

TELLS OF HIS WESTERN HOME

Rev. Babcock Gives Another Interesting Description of North Dakota Life.

MUCH WORK AND HARDSHIPS

The following extract from a letter written by Rev. Benj. Babcock, formerly pastor of the M. E. Church in this city, to Editor A. J. Benjamin, of the Wisconsin Christian Advocate, was published in the September number of that paper, and as a letter written by him last February. to THE TIMES was received with much favor, we feel assured that further news from the same source will be equally interesting to our readers:

DEAR BROTHER BENJAMIN:

As you know, we came here to accomplish the double purpose of serving the Lord and proving up on a claim; the latter by way of assuring ourselves that old age would not find us entirely dependant. I had expected to be able to do both at once and so took a charge at Bowbells, twenty-five miles from our homestead on the same railroad as our own station, Ambrose. But the road to prosperity was not to be so easy. To begin with, as often happens when the railroad is completed, the town was located three miles east of the place where the people guessed that it would be and started a town, so the whole town moved, leaving us thirteen miles in the country. Then instead of a through train there was an all day effort to make 60 miles on an accommodation (?) train, and this left us ten miles from Bowbells to wait for another train at midnight, so it would take three or four days out of every week to go and come; and then to cap the climax, the winter was so severe that for weeks no train came thro' on the Flaxton branch of the Soo, so we camped in Bowbells all winter, and got onto the claim only last May. This means that we must stay fourteen months instead of eight, as if one does not establish his residence on the land during the first six months he does not get the benefit of that period as "constructive residence." When finally we saw the snowbanks melting we packed up a few of our things, stored away the rest and came out to our prairie home, a shack 14x16 feet, with tar roof. Concerning claim life it can be summoned up about this way: You pay dearly for your quarter section of land before you have your patent. Many of my experiences while hauling out our carload of stuff from the town are humorous enough now that they are past, but at the time they did not excite me to much mirth. With a four horse team I have been stuck in an alkali slough and had the "leads" break loose, so that the only thing to do was

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to pull off my footgear, roll up my trousers and wade into the ice covered water to hitch them on again. One night in the same slough I spent between two and three hours trying to get my load out. Finally, after carrying out on my back nearly the entire cargo of my prairie schooner, we got the rest to shore. I have been lost on the prairie, missing the trail by only a few rods. Have slept in hay stacks, vacant shacks and barns. Have worked eighteen hours per day many times, tired my horse out so that we had to stop for the night. Have had the wind strip all the tar paper from the roof so that the rain would pour down and soak our beds, and in fact have undergone almost everything. The same night while I was trying to get thro' the slough of despond the wind carried off our tar paper. It was Saturday night and at midnight just as I had eaten my supper and turned in, it began to rain. We put up a waterproof robe for a canopy to our bed and slept for a spell, but soon the water found its way down to us. It was a scramble to find a dry spot and finally at four o'clock Sunday morning, with no sign of abating floods, I crawled out on the roof and laid a new coat of paper so the rest could sleep. It was a clear case of extricating something from the well. The winds, which seldom rest or seldom stay in the same quarter for two successive days, are nerve wrecking if one has any fear of storms at all. The shacks will shake and tremble, the roof teeter, dishes rattle and destruction seem imminent, but few accidents do occur.

We live on the main trail from Ambrose, the nearest railway station from which settlers can reach the newly opened lands in northeastern Montana and southern Canada, and every day sees heavily loaded teams hauling across with their loads of immigrant goods. The ox team is much in evidence and the patient animals have made the west greatly their debtors. The mule plays his part too, and horses with heads hanging low and feet wearily dragging, tell the story of the hardship to man and beast in the seeking out of a new home. Many of these go out as far as seventy miles from the railroad. These frontiersmen of today may not endure as great hardships as did our forefathers in Wisconsin but these prairie shacks know many a secret of great suffering and privation. During the winter when the blizzard howls and seeks out the crevices in the well-sodded shack, there are no logs to roll to a fireplace and no nearby trees to replenish the

wood pile, but we burn lignite coal, wondering how soon we can get more from the mines forty miles away. This coal is a blessing to the settlers, as it is cheap and very plentiful in many places, but it burns rapidly. Last winter we burned a ton every ten days in two stoves, but here it was as high as \$15 per ton, \$2 for coal and the rest for hauling. Country stores are quite plentiful, so actual want of food is not so prevalent as might be imagined, but the money is not so plentiful as most of the people are poor and the country being so new affords no chances of employment. Money loans regularly at 12% and then the banks generally demand a bonus of from 10 to 25%, which, though illegal, is yet forced from the poor settlers who must give a preliminary mortgage on their claims, another illegal proceeding. Young men keeping "bachelors' hall" and young women braving the wilds are the most common of the citizens of this land and married men with families are quite scarce. This means, of course, that there are few here who actually intend to make a permanent home, but we will prove up and "go back home again." We have plenty of neighbors here but they are thinning out some now. We have several permanent families however. I have found a family here which was formerly on my charge at Florence, Wis., and regular attendants at the services. Another Lawrence schoolmate is not far from here on a claim, Frank Rau, of Seymour.

Yours truly,

B. BABCOCK.

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The Times

ISSUED ONCE A WEEK

IS IT SO?

Former Hartford Preacher, now Out
Writes for Information.

Verily, Dak., Jan. 31, 1910.

Editor: Having read in the papers of the winter with you, the raging blizzards, the deaths from freezing, the coal famine, and scarcity of food and flour, and having many friends there, I am writing you for the real honest truth of the matter, knowing that it would be impossible for you to tell it otherwise than it is. Is it really true that the snow was so deep that your esteemed assistant could not get out to church and that Ur Amidon had to tunnel across the street or miss the services; that Dr. Rogers could not get down town before breakfast and that he and Col. Brink were actually unable to get together for forty-eight hours, and that the bunch of yarn spinners failed to congregate for two consecutive evenings at their wonted haunt, the jewelry store, while J. C. Denison was compelled to forego the lifelong habit of going down to work? Was it indeed so cold that one of Nathan Mercer's stories got frozen in mid-air, while Fred Durkee and Frank Buchanan could not get their fingers warm enough to play checkers; and is it a fact that Ma Wiley couldn't bake her apples? Did Al Schroeder have to build a fire under his cows to thaw them out before he could milk them, and did the Universalist minister have to preach a sermon on hell to keep his congregation from freezing to death? Is it true that the wind blew so hard that it took Wallie Melcher's whiskers off and made Frank Day drop a big wad; and did it blow the respective and respectable editors of The Times and Press into each other's arms so naturally that they had to apply to the divorce court for a separation?

Is it so that the howling of the blizzard sent Fred Rhodes out scantily clad, thinking he was hot on the trail of a Dakota coyote, while Dr. Benson actually went down town on a run

thinking it the dying wail of some neglected subject for humane work? Did the frosty walks crack so loudly that C. W. Sayles imagined he saw the smoke-obtained and powder-burned face of a preacher and begin to hunt for an ambulance and stretcher? Is it so that the price of coal got so high that they had to call out the hook and ladder company every time a citizen wanted any?

All of the above unconfirmed rumors naturally cause us out here in this mild climate and land of abundance of fuel for the asking to feel very solicitous for your safety. In conclusion I might add that to-day walking along Main St. I saw merchants lower their awnings to protect their stores from the beating rays of the sun, that men sat about in their shirt sleeves and fanned themselves with their overshoes, which have been useless for anything else here. Last night the wind began to blow from the east and we were fearful for the results as coming from the frozen regions to the east of us as it might damage our banana crop, but to-day a "chinook" came out, seized the east wind by the collar and the east end of its pantaloons and hurled it back to the land from which it came.

Kindly let us know the real conditions there and if relief work is needed we shall hasten to do our part. Until then, I am,

Yours from the land of sunshine,
Benj. Babcock.

Yea, verily, Rev. Brother, all this and more, for the worst is yet to come that you have not heard. One of our Methodist sisters had intended to write but her tongue has been so dry all winter from the absence of ozone in the house that she couldn't lick a stamp or her young hopeful of a tender age, and Dr. Wright stayed at home one whole day when he saw his shadow froze in the walk going to his barn. Geo. Harter had an immense snow bank in the rear of his house, but being an expert in over coming difficulties erected a derrick by which he drew himself over the bank rather than go to the trouble of shoveling it away. The drivers of testing machines, of the Kissel Motor Car Co. have had much enjoyment lately in racing on the mill pond, but the snow is so deep that only the head of the drivers can be seen while the snow flies in silvery clouds, but it serves as a great advertisement for the company as their notors are the only ones in existence that are able to bear such a strain.

Hartford is a wonderful place this winter, and thrilling narratives could be told of the doings here did space permit, but as it is you had better make a trip down and see for yourself.