THE WINNING OF A HOMESTEAD: BY HARRIET JOOR

SINCE I took up a homestead claim, countless letters have come to me asking what lands are still open for filing, and what one must do in order to file on a claim. Others ask the expense of homesteading, of the daily living as well as the cost of the land, and what equipment is needed for the life on the plains.

A written request to the Commissioner of the General Land Office, Washington, D. C., will bring to the home-seeker a list showing roughly the character of the land now open for filing in the different States, and the name of the city or town in each of these States in which the U. S. Land Office is located. By writing, then, to the Registrar of any of these offices, general information as to the land under its jurisdiction may be obtained.

Each man or woman who would take up a homestead claim must first personally inspect the quarter section on which it is desired to file, and then present to the Land Office of that district an application made out before the appointed authorities. Within six months after filing, one must put up a shack and actually begin living on the land; else one’s right to the quarter may be contested when final proof is made.

The settler may then commute, after fourteen months’ continuous residence; or make homestead proof, after a residence of from three to five years. In the latter case a five months’ leave of absence is permitted in each of the three years, with seven months of residence between each absence. The commuter, when proving up at the end of fourteen months, is now expected to have ten acres under cultivation, and such other simple improvements about his home as show an honest intent to make it a real home. He must also pay a certain amount for his land; this amount varying in different localities. Here in Perkins County, South Dakota, it is fifty cents an acre. Thus, when my neighbor commutes on a claim of a hundred and sixty acres, with the publishing of the application for proof, official fees and price of the land, the final proof costs him altogether from $95.00 to $100.00.

The homesteader who proves up after three years’ residence has a little more to pay in the way of commissions, but pays nothing for his land; so the final proof costs only from $18.00 to $20.00. He, however, has put much more money into the land itself, as he is required to have ten acres under cultivation the second year, and twenty acres the third year, if he has a quarter section. The requirements for a five-year proof are much the same as for the three-year, only that there shall be
twenty-five acres under cultivation when proof is made.

**Homestead Expenses**

Women homesteaders have usually to hire help for most of their farm work; and for the many would-be home-seekers who are anxious to know the actual cost of the whole undertaking, I have noted down roughly my own general expenses.

- Cost of filing homestead entry: \$14.00
- Cost of lumber in floor and roof of soddy: \$50.00
- Cost of work in building soddy: \$50.00
- Cost of plastering soddy (with sand and clay): \$7.00

A shack in any neighborhood costs much less now than when mine was built, as labor is not in such demand, and the lumber need now is hauled only thirty-five miles instead of seventy-five, as when I filed. In many localities, also, a frame shack may be bought second-hand for twenty-five or thirty dollars and hauled across country to the new claim.

- Cost of digging and curbing my well: \$37.00
- Cost of fencing in house and well with barbed wire: \$7.00
- Cost of running the farm for three years (preparation of soil, seed, harvesting, threshing), about: \$200.00

Here the returns have not nearly equaled the output; but I did not expect them to, during these first years. The expense of making final proof is about \$18.00.

Clothes out here on the plains are a negligible expense, as we wear our clothes until they really wear out, regardless of the cut of sleeve or skirt; and, as was said of the Kansas pioneers a half century ago, we “dance blithely in the cast-off finery of our kinsfolk” back in the world! A little old red woolen frock that I brought out with me to make into a braided rug, served me instead a whole year as a “party gown!”

**Food and Equipment**

Living expenses, as nearly as I can estimate, average three dollars a week for food, wood, coal, and oil for the lamp. Some things, like canned goods and coal-oil, are higher here than they are back in civilization; but milk, butter, and eggs are cheaper out here—when they can be gotten at all.

One can live much more expensively than this, even out here, where luxuries do not exist—especially if one lives on canned goods. Or one can live more cheaply by eliminating fresh milk, eggs and a liberal use of dried fruits; but in the lack of fresh meat and fresh fruit, these are really needed to make a balanced diet.
Let no one who comes a-homesteading expect luxuries; for these, and even many simple comforts, cannot be had. Once, for four months on a stretch, I could not buy a single egg; the hens were not laying! And sometimes during the winter, for weeks at a time, butter cannot be had, while fresh fruit and fresh meat are always a rarity. These things, however, mean very little in the daily happiness of the plucky prairie-people, and the "needfuls" can always be found in some form. Canned milk can be kept on hand; or milk in a powdered form, which is cheaper than that in cans and equally good for cooking. There is an egg-powder, also, tested by experts, which will help tide one through the winter; and a wide variety of dried beans, peas and lentils, doubly precious in a meatless land. One grows weary of the sight of a tin can out here where there is a motley heap of them beside every abandoned shanty; so, whenever possible, I get things in the dried form instead of in cans or jars; corn, beans, fruits, bacon and dried beef. They are equally palatable this way, and much less expensive. Except in the worst years of drought, you can raise your own potatoes, lettuce, corn, beets and beans, drying your own sweet-corn for the winter, and harvesting your own winter supply of dried beans.

For those who inquire what equipment is needed, I would say, bring out very little besides clothes and bedding. The few things that are needed to furnish a shack (cot, table, small stove, camp chairs, a few dishes and cooking utensils) can usually be gotten second hand from settlers who are proving up—or from the nearest town. For food supplies, some you will get from the country store, and others you will probably have freighted out from the East. I usually send an order East each fall.

Out on the plains, a woman must be her own laundress, so bring simple clothes; also a sweater coat, pair of strong shoes, and strong walking skirt.

Each woman homesteader should also have a light rifle, and know how to use it— to frighten hawks and coyotes from her chickens, and jack-rabbits from her garden patch, and add toothsome "cotton-tails" to her bill of fare, as well as to insure her own safety.

PRAIRIE FOLK

Tramps are never seen out here, for our little new hamlets are too far from the railroad; but folk of every station in life and every nationality drift to the prairies in quest of homes. One morning a Syrian peddler will pause at the door, the next a Russian peasant will inquire in broken English, direction on his way, or ask help in finding his wandering cow; or a blue-eyed Swede in a white-topped prairie schooner comes seeking a drink of water. Never have I met aught but perfect courtesy and frank kindliness; but where strange folk are continually drifting past her door, no woman is warranted in living
utterly alone with no means of self-protection.

Life on the Plains

Several eager girls, yet in their teens, have written to ask how old they must be before they can file. There is a movement now on foot to lower the age limit to eighteen, but at present no one under twenty-one can enter a homestead claim; and, indeed, both men and women need the maturity of their full twenty-one years before entering upon so isolated and lonely a life. Even older folk occasionally have their heads turned by the first intoxicating taste of such wide, unwonted liberty; and the draught is sometimes too strong for young, untried natures, whom life has not yet innured to self-control. Besides, to bear with equanimity the loneliness and the inevitable discouragements and disappointments of frontier life, one needs that steadiness of courage and good cheer that usually comes only after the fitful enthusiasms of early youth are past.

Most difficult of all to answer are the letters from elderly women wistfully seeking a home, and from women broken by illness or grief, asking if it would be well for them, also, to seek a new life on the plains.

No one can solve this problem for another. Ask yourself—you who would be a homesteader—whether you are fitted for the life. Can you draw your happiness from within, or are you dependent upon constant stimulus from without? Some natures cannot endure solitude, and to such the very immensity of the plains becomes in time a menace to sanity; the silence, that to another is fraught with healing, becomes a horror and a dread.

The homesteader’s need not be a hermit-life; it may be warm with neighborly human interests; but there must come many lonely hours. Twilight, when the day’s work is laid aside, seems ever, to me, the hardest time, and most full of wistful home-memories. But there are lonely hours in the city, too; and there, as here, one has to make one’s own happiness. Always the days may be cheerily filled with work and gardening, books and sewing. Two brides-to-be wrought beautiful household embroideries for their wedding-chests while holding down their claims; and a group of college girls embroidered for themselves lovely lingerie which they never had found time for “back in the world.” One girl carried on a long-postponed course with a correspondence school; another busied herself with her camera; while a dear old neighbor of mine pieced quilts for the grandchildren “back home,” and cut and dyed countless balls of carpet strips to be woven into a rug for her daughter’s home.

Hardships—and Compensations

There are hardships which you who would be a homesteader must face. Hail
may beat down your fields of grain, and
drought may parch your green stretches of
corn; the beans over which you have toiled
so hard may be devastated by jack-rabbits,
and your green peas laid low by cut-worms.
And sickness may come—but kindness,
then, comes, too; such delicate, understand-
ing kindness as only folk who have the
same hopes and the same handicaps can
show one to another.

For the first weeks, the manual work is
hard for muscles that are all unused to
service; even the drawing of a pail of water
seemed at first beyond my power. Wash-
ing has ever been my Waterloo; while
cooking and housework seem always like a
game, and my soddy like a playhouse of
child-days. The very crudeness of our
housekeeping equipment out here on the
plains only makes it seem more like the old
play-house time.

Yes, there are hardships; but there is
health in the faces I meet upon the prairie-
trails, and content in the clear eyes that
smile frank greeting into mine, and hope—
the miraculous, ever-renewed hope of the
pioneer—behind the smile.

For every precious thing in life we must
pay a price; and all the deprivations of
homesteading have seemed to me but a little
price to pay for air that is clean and pure
as golden wine; and sunlight, straight from
heaven, flooding plain and hill; and dim
blue distances for the healing of weary
eyes; and the big, blessed prairie silence for
the healing of tired nerves.

"ON THE JOB"
From one of our friends.

THE most sensible word yet spoken
within the English war zone was that
of Lord Roberts—"Bobs." He coun-
seled the British to stop inventing atrocity
yarns about the Germans and to get on their
job as fighters.

In different circumstances the advice is
equally good here.

America has work to do. Get on the job.

If we never did another dollar's worth of
business with the peoples at war, the loss
wouldn't be one per cent of our total volume
of business. Get on the job.

Our soil, though yielding this year prod-
ucts worth nine billions of dollars, is cap-
able of yielding twenty billions or thirty
billions every year. Get on the job.

Beneath Old Glory nature's resources are
limitless. Get on the job.

Prosperity is what we make it. Get on
the job.

As a man thinks, so is he. Think that the
bottom is dropping out, that there's nothing
ahead but trouble and, sure enough, the
deuce is soon to pay. But chirp up, smile
and go to the task of the hour with hope's
banners flying, and sunshine soon clears the
mists away.

As a matter of fact, there are mathemati-
cal proofs that business is on the rebound.
Note the bank clearings, the foreign com-
merce figures, the car movements—all sure
indexes.

Prosperity is plainly billing for a return
engagement.

On the job, everybody!
Get busy!

THE PHILOSOPHY OF ZARATHUSTRA SIMS

I DON'T know which is more ridiculous,
a farmer trying to mail a letter in a
city fire alarm box or a summer boarder
trying to get maple syrup out of a hickory
tree in August.

PARSON HUBBARD preaches "Love
thy neighbor as thyself," but he admits
that it isn't so easy when thy neighbor is an
ornery cuss that never oils his windmill.

A SENSE of humor is a fine thing to
have, but a good deal depends on
whose corn it is and whose cow gets
scratched up with barbed wire.

CALEB BELDEN says it's all right to be
forehanded, but what's the use of cut-
ting hay before the timothy's ripe, or short-
ening your life by overwork? But I notice
he doesn't object seriously to Hannah's lop-
ing off a couple of years of her life that
way, if occasion offers.

HALF-WITTED KELLY can neither
read nor write, but he exhibits a great
admiration for education when he sees
Eddie Thompson enjoying the post cards
in the R. F. D. boxes at the cross roads.

I NEVER knew any one with a more abid-
ing faith in Providence than Susan Bea-
man, but I notice she puts her trust in a
feather bed during a thunder storm.