THE HIGH COST OF GIVING

By Esther Hall Dixon

Eleanor rocked slowly and squeakily in the farmhouse living-room—not the "white house with green shutters and red barn" farmhouse of Ontario, but a two-room shack on a southern Alberta irrigation tract. Suddenly, with a sigh that pronounced itself the period to a long reverie, she rose and walked to a chest at one end of the room.

She lifted the cover, and as she did so a letter slipped to the floor, released from an accidental hiding place. It was sealed and addressed but not stamped.

"Now, how in the world—!" exclaimed Eleanor picking up the letter, and, after examining it: "My first letter to Eva, and I had to write another."

She tore open the letter and became immediately engrossed by the lines from her own pen, written six months before to her dearest girl friend back in Toronto, her own former home. It was like meeting a ghost of herself to come face to face with her thoughts of six months ago set down in black and white.

"John built our little home himself," she read. "And what do you suppose I have in the kitchen? A sink!" Just where it ought to be, I suppose you'll say, but I want you to know that I'm the first woman on this tract to have a sink.

"Our home has just two rooms. The combination living-room and bedroom is 16 by 16, and the dining-room and kitchen is 9 by 16. John stained the living-room woodwork in brown mission, to match the furniture we bought. We have one large window in the front, where we get a beautiful view of the mountains in the distance, and the rest of the windows are the small-cottage style. I have curtained them in scrim. Our rug is tan and the walls are covered with burlap. Our bed pulls up to the wall in daytime and does service as a mantel. So you see, Eva, when we get our pictures hung it will be very homelike."

Eleanor looked around. The pictures were hung. It was homelike.

"There isn't much room for argument in my little kitchen," she continued in the letter, "but there are advantages in being able to stand in the middle of the floor and reach everything you want."

And then came the details in arrangement of the kitchen, told with such accuracy that Eva might have entered in the night and have put her hand on any pot or kettle.

While this was a truthful description of her new home, there was something which Eleanor had not told about her arrival in the little town of Murvale, and that was of the big lump that had come into her throat when the train began to slow down for the station and her eyes could see nothing but miles and miles of sagebrush from the car window. Timidly she had touched John's coat-sleeve and strained back the tears as she had asked:

"Why, John, why—where is Murvale? Where is the town, John?"

And how sweet and patient and jolly he had looked when he had bent down to say:

"Cheer up, dearie. There's a cow standing in front of it."

And then they had both laughed and the day had been saved. John was always saving the day. Eleanor was the only woman on the tract who had a sink. Christmas was but ten days away. She had exactly sixty-three cents with which to get a present for John—her John! So the thoughts jangled about in her head.

She returned to the letter.

"I really haven't had time to get homesick and I think I'll keep so busy that I never shall have the time . . . I know that you and all our friends are still wondering why we came out here. John came in March to prepare the way when you thought it was a business trip. For months there had been a heavy black cloud over our little home by the lake. It seems to me like a nightmare now—those terrible days when John had to stagger home from work in semi-blindness. And then came the verdict of the specialist—unless John could break entirely away from the office, abandon his law, and live out of doors he would be blind in a few months."

In spite of her cheerful resolve not to be homesick, and in spite of the work which had kept Eleanor's fingers constantly busy, there had been days when her heart was so heavy that it seemed by virtue of its very proponderance to drag her mind, willy-nilly, back to the little home they had left. And never had this feeling seemed harder to conquer than in these days just before Christmas. She missed the bustle and hum, the shopping hordes, the gayly trimmed store windows and red Santas on the street corners, the parcel-laden delivery wagons—all of which bespoke for weeks beforehand, in the city, of preparations for the holiday season.

Out here—well, even the great thrill of empire-building had not yet had time to overcome her love for the old order. Chores went on, chickens were tended, cows milked, horses led to water, fences patched. Where were any hints of thrills to come? Any sweet mystery of anticipated joys?

Back home there would have been a big dinner on Christmas eve, with guests and gifts and good things to eat, and John would have worn his dress suit and she would have worn her wedding dress, which was her only party gown and bespoke the most extravagant gayety. Why not have the dinner party anyway? It would be minus the guests perhaps, but she could cook a good dinner and John had his dress suit and she her wedding gown.

Once more she lifted the lid of the chest, and this time she took from it a soft, shapeless package that rustled strangely amid the severity of mission furniture. She loosened a few pins, and the tissue paper wrappings fell away, releasing a cloud of white satin that billowed from her hand to the floor like a foamy meringue and lay silently glistening with a soft dull splendor as she held it up at arm's length, her bosom heaving with unexpected emotion at the sight.

Her wedding gown! As she gazed, faces rose in tiers before her, glad, tender faces with shining eyes and smiling lips—her friends as she had looked upon them when she had turned from the altar by John's side a year ago. She remembered how her slippered feet had scarcely seemed to touch the rose-strewn aisle, and she felt as if she were again floating to the majestic tones of the organ recessional, her hand enveloped in the curve of John's proudly extended arm. A queer noise brought her to the present with a start. It was the teakettle boiling over!

There seems to be a teakettle in the life of everyone. As she walked to the stove to set the kettle back her hands were unloosing the fastenings of her gingham house dress, but in a moment a new thought assailed her. Suppose—suppose she had changed too much!

The absurdity of the thought was lost upon her, and she sprang in real anxiety to the narrow mirror that hung over her sewing machine, and stood staring into her own reflection with tense interest.

Except for the lines which fatigue had deepened around her mouth, there was nothing especially the matter with what she saw. Her hair still waved. It was nice hair, red-brown with gold glints in it. Her forehead wasn't intellectual. It was too low for soaring intellect, but it was broad and smooth. No fault was to be found with the brown eyes, and the nose was unobjectionable except for the faint, hardly visible glints of a few freckles which last summer's sun had whipped into being. Reassured that she would be spared the pain of seeing an old-worn face above her beloved gown, she caught up the wedding dress and with a few deft motions slipped it over her head. Then she became absorbed before the narrow mirror in an endeavor to get an accurate reflection of herself in toto by presenting a rapid succession of longitudinal strips.

Suddenly the door behind her burst open. She wheeled, and confronted the pop-eyed countenance of Mrs. Valentine, wife of the chief construction engineer for the big irrigation project of which John and Eleanor owned eighty acres. Mrs. Valentine's love of finery was attested by one glance at her purple broad-clothed person. She was very short and very fat—one of those women who change when they reach thirty, become good, simple, and fat, and then do not change any more at all.

"Oh!" she gasped at Eleanor.

"Oh!" Eleanor returned in startled echo.

Then she recovered enough to add explainingly:

"My wedding dress."

"Lovely, perfectly lovely, my dear!" gushed Mrs. Valentine, advancing to touch appreciatively with a pudgy forefinger the delicate tracery of lilies of the valley embroidered in pearls upon the bodice, the work of Eleanor's own fingers.

"I wonder— No, I shouldn't dare ask it," she declared with a ponderous sigh. "Clothes are such a problem out here. You wouldn't, I suppose—" Once more she stopped.

Eleanor stared inquiringly. What favor could the chief's wife possibly wish of her? Mrs. Valentine was like a roly-poly kitten whom you hated to deny things.

"What is it?" Eleanor asked encouragingly.

"I really oughtn't to ask it. The Oddfellow's Ball is to be on January fourth. We have received an invitation, and Jim has to be in Calgary that very week. It seems too good a chance to lose, but I haven't anything to wear—not anything! You wouldn't sell—" she fingered the bugled sleeve suggestively. Eleanor drew back as if stung by the touch.

"Oh, I couldn't, Mrs. Valentine. It's my wedding dress. I made it every stitch myself and it's the dearest thing I own."

Mrs. Valentine turned away with a pouty look of defeat.

"Just as you feel about it. It's a dream, and the style's as good as when it was made. Hand embroidery is always good, and especially in pearls. The fullness about the waist could easily be adjusted to fit me. If you should change your mind, I'll give you—fifty dollars for it."

After Mrs. Valentine's visit, Eleanor, as a vent to her feelings, plunged into a frenzy of house-cleaning. With an armful of garments to be shaken she went out to the clothesline in the back yard. She was surprised to hear voices, and, shielding her eyes from the glare of a blanket of snow under the bright Alberta sun, she saw John in conversation with a stranger on horseback. As she flung the clothes over the line their conservation came clearly to her ears through the still frosty air.

"It's first-class," affirmed the stranger. "Gen-u-wine rawhide cantle, hand-stitched, brass cap, and this here's real russet leather."

Most of this unintelligible to Eleanor, but not the answer to John's question:

"How much do you want for it?"

"Fifty dollars," was the answer.

Once more in the house Eleanor went to the telephone. Rural service in this new country was slow.

"Hello!" she called. "Hello, Operator, get me the company's camp, please. I want to talk to Mrs. Valentine."

As she rose from the telephone, Eleanor looked through the kitchen window just in time to see John leading Beppo out to be admired.

John, too, had a prized possession. It was a thoroughbred riding horse, the gift of a wealthy Ontario uncle. It had been presented to John when he came West, the uncle's idea of ranching being, apparently, to mount a blooded steed and ride over vast estates each day. John had not questioned his necessity for the beautiful creature, but had accepted him enthusiastically because his natural love of animals had been intensified by years of city life.

Beppo was never put to the heavy farm implements, never hitched at all, in fact. John could not ride him because he didn't have a saddle. Once he had tried him bareback, but, being an inexperienced mount, he had not cared to repeat the trial. Beppo, therefore, was enjoyed only through the medium of caresses and grooming and display to visitors, as great an object of pride, no doubt, as Joseph's coat or the Queen of Sheba's jewels. In the long meantimes he pastured contently in the corral or champed impatiently in his stall.

"Dearie," he whispered, "I'm going to put my Christmas present away for a while. It's—it's too nice to use right away."

Eleanor did not know it, but thoughts of Christmas had also come to John. Driving home from town one evening he had wondered about it. She needed a sweater coat and a pair of heavy mountain boots, he thought, and then a feeling of shame swept over him. Eleanor was the same Eleanor, whether city dweller or rancher's wife. And he loved her, not because she worked hard and was helpful, but because she had nice hair, red-brown with gold glints in it, and a forehead that wasn't intellectual, perhaps, but was broad and smooth; because no fault could be found with her brown eyes and her nose had a few glints of freckles on it; because she had an adorable mouth that, for all it had a tired droop in the last few months, still seemed made only for smiles and kisses.

Hotly he rebuked the thoughts that had linked her Christmas with a sweater coat and mountain boots. He remembered a day when they had stood in front of a jeweler's window. Every shade and glitter known to iridescence was caught and lay gold-imprisoned in the purple bed of that window; a fortune in green fire, another in red flame, another in costly white light, beside the beautiful gleam of turquoise, topaz, sapphire, and jade.

"What will you have?" he had laughingly inquired of her.

"Oh, that!" she had glowed back over her black muff at him. "It would look so sweet with my wedding gown."

"That" had been a tiny string of pearls in one corner, and he had happened to read the tag attached. It had made him turn away then. He remembered it wistfully now.

He reached home, unhitched with numb fingers and heavy heart, fed and bedded his horses, and turned to leave the stable when a soft sound, half-snort and half-whinny—a horse's plea for recognition—arrested him. He turned back, entered Beppo's stall, and took the satiny nose in his hand.

On Christmas eve the table in the little ranch-house kitchen was set with the best silver and linen for a formal dinner—for two. Aunt Julia's silver candlesticks shed a soft pink-shaded light. A silver fern dish reflected in a flat mirror stood in lieu of flowers for the centrepiece, and wedding-present china and glassware completed the appointments.

Eleanor in a summer dress of figured lawn announced the meal, and from the living-room strode John in full evening dress, a majestic, perfect John as he had looked back home.

He stopped in the doorway.

"Why didn't you wear—"

"Sh!" cautioned Eleanor. "Don't spoil things by asking any questions to-night. Shall we have our gifts first?"

She led him to the centre of the living-room and touched his eyes lightly with her fingers tips to close them. He heard a pulling and straining that ended with a final bump and a huge bundle lodged at his feet.

"Wait a minute," he begged, and, stepping to the table, he drew from the drawer a tiny jewel case which he presented to her.

"Now!" he announced, and both became busy with wrappings.

As John rose from his stooping posture their eyes met in a peculiar look. It was not anger, nor surprise, nor disapproval, nor horror. They simply stared.

Then, with a laugh that held in it a sob and a myraid of unreadable things, Eleanor went straight to her husband, warm lips and arms and starry eyes.

"Dearie," he whispered, "I'm going to put my Christmas present away for a while. It's—it's too nice to use right away."

"Oh, John, don't you like it?" she asked with a catch in her voice.

"It isn't that, little wife," he confessed, giving her a mighty squeeze. "I may as well be honest. You see I—well, I can't use that handsome saddle because I sold Beppo to get this," and he pointed to the jewel case.

"John! Did you? Why, how funny! I can't wear my pearls either because I sold my wedding dress to get—this," and she tapped the saddle.

At the same moment they both straightened to a listening attitude.

"It sounded like a sleigh," she whispered. "Listen!"

"Uncle Steve!" they both cried in unison a few moments later to the muffled figure stamping himself free of snow on their little back porch.

"Merry Christmas!" came from under the mufflers, accompanied by a plume of frosty breath.

"How in the world— Do come in to the fire. When did you— Why didn't you tell us—"

"Hold on! Hold on!" begged Uncle Steve. Turning to John he said sternly:

"What kind of a stock raiser are you, young man, to leave a thoroughbred, Ontario-raised horse out in this weather?"

"Beppo? What do you mean, Uncle Steve? Beppo—is-isn't here. He—"

"I was talking to him about that only a few moments ago when I found him leaning over your gate as I drove up. By Jove, sir, the old boy knew me."

"I'll go right out and put him up while Eleanor makes you comfortable," said John.

"Here, not so fast!"

Uncle Steve stepped to the back door and dragged from the porch a big bundle which he set before John. From his coat pocket he produced a smaller package for Eleanor.

"Open 'em right away and tell me if I'm a good prophet," he said with a twinkle in his eye.

The rustle of wrapping paper drowned all remarks.

Eleanor pushed an ivory button in a little plush case and held up—a string of pearls!

At John's feet lay a shining new saddle.

"For Beppo," chuckled Uncle Steve; "that is," he added severely, "if you promise to treat him better. So you didn't know he was lost, eh? Well, where in tarnation did you think he was?"

"Yes, I—I—knew he was gone," John made answer. "You see, Uncle Steve, I sold—I mean, I loaned him to a ditch rider at the irrigation camp. He must have broken away."

Eleanor could hold in no longer.

"But it's all so wonderful! What brought you away out here, Uncle Steve?"

Uncle Steve emitted a thunderous guffaw.

"That's a good one. I've owned the 160 acres alongside of you here for the last four years. In fact, I sent the agent to John in the first place for the very purpose of getting you out here. I'm sort of particular about my neighbors, you see. Where you going?" he broke off to inquire as Eleanor suddenly turned away.

At the kitchen door she turned.

"I'm going to tell Mrs. Valentine that I shall be glad to loan her my wedding gown," she said happily.

THE TRAPPER.

Raccoon Trapping Methods.

After finding raccoon runs and trails near lake or stream, set trap out in water deep enough to cover it. Then cut two separate pieces of brush, scent with the best raccoon bait, and place one on each side of the trap. Or the trap may be concealed in a path made by the coon, covered carefully with loose earth and baited. On catching the scent the coon will be sure to investigate. Another good place to set coon traps is at the mouth of small creeks or at the bottom of old logs that have fallen across a stream.

Coons are attracted by bright objects and always investigate the unusual. In the majority of cases their curiosity proves fatal to them. A bright tin fish to be attached to the pan of the trap will glitter in the sun or moonlight and will draw the coon over to the trap.

In preparing for the market coon should be taken off open. When trapped in the northern and central sections of the country, the furs should be stretched in their natural shape, care being taken not to overstretch. Southern pelts should be stretched as nearly square as possible. All superfluous meat and fat should be removed, but the pelt should not be scraped too closely. Skins should be dried in cool place, not in sun or near fire. They are ready to ship when dry enough to hold their shape.

Christmas Carol.

The earth has grown old with its burden of care
But at Christmas it always is young,
The heart of the jewel burns lustrous and fair
And its soul full of music bursts forth on the air
When the song of the angels is sung.

It is coming, Old Earth, it is coming to-night!
On the snow flakes which cover thy sod;
The feet of the Christ-child tells gentle and white,
And the voice of the Christ-child tells out with delight
That mankind are the children of God.

The feet of the humblest may walk in the field
Where the feet of the Holiest trod,
This, then, is the marvel to mortals revealed
When the silvery trumpets of Christmas have pealed
That mankind are the children of God.

—Phillips Brooks.

Christmas Day, 1918.

He shall come down like showers
Upon the fruitful earth;
And love, joy, hope, like flowers,
Spring in his path to birth;
Before him on the mountains,
Shall Peace, the herald go;
And Righteousness, in fountains,
From hill to valley flow.

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The Future of the Live Stock Industry

The arrival of peace has created new conditions in the export of meat and produce and some uncertainty in the minds of Canadian farmers as to future markets. Information in the hands of The Honorable T. A. Crerar, Minister of Agriculture, convinces him that the export market will continue to absorb at firm prices, as compared with the prices for all other agricultural products, every pound of beef, bacon and other animal products that Canada can supply. In discussing the situation the Honorable Mr. Crerar said: "In view of the great scarcity of cattle and live stock of all kinds in Europe, and because of the great demand for live stock and live stock products of all kinds sure to continue for some years at least, I am going to ask the farmers and live stock men of Canada to maintain their breeding operations on a war time scale, to properly finish all feeding stock, and to conserve all good breeding females, and to still further improve their herds and flocks by using even greater care in the selection of the sire."

Star Song.

Tell us thou clear and heav'nly tongue,
Where is the Babe that lately sprung?
Lies he the lily banks among?

Or say if this new birth of ours
Sleeps laid within some ark of flowers,
Spangled with dewlight: thou canst clear
All doubts and manifest the where.

Declare to us, bright star, if we shall seek
Him in the morning's blushing cheek,
Or search the beds of spices through
To find him out?

—Robert Herrick.

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