is put through a thing called a "separator," which separates the cream from the milk—it is worked with a big wheel and a handle, and I turn the handle while Mrs. Gregory attends to the milk and the cream. It takes about half-an-hour, but it is hard work while it lasts. When that is done I feed the calves and the pigs with the milk and some other stuff that is put in the milk (some kind of crushed corn) they call it "chop"—nothing to do with mutton!

My next "chore" is to feed the hens, of which there are nearly a hundred. We get about fifty eggs a day, but there are not many of them that appear on the table, as they fetch a good price in town. When they get down to fifteen cents a dozen, *i.e.*, sevenpence-halfpenny, Mrs. Gregory says we can eat all we like. This finishes my regular morning round; the rest of the "chores" are incidental, and vary from day to day—getting water for the house from the well at the back of the bluff, a hundred yards away; cutting long poles into firewood for the stove with a "buck" saw; splitting the wood with an axe and filling the wood box in the shed; and the last few days I have been doing some gardening and putting in some seeds. This, from my old fondness for gardening, is more in my line, and I find I know more about it than they do here. It was a treat to find something that I could do without having to have a woman or a "kid" to show me how. At twelve o'clock Mr. Gregory and Little Ben come in with their horses and we have dinner, usually "pig" in some shape (roasted, boiled or fried), plenty of very good potatoes, rice pudding also, usually, with an occasional "pie" (so called), of dried apples, or prunes, or raisins. Then there is bread and butter and tea again. I am always as hungry as a hunter, or it would be a pretty monotonous diet. After

dinner, Mr. Gregory goes back to his seeding, and at first Little Ben and I used to let the cattle out and drive them to a slough (a big pond) for water, and back again to a big yard where there were some straw stacks; but now the weather is warmer we let them out in the morning, and they wander about on the prairie till evening, when we put them back in the stable, and give them some hay before we have supper.

In the afternoons I go out with Little Ben and work with him at the harrowing. He has a quiet pair of horses, and I can drive them pretty well now, and can put their harness on, and "hitch" on to the harrows quite farmer-like. It seems generally to be windy here, and the ground is very dry and dusty; when we come in from the fields we are as black as sweeps. We come in from work at about five o'clock, and by supper time, at six, we have the cattle fed and all the "chores" done, except milking. For supper we have bread and butter, fried potatoes and cold meat—still pig—and tea. Supper over, the milking and its attendant "chores" of separating the cream and feeding the pigs and calves, brings the day to an end. Mr. Gregory helps at these at night, and they do not take long. Then bed, and it's a pretty tired "chore boy" that lays his head on the pillow to dream of home and mother till Big Ben sounds "Five o'clock, boys," in the morning. But it is getting easier as I get used to it, and I feel first rate, and as Little Ben says vulgarly, "I am putting on meat like a stall-fed steer." With love to you all.

Your loving son,

TOM LESTER.

P.S.—Show Uncle Jack the photos. I took them with my new camera, and got them developed in town.

[*R. Stock.*

TYPICAL COWBOY'S BEDROOM ON A CATTLE RANCH IN SASKATCHEWAN.

LETTER No. 5

The Hoe Farm,
Minnedosa,
June 22, 1911.

My Dear Mother,

THE family have gone off to some kind of "preaching" in the school-house, but I thought I would spend my Sunday afternoon in writing home. I asked Mr. Gregory who the people were that conducted the service, and he said it was a "Plymouth Rock" from Minnedosa. I never heard of that denomination before, so thought I would make no experiments in theology. As soon as I can ride rather better I am to have one of the horses, and shall be able to go to church in town. I still have plenty of "chores," for Little Ben goes to school now, and we have more cows to milk and more calves to feed, and I do my share in the milking, though not yet an expert. The hens, too, take a good deal of time just now. They are Mrs. Gregory's special charge, and I am under her orders, so I have nests to make, broody hens to set, and coops to make for each family of little chickens as they make their appearance.

Surely there never was such a man for loyalty to his native place as Big Ben; the very fowls are "Plymouth Rocks," and very handsome birds they are too. Mrs. Ben was awfully taken with the coops I made; she said they were the best she ever had. I measured and planed and fitted every piece of board in them. Of course it took time, and Little Ben undertook to show the superior smartness of the Canadian way of doing things—he "could make one in half-an-hour." He did, with an axe, a hammer and a buck-saw, and it was coming to pieces again in a week.

In the afternoons for the last two or three weeks I have been working with Big Ben. He is clearing and breaking some new land at the far end of the farm. Although there are no big trees to cut down, a good deal of the prairie is covered with "scrub," *i.e.*, small bushes of willows and wild roses, and here and there bluffs of young white poplars, twelve or fifteen feet high. All this has to be cut down and cleared away, before the land can be ploughed up with a strong breaker plough. Big Ben has an axe, and I have a brush hook to cut the smaller bushes, which I pile up in heaps, to be burnt as soon as it is dry enough. It is pretty hard work, and I sometimes get rather sick of the steady sticking to a monotonous job; but Big Ben is pleasant to

work with, and I always feel I am really learning something. Of course he does all the ploughing. Breaking "scrub" land is hardly the job for a beginner, but I am getting used to handling the horses, and when there are many roots to be torn up, I drive the horses and keep them in the furrow, so as to leave him freer to hold down and guide the plough.

We have had a great change in the weather since my last letter, nearly all May it was fine, but very chilly, a clear sky with strong north-west winds, and often a little frost at nights. It was good enough weather to work in, but nothing seemed to grow, and I thought the trees and the prairie would never get green. In the first week in June, however, the rain came, and since then it has been warm and showery, and the whole face of the country is quite changed. The wild fruit trees are white with blossom—the cherry, the cranberry and the saskatoon; down among the willows by the creek are wild black currants and raspberry bushes, and nearly everywhere on the prairie you can see the flowers of the wild strawberry. Long ago, in the end of April, came the first flower of spring, the anemone, or wind flower. They came so suddenly and unexpectedly, while all the prairie looked brown and dreary, that I could hardly believe they had grown out of doors when Regina brought home the first which she had picked on her way from school. They are very like the crocus, only a pale violet, and the flowers come in clusters before the leaves. The violets are out now, but they are a disappointment, for they have no fragrance; in fact, they are just what we used to call "dog violets" at home. Everything is green, the prairie, the bluffs, the "grain" fields ("corn" means maize here), and it all seems the more lovely from the dreary, forlorn brown interval between the winter snow and summer, which does duty in the West for spring-time. But, mother, there is a serpent in our Eden, full of guile, and more subtle than any beast of the field—the mosquito.

The mosquito came to me as a surprise, and a very unpleasant one. I'm sure the geography books always spoke of it as a tropical beast. I suppose it is an insect, a beastly insect any way.

As soon as the warm showers came, it came from nowhere, from everywhere, and it has made my life a burden and my face like a map of the world, with red blotches to show the British Empire. Neither does it play the game, and make its attacks when your hands are free to ward it off, but just when you are carrying a couple of pails of water from the well or milking the cows. Before the mosquitoes came I used to have to go and drive the cattle home in the evening, for they were greedy for the first green grass and reeds along the sides of the sloughs; but now they will come racing up, followed by clouds of mosquitoes, and we make smudges of damp straw and

grass, to choke off the blood-thirsty little wretches. There is nothing in the least incidental or casual about the mosquito's method of attack. He alights on your forehead, or neck, or nose—the tenderest and most inviting spot—a thin, leggy, anæmic-looking gnat. He proceeds to unroll his proboscis, like the hose of a water-cart, and makes an incision, swift and deep, like the dentist's preliminaries to extracting a tooth without pain, and equally painful. Withdrawing his needle, wiping it carefully, and putting it away in his instrument case, he then screws the nozzle of his nose into your flesh, and proceeds to pump blood. If suffered to carry out his design to the end, he swells and swells to the utmost limit of the expansion of his skin, and finally withdraws and rolls up his nose and flies off with a wobbly and drunken flight; to sleep off his debauch among his depraved companions.

We have gauze netting over the bedroom window, so they are not very troublesome at night, and after a day's hard work I am not easily kept awake. Moreover, Big Ben assures me that after my first summer they will not trouble me very much; indeed, I appear to be the chief sufferer, which is a consolation to the others, and Regina has rigged up for me a kind of muslin curtain to my straw hat, which is a great protection when I go for the cows.

I hope you will not think I am discontented, but the mosquito is a grievance; he was not in the bond.

Your loving son,

TOM LESTER.

P.S.—Will you send me some of the old part-songs I used to sing with Mary last winter?

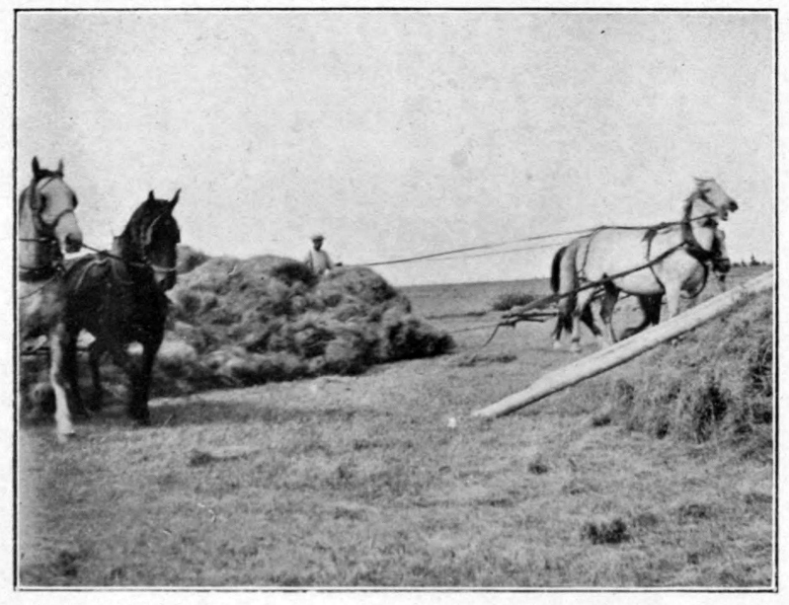
LETTER No. 6

THE HOE FARM,
MINNEDOSA,
July 28, 1911.

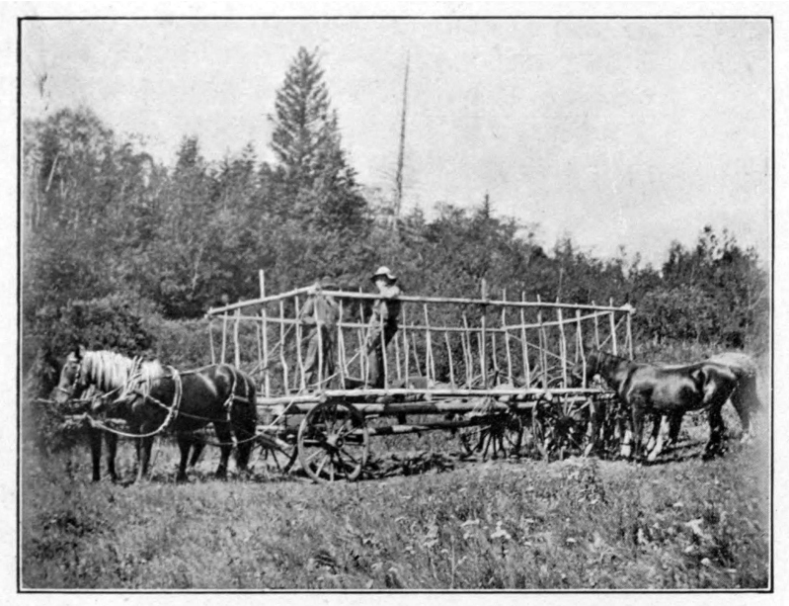
MY DEAR MOTHER,

MY letter is a little late this month, but I have been very busy between work and play. The work first. Big Ben says that is the secret of success here, and I guess he's right. This has been our haying time—not a bit like the old song, "Down in the Meadows amaking the Hay," nor like haymaking at the old Squire's, where we used to picnic in the Park, and wind up with a dance at the Hall. Little Ben and Regina are having their school holidays—and working from daylight to dark on the farm. The "wimmen folk," *i.e.*, Mrs. Gregory and Regina, are doing all the milking and dairy work, and most of my "chores," while "the menfolk," Big Ben, Little Ben, and myself, have been left free for the haymaking. We have no meadows here, like those at home, but just cut the long, coarse grass which grows round the sloughs. As there are not many sloughs on his own land, Mr. Gregory has got a "permit" to cut the hay on a section of Government land two miles away, and this section is just a net-work of little lakes with belts of hayland round them. We have generally fed our horses and had breakfast before seven o'clock, when we start off in the waggon to the haying, taking our dinner and a big bottle of oatmeal water with us to drink; the slough water is impossible—too much animal life and embryo mosquitoes. We each have our own work, Big Ben cuts the hay with a mower, Little Ben "coils" it into rows with the old black mare and a hay-rake, and I put the rows into "cocks" with a fork. The hay is quite dry in three or four days of fine weather here, and then we stack it out on the prairie, where it will be left till it is needed in winter, when it can be drawn home on the sleighs. We put a rough-and-ready fence of barbed wire round the stacks, to keep stray cattle from them, and plough a few furrows round, as a protection from prairie fires in the Fall. We have a kind of picnic dinner at eleven o'clock, and about four o'clock Regina generally drives over in the old backboard and brings us a "lunch," and some hot tea. We work again till it is nearly dusk, and take home a load of hay with us, all riding on top of the load. This load we leave at the hay-loft door for the night, and Little Ben and I put it in the loft before breakfast the next morning. As the "chores" are usually all done when we get home at night, it is supper and bed. The papers

are very fond of talking about “the strenuous life”—Big Ben is a past master in the art of living it himself, and teaching it to the other fellows as well.



HAYING BY MEANS OF A “SWEEP.”



[*R. Stock.*

A BASKET HAY RACK, WHICH HOLDS ONE TON.

But we have had some variety and fun in this last month too; we have a football club in the settlement, and I am at my old place, "half back." If the rest of this letter is out of your line, mother—and I know you think "soccer" a horrid, dangerous game—why, just let Brother Jack read it; he'll appreciate it more. We had a meeting in the school-house in May, and organised an Association Football Club; we appointed our member of the Ottawa Parliament honorary president—that means a ten-dollar bill to the club. The member who represents us in the Legislative Assembly at Winnipeg we made honorary vice-president; the honour will cost him five dollars, and the ordinary members, like myself, pay two dollars apiece. We have about twenty-five playing members, and the whole settlement takes the greatest interest and pride in the football "boys." We have a club practice every Thursday night, and have a series of matches arranged with neighbouring clubs; nearly every school district has its own club. Last Saturday we played Hazeldean, and beat them easily. They were a big, heavy lot of fellows, but slow, and we played all round them. Next Saturday we are to play Minnedosa on their own ground, and I expect we shall get a good drubbing; they were in the finals for the Championship of Manitoba last year, and are said to be stronger than ever this season; still, we shall put up a good fight. We shall have a strong team when we have played more together, and get used to each other's game, and we represent all sorts and conditions of society. Four or five of our team are farmers' sons born in Manitoba of Scotch descent; one Welshman, a keen player, but with an immense idea of the superiority of Welshmen to all others, and a fine conceit in himself personally; two young fellows, working as "hired men" on farms near by, who came out as "Barnardo boys." I suspect they hail originally from the slums of London, but really they are very decent fellows, and have learned to play the game somewhere. They have been out three or four years, and must be good workers, for they are getting twenty-five dollars a month wages, and are saving up to go home-steading next year farther west. Then there are two old public-school men, fine football players and nice fellows, but somehow not suited to the life. One of them is a "farm pupil," which means that his father pays three or four hundred dollars a year, so that his son may do a little farm work when he feels like it, but I guess he does not feel like it very often. I should not care to pay for the privilege of doing the "chores." He may have an easy, pleasant time, but he'll never learn to farm or to make a living by farming in the West. The other public-school man is still more unfortunate—he does not like work, and his people will not send him any money. He tried for the army and failed, he tried office work in a country bank; it was too slow, they got him in a London office, and he got into debt; he hung round among his relations till they were tired of him,

and finally gave him a few pounds and sent him to Manitoba. Some people "at home" seem to think that there is a keenness in the Colonial air which inspires the "home" failures with a keenness and a capacity for work which has never shown any evidence of itself "at home." Now he is "choring round" at a bachelor farmer's for his board and lodging, does the cooking, cleans the stables, cuts the firewood, and probably does the limited amount of washing which is sufficient for a bachelor's shanty. He is six or seven-and-twenty now, and I do not suppose he will ever be anything better—a fine finish to an expensive education and good abilities!

It is not the fault of the West, and not half his own fault; he's been brought up to be above work, and now he is above it or beneath it. And yet he is an awfully nice fellow in lots of ways, and can play a great game of football when he gets roused up. Jack Dalton and myself complete the team. Jack is our goal-keeper, and a dandy one too. He has only been able to get out twice to practice, his "boss," different to most of the farmers round, has no use for football or anything but hard work for his "hired man." Jack likes the country well enough, but is not at all comfortable in his surroundings—a very rough "boss," who usually comes home "half seas over" and very profane and quarrelsome from his frequent visits to town, a houseful of noisy and unkempt children, coarse food, ill cooked, and work all day and every day. I can tell you I think I am pretty lucky by comparison. Jack says he will "tough it out" till the harvest, and then look out for another place, whether he can get his wages or not for the time he has been there. He was hired for the year, and will probably have trouble, as he had no written agreement about a month's notice. Regina has just called me to supper, so good-bye.

Your loving son,

TOM LESTER.

LETTER No. 7

The Hoe Farm,
Minnedosa,
August 18, 1911.

My Dear Mother,

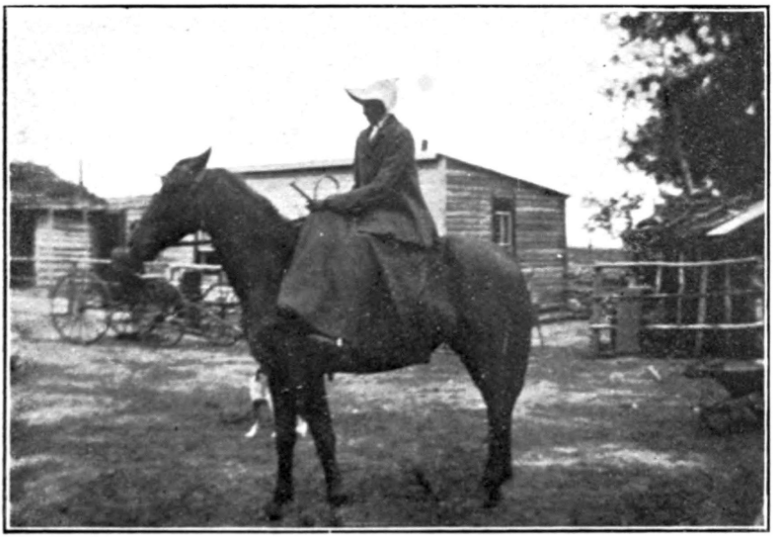
THIS must be a Show letter—not a letter to show, but to tell you about the great event of the year, the Annual Show of the Minnedosa Agricultural Society. A good many of the farmers do not take much interest in the Agricultural Society, but here we are all keen "Show" people. Mr. Gregory is one of the directors, and every one takes an active part in making things go.

Early in the summer Big Ben canvassed the settlement with one of the directors from town, to get new members and to stir up his neighbours to exhibit their stock; then he spent two days in town among the business people there, to get them to give special prizes, and we all have had to work hard at home, each with their particular hobby. Big Ben showed his best team, the black mare and her foal, his Durham cattle and Berkshire pigs. Mrs. Ben, besides her butter and home-made preserves and white bread and brown bread, had a whole box full of things which she had made last winter, ranging from coarse knitted winter socks to hand-painted satin sofa cushions and point lace (this is the land of varied accomplishments). Little Ben showed the pony and two calves which his father gave him for his own private property. Regina, besides helping her mother, won the first prize for a map of Canada, and also for the best bouquet of wild flowers, and the second prize for the best collection of native prairie grasses. We three young people spent all one Sunday afternoon gathering the wild flowers, and must have wandered for miles over the prairie. It was tea-time when we got home, and later still when Little Ben turned up. He got tired of looking for flowers, and wandered off to the sloughs on the hay section, to see if he could see any young ducks. Mr. Gregory said I could show the hens and any vegetables I thought worth while, as the poultry and garden are my particular charge. I got first prize for the best coop of Plyms.—six hens and the big "rooster"—and also for potatoes and carrots.

The Show lasted for two days, the first a hard day's work, for very early in the morning we had to drive in the cattle, and then to return to Hoe Farm, and make a second trip with the pigs, poultry, and all the smaller things,

which had to be in their places in the Show by dinner-time. Big Ben stayed in town all night, but Little Ben and myself went home and did the "chores." The second day was "the day" of the Show, and although we were up early and started for town by seven o'clock, we found a great many were earlier than we were, and when we got to town there was not a spare stall at the livery stables, and the streets were crowded with young people in their holiday best.

We drove right up to the Show Grounds, a big, level, fenced-in field at the foot of the hills, and just on the northern outskirts of the town, unhitched the team in the shelter of a poplar bluff, tied them to the waggon wheels and gave them some hay, and then left them to their own devices, while we "took in the Show." The great attraction for the ladies was the Exhibition Hall, a new, unpainted, pagoda-like structure built of lumber, and two stories high, a small dome on top, on which was flying the Canadian flag (Union Jack with Canadian arms in one corner). The hall downstairs was used for "dairy, garden and domestic products," so said the hand-book of the Show, and here were loaves upon loaves of bread, white and brown, small and large, good, bad and indifferent; some, like Mrs. Ben's, which took first prize, all that bread should be, and some all that it should not be; butter in little dainty pats ready for the table, in pound "prints" and in earthenware "crocks" holding twenty pounds; jam, made from native wild fruits, in little glass jars (some showed as many as ten or twelve different varieties); home-made cheese and home-made soap; then came the garden exhibits, all the ordinary vegetables we have at home; but some, especially the potatoes, finer than any I had ever seen before. Next to the vegetables came the farm products: bags of grain, wheat, oats and barley (grown, of course, last year), sheaves of wheat, fresh cut from the fields, to show the promise of what we hope this year's crop will be; and sheaves of different kinds of "tame" grass —timothy and browse grass—which many of the farmers are growing now, as the land is getting fenced in, and there is not so much wild land for the cattle to roam over. The centre of the hall was taken up with flower stands, on which were shown flowers in pots, cut garden flowers and wild flowers. Most of the house flowers were shown by the town people. There was not much variety, but plenty of good geraniums, fuchsias and begonias. The cut flowers included most of our old favourites "at home": stocks, pinks, asters, mignonette and sweet peas—there were heaps of sweet peas, beauties!



READY FOR THE MORNING GALLOP.

"OFF FOR THE DAY."

The hall upstairs was mostly given up to ladies' fancy work; I'm not going to attempt to describe that! The "fine arts" were upstairs also; the less said of them the better, though there were one or two pretty water-colours of prairie and log-house scenes that were not so bad, and evidently of English taste and handiwork; but the paintings in oil—horrors!—none of the portraits were up to the standard of the village "pub." sign of the "Marquis

of Granby," and the efforts in scenery would have disgraced a travelling show.

Leaving Mrs. Ben and Regina to revel among the "fine arts," and "fancy work," Little Ben and I made the round of the stables, cattle sheds, and pig pens—just about up to a country cattle show "at home," but only about a dozen sheep! "Too many prairie wolves, too much trouble to put up fences," says Big Ben; and Canadians do not seem to care for mutton, so long as any form of pig is available. At noon we went back to the Hall to find the ladies, and then we all went together to have dinner. This we had in a large tent on the grounds, which was "run" by the ladies of the English Church, and a very good dinner we had for thirty-five cents apiece. Everybody works here, and they all work together. When I went by the tent in the morning the parson (Mr. Jordan) had his coat off, and was "bucking" wood for the cook stove, Mrs. "Parson," with sleeves rolled up and a big apron on, must have spent most of the day in firing up the stove to boil water for the tea and coffee, while a round dozen of other ladies were cutting up joints of beef and hams, pies and cakes for dear life, while the young ladies waited on the tables.

We saw very little of Mr. Gregory all day. He was the director-in-charge of the houses, and Mrs. Gregory foregathered with one or two old cronies, and went back to the Hall to a more thorough examination of the fancy work, and to criticise the judging of the bread and butter, which did not meet with her approval. Little Ben and Regina and myself watched the athletic sports, which were not up to much, except the football match between Minnedosa and Russell, which was a fine game; and as the day was very hot, we had a good many ice-creams and "soft" drinks—ginger beer and lemonade. Fortunately, "hard" drinks—whisky and beer—were not sold on the grounds, and I only saw one or two men at all "under the weather." We had tea again, altogether, in the tent; after which Mrs. Ben and Regina drove home in the buggy, while Little Ben and myself drove home the cattle. It was dark when we got back to Hoe Farm—tired, I should say so; but, like the "three jolly huntsmen," we had a "rattling day."

Now we are back to everyday humdrum again: school for Little Ben and Regina, "chores" for the "chore boy," and Big Ben is ploughing his summer fallow with the oxen, to give the horses a rest, before the serious work of the harvest, which will be on us by the middle of next week with a rush.

Your loving son,

TOM LESTER.

P.S.—I wish, mother, you would send some little fancy thing for Regina's birthday on October 3; it would only look "decent," when they are

all so kind to me.

LETTER No. 8

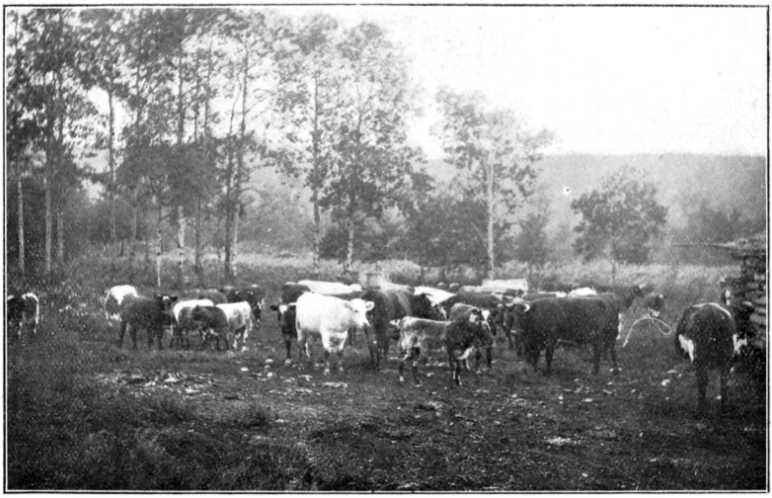
The Hoe Farm,
Minnedosa,
September 23, 1911.

My Dear Mother,

THERE is nothing like the harvest time in the West to teach a fellow to appreciate Sundays as real days of rest. We have had glorious weather for the last month, hardly seen a cloud in the sky, and not a drop of rain since the big thunder-storm which came the night after I wrote my last letter; but it was a terrific storm. It had been very hot and sultry for two or three days, and there were heavy black clouds in the south-east when I went to bed and to sleep. I was awakened by a clap of thunder which seemed to jar every timber in the house; before I realised what it was, there was a flash of lightning which lit up the room like switching on an electric light, followed by a second crash of thunder sharp and metallic—and then came the rain. It came first with a few big drops, which we could hear splashing on the shingle roof, and then in torrents. The storm lasted for nearly an hour, though the first two crashes of thunder were the worst—the farm buildings and yard were lit up by almost continuous sheet-lightning long after the thunder had died away to an occasional rumbling in the west.

As soon as the worst of the storm was over, Big Ben went out to the stables, to see if the cattle and horses were all right. There was no harm done there, but in the morning the garden looked rather a wreck; and what was more serious, the finest and heaviest of the wheat on the summer fallow was badly laid by the rain. We had had a few thunder showers in July, but I never experienced such a storm before, and I did not care for the experience.

The day after the storm Big Ben went to town, and brought out with him an extra "hand" to help with the harvest—an Ontario harvester. The railway company brings up on very cheap tickets thousands of men at this time of the year, to help take off the crops in the West. A good many of them are farmers' sons, who take the opportunity of seeing the prairie, with the idea of afterwards settling here, if they like it.



A BAND OF CATTLE COMING HOME FOR THE MILKING.

Our particular “harvester,” Jake Maguire, is, I suspect, a fair sample. He is used to farm life, and a good man with horses, can get through a lot of work in rather a rough-and-ready way; knows a little more than anyone else, though Big Ben is working some of the conceit out of him. He is jolly and pleasant enough with me, though there are some little things I have hardly got acclimatised to yet: he chews large quantities of very black tobacco. He is very skilful in the use of the knife, where we have a prejudice for using the fork. He shares my bed, and only removes his outer garments before retiring to rest. He made great fun of me this morning, for going down to the lake for a swim before breakfast. He cannot swim himself, which I can quite understand.

Now for the harvesting. I escape most of my “chores,” as Little Ben has to do them before and after his school hours; but I have longer hours and heavier work. We cut the barley first—and on it I learnt the art of stooking, *i.e.*, putting eight or ten sheaves into what we used to call “shocks” at home. I found it very hard work at first, not only that my arms ached, but my wrists were scraped nearly raw by the sharp ends of the straw.

By the time we got to the wheat the worst of my apprenticeship was over, and when we came to the oats I rather liked it.

Big Ben does nearly all the cutting of the “grain” with the binder and three horses. Jake and myself follow the “binder” and do the “stooking.” At eleven the three horses that have been working are put in the stable to feed and rest, and after a short half hour for dinner Big Ben is at work again with three fresh horses, and works till dusk.

This has been the steady round for nearly a month, varied with the stacking of the barley and some of the first cut wheat. Stacking is pretty heavy work too. We do not draw the "grain" home, but make the stacks in sets of four out in the fields, so as not to have to draw our loads far over the rough land.

Big Ben builds the stacks, and Jake and I pitch the sheaves to him. Stack building is quite an art, as here they do not put any sort of thatched cover to them, as they do "at home"; at the same time they must be solid enough to keep out any rain or snow that may come between now and threshing time. We had a lot of trouble with the wheat on the summer fallow, as it never stood up again after the thunder-storm, and a great deal of it was so tangled up that the binder would not cut it at all. However, the pigs are to be driven down to it after the threshing, and I suppose there will not be so much lost after all.

We were far more fortunate than two or three of our neighbours to the south of us, for instead of rain they had a hail-storm that night, and nearly all their crop was destroyed. Mr. Gregory and I drove down on the Sunday afternoon after, and I never saw such a sight in my life. I would not have believed such harm could have been done just by hail-stones. At one house that we went to all the windows were broken on one side of the house, and the flowers and vegetables in the garden literally cut to pieces. The wheat fields were as flat as if they had been rolled, and a lot of the grain pounded and driven into the ground.

The man at the house said some of the hail-stones were nearly as big as hens' eggs, and not smooth and round, but just like solid chunks of ice. Fortunately, the hail-storm only came in a narrow strip about a quarter of a mile wide across three farms—that is, to do serious damage—but those that were caught by it will have no crops to sell after all their hard work.

The hail-storm, like the mosquito, did not appear in any of the emigration literature they sent me when I wrote to that office in London. However, Mr. Gregory says he has only been "hailed out" once in the last fifteen years. It seems to run in streaks; in some places the crops have never been damaged by hail since the country was settled, while other districts have been caught three or four times.

There is to be a kind of "harvest home" supper and concert in the school-house in a couple of weeks' time, at which I am to sing. My voice has got pretty well over its "breaking," and we practise at odd times. We are going to sing "When ye gang awa, Jamie," with "Darby and Joan" for an encore, if we get one. They are rather ancient, but I do not fancy we shall have a very critical audience, and there is a strong Scotch element among our Canadian

neighbours. Big Ben is to sing “Nancy Lee.” He had a voice once—there is plenty of it still, with any amount of enthusiasm; but driving oxen and the climate have made it rather rough and jerky in spots.

Your loving son,

TOM LESTER.

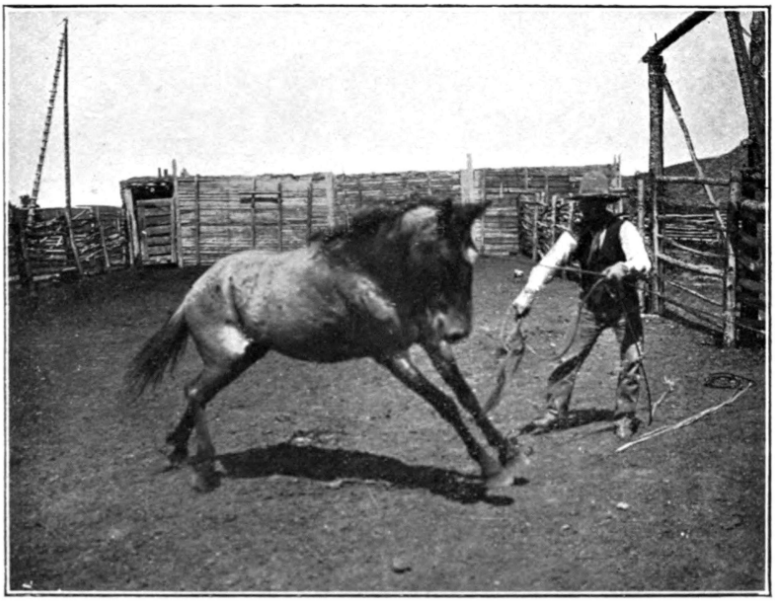
LETTER No. 9

The Hoe Farm,
Minnedosa,
October 19, 1911.

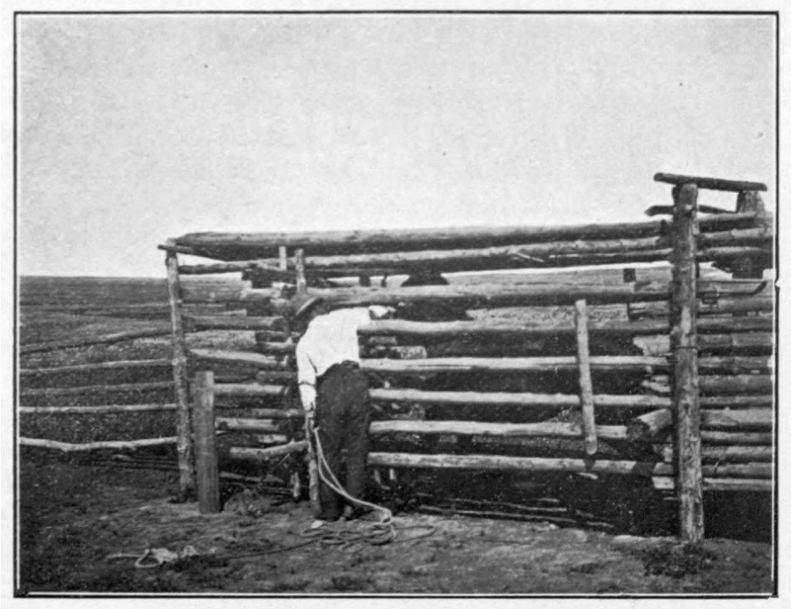
My Dear Mother,

WE have had a comparatively easy time since the rush of harvesting was over, though there is still plenty to do. We do not get up quite so early, for it is not light till seven o'clock. We take our full hour for dinner, and there is no work except "chores" after supper. Little Ben has been home from school most of the month, and Fall ploughing has been the standing dish. Fall ploughing is the ploughing of the stubble fields from which the crop has just been taken, ready for seeding next spring; and Big Ben, Little Ben and myself have tramped a good many miles after the plough, but we hope to have it finished in a few days. Two of us have been using horses, and the third a yoke of oxen; but I cannot manage the oxen very well, and they take advantage of my ignorance. With Big Ben they go along steadily and smartly enough, and will almost keep up with the horses; but as soon as I take the plough-handles they seem to think they can do as they like—and they do. It is in vain that I shout to them by their proper names of Buck and Bright to "git up"—they go slower and slower till they just crawl along. If I make a frantic effort to reach them with the long switch I use as a whip, and succeed in landing a sharp cut on Buck's hind-quarters, he promptly jumps out of the furrow, jerks the plough-handles out of my hands, and I have to stop and drag the plough back into its place.

Jake, the Ontario harvester, who was with us last month, said a man could not drive oxen and be a Christian—and sometimes I think he was about right.



THROWING A HORSE WITH LARIAT.



HORSE-BREAKING BY THE AID OF THE CHUTE.

Yesterday afternoon I had a horrible time with them—they seemed possessed. Big Ben and Little Ben were in another field, and I had been left to finish off an odd corner of stubble, in which there were a good many

stones. I am satisfied Buck and Bright just laid themselves out to exasperate me. Every time the plough-point struck a stone—jerk—it was thrown out of the furrow, generally striking me a smart blow on my wrists with the handles. I would shout "Whoa, whoa." Buck and Bright would tramp stolidly along, as if everything was lovely, dragging the plough on its side. Finally, I would get them to a standstill and abuse them—not that they minded that in the least. Buck would say inaudibly aside to Bright, "This Englishman is pretty green," to which Bright would reply with a heavy and silent wink, "You bet, he is." In twenty yards we would strike another stone, and the whole play would be repeated, with additional exasperations on the part of Buck, the ringleader in all the trouble. He used to belong to a Scotch Canadian, and is possessed of a stodgy oatmeal kind of humour, which does not recognise when a joke has seen its best days. My temper was getting more ragged all the time, and finally, when a specially violent jerk of the handles caught me in the pit of the stomach and knocked me sprawling, I left them standing, went to a near-by bluff, cut a stout stick, and undertook to give them an English thrashing—especially Buck. They took the first few cuts quietly and stubbornly, then switch with their tails and up with their heads and off they galloped, dragging the plough after them—off the ploughing—across the prairie and right into the middle of a shallow slough, where they stood calm and impassive, chewing the cud.

I tried hard words and kind words; I threatened, I entreated, I pelted them with sticks and stones; they simply ignored me with a sublime indifference, and chewed away as blandly and contentedly as if they were in the stable enjoying a well-earned repose after the conscientious performance of duty. It ended in my taking off my nether garments, wading in the slough up to my middle in icy-cold water and mud, and driving them out. The point of the plough was twisted and one handle broken off when I reached home, a wet and draggled object of pity. I was consoled by Big Ben with the caustic remark that "If I couldn't keep my temper I'd better quit driving oxen"—disgusting!

But there has been compensations. This is the shooting season, and that has meant a lot of pleasure mixed up with the trials of the oxen and the ploughing. Wild-duck shooting began on September 15, and prairie-chicken and partridge shooting on October 1. Little Ben and I had a half-holiday on the morning of the fifteenth, and were off soon after daylight—Little Ben armed with his father's old single-barrelled muzzle-loader, and myself with the "keeper's" gun which Uncle Jack gave me. When we reached home, soon after dinner-time, we had twenty-two ducks of different kinds and sizes—five fine mallards, three canvasbacks, two widgeons, two spoonbills, and

the rest blue-winged teal—quite a bag. Little Ben's respect for me was greatly increased, when he found that I could shoot a duck, as he expressed it, "on the fly." His own way is the Indian fashion, and not very sportsmanlike to my thinking: he crawls and creeps through the long grass round a slough in which he sees ducks, and then "pots" his unfortunate victim without giving it a "show." We took the old collie dog with us to retrieve, but he was not altogether a success. Sometimes he would swim right into the middle of a slough and bring a duck out; at other times he would only bring them to the edge of the reeds, and I would have to take off my shoes and socks, roll up my "pants," and wade in for them.

Little Ben had a good laugh at one piece of "greenness" of mine. After wasting five cartridges on what I took to be a small duck, which dived the moment I pulled the trigger, I finally knocked it over. When I showed it to Little Ben, he told me it was a kind of grebe, not fit to eat, and rejoicing in the euphonious name of the "bellower." Since the first day we have had no regular "hunts," but I have several times got two or three ducks before breakfast on the sloughs near the house.

The prairie-chicken shooting is, however, the best sport; they are splendid birds, very like the grouse "at home," and there are lots of them on the wheat stubble every morning and evening; but work comes first with a Manitoba farmer, and I can only get off for an occasional shot at them. Yesterday, however, the ground was frozen too hard to plough in the early part of the day, and Little Ben and I were out for two or three hours. They are getting very wild and wary, as they have been shot at so much by the town "sports."

Every afternoon when we are working we can hear the "pop, pop" of their guns all round, and sometimes they will drive into the field to speak to Big Ben, and ask permission to shoot over his land. More often they shoot without asking leave, which makes him "mad." One day the "parson" from town walked over to me where I was ploughing, with his two boys—the younger one, who described me to his father as "a green Englishman" on the day I reached Minnedosa, was labouring along under a load of prairie chickens and ducks. The young cub! I hope they were heavy. The "parson's" attire was a curious mixture—it began with a clerical collar, and ended in a gamekeeper's leggings.

The shooting has been a great treat, and has made amends for a lot of hard work. The townspeople, lawyers and bankers and storekeepers, seem to be able to get out when they like. They don't do much walking. They have livery rigs and proper sporting dogs, setters and pointers and retrievers. Some of them can shoot, and some of them could not hit a haystack if it

were to fly; but I doubt if they get as much real enjoyment out of it as Little Ben and the "chore boy."

Your loving son,

TOM LESTER.

P.S.—Don't meet trouble half-way, my good mother. "Chore boys" do not form attachments on seven dollars a month.

LETTER No. 10

The Hoe Farm,
Minnedosa,
November 28, 1911.

My Dear Mother,

FOR once I am writing my letter on a week-day, as I gave my foot a nasty cut with the axe yesterday, when I was splitting some firewood. It is not at all a serious matter, but will keep me in the house for a day or two, and I rather enjoy a little holiday.

The threshing is over—another of the great events of the farm year. The "threshers" came a week after my last letter, and were here for six days, but one day was a Sunday, and for one day we lay off, as there was a breakdown with the separator (the machine which does the threshing), as a fork got into the cylinder, and broke things up generally.

THE THRESHING.

The man who owns and "runs" the threshing machine brought his gang of men with him—ten men altogether—and two teams of horses. The men were a very miscellaneous collection—the "boss" was a Scotch Canadian, who has a large farm of his own in the next settlement—a big, rough, powerful man, a "terror" to work, and make others work; but he knew his job thoroughly, which was the principal thing. The engineer was a young Englishman—out two years—who had left his regular work in a machinist's

shop in town just for the threshing season. He was to have a hundred dollars a month wages for the two months that the season lasts. The other men got about three dollars and their board a day for each day that they worked; they included three Galicians—silent, dark-visaged fellows, who kept to themselves, two Manitoba farmers' sons, a "Barnardo boy," a Swede, and a time-expired Royal Navy sailor. The last was the life and wit of the gang, and kept everyone in a good humour. He was at once an immense favourite with Big Ben, for he hailed from the Three Towns, and his Plymouth yarns made Big Ben quite sentimental and reminiscent for a week after.

The gang slept in their "caboose," a big van fitted up with sleeping bunks, one tiny window, a small stove, and very limited ventilation.

Personally, I should not care for the caboose side of going threshing—though the "Barnardo boy" said they were as snug as possible; but "snugness" is not everything.

The "gang" only came into the house for their meals, but there had to be great cooking, for threshing is hungry work; and it is a matter of pride among the farmers and their wives to "put up" good meals for the threshers. Mrs. Ben and Regina were busy for days before, baking bread and making pies without number—apple (dried) pies, pumpkin pies, raisin pies, prune pies. But the Canadian pie is not a pie; it is baked in a tin plate, two layers of paste with that which gives it its particular name between. While the "wimmen folk" were busy cooking, Big Ben and myself killed and cut up a small steer and a pig, and there was very little of either left when the "gang" went away.

An "up-to-date" separator is a wonderful piece of labour-saving machinery, and very few men are required, considering the amount of work which is done. There is a band-cutter which cuts the twine which binds the sheaves, an indicator which counts the bushels of grain, a spout which carries the grain into the waggon box, a "blower" which carries away the straw and makes a rough stack of it—all working mechanically and saving labour. My particular duty all through the threshing was to keep the engineer supplied with water for his boiler. The water had to be drawn from a little lake—a distance of half a mile or so—in a big tank. I had to back my team a little way into the lake, and then dip up the water with a pail fixed to a long handle. It was hard work, and a cold and sloppy kind of job on a frosty day.

I had a small catastrophe on the last morning. I had filled my tank, and was fixing the cover, when my horses started without warning, and I fell backwards into two feet and a half of water. I was drenched to the skin, and by the time I got back to the threshing my clothes were nearly frozen stiff.

The gang thought it was an immense joke. I didn't see it myself; but I got a change of clothes, and didn't even catch cold.

We took two or three days to tidy up after the threshers left, and then Big Ben and myself settled down to drawing the wheat to market. After breakfast and "chores" were over we would "clean up" our loads, put the wheat through the fanning-mill, to blow out the dust and chaff and take out any weed seeds or rubbish (winnowing we called it "at home"), put it into bags and load it into the waggons.

This would take till dinner-time; and after dinner we took it to town. As soon as we reached the grain-market—which is just the open street in front of the post-office—the buyers would rush up, climb on to the load and open a bag to examine the wheat. Some days there would be quite a competition among the buyers, and Big Ben in the end would get several cents a bushel more than the first price offered.

As soon as the grain was sold we drew our waggons up to the elevator, where it was unloaded and weighed. There are three large elevators in town, but the last time we were in two of them were quite full, and the third had very little room left. There is such a rush all over the West to get the crop sold that the railways cannot take it away from the elevators fast enough. However, the price has fallen, and Big Ben says he will not sell any more till spring; he is better off than a good many of his neighbours, who have to sell, whether the price is good or bad, to get money to pay their bills. He gave me my wages for the past seven months the other day, ten dollars a month with five dollars a month extra for the last four months. It was rather better than he promised me at first, and he said he was quite satisfied with my work. I am afraid I shall not be able to save very much of it, as there are quite a lot of things I have to get for the winter—working clothes and a fur coat of some kind. A cloth coat is no good for the winter here, if a fellow has to go to town on the top of a load of grain, or to go to the "bush" for wood. I am sending some small presents home—Indian moccasins for Jack, moccasin slippers for Mary, and a piece of Indian beadwork for yourself. I got them from an Indian in town last week. We usually see two or three when we go in—there is a small Indian Reserve not far away, and the Indians go into town a good deal in the summer to sell wild fruits, and in winter with moccasins and things they make from deer-skins.

There is not much of the "Last of the Mohicans" about a Manitoba Indian. He is usually dressed in a mixed assortment of "white man's" clothes, which have been given him, though I have seen one or two old men wearing blankets. On the Show Day I saw one or two young squaws who

were great swells in the fancy beadwork line, others looked like a “Mary Ann” on a Bank Holiday.

Big Ben says a few of the Indians on the Reserve are quite well-off—have good ponies and cattle, and put up hay for themselves and to sell in town.

The Reserve is a block of land kept for the Indians by the Government, and the white settlers are not allowed to interfere with it in any way. When you get this it will be nearly Christmas, and for the first time I shall be away from home. I hope, mother dear, you will all be “happy,” and if I am not “merry” at the thought of it, I shall have to reconcile myself with the “Old Squire’s” motto—“What must be, must be!”

Your loving son,

TOM LESTER.

P.S.—It was awfully good of you to send the pretty collar to Regina for her birthday; she was delighted with it.

LETTER No. 11

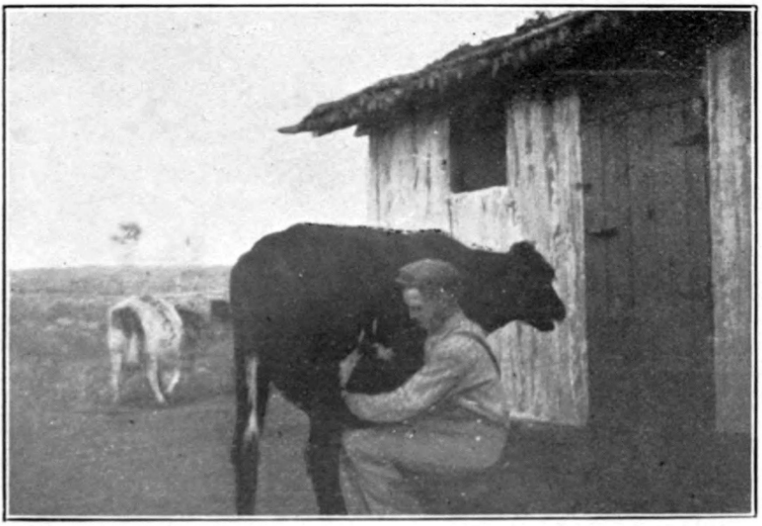
The Hoe Farm,
Minnedosa,
December 29, 1911.

My Dear Mother,

CHRISTMAS has turned out better than I expected, and I have really had a very good time. On Christmas morning Mr. Gregory, Regina and myself drove into town for church, Little Ben staying at home to help his mother and do the "chores." It was a perfect Manitoba day—the sky without a cloud, not a breath of wind, and the thermometer a little above zero. We had a good deal of snow in the early part of the month; but the town trail is used by nearly all the settlement, so the snow was well packed down, making good sleighing. During the night the air had been heavy with frost and fog, which had crystallised into hoar frost at sunrise. Every bush and twig seemed decked with diamonds flashing in the sunlight, and the horses were as exhilarated as ourselves by the keenness of the air and the merry chiming of the sleigh bells. Of course, all the stores in town were closed, and the Main Street nearly deserted, but there were bands of bright and happy children playing on the river.

We put the horses in the livery stable, and walked up to the church; the first hymn, "Christians, awake," started just as we entered the door. The church was well filled—I suppose it holds about three hundred people—and there was a very good choir. It was more like "home" than anything I have met since I came out. There was very little in the way of decoration, but there was some real holly, with lots of red berries, on the pulpit and above the altar. I wondered where the holly came from, for I knew it did not grow here—nothing grows here in the winter time. I heard afterwards that it came from Maine, in the United States, and that it cost tenpence a pound!

When we got back to Hoe Farm, we found dinner ready, and we were ready too. In the afternoon we had the cattle to drive to the lake for water, and the horses to attend to—which took us till dusk—for it is dusk by four o'clock. However, we had some good fun in the evening, skating on the lake by moonlight. A lot of the young people round were there, and we made a very noisy party. We had a big, blazing bonfire on the ice—it is two feet thick, so you need not be nervous—and finished up with Big Ben inviting the "crowd" to the house for hot mince pies and coffee.



MILKING TIME ON A RANCH.

SELLING WOOD IN TOWN.

Still more dissipation in this letter, mother, for on Christmas Day “the parson” asked me to spend the next evening at his house, and six o’clock found me at the rectory door in my Sunday best.

I had expected just a quiet family party, but found that I was only one of a crowd of eighteen young fellows—from eighteen to twenty-five years old, all Englishmen—whom "the parson" had gathered together for an "Old Country" Christmas.

I was introduced to each one as Tom Lester, and the "parson" called them all by their Christian names. It was rather embarrassing, but I was much relieved to find that I knew two of them already—the engineer and the Plymouth sailor man who were with the threshing gang. They were very friendly, and soon made me feel at home with the rest. With the exception of one other, who was "hired man" on a farm close to town, they were all living in Minnedosa for the winter, and twelve of them were "keeping back" in the rooms over an old wooden store in Main Street. These were generally known by the rest as "the Pirates," and their "back" as the "Pirates' Den." Only three of the whole party had regular work for the winter; four were carpenters and two bricklayers, who had had regular work and good wages till "freeze up" (the beginning of November), and were living cheaply out of their savings in the summer; the rest had been working on the railway or on farms, and were still making a precarious living by "bucking" wood or other casual jobs in town. They were as friendly and jolly a lot of fellows as I ever met, and I enjoyed the evening immensely. They were much more interesting than a lot of young fellows "at home," for they represented such a variety of experiences—several of them had been through the South African War, and two had been at sea, "before the mast," on merchant ships. Most of them came to Canada with the idea of "home-steading," but very few intended to go farming now. Englishmen who have "followed a trade" in large towns do not seem able to stand the monotony and loneliness of Western farm life. We were all laughing and talking together when "the parson's" younger boy, my old friend, came to call us to dinner in the dining-room. Here we met Mrs. Jordan, an elder boy of my own age, a daughter a couple of years older, another daughter about fifteen, and two little girls (called by the rest Tallycoram and Buster, though I should imagine these names are not baptismal). Mrs. Jordan and the girls seemed to know all the "Pirates," and it was just like a big family party, "the parson" at the head of the table, faced by a big turkey and a roast of beef, replaced later by a monster plum pudding and mince pies; Mrs. Jordan at the foot of the table, with tea and coffee, and the girls and boys helping with the waiting.

CHRISTMAS TIME—THE ICE HARVEST.

After dinner, while the table was being cleared and the dishes washed up by Mrs. Jordan and the girls, helped by the "handy man" from Plymouth, most of the others crowded into "the parson's" little study for a smoke, while the non-smokers, a minority including myself, sat in the large sitting-room and talked. When the ladies came in we had a regular concert, vocal and instrumental. Two of the "Pirates" were really good violinists, the "handy man" had brought his cornet, while a third "Pirate" played the accompaniments for the songs on a small American organ.

Such singing you never heard! Soldiers' songs, sailors' songs, comic catches, sentimental ballads, and everything with a chorus was sung by the whole crowd. The party broke up at twelve o'clock with hot coffee, mince pies, and "God save the King."

I did not come back to Hoe Farm that night, but shared the "handy man's" bunk in the "Pirates' Den," and walked home after breakfast the next morning. Next week we shall be back to steady work again after our holiday time. We have a lot of hay to draw home from the prairie, and then the wood for next year's burning has to be cut in the bush eight miles away, drawn home, and cut up into stove lengths and piled up to get dry. Big Ben was in town yesterday, and sold fifteen hundred bushels of oats; the price has gone up, and they are worth thirty cents a bushel, so that will mean some more trips to town, and pretty cold trips too, for it has grown much colder since Christmas Day, and last night the thermometer registered 40 degrees below zero. The little fiction in the emigration pamphlets about not "feeling" the cold in the West, owing to the dryness of the atmosphere, does not, as they

say here, “pan out” in reality. One does not suffer from it, with plenty of good food and suitable clothing, but you certainly feel it, or freeze, and then you feel it when you thaw out.

Your loving son,

TOM LESTER.

LETTER No. 12

The Hoe Farm,
Minnedosa,
January 27, 1912.

My Dear Mother,

I HAVE been through my first blizzard, and live to tell the tale. It was certainly a most unpleasant experience; Big Ben was with me, or it might easily have ended in my being under a snow-drift out on the prairie, instead of sitting by a warm stove writing home to you.

The first two weeks of this month were bitterly cold, but beautifully fine, two things that often go together here—intense frost and a cloudless sky. Big Ben and myself made several trips to the bush, drawing home wood cut last winter, and which had been piled there to dry out. Then came a sudden change of weather; the wind veered from the north-west to the south-east, and we had two or three damp, raw days, which ended in a fresh fall of snow, and a rise in the thermometer.

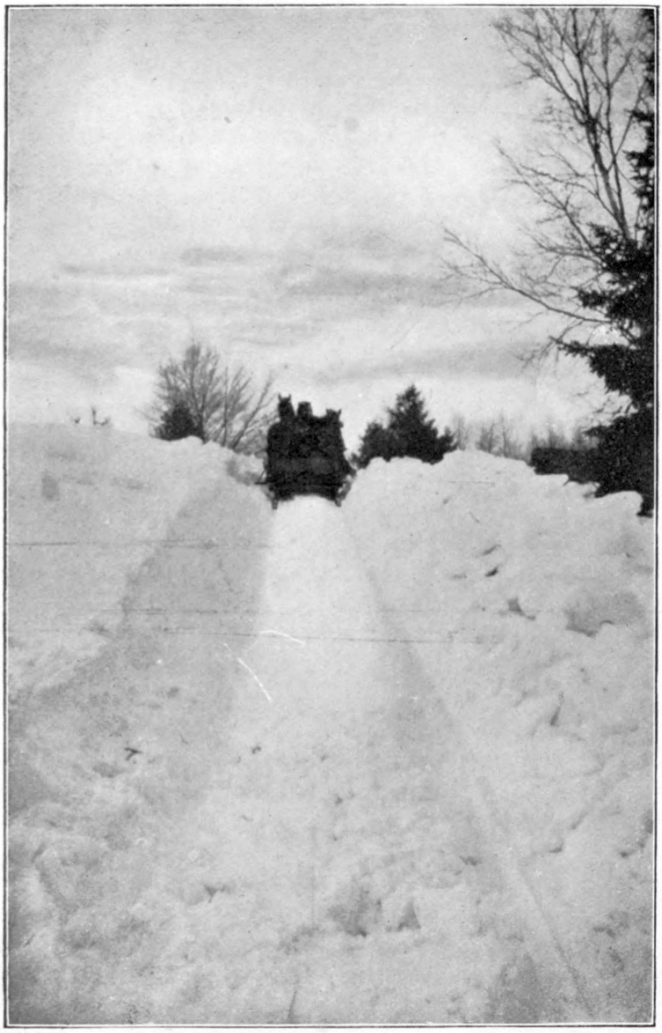
The next morning, after the snowfall, the air was as soft and mild as if spring were coming. There was not a breath of wind, and the sun shining on the newly fallen snow made everything of such a dazzling purity of spotless white that it pained one's eyes to look upon it.

We started for "the bush" Big Ben and I, with two teams and sleighs, directly after breakfast, intending to make a long day's work, not only bringing home two loads of dry cord wood, but also to spend several hours in the woods cutting "green" wood for next year's supply. The horses easily kept the trail, for they could feel the firm road made by our previous trips, under the fresh snow, and we trotted along gaily for four or five miles of prairie, then a couple of miles of bluffs and scattered trees, where the best timber had been cut in previous years. For the last mile to our wood piles the trees were thick together, and our narrow road was the only opening.

We unhitched our horses, tied them to the sleighs, threw their blankets over them, and both of us set to work. In the bush it was so still and mild that we not only took off our fur coats, but also our rough working jackets and mitts.

In this part of the woods many of the poplars were nearly a foot through at the bluff of the tree, and about forty feet high. Big Ben cut the trees down, and I lopped off the branches, and then cut the trunks into four-foot lengths.

We worked away steadily for a long time, the silence of the woods only broken by the chopping of our axes, and the occasional crashing of the branches of a big tree as it fell.



[*R. Stock.*

AN ONTARIO ROAD IN MIDWINTER.

It was past noon when we stopped work for dinner, and to feed the horses. For the horses we had brought bundles of hay and their usual allowance of oats, and for ourselves several very substantial rounds of toast, and some equally substantial slices of cold fat pork. Fat pork and thick toast may not sound very appetising, but, after all, the enjoyment of food is all a

question of the keenness of one's appetite, and in the bush I would not wish for a better dinner.

As we did not expect to be home very early, we also made a fire, melted some snow in an old saucepan, and made tea; hot, strong, black tea, without milk or sugar, served in a tin mug, and with more than a suspicion of smokiness, is just splendid in the bush.

It was not till we sat down by our fire after dinner that we noticed a change in the weather, or rather I should say Big Ben noticed it. The clear blue of the patch of sky we could see overhead through the tree-tops was becoming hazy, and dimmed by a thin film of quickly moving cloud. We on the ground felt no wind, but the upper branches of the trees were swaying gently, and as we listened keenly we could hear a long, weird sighing pass through the woods; it was not a sound that you could hear so much as feel.

I do not suppose I should have paid any attention to it had I been alone, but it filled Big Ben with uneasiness.

"There is going to be a storm, Tom, and the sooner we are out of this the better."

We had loaded our sleighs with dry wood before we had dinner, so we "hitched up" our horses, and were soon started for home. By the time we got out of the thickly-wooded bush there was already a great change; the sky was dull and leaden with clouds, the air was thick with falling snow, and fierce gusts of wind went soaring through the tree-tops, making the frozen branches creak and groan under their sudden attacks. So far, however, we had had no trouble with our horses and loads, for there was sufficient shelter from the brushwood and small bluffs to keep the snow on the ground from drifting to any serious extent. When, however, we reached the open prairie, we felt the full force of the blizzard, and I was honestly afraid. It was not only that snow was falling heavily, but the wind swept along the prairie, carrying the loose snow that had fallen the night before high into the air. Big Ben was just in front of my horses with his team and load, though often I could not see them, except dimly in brief lulls of the storm. Not a trace of the trail was to be seen, and in places new drifts had formed, through which the horses bravely ploughed their way. We each sat on the front of our loads, shouting occasionally to our teams to cheer them on, but entirely unable to guide them, for no one could keep his face to such a storm for more than a minute.

Suddenly my team stopped, and I heard Big Ben shouting in front. I got down from my load, and struggled through the storm to see what was amiss. He had struck a deep drift, and one of his horses was down, while his load

was tilted high on one side, and threatened to topple over. With a great deal of stamping and trampling down of the snow round the horses, we managed to get the horse up on its feet again, but it was hopeless to think of getting our loads through the drift.

There was nothing for it but to throw off our wood; so to work we set, and soon had it off and made a fresh start. Relieved of the heavy drag of the loads, our teams made better progress, though we could not see whether we were in the road or not, and had to trust entirely to the horses, but they brought us safely through.

After what seemed a long and weary plodding through deep, loose snow the front team turned sharply to the right, and a minute after the runners of our sleighs struck a firm, hard-beaten road—we were on the town trail. Though the blizzard still raged as furiously as before, our danger was over, for the drifting snow did not lodge on the hard-beaten trail, the horses were sure of their footing, and the force of the storm was on their side, instead of in front of them.

We did not stop again till we were at the house door at the farm, and were very thankful to be safely home.

The blizzard kept on all through the night, and the old log-house groaned and creaked, as if its heavy timbers would be torn asunder. Towards morning the storm abated, the gusts of wind came at longer and longer intervals, and finally died away altogether. When we got up at sunrise the sky was as bright and clear, the air as calm and still, as on the preceding morning; but the Storm-King had played strange pranks with the snow. Everywhere, round the house, in the yard, and in the fields, where it had been exposed to the full force of the wind, the ground was swept bare, and the snow piled high in drifts in every spot sheltered from the storm. The front door and windows were covered nearly to the top, and it took us all the morning to shovel away a passage to the stable door, so as to be able to feed the horses and cattle.

I think I must have experienced now all the varieties which go to the making of the Manitoba climate, and, take it "for all in all," I like it; it's all on a grand scale, and there is none of the everlasting drizzle, which used to make me feel so muggy and discontented with the world, and myself, "at home."

Your loving son,

TOM LESTER.

P.S.—I caught a lovely mink in a trap on the little lake yesterday. As it is the first, I am going to make a ruff of it for Regina. I'll send the next to

Mary.

THE END.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Some illustrations were moved to facilitate page layout.

[The end of *A Manitoba Chore Boy* by Edward Anthony Wharton Gill]