

AMONG THE DOUKHOBORS.

Interesting Visit to the Colony at "Good Spirit Lake."

AN IRATE SETTLER.

His Views of the New Settlers Disapproved.

A DOUKHOBOR FUNERAL.

The Immigrants Regarded as Excellent Neighbors by a Typical Rancher and His Wife.

(Special Correspondence of The Globe.)
Yorkton, Assa., Sept. 7.—We were bound for the Doukhobor colony at "Good Spirit Lake," according to the map, or "Devil's Lake," as the inhabitants call it. The Indians are, I fancy, responsible for the latter appellation, as, like the Chinese, all "spirits" are to them "devils."

The morning was cold and a bitter wind blew in our faces. The drive was, however, interesting, and so was the young Dutch gentleman who had kindly consented to act as our "whip." It was like a page from the books of Maarten Maartens to listen to the description of life at The Hague, where his father was something "in waiting" to the Prince of Weitz, whose son was reported to be the aspirant for the hand of the young Queen of Holland.

We drove for hours through a grass country, passing many men cutting hay round the margin of the immense sloughs. Now and then we missed the trail owing to the wind bent grass obliterating all marks of the wheels that had passed through before.

I was greatly interested in this Doukhobor settlement, as before leaving Ontario I had read an irate letter from a settler in this district, complaining that at least a hundred settlers were obliged to leave on account of the incoming "serfs." So I was most anxious to see for myself the condition of affairs that was so vehemently set forth in that letter.

It was nearly midday when we reached the shores of the Good Spirit Lake, a tiny inland sea, to-day lashed by the wind into a mass of thick, wool-like foam. The trail led along the heavy sand of the shore at the head of the lake, and for miles there was hardly a house to be seen; nothing but low bluffs and the stretches of sand covered with flying flecks of this curd-like foam. I can't help fancying that the water must be impregnated with some mineral substance that would account for the peculiar character of the foam that was as tough as the whipped white of egg.

The lake is looked upon as the future summer resort of that thriving little cosmopolis, Yorkton, and fairly good fishing and shooting are to be found in the vicinity.

Arrival at a Ranch.

After an hour's drive along the lake shore we came upon the ranch where we proposed to "put up" for lunch. In spite of our arrival being most inopportune, we had a kindly welcome from the mother of the young rancher, whom we found busy with his haying.

Our host and hostess were keenly alive to the drawback of having such a large number of settlers coming into their part of the country. They had been in the country for twelve years, and were, in truth, squatters, not having "taken out their papers," as people in that part of the world call it. It did seem rather hard that they should have to move further north after so many years spent on their ranch, but our hostess with perfect candor admitted that the nationality of the incoming people had nothing to do with the question. A rancher must give way before close settlement, and she

had nothing but kindly words for the Doukhobor people, to whom she had been most good, trying to give them what help she could, and finding them ready to do all in their power to return her neighborly attention.

In a former letter I have alluded to the difficulty that the different Administrations have had with the ranching community in the west, and the natural antipathy that those whose cattle range on free land have towards the incoming settlers who propose to take up mixed farming and consequently fence in the land on which they have taken up homesteads.

The story my hostess had to tell of her own experience was most interesting. She was the widow of a sea-captain, and had travelled round the world on her husband's ship. After his death she had brought her young family out to Canada and invested her capital in cattle. The result was apparently satisfactory, and as she belonged to that splendid type of pioneer woman who has in reality made our country what it is, she was able to appreciate the traits which the Doukhobor women possessed in common with all home-loving women.

The Irate Settler.

I was anxious to find out if the letter which I had read with much interest in a Toronto paper had been authorized, as it were, by the settlers of the district, but I found that the writer was not a persona grata with my hostess, and I learned that the exaggerated terms in which the letter had been couched had disgusted the educated settlers in the district. On inquiry I found that there were only about twenty families in the whole district, and the nationality of the incoming people had nothing to do with their seeking fresh pastures.

Later on I met the author of the letter in the midst of a most wonderful hay meadow, and I felt quite sympathetic with his desire to retain for his own use as much as possible of this beautiful park-like country. I had been warned that the subject of the Doukhobors would rouse him to a degree not to be desired, but I did not find his conversation as violent as the epistle signed with his name. It was simply a difference of opinion regarding the immigration policy of our country.

I found Mr. —'s dislike to all foreigners an inherited trait, handed down from the age when England was an insular power, and not the Imperial realm of to-day that holds within its grasp all nationalities and creeds. It does one's heart good, however, to see the Union Jack waved with mighty vehemence just so long as the violence does not render the cross which forms its base an unmeaning smudge of color, rather than a significant emblem. It is a mistake to suppose that the Doukhobors are either ignorant "serfs" or of low moral standard. The constant war between flesh and spirit, which has earned them the name of "spirit wrestlers," has not been earned without a struggle, and that struggle has left its imprint on their faces and sharpened their intelligence to an extraordinary degree. Their working out of life's deep problems would astonish many a man who has followed out the same line of thought with the aid of many books.

The Doukhobor Faith.

The practice of such a religion has never attracted many followers, and the people are content to exhort, and constantly urge to higher forms of practice among themselves without trying to preach their gospel to the world at large. The religion is in itself obscure, but its practice is most simple. In the "empire of the Tsars" Leroy-Beaulieu sums up the essence of their religion in a few simple words. "The prophet Eobbrokhin," he remarks, "one of their spiritual leaders in the eighteenth century, is said to have explicitly taught that God does not exist by Himself, but is inseparable from man. It is for the righteous, in a way, to give Him life." A curious doctrine, but one which seems to be the mainspring of their innate dignity and wondrous patience, one that conduces to sobriety and all the virtues that make these people a desirable element in any community.

Their faith in regard to a future state reminds the writer of the famous "mot" of one of the most brilliant women in France, who, when questioned as to her belief in a future state of bliss, replied: "Ah, who can say? To insure certainty, I make my Paradise here below." The reverence that these people pay to the rites belonging to burial has resemblance to those observed by the primitive Christians. We happened to reach our stopping place for the night just as our hostess had returned from a Doukhobor funeral at a village seven miles further on. The story she had to tell us was intensely sad. Ten days before several of the women had come to her ranch bringing with them one of their older women, who was suffering terribly from a felon on her hand. Mrs. B., our hostess, knew little about medical science, for, as she said, "the one thing about the prairies is that there is seldom sickness to be heard of, and doctors do not thrive." However, she did what she could, and poulticed the poor hand, making the sufferer put it in a sling. A day or so after she went to the village, and again put on a hot poultice, and thought the patient looking better, but at sundown the previous evening they had come in hot haste for her, and she saw her husband showing unmistakable signs of trouble, and they arrived to find the poor woman breathing her last, evidently having succumbed from blood poisoning. "It was heart-breaking," she said, "to think that a lance might have saved that poor woman's life."

A Doukhobor Funeral.

Then she went on to tell me all the details of the funeral and the last sad duties that were performed for the dead. It was just as the sun went down, and we had shut the door between the tidy living room and the kitchen while we washed up the supper dishes, and it will always remain in my memory the womanly, tender way in which my bright young hostess told me, with hushed voice, of the way the death burial of that poor woman had impressed her. She had wished that some of her Anglo-Saxon neighbors had been there to see the gentle, loving reverence with which the Doukhobors treat their dead. Where the men had got the lumber she did not know, but the simple coffin appeared as if by magic, with its stainless white linen sheet, and crimson pillow for the poor cold form. "They seemed very poor," she said, "but they had laid their mother out in spotless clothing. No detail of the toilet was forgotten; the poor discolored hand was hidden beneath a richly-embroidered handkerchief. A service was held in the house, and then two daughters, the son and son's wife lifted the coffin high on their shoulders, and although the way was long, the trail rough and unbroken, they carried their dear one to the grave, which was neatly prepared with boughs and leaves to hide the newly-turned earth. Men bearing the lid of the coffin followed, and after further recitation of Psalms at the grave they knelt in prayer. There was a heart-breaking farewell taken of their dear dead, and the lid was at last fastened and the coffin was gently lowered into the grave.

No one left the grave until it was neatly covered with sods and branches. Then they insisted that Mrs. B. — should come back to the village to have some refreshments. There a long table was set, with the little they had to offer laid on a fine linen table cloth. It was a sad feast, she said, and after it was over they tried in every way to express to her their gratitude for her sympathy and neighborly kindness. The son of the poor woman brought her a handkerchief that his mother had worked for him, and insisted on her taking it as a keepsake. "They are such grateful

people," she kept repeating. "Fancy my husband lent them his wagon for some work, and when they brought it back, they signed to ask 'How much?' Of course we would not take anything, so the girls who had drawn it six miles—think of it, four girls, the men and horses were all hard at work—these girls came back the day after, and shyly brought out three of their best pieces of linen as a gift just for the loan of a wagon."

Mrs. B. — was known as the best housekeeper in the district, and her interest and delight in these people knew no bounds. They were trying hard to learn a little English. She said the way the women remembered the names of various kitchen utensils she showed them was a marvel.

Excellent Neighbors.

I found her, in truth, delighted to have these villages near their ranch, as she told me that both she and her husband found them interesting to a degree. The men they had had working for them gave great satisfaction, and as their "chore boy," a young English gentleman, had gone north, they had taken a Doukhobor boy in his place, and she was amazed at the amount of work he took off her hands.

It was a very pleasant evening that we spent in that cosy log house, and the result was that our hostess expressed herself more than willing to dispense any medicine or comforts that we might be able to send her for the fever-stricken people in the villages during the winter.

"There isn't much room in here," she said, "but I will turn my dairy into a store house, if you like."

We sat late looking over her own beautiful hand-sewing, and discussing the women who had such a hard winter before them. For their work she had a great admiration, and was preparing to learn some of the knitted lace and drawn work at which they are so proficient.

We had to make an early start in the morning, and much to our disgust we found pouring rain confronting us. However, we went to some of the further villages. One in particular impressed me so sadly. A group of men and women came up to the carriage to speak to Captain St. John, and to tell him that the letters which had been received from Russia spoke of the hopelessness of getting their dear ones liberated from Siberia. There were several of the women and girls whose husbands and fathers were in exile, and the pitiful expression of their faces, as they told their sad story, will remain on my mind for many a day. An impulse that was irresistible made me beg Captain St. John to tell them that their young Russian Empress was the child of our Queen's most loved and gentle daughter, and that I knew the day would come, and not far distant, when the knowledge of how and why they suffered would reach her ears, and that the daughter of the loved Princess Alice would, in the memory of that great sorrow that left her motherless, restore their dear ones to them.

One so associates all that is most sacred and closest in family ties with our own royal house that I felt the words I felt to be true. God grant they may prove so. Separation by the hand of death is terrible enough, but how much worse to have our loved ones cast into a living grave.

The weather turned out so bad that we had to hasten our return to Yorkton, hurriedly passing through the villages on our homeward way.

It was late when we returned to Yorkton, and on our way we met the husband of our hostess of the night before. We chatted for a time, and I learned from him that he lamented, as greatly as others did, the exaggerated and injudicious letter sent to the Ontario papers, which tended to prejudice the Canadian people against a law-abiding and worthy people who have sought sanctuary in our great western country—a country so vast that in two or three years, when these people have gained confidence and gone off one by one to claim their homesteads, they will be swallowed up in what is now an immense unbroken tract of country, each one doing his share in moulding the fortunes of our great Dominion.

Lally Bernard.