

OUT OF THE  
NORTH

*Emily Murphy*  
as  
*Janey Canuck*

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A Breezy Description of An Expedition from Edmonton  
Eastward

OUT OF THE NORTH

By JANNEY CANUCK

It is September of a morning, when we pull out of Edmonton—throned Edmonton of Alberta—for a run down and across the seven Provinces of Canada, to stop here and there for a conference or two, but notably for the Canadian Women's Press Club and the Directors' meeting of the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada.

Sirs, what a morning it is—almost like a chime of laughter. If these things were communicable through the medium of paper we would tell about the shine of the sun on the river, of the super-subtle air, and of how the trees stand closely on the fields like herds of tawny horses.

Besides, if we tried to set this down, we are afraid you might laugh at us. To understand the delights of an ever-widening world, with never a telephone between earth and sky, one must have been shut up in an office for months upon months. Ah, well! you can laugh if you care to. We are Cocks of the North, and we don't care who knows it.

At the edges of the city, the people are gathering in their potato crops, the children helping for awhile before going to school. Anyone can see that the trouble with picking potatoes lies in the fact that you are too close to your work.

We have fourteen thousand plantations of potatoes this year in our city, which must be pretty nearly a plantation for every householder.

But Edmonton has always been famous for its tubers. As far back as we know, the first garden was planted a hundred and sixteen years ago, that is to say, in 1804, by Henry Harmon, a factor of the North-West Fur Company. He tells in his diary that he planted potatoes and garden seeds on May 23rd, a month after the ice passed out of "the Sisiscatchwin River." In October, he reports that his nine bushels of seed had given a yield of one hundred and fifty bushels, and that he is now assured of a comfortable subsistence.

It is well he planted those potatoes, for, that winter, food was so scarce in the district an Indian woman—in spite of popular prejudice against the habit—killed and ate fourteen of her friends and relatives.

Indeed, it is set down in the reports of "the Gentlemen Adventurers of the Hudson's Bay Company," that two Indian women devoured two white men from the fort, having accompanied them on a winter's journey.

The women told afterwards that one man's flesh was pleasant to the palate, but that the flesh of the red-haired Scotsman tasted of tobacco.

Out by the potato-patches, men are at work demolishing the penitentiary and have exposed row after row of cells to the air. These are joined together

like the cells of a honeycomb, which is the only particular in which they approximate the yield of the hive.

Once, I went to see a woman in this jail, who was condemned to be executed, but whose sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. She was here for shooting a young woman who had won her husband's affections so that he turned her, (the old wife), out of the home.

I went to tell her that her husband had died the day before—that he had been caught in a belt of a machine and whirled and whirled around until all his life was beaten out—to ask her wishes about the estate; and how she wanted his personal effects disposed of.

One falls a-marvelling that Fate should trip up a woman with so wry a joke as this, and it is no wonder she could not understand aright, for you see this woman had never really owned a thing before. She could not comprehend what it meant to be the heir, and I could not explain because she had lost her rights as a citizen of Canada. We are foolish poor things, we women, and all we could do was to cry together. Sing woe, woe, and alas!

This was years ago, and now the woman has grown very old. Just awhile back, in the folly of my heart, I wrote to the Lords of the Council, that they let her go free, and to that farm where her adopted daughter awaits her coming.

Maybe, some day, a practical person will pray about this thing, and then we will see what happens.

**T**here are other things to be seen on the edge of the city, where the yellow Saskatchewan loiters along with not so much as a wheel to turn.

Among these is a coal-mine, for Edmonton is encircled by mines. For that matter, if you care to sink your cellar deep enough in any part of the city, you will come upon several seams of coal.

It is passing strange to read concerning the household and industrial tragedies that threaten the southern provinces of Canada when an embargo has been placed upon coal from the United States, or when a strike has occurred in the American collieries, in view of the fact that the Province of Alberta possesses one-seventeenth of the coal of the world and that our mines are frequently shut down for want of orders.

Or if orders come with a rush in the autumn or early winter, when the railways are hauling our grain to the head of navigation, the miners must, perforce, be left off because no freight cars are available.

Or if freight cars are available, and orders have piled up in a manner wholly satisfactory to the Company, then do the miners drop their tools and ask for a dollar a minute extra. In this event, there is nothing left for the manager but to “use language,” or to go out and graze like Nebuchadnezzar, the King. Managers do not like grass.

This is why, up to the present time, coal-mining has been more or less precarious in this Province. Some people have invested in coal mines and escape in the nick of time. Among those who did not escape was my own family. I lay my hand on my heart and assert that we did not.

When everything else had been conquered, the Saskatchewan River found an opening and flooded out the whole works. Bread may be cast on the waters, or almost anything else, and be found again after many days, but with coal it is wholly different.

Dr. Macphail pointed out that the main concern of the race is to keep itself warm, and that for our very existence Canadians are dependent upon coal. This is why it is highly important that Railway Corporations and Boards of Arbitration should give the closest possible attention to the coal resources of Alberta which, in view of their enormous extent, must ultimately become our basic industry.

Another industry carried on in the city is that of sheep-herding. The herder is a tall man of perfect strength, in no wise comparable with those “woeful shepherds” whom the poet bids to “Weep no more! Weep no more!” Shepherds nowadays receive handsome pay cheques, which probably accounts for their dry eyes and upstanding physiqués.

This man is herding sheep for the packing plants nearby, and consequently has a change of flock every day or two, so that all the similes concerning shepherds fail here.

Once I stood by the chute of the packing plant and watched Old Billy, an Angora Goat, who decoyed the sheep up the incline, at the head of which they would be slaughtered.

Up and up they went—each of them a poor woolly idiot—terrified by the smell of blood but still following on after the leader, all the while “bleating blindly towards the knife of death.” I might easily moralize about

this if the readers had not already forestalled me, by framing their own deductions.

At any rate, after seeing this, one quite understands why goats could only be tolerated on the left hand, although it is questionable whether the sheep are not too stupid to appreciate the honor of being delegated to the right.

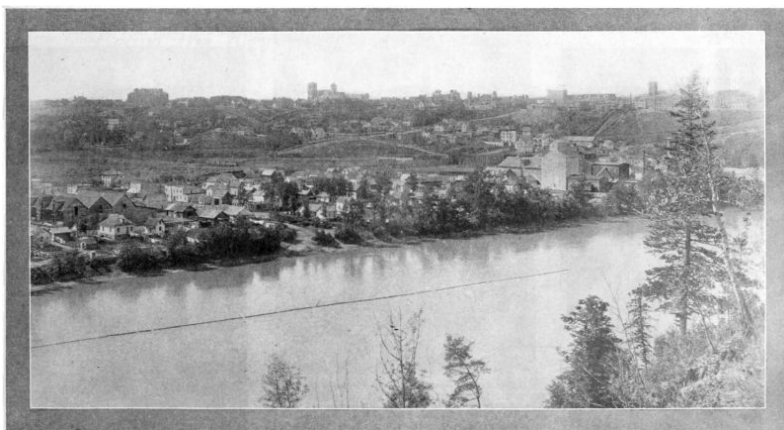
Once there was a Greek philosopher who wrote a good deal about goats, and he said that they breathed through their ears instead of their nostrils. And maybe they do, seeing that wasps sting with their tails, and men think with their digestive organs.

. . . . But they were the sights we were talking about when led to talk of sheep and shepherds.

Having left the city, our train passed through fields of fallow with their fat black soil; fields where the "green feed" has become yellow; past lakelets aflush with teal and mallards; and through white forest of poplars in which any white-skinned nymph might escape from Pan if she had a mind to. Once, we pass a new steading where the house clings to the soil, like a grey barnacle by the sides of which half a hundred sunflowers lift their royal, loyal heads.

A man may feel lonely in a cabin like this, and hate his companion, but it is treachery to the laws of the North to say so.

Sometimes, we come to a firesmitten area where the flames have eaten the life out of the country. A camper or careless smoker, has left a cancerous patch in the grass that smouldered and grew into flame, leaving in its wake these weird tormented trees that seem to hold wild hands to the sky. Someone has computed that twenty-nine trees are destroyed by fire for every one that is cut by the axe, in view of which fact men should not be allowed to carry matches at all, even in the face of their possible starvation.



Photograph showing a section of Edmonton in the Summertime.

Here and there, the threshers are at work converting the stooks into grain, but the farmers, this year, are declaring that, hereafter, they shall have community threshing machines because they are mulcted as high as sixteen cents a bushel by the threshermen.

In spite of the horrible happenings of last year, when thousands of cattle died of starvation, many of the farmers are burning their straw stacks on the fields. There is a name for these men but my knowledge of a certain clause in the criminal code which prohibits the use of insulting and abusive language in public places, prevents my putting it down. You, however, may think of it if you care to.

There are people who claim that there is too much unoccupied land in the western provinces and that only an amount equal to the roads has been cultivated. They say we need immigrants to help lower the taxes; to help pay the railway deficit of sixty million dollars a year; and to produce more food for the world's consumption.

Yet, curiously enough, while we are seeking immigrants, our own people are emigrating to other lands. In 1919, nearly 60,000 Canadians left this Dominion to settle in the United States. In spite of the militant bull-dog in the picture with his feet firmly implanted on the flag, it is not true to say, "What we have we hold." The reason for this must be left to politicians and pamphleteers. There are probably many reasons.

Just now, a colonization association composed of prominent Western gentlemen are raising two million dollars in an effort to people these solitary places. We hope the Canadian Committee of Mental Hygiene, and other Canadian Health Associations will keep a look-out on the type of persons



brought in, for the “melting pot” is not nearly as satisfactory as we had hoped.

Yes! while we need population quite badly, we have some misgivings about this colonizing association, and may as well tell the reason here. It is entirely composed of male persons, whereas the immigrants will be composed of both males and females.

It has ever been the practice when the European family-trees have been shaken and the culls shipped out to Canada, the males responsible for the shaking and shipping, being alarmed by the habits of the culls, have called upon the women of this country to put these through some kind of a process or of a sweet suasion known as civilizing, proselytizing, or Canadianizing. Temperance Unions, Missionary Societies, Women’s Institutes, Daughters of the Empire, United Farm Women, Young Women’s Christian Associations, and a dozen kindred organizations all composed of women, are hard at work—and all the time—trying to classify or clear up just such hopeless hordes from other countries.

It is high time we took a full bite out of these one-sexed immigration societies. To speak guardedly, and with a delicate refinement, there should be the very dickens to pay. There won’t be however, because we women love to make martyrs of ourselves, and no work is too onerous, or even too useless for us to undertake.

Sometimes I think the female of the species is too religious—if such a thing could be—and that this tends to destroy her sense of humor. At any rate, the joke is on the women folk—a tragic one to be sure—and we do not know it.

Having passed the southern part of Alberta, we find ourselves across the border in the Province of Saskatchewan, and still travelling east and south. Here we have left the trees behind us and are fairly out on the wide prairies—a land level as paper, with no place where one could hide except on a roof behind a chimney.

When a man makes a bed on these plains, he likes to make it in a buffalo “wallow.” It seems like a stopping place, he says.

Many folk who have never seen the prairies think of them only as grasslands where wild men ride after wilder cows, with a sprinkling of Mounted Police and red men thrown in the picture to give it color and dash.

This is not entirely wrong, for the prairie is many things, as must be allowed in a land that has a stretch of over a thousand miles.

Besides, this idea of the prairie is not an unworthy one for, in this summary, there has been included the three finest classes of free riders in all the world—that is to say, the Indians, the cowmen, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

And sure they're bonny boys too, and if you are the right sort yourself, you might ride a horse also, and get to like them pretty well.

Others think of it as an untilled, trackless, plain, dreary as eternity, where distance stretches into distance till lost in some void of the infinite sky.

Yes, this is true also. Nowhere on the earth is there such silence and inscrutability as in the large lands of the North, but notwithstanding this, there are hundreds of things to see. Thomas Carlyle knew this when he set it down that “Even a Russian steppe has tumuli and gold ornaments.”

Some there are—soft-nurtured folk and urban bred—who think of the prairies as snow-clad for many months in the year.

Yes, there is snow on the plains—snow of a very cold kind—but how else are we to have hardy men and hardy wheat? Besides, snow is not an evil in itself. The wise man of Uz asked this of his generation, “Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow?”

A great and gentle prelate, one Bompas, who lived for half a century in the wonder-house of the North, answered it for us, and showed how the snow was color, covering, and beauty. Yes, and to him, it was an adventure, for he writes. “A first walk on the Arctic Ocean is not unaccompanied by a strange sensation, a sort of feeling of having caught a lion asleep.”

And having said this, I wish to contradict myself and say the prairie folk may be subject to obsessions also, in that one, with eyes unopposed, may dream and drift on these plains as in no other place in the world, except upon the sea. They have told me this themselves but their story has been so unknit and unjointed I cannot set it down.

On the whole, the people who live on the prairies are happy. Perhaps, it is because they are mostly young and are making homes. For this reason, and in the face of all opposition, we will contend till our pens wear out, that the happiest existence in the whole world is to live out-of-door with the person you love.

One of my companions who is a writer has also been thinking on this splendid land of Saskatchewan and ventures the opinion that, hereabout, all the cups are full. It was only natural that she should be contradicted by the second writer in my party who says. "Except the tippler's cup."

It is very hard in the North-West Provinces for people to forget that liquor is under a ban. It is not that they suffer to any extent from the drinking of water, but merely because intoxicants are prohibited.

Lame Dog, an old Cree I have known these many years, when he came to town recently, brought me a cup made from birch-bark, and warned me not to dip it in the sloughs by any trail lest I be overcome by the death-sickness. When white people drink from sloughs they become whiter and cannot eat for their stomach-pot turns upside down. "Pah!" says the Cree, "if it were not for those mad-hearted police who scrape their necks smooth every day, all people would have brandy instead of water. It is a bad goodness for men not to drink brandy."

And that I might the better agree with him. Lame Dog presented me also with a foxtail "feather" that was white at the tip. It is his hidden desire that Manitou, the high-hearted one who sees all things, will let his eye to rest upon me steadily and preserve me from the evil ghosts of dead men.

**W**innipeg, the Capital of Manitoba is the centre of the continent of North America—that is to say there is as much land north of Winnipeg as there is to the south of it. In view of this, the misguided person on the Gulf of Mexico who sneers at Winnipeg as being situated at the top of the earth, had therefore, better apply a ruler to the map and see what a colossal mistake he is making. It ought then to become evident to him that, in time to come, this northern country, greater in area than the United States with our Eastern provinces thrown in, will in time, come to be the heart of Canada and that Edmonton on the Saskatchewan still north eight hundred miles, may be its great metropolis. We say this because no city in Canada has such enormous resources at its door unless it be Vancouver.

No! No! we are not decrying the Eastern cities; we are asking you to put the ruler to the map of America—not Canada alone, mind you—and open your minds to the idea.

Indeed, we merely draw attention to the fact that statesmen and financiers, having this in mind, may by the scale of a hemisphere, shape their designs. When so "Great truly is the Actual" one hesitates to speak of

visions or foresight but, nevertheless, it is true that few of us have properly spied out this Promised Land of Canada, or measured aright its fruit, its milk and its honey.

At Winnipeg, we leave “the flyer” of the Canadian National Railway which has carried us from Edmonton in twenty-seven hours, the shortest scheduled time that has yet been given to the travelling public. What heretofore we have called “the illimitable prairie” seems limited after all.

In our city when it was Fort Edmonton, there were three sisters who used to travel this trail by ox-cart, and on down to St. Paul in the state of Minnesota in order that they might catch the train for Hamilton, Ontario, where they attended boarding-school. If they kept steadily to the trail, they could catch the train in three months’ time.

In answer to your question, I reply that the three sisters are with us yet, and still attending the gayest of our festivities. Each of them, at the age of sixteen, married a Factor of the Hudson’s Bay Company, and played notable parts in the life of the country. One married Factor Woods who had charge of the Post at Athabasca Landing; the second wedded Factor Young of Grouard on the Lesser Slave Lake, and the third, Factor Hardisty of Edmonton.

Mrs. Woods had no family; Mrs. Young had several sons who fought in the late European war, and a daughter who is married to Dr. Roy, the Canadian Commissioner in France. Mrs. Hardisty also sent two sons to the war. The lofty peak in the Yellow Head Pass known as Mount Hardisty, was so named in honor of her husband, who, by-the-way, was a brother-in-law of the late Lord Strathcona.

One might linger and talk about these old families of the North, who ought to be much better known in Canada, but it is time we caught our train which pulls out short on the twelve-hundred-mile stretch to Toronto, which is down by the Sea of Ontario.

THE END

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

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Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *Out of the North* by Emily Murphy (as Janey Canuck)]