

GEOGRAPHY
AND HOW IT IS
WRITTEN

Nellie L. McClung

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Geography and How It Is Written
By NELLIE McCLUNG



Copper Cliff Hospital.

IT has always been an interesting side light on humanity, that people think their own country the best in the world, even if their country is hot, or cold, or dry, or flooded, or flat as a bake-board, or perpendicular as a spite-fence. It does not matter. There is no country so bad that it cannot find some one who likes it, and will conscientiously lie for it.

On the other hand, it is quite likely that many a country has been harshly judged by hasty critics, and that the best judges are the people who belong to the country, and not the casual visitors who take a hasty glance, and then presume to judge and criticize. Geographies appear to have been written by visitors, and grouchy, mosquito-bitten ones at that. There is an old English geography, whose Canadian notes were written, I know, by a fussy old chap who wore a chest protector and a wig: It is perfectly easy to read between the lines. He could not get his tea—or a bath. He only had one towel in his room—and it was a slippery-elm one. The water pitcher had a crust of ice on it—the window was frosted over! So he warmed his fingers over the lamp, and wrote:

“North of the forty-ninth parallel, hardy men trade in furs!”

The next morning he added to his notes:

“Haymakers are often frozen in their tents!”

Of course you see the significance of that, don't you?

There were not enough clothes on his bed! I've slept in country hotels, too. I know that flowered yellow and red deception which lies folded V-shaped on the foot of the bed, and which at first sight seems to promise warmth and comfort. It is fallaciously called a “Comforter,” and when referred to by the management, it is after this wise: “You will find a comforter at the foot of your bed—if you should need it!”

They are quite right about you—finding it. The color helps you in that, and they are right in their supposition that you may need it. You do. But the remainder of the sentence is misleading. It is not a Comforter!

It may have been something of that nature in its youth, when the wadding stayed in place. But now it has run down to the corners, and the centre is a barren waste. Some frost-bitten travellers have declared there is no wadding in these comforters, but that is a slander—there is! Holding it up to the light, when the sunshine is strong, will reveal it.

“Haymakers are often frozen in their tents,” wrote the professor, when the sun got high enough to pour into his room, and warm his stiff fingers.

AND now behold, the scene has changed. It is summer, a rare day in June. The mists, blue and filmy, are rising from the river, and a gay chorus of frogs comes on the listless breeze. The Professor is in town again, (not the same one who visited us last winter—he got his—and went “home.” Now he is lecturing on “Canada, Land of Snow and Sunshine”). The Professor, (the new one), is being shown around by the Board of Trade, after a luncheon given by the Local Council. The Professor has an automobile veil of green mosquito-netting, hanging from his hat. The word “automobile” is not yet known. It has not yet emerged from the gray mists of futurity. But the mosquito is present with us in large numbers.

The Board of Trade members do not notice them, being old pelters, whom mosquitoes have long since marked “exempt.” Not so the Professor. For all he is so thin, cadaverous and lean, the mosquitoes are not deceived. They know him; he is their lawful meat, by every international law, and they follow him closely, more closely than the members of the Board of Trade followed his speech.

At night, when he is shown to his room in the Grand Union Hotel, he is relieved to find that he is free from the mosquitoes. There is not one to be seen, and he concludes that they go down with the sun, though if he listened closely, he would hear the baffled breathing of a mighty host at his windows, daring him to come out.

While he applies mosquito-bane to his wounded face, he thinks about his notes, which have not been written for the day. Being a master of deductive reasoning, he reaches this interesting conclusion, which appeared subsequently in “Canadian Notes,” in an English geography still obtainable. “Haymaking in Canada is largely done at night—on account of the flies!”

WE do not like to have our country “written up” by casual visitors. They are too harsh in their judgments. The real geographers are the old settlers, who see their surroundings in the rosy hues of optimism.

Once I passed—on a train—through a windswept, treeless, level prairie, as monotonous, as dusty, and uninviting a landscape as I have seen. The soil must have been good, for the farm-houses were comfortable and well-kept. The first big barn bore the name “Fairydell Farm,” the second one was “Heatherbrae!”

I could not lift a profane finger to write about a place like this, when I knew what the people themselves thought of it, Fairydell and Heatherbrae!

So be it!

The optimism of the regular inhabitant is a thing to marvel at. They tell me there are travelling men in the West, who have been eating at country hotels for years, and who still say, smilingly:

“Please pass the cream!”

It is not that our own people need to be told what a great country we have right here at home, that any of us take our pen in hand. We know. We are not led away by appearances. But Canada is so large, it is hard to see it all, or get a report from the people who are on the spot, and misapprehensions have arisen!

There are certain parts of Canada to which justice has never been done, and which are underestimated yet, even by our own people. Take the North Shore Country, in New Ontario. Now to pass through it, on the train, the sheer rocks and rugged hills, where the pine trees have split the rocks to get a foothold, would lead the unthinking to believe that it was fit only for jack-pines and jack-rabbits, and to even believe the story told by a disgruntled settler who gave as his reason for quitting his farm, that the soil was so poor he noticed the jack-rabbit who ran across it, carried a lunch in his pocket!

The North Shore Country, as seen from the train, is not encouraging, and it would appear to be fairly safe from the poisoned tongue of calumny and slander. But that merely shows again the folly of Pullman car travellers, who whisk by at forty miles an hour, and then write their impressions. They do not know what beautiful places, what sun-lit slopes and green swards lie beyond.

If I had any faith in geographies, it would have been broken again this summer. This time it is Algoma! The name suggests barren wastes, rich in mines but devoid of verdure, with smelters belching out poisonous fumes which eat the grass and leaves, like the locust of old, and parch the throats of the unhappy people who are forced by an unkind destiny, to spend their miserable days in the mad race for wealth—none of which they received, but to hand it to some soulless company.

I had some such impression as this, gathered from things I had read, and I always thought of “Copper Cliff” as the very, centre of industrial slavery.

I GOT my first surprise in Sudbury, which is five miles from Copper Cliff. Here I saw hedges of pink, white and rich wine-colored lilacs, and pink honeysuckle growing over the fences. I saw beds of purple and yellow

pansies, as large and profuse as ever bloomed in the Niagara peninsula; comfortable homes, clean sidewalks, a beautiful lake a mile out of the town, edged with cottages; swimming beach, crowded with happy children, and the people!—I must say a word about the people.

Sometimes the Eastern people object to the way we who live West of the Great Lakes, are accustomed to use the word “western.” We speak of a “western” welcome, when we mean “warm and hearty”; we tell of “western” progressiveness, and “western” initiative. I do not blame Eastern people for resenting the inference—I know it is not in good taste—but I am going to use it now to describe the Sudbury people, and say that they belong to us, the West in everything but geographical position. One woman said to me: “We have to be alive here. We are a small city—away by ourselves—we miss the advantages of a large city, and we simply have to keep the forces of progress in motion. We have to be sociable and neighborly, and give our young people a good time or the big cities will lure them away!”

Sudbury is a city of homes, gardens and flowers. There are no slums and no poor. Every one seems prosperous, and what is more remarkable, contented. Many of the Sudbury people work at Copper Cliff, the great nickel and silver mine, which is connected by an Electric Railway, also by a splendid motor road. Eighty per cent. of all the nickel of the world, is found in Canada, and the mines in Algoma are so rich and so extensive, that what the miners can see ahead of them will last for forty years. The ore is sent to Port Colborne now to be refined, and part of it to Jersey City.

COPPER CLIFF is a company-owned town, but the company’s hand is upon the town for good and not for evil. The company owns the houses, and rents them to the employees for five to twelve dollars a month, including taxes. The houses are painted and are kept in excellent repair. They seem to have from five to seven rooms, and would rent at from fifteen to twenty-five dollars in the city.

The company are possessed with a desire to make their people comfortable. There is a school, which is attended by six hundred and thirty children, and has sixteen teachers. The noon-hour struck while I was there, and I saw the children pouring out of the large halls. I looked in vain for the pallid faces and the lack-lustre eyes. They were not there. So far as I could tell from the brief survey I made as they filed past me, the children were rosy, healthy, well-fed and well-dressed.

I saw the Children's Clubhouse in the distance, where a Scout-master looks after the boys, and a girl worker devotes her time to the girls. On the hill is the Copper Cliff Club, which is naturally an object of pride to all the people. It is a fine frame building, fitted with all the luxuries of the most fashionable club. In the basement there is a large swimming pool, where for five cents, a towel can be hired and a swim indulged in. There is a bowling alley, where a game of bowling can be enjoyed when the work of the day is over.

"But have the men any time for this?" I asked. "Aren't they too tired when their day's work is done?"

"We work three shifts of men," the wife of one of the managers explained. "The men have eight hours for rest, eight hours for play and eight hours for work. The bowling alley and swimming pool are in constant use. We reserve two nights a week for the women, and they use it as much as the men."

Upstairs, there is a handsome assembly room, with a huge fireplace, whose mantel is decorated with bowling and baseball trophies won by the different clubs. The baseball and cricket grounds I could see from the window.

The assembly room seats five hundred people, and here all their public meetings, dances, and parties are held. Every speaker or singer that comes to Sudbury, is brought out to Copper Cliff. The ladies' dressing-room is very dainty in pink and gray, with wicker furniture, and every comfort. It is the room I most distinctly remember. It is so unique in its beauty, and the painstaking detail with which its appointments are arranged, that I just knew it had been furnished by a woman, and one who knew her business! And so it was!

The hospital, where the miners and their families are cared for, for the monthly fee of one dollar, has the best operating room in Canada, I am told, outside of the Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto. There were only three patients in it when I was there, but the full staff of nurses and doctors were on duty. The head nurse told me they have the eight hour day, like the men. There are between three and four thousand employees, but the fee of one dollar a month a family does not begin to cover the cost of maintenance. However, the company are quite able and willing to pay the deficit.

"What about wages?" I asked. "Are the men satisfied? Have you had industrial troubles?"

“Not for nine years,” said the manager’s wife. “We believe in co-operation and profit-sharing. Each man who works for us, gets shares in the Company, and the shares pay a big dividend. So the men do not strike. They are interested. They are one with us in our desire to see the company succeed. Agitators come among us, but they have nothing to work on—our men are contented and happy, well-fed, and not over-worked. So the agitators go away in despair.”

THERE is a fly in every ointment; a striped rodent at every garden party. Even Copper Cliff, with its fine club-house, swimming tank, baseball ground, bowling alley, free hospital, fine school, low rent, and nine churches, has something which mars the joy of life!

It is Sulphur—Fumes!

The manager’s wife told me all about it, and the faint, acrid odor in the air, which assailed the back of the throat, gave point to her remarks. The ore from which nickel and copper are taken, is a pyrrhotite, containing twenty-five per cent. sulphur. Naturally the sulphur fumes are liberated, and when the air is heavy and damp, and the wind in the wrong direction, they drift over the little town.

The drooping lilac tree that I saw, whose outer leaves were yellow and burnt, had not been assailed by grub or worm or frost.

It was “sulphured.” “She must have forgotten to cover it when the wind blew this way,” said the lady who pointed it out to me.

The people of Copper Cliff, notwithstanding the fumes, are able, with great care, to raise flowers, and I do not think the Victoria people, with their wonderful climbing roses, or Winnipeg with their twelve foot hedges of sweet peas, get any more delight from their free bloomers, than the Copper Cliff people get from their carefully nurtured blossoms. To raise a flower, in any country is a matter of pride, but in Copper Cliff it is an achievement!

The manager’s wife took me to see her lilac bush, which had “fifty-three blossoms” on it. She knew them all by name. So would any of us if we had to run and cover the bush when the wind changed. I am here to testify that the bush was healthy and luxuriant in leaf and blossom.

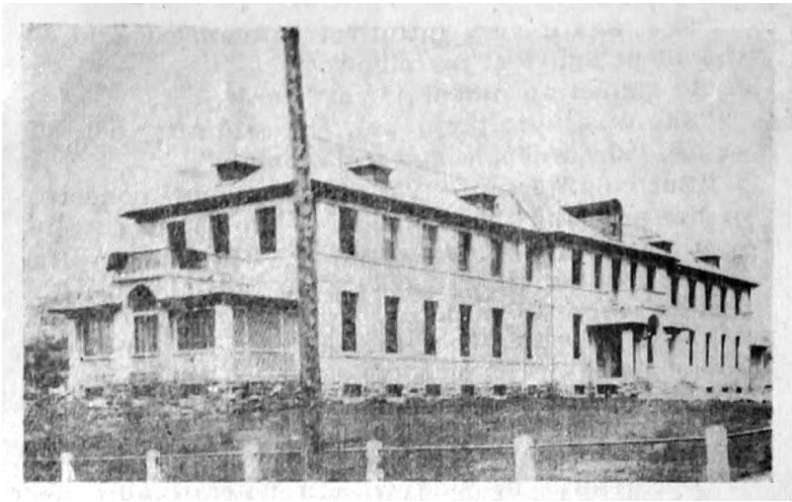
The sulphur fumes are not nearly so bad since the roast-ovens were removed to a distance of twenty miles. But they still blow where they list, on occasions striking the town and leaving the grass sere and brown. They

tarnish the silver, put holes in rubber goods, and strangers find them quite distressing.

The company admit that there are fumes! And they admit that they are destructive! I hardly expected that. Unlike the Vancouver people with their rain, or Winnipeg with its cold, they cheerfully own up to the fumes.

If you are a farmer, living near Copper Cliff, and your crop is attacked by the fumes, all you have to do is to invite the company's inspector to come down and view the ruins. He estimates what the crop was worth, and the company signs the cheque. On a bad year, when the rain has been delayed, or there has been too much, it is said the farmers in the Copper Cliff community turn longing eyes toward the roast-oven and wonder why the fumes have failed them. Sometimes rust comes on the crop, or it is attacked by an insect and for this, Nature gives no rebate! So no wonder the thrifty farmer prays for a good crop—or fumes!

COPPER CLIFF, although it is a bare spot, so far as herbage is concerned, is a hopeful indication of the good days to come, when employers and employees will recognize that they are not enemies but partners. It is also encouraging to see that the care, ingenuity and humane instincts of a company can overcome natural disadvantages and make life comfortable and happy for their people, and that it all pays in cold dollars and cents. While other companies find themselves unable to fill their contracts, on account of their men being on strike, the mines at Copper Cliff go gaily on, every one working, and every one happy. They prevent strikes before they take place, and every one is the gainer. It all bears out the contention that health and happiness are cheap at any price!



Copper Cliff School.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *Geography and How It Is Written* by Nellie L. McClung]