

WE AND OUR NEIGHBORS

Mrs. Peattie's book of light stories, the "Mountain Woman," is too interesting to lay down until it is finished. The story of "The Three Johns" is as realistic as the most modern art student, who puts down his brush when the sun goes under a cloud, can produce. The blizzard, the stampede, the hot wind which has all the characteristics of the simoom of the desert, Mrs. Peattie reproduces with horrible exactness. The despair, the loneliness, the toll of the prairie dweller of western Nebraska are pictured with a sympathetic hand. There is not much of the glorified mosaic of the spring time, nor the beauty of the slanting rays of morning and evening, nor much of the rustle-song of the corn. The prairies are never-ending and make the farmers and their wives crazy. The sun is pictured at his worst and highest and in his most devilish act of burning up the corn. From first to last the book is true so far as the climate and the hardship it causes are concerned. The conclusions are not exactly correct, because a stranger would not know that the Nebraska climate is one of the most healthful and stimulating weathers on the globe. Cool, fragrant, musical, summer nights, a fall that lasts from October into January of next year more than overbalance the truth she has told about an unusual spring and midsummer. To be sure, the agony and suspense of drought is not exaggerated, the infernal vindictiveness of a blizzard is underexpressed and the heroism of the men and women who are fighting storm and drought with the broken weapons of poverty is only faithfully recorded. The impression would not be so strong if the author had decorated and draped her stories in flowers and showers. As one of those who live where plumbing, artesian wells and arboriculture have made the climate fatal only to the old and the young, I am grateful to Mrs. Peattie for reminding me of these, my brethren, who toil without reward and give up the struggle without recognition. There are sentences that recall "The Ancient Mariner": "The heat of the summer was terrible. The sun came up in that blue sky like a curse, and hung there till night came to comfort the blistering earth."

The "Jim Lancy's Waterloo" story closes with the sentence: "I've got just enough to buy a ticket with. There's a kind of satisfaction in giving the last cent I have to the railroads." The narrative has shown that Jim Lancy's crop was destroyed by drought. But as the weather is unresponsive to curses or compliments and never asks any favors of man he lays his poverty to the door of the railroads. Even a populist can see that it is not the policy of the railroads to depopulate the farms. So long as all the farmers pay the same rates they get just as much profit from their grain, within certain limits, as though the rates were smaller. For the market price, among other things, includes the cost of transportation. If it cost less to send it, it would sell for less. Jim Lancy's irony is as excusable as a drowning man's curses against water.

Mrs. Peattie has the spirit of a knight errant. Women crazed by injustice and the fear of starvation, frightened children, sun-defeated farmers who cry out against what seems the unrighteous cause of their trouble as the sick sometimes curse God, find in Mrs. Peattie a wrathful champion. I think she will yet make that small, whining man who goes about saying he did not kill Mrs. Notson and her children appreciate if he cannot emulate the power of truth.

The last story is called "A Lady of Yesterday." Why "of yesterday?" Her dainty ways and Christian charity were hers when she died as much as when she was she was first lady-in-waiting.

"The Bella," and Rosberry Shrub" that play here on Saturday night are

worthy of a good audience. Omaha has an idea that Lincoln is jealous of her size and opulence and culture. This is not so. Only we do not like to be bullied because we are puny, and gauche. Let Omaha be kind to us once and we will fag for her like a younger brother. Mr. Short has established a flourishing dramatic school in our big sister's yard, which is beginning to show excellent results. At a recent exhibition in the Creighton theatre the house was crammed. And the critics were either musled or very much pleased. It must have been the latter, for experience teaches that there are very few musles that fit a critic's mug.

Every one who went to the Omaha minstrel show will remember the stump speech delivered in Mary Ellen Lease style by Mrs. Matheson. She and Mrs. Wheeler, a semi-professional will appear in "Rosberry Shrub," or the New England Spinster's involuntary orgy, which will be put on as a curtain raiser.

The fine houses in Omaha are scattered about even more than in Lincoln. On the bluffs that command the river are Kountz Place, Bishop Clarkson's residence and other piles of brick and stone with a view attached. The Kountz house is imposing by its size and repose. The lawn slopes from the street perhaps three or four hundred feet to a terrace in front of the house. It is the gently rising lawn and the quiet masses of the house that make the place impressive. From the windows in the rear there must be a noble view of the river. A greater number of the more costly houses are in the western part of the city. Richardson is the architect of Mr. Yates' house built of gray stone, with towers, balconies, bay windows, a porte cochere and everything that the XIX century mind considers magnificent. Nearly all the large houses have spreading lawns with terraces. The trees have been planted to conceal one part from another, so that the guest wandering about has a new view at each progress. The subject of views has not been given the attention it deserves in Lincoln. There is no remedy for melancholy or narrow-mindedness like a view. Just to watch the changes of the Missouri river, today a stretch of sand with here and there a little pool of water, tomorrow a muddy, rushing stream, and the next day a river a mile wide and still rising, is enough to keep the mind out of a rut. Of course here in Lincoln we are thankful for a dancing room in the third story, let alone a view which we should have to share with beggars anyway, and besides Omaha has so much more room. The pressure on the real estate agents of Lincoln by the hordes from the east who have to take what they can get, view or no view, becomes more of a problem every day. Seriously a view will contribute more to the proper raising of children than a rod. A family man owes a view to the next generation more than he does a bay window or a porte-cochere. When the childish heart is filled with bitterness and the boy goes to the window to hate his parents, miles of upland and lowland in shadow and sun will convey their message and keep him from spoiling in spite of himself and his parents. What of courage, and faith the Swiss have more than their neighbors is due to their habitation of the mountains. We cannot have much mountain scenery in Lincoln, but the resident who can choose his location will build his house on a hill where, when night comes he can see the clouds pile up in purple and carmine masses that do not remind him of the district court, the bank, the university or even of Shakspeare. Whistler discusses the peculiar advantages of a picture with a light in the background, a suggestion of a picture or light beyond. Everything that we do not see is better than that we do see.

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