

The Free Press Short Story

AN EASTER DIVIDEND

BY MARGARET E. SANGSTER

ANNABEL WEST was twisting a turban into shape when the girl came into her neat, tiny shop.

The girl, surveying Annabel, saw a different picture. She saw a plain woman with keen eyes and slim, deft fingers.

"You mean the little sign in the sign that reads, 'Old Hats Made Corner of the window, don't you?' New?"

"Yes," the girl nodded, "that sign. Although if you can make my old hat look new you're a genius!"

"Let's see the hat," Annabel laid aside the turban on which she was working.

"How much will the fixing cost? And how long will it take? Because I have scarcely any money and even less time."

"This is my busiest week of all the year," Annabel glanced at the clock on her worktable.

"I've another gardenia exactly like it," she said as she worked, "and you shall have it to pin on the lapel of your jacket."

"The girl stared at her reflection in the mirror. Color rose in her cheeks and hope lighted a candle in her eyes."

"I can't afford the flowers, really I can't. I know they must have cost you lots of money leaving your profit out of it entirely!"

"They were in a box of assorted trash," Annabel snorted. "I was about ready to throw them out. You're doing me a favor by wearing them."

"The girl dimpled. Yes, actually dimpled. 'You,' she said, 'are a dear, Dr. West, as well as a great artist!'"

"Annabel West knew her cheeks were pink, also. She placed a bow of the shiny straw where it would do the most good and allowed herself a small exclamation of satisfaction."

"You'll pass muster, my dear; you most certainly will! And now go along with you. You've barely time to keep your appointment."

"The girl rose from her chair. Carefully she pinned the extra gardenia to the lapel of her jacket. She extracted a coin."

"until I thought of my disgraceful clothes." "The felt hat was ripped apart now. Annabel West was diving into a great box of straw braid and trimmings and artificial flowers."

"Why should shabby clothes be considered disgraceful?" "They're not," the girl answered. "Oh, indeed, I don't consider them so."

"Annabel West interrupted by emerging from the box of millinery necessities. She said crisply:

"Come over in front of the mirror child, and sit down. I've some fitting to do on that very attractive head of yours. And remember this—no answer to a prayer is ever an illusion."

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ment situation, and the girl, in her young despair, had done something desperate. By mid-afternoon Annabel was so distraught that she tucked the wrong shade of tulle upon a bridesmaid's hat which she was constructing.

"Oh, I'm sorry," she said to the bridesmaid, "but I'm more than a trifle worried. I've just realized that I don't know her name!"

"The bridesmaid asked, 'Whose name?' and Annabel found herself telling the story. 'The girl went away,' she finished after a brief respite, 'and she never returned. And there's no manner in which I can trace her.'"

"The bridesmaid was a sophisticated young woman. She giggled. 'You're a snip, Miss West. That girl never had any intention of coming back. Her story about a job, and her pitiful fifty-cent piece, were a racket! She was out to get her hat made over.'"

"Momentarily Annabel was touched with an unreasoning doubt. The doubt changed to a feeling of crossness at the bridesmaid. For a second she was glad that the tulle had been wrongly chosen."

"You," she said to the sophisticated young lady, "are an uncharitable person. That's all she did say, but she was remembering the tears that had touched the lashes of the shabby girl as she made her exit."

"Four o'clock changed to five, and five to five-thirty. Annabel did not sit idle, watching the clock—no, indeed! It was the week before Easter, open season for milliners, and she was at her busiest. Though she glanced only occasionally at the shop's timepiece, she was acutely aware of it."

"Her worry about the girl, try as she would, was beginning to be tinged with her young customer's skepticism, but the stitches that she took in silk and straw and erpe de Chine were accurate and neat. Even as she doubted, her mind was crowded with reflections and memories of all the girl had said."

"Dear God," she prayed, "don't let anything have happened to her. And God—don't let me be disappointed in her—and, through her, in human nature. Let the girl have had a good reason for not returning. Let—"

"Even as she prayed—the door of the shop burst open to admit a young person whose shabby black suit was nullified by the modish, but that she wore, and by the wealth of April flowers—jougulis and narcissuses and tulips, real ones—that she carried in her hands."

"Oh, Dr. West," cooed the transformed voice of the erstwhile discouraged girl, "I've come back to pay for my hat. These flowers are a dividend!"

"Annabel West exhibited such a placid face that no one could have guessed that she had been frightfully disturbed."

"Dividend on what?" she wanted to know, calmly.

"On my first week's salary," the girl told her. "I was hired—and put to work at once. And my new boss gave me a week's pay in advance. He said, 'the girl was all one smile—' that he didn't want to take a chance on letting me go out for a 'snap' firm of fashion artists would snap me up from under his very nose. And he asked for the address of my milliner—I told you how he was about hats! He wants to have you make an inspiration like mine. I'm using his very words for 'just wife.'"

"Annabel West was smiling, also. She was not a plain girl, the woman now. She was nearly as attractive as her guest. She was thinking, 'I'm going to do this sort of thing often as my way of helping. This is my Easter resolution: I'll make hats for girls who are down on their luck so that they'll find new courage and new jobs. I'll advertise the fact. I'll spend half my time making 'em!'"

"She said aloud: 'I'll be tickled to death to have a new customer. And I adore my flowers!'"

One Blind Man And Collie Dog

Called On Farm After Farm Till They Had Tidy Sum for British War Savings

LONDON, (CP) — How a blind Cumberland man trudged from farm to farm through the snow to collect £610 (\$2,714) for a district war weapons week was told by Lord Kindersley, president of Britain's National Savings Committee.

Relating the episode Lord Kindersley said the man whom he identified only as "Jonathan," set out every day, led by his trained collie dog to visit outlying farms near Carlisle.

LEWES, England, (CP) — Michael Lawlor, a Newfoundland fisherman, and Canadian iron-worker and coal miner, tried 26 times to enlist and failed, but was accepted on his 27th attempt.

The Week at OTTAWA

Specially Written for The Acton Free Press by LLOYD MACDONALD Canadian Press Staff Writer

OTTAWA, (CP)—The Easter recess leaves members of parliament free to return to their homes this week for a fortnight and enables them to give their constituents a first-hand picture of the work accomplished since sittings resumed February 17.

Aside from debate on the war effort, discussions of agricultural problems took a large share of the members' time during the past month. They are now anxious to hear their constituents' reactions to the 1941-42 farm policy.

Members from the west will be on hand when preliminary arrangements for carrying out the government's wheat acreage reduction policy are being made. Farmers in the prairie provinces and the Peace River block of British Columbia will be planning their operations for the coming year.

Opening of the national salvage campaign April 14 will provide some work for members during the recess. They have been asked to serve as organizers in their constituencies for the drive to round up the nation's waste materials to aid the war effort.

For most cabinet ministers the recess gives no respite. Work piled up on their desks while they attended sittings of the House sessions. Finance Minister, Huley will be among the busiest. His budget for the present fiscal year is to be presented soon after the Commons reconvenes.

In the last few days before adjournment, agricultural problems got a thorough airing in discussion of the \$35,000,000 estimate to finance the acreage reduction plan and the want-of-confidence motion introduced several weeks ago by Mark Sinn (Con. Haldimand).

The bonus plan met criticism which crossed party lines. Ontario members contended the plan would aid Western farmers at the expense of those in Eastern Canada. Chief western critics were C. C. F. and New Democracy members, but Harry Leidy (Lib. Forage) felt the plan would work to the advantage of man-with-larger-mechanized-farms and not to the small farmer whose costs of summerfallowing would be high.

The field was cleared for agricultural discussion after disposal of money bills authorizing expenditures, totalling \$1,550,000,000 for the present fiscal year and the one ended March 31—the largest sum assented to at one time in Canadian history.

How the money will be raised won't be disclosed until the budget is brought down.

Canada's butter producers are still waiting for a price peg on their product as the "flush season" and its attendant heavier stocks draws near.

Only a few months ago declining stocks caused fear of a butter shortage and the government set 35 cents a pound as the level beyond which the price could not rise.

Now production is due to mount as herds move to pasture. To insure a fair price for the farmer in the heavy-production months producers are urging that a minimum level also be set.

The government had authorized the Dairy Products Board to fix a minimum price and two suggestions for the minimum already have been made. The National Dairy Council of Canada and a group of Ontario, Quebec and Maritime dairy organizations propose that the price be 31 cents a pound, while the Canadian Dairy Farmers' Federation suggests 34 cents as a fair level.

Both groups ask the government to provide an alternative market for butter at this minimum price, if available stocks cannot be sold to the trade when production reaches its peak.

Predominance of agriculture in the prairie provinces is demonstrated amongst the wealth of facts about Canadians provided by the national registration. Almost half the men registered in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta know how to handle horses, tractors and farm machinery.

The government can rely on 410,230 proficient agriculturalists from this area. Of the 869,650 men registered in town and country only 152,560 said they had no farming experience at all.

Incidentally, the prairies boast 11,384 women and 79,230 registered men who can milk and handle tractors and machinery besides.

WAR 25 Years Ago

2nd Canadian Division Suffered Severely in Battles Among the Craters at St. Eloi

BY H. H. GORDON Canadian Press Staff Writer

Heroic soldiers of the 2nd Canadian Division battled against heavy odds around the mine craters of St. Eloi in the First Great War 25 years ago. Flung into the sharp salient thrust into the German positions in northern France, the Canadians waged a bitter duel with the enemy over terrain pitted with shell-holes and deep in mud.

Late in March the 3rd British Division had horded into the German line in a series of actions and the Canadians under Maj.-Gen. J. E. W. Turner took over the area early in April. The position comprised trenches running alongside some 10 craters created by a German explosion on what became known as St. Eloi Mound.

When the overseas troops moved into their positions most of the craters were behind them. The Germans poured a heavy concentrated artillery fire on the area for three days and succeeded in recapturing two of the craters. Mistakes regarding the

location of the craters resulted in poor artillery co-operation and counter-attacks by the 6th Brigade under Brig.-Gen. H. D. B. Ketchum were unsuccessful.

Guns Brought Relief — The 6th Brigade was relieved by the 4th under Brig.-Gen. Robert Rennie on April 7. Several fierce attempts were made to recapture the craters, but it was not until Brig.-Gen. David Watson's 5th Brigade received adequate artillery support that the area was recaptured on April 17.

During the "Battle of the Craters" Canadian casualties mounted to more than 1,000. The 29th (Vancouver) Battalion and the 27th (Winnipeg) Battalion suffered severely, but Ontario, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia battalions also played a big part in the protracted actions.

"The story of the craters is like that of most of the Battle of St. Eloi, one of misfortune for the 2nd Division, but it is not one of blame," wrote Sir Max Aitken—now Lord Beaverbrook, the Canadian Eye-Witness. "The successive regiments who held the outpost at a great disadvantage compared with their enemies. They were not, and could not, be properly supported by their own guns because the enemy artillery was pounding them to pieces."

"We had better prepare today to die fighting rather than to fight dying," Eddie Rickenbacker, President Eastern Air Lines.

U.S. Planting Millions Trees

Great Shelter-Belt From Canada to Texas Being Formed to Beat Winds

LINCOLN, Neb., (CP)—The greatest U. S. tree-planting job of the spring is the setting out of an additional 35,000,000 trees in the prairie states shelter-belt.

In six years approximately 200,000,000 trees will have been planted in this six-state project to create a natural barrier against the strong winds, hot and cold, that blow across the Plains.

The trees have been planted in strips which, if placed end to end, would reach 16,000 miles. They protect 27,930 farms. Roughly, the shelterbelts are being planted across the eastern portions of North and South Dakota, and Nebraska, across central Kansas, western Oklahoma and a strip of Texas.

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