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## Article Title: Nellie Bly's Account of Her 1895 Visit To Drouth-Stricken Nebraska and South Dakota

Full Citation: T D Nostwick, "Nellie Bly's Account of Her 1895 Visit To Drouth-Stricken Nebraska and South Dakota," *Nebraska History* 67 (1986): 30-67.

URL of article: <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH1986Drouth1895.pdf>

Date: 8/22/2012

Article Summary: Nellie Bly (Elizabeth Cochrane 1867-1922) was a crack reporter for Joseph Pulitzer at the *New York World*. When stories of want began emanating from Nebraska, her reporter's instinct for an important story compelled her to investigate. She visited a tier of north and central Nebraska counties and a small portion of South Dakota, described her impressions of the blighted land and its stricken people and went on to state what she thought needed to be done. The five articles contained in this account were transcribed from the *New York World* where they appeared between 28 January and 13 February 1895.

### Cataloging Information:

Names: Lorenzo Crouse, Nellie Bly (Elizabeth Cochrane), Robert B Peattie, George Crager, Mr Nason, Rev Dr Ludden, High Shield, Little Day, Red Breast, Bull-Goes-in-the-Lead, Andrew-Loud-Thunder, His-Voice, Looks-Back, Stewart, Nebraska; Roy Gordon, James Reed, Joseph Gibson, Mr Homer, B N Piper, J S Strait, A M Lipsey, J P Harding, A J Mothersead, F J Nichols, George a Metz, P L Harper, P B Gavin, S W Brant, J F Gibbons, W H Needham, Miss Belle James, Mrs D D Moore, Mrs James Randall, Mrs L A Funk, Mrs G Klett, Mrs Alexander Neas, Mrs James Mackey, J F Abernathy, Frank Pfaff, Henry Turner, J A Everman, J S White, C L Crocker, W S Booten

Place Names: Valentine, Nebraska; Elm Creek, Nebraska; Fairfax, South Dakota; Deland, Piatt County, Illinois; Clark County, South Dakota; Bonesteel, South Dakota; Gregory County, South Dakota; Wallace, Lincoln County, Nebraska; Butte, Boyd County, Nebraska; Spencer, Nebraska; Sigourney, Nebraska

Keywords: "Nellie Bly with Starving Nebraskans," "Nellie Bly Roughing It," "Land of the Destitute," "Nellie Bly Sees Misery," "The Wish to Own a Home," [Article Titles]; Nebraska State Relief Committee; Ancient Order of United Workmen, "wheat coffee," Boyd County Central Relief Commission; Elkhorn Road [Elkhorn Railroad]; "bach" [essentially a hermit, one who came west to live on his 160 acres]

Photographs / Images: Relief supplies being unloaded and distributed at Elm Creek, Buffalo County, Nebraska, in 1894 [two photographs]; Grand Charity Musical Entertainment For the purpose of procuring Seed Corn for the destitute farmers in the vicinity of Wallace, Lincoln Co., Nebraska advertisement; Aid the Suffering, At a called meeting at the court room in Sigourney, Thursday evening, January 17, 1895 advertisement

# Nellie Bly's Account of Her 1895 Visit To Drouth-Stricken Nebraska and South Dakota

*Edited by T. D. Nostwich*

## INTRODUCTION

The early spring weather of 1894 gave Nebraska farmers some reason to hope that after several successive years of drouth and poor crops, this might prove to be the long-hoped-for year of bountiful harvest which would enable them to pay off their debts and get on a solid footing. However, around 20 May their hopes received a setback when a heavy frost destroyed thousands of acres of corn and much of the fruit crop. But something far worse was to come. June and early July yielded only a barely adequate rainfall. Then on 26 July a true catastrophe occurred when—in A. E. Sheldon's memorable words—"a furnace wind began to blow from the southeast. In three days the Nebraska corn crop was dead in the furrows." Nebraskans had endured prairie fires, grasshoppers, and hailstorms in the past, but nothing quite as devastating as this searing wind had yet visited them. Writing in 1931, Sheldon could still declare that the 1894 summer was the nearest Nebraska had ever come to a "complete corn crop failure."<sup>1</sup>

Hardest hit were farmers of central and western counties, many of them recently established homesteaders who eked out a marginal existence. Faced with total crop loss, they were obliged to sell or mortgage property and livestock just to provide food for their families; to turn loose their horses and cattle to grub for what little fodder the barren land might provide; and to eat the very seed they had managed to husband for next spring's planting. Of course many of them, especially renters and holders of unproved claims, abandoned their farms to return to former homes or to seek work in Omaha and other cities. Some stayed on for various reasons—a pride that made them reluctant to admit their need and to beg for aid; the stubborn hope for a better season next year; or simply the lack of means to go anywhere else. With the arrival of winter, they faced a harrowing test of fortitude.



*Nellie Bly, New York World, 2 February 1890. Courtesy of The New York Historical Society, New York City.*

Once the appalling dimensions of the disaster became generally recognized, it was perceived that what would be needed was assistance on a massive scale never before attempted. Outgoing Governor Lorenzo Crouse appointed a relief commission, which certainly knew the urgency of the situation. But its first fumbling efforts to gather supplies in the quantities needed were only partially successful; and it was soon overwhelmed by the logistical problem of getting them to so many widely separated people, most of whom lived miles from railroads. Not surprisingly, changes of bureaucratic bungling, neglect, and favoritism were soon being leveled at commission members.

Particularly pointed was the criticism made by Robert B. Peattie of the *Omaha World-Herald*, who in grim detail reported on the blighted areas in a December series of fifteen articles. Some were reprinted or excerpted by newspapers in New York and other eastern cities, thereby alerting the rest of the country to the dire need of Nebraska farmers. Stories began to appear under alarming headlines: "Hundreds of Families in Destitute Circumstances: Some Are Eating Prairie Dogs"; "Farmers Freezing and Famishing: Fifteen Thousand Persons Must Be Cared For Until New Crops Are Harvested"; "Men Who Never Asked Aid Before Beg for Their Families"; "Women and Children, in Calico and Rags, Without Shoes or Stockings, Are in Despair"; "No Christmas for Them: While You Feast To-Day Give a Thought to the Famine-Stricken People of Nebraska."<sup>2</sup>

It is hardly surprising that America's best known reporter turned her attention to what was happening on the prairies. Nellie Bly, the professional pseudonym of Elizabeth Cochrane (1867-1922), was then at the crest of her fame. She was one of Joseph Pulitzer's crack reporters at the *New York World*, the most influential (if not the best) newspaper in the country. Though she had won international fame – and is certainly best remembered today – for going around the world in fewer than eighty days (in precisely "seventy-two days, six hours, and eleven minutes," crowed the *World*), she was at heart an investigative reporter with a driving zeal for social justice. By no means a political radical, she yet saw her mission as aiding the needy and downtrodden, the oppressed and exploited, wherever she found them – among cruelly neglected inmates of the New York City madhouse; degraded dwellers of filthy slum tenements; or malnourished, overworked, and underpaid women and children in sweatshops. Called by her biographer the "good angel of the laboring classes, the tenement houses, and factories," she was always quick to expose dishonest politicians and public officials, incompetent or indifferent bureaucrats, greedy employers – all those who sought to profit from the weak.<sup>3</sup>

Little wonder that Nellie Bly's compassion was aroused by the dreadful stories of want emanating from Nebraska. Her reporter's instinct for an important story compelled her to investigate. Visiting a

tier of north and central Nebraska counties, as well as a small portion of South Dakota, she described her impressions of the blighted land and its stricken people. Then she forthrightly stated what she thought needed to be done.

Her five articles record in vivid detail much of what she saw and make us feel how it was to live through that terrible year. They are animated by the young woman's sympathy for the suffering of man and animal alike. They were her last major journalistic undertaking, for it was while on the train returning to New York City that she met Robert Seaman, an eastern industrialist, whose wife she became a few months later. But that as her biographer relates, was not before she had arranged with the *World's* backing "that a relief committee be set up in the East, to send food and serum and doctors to this stricken place."<sup>4</sup>

The five articles have been transcribed from the *New York World*, where they appeared between 28 January and 13 February 1895. The fact that their datelines are earlier than their dates of publication suggests that Nellie Bly may have taken them with her to New York instead of wiring them to the *World*.

The University of Minnesota Library supplied the microfilmed copy text. Original headlines have been retained, but subheadlines have been omitted. The transcription is literal except for the combining of short paragraphs and less than a dozen emendations made to assist the reader.

## NELLIE BLY WITH STARVING NEBRASKANS

*VALENTINE, Neb., Jan. 19*— One glimpse of the home life out from the railroads and one is convinced that the tales of destitution in Nebraska have not been exaggerated. I drove over thirty miles around the country to-day and I saw nothing but misery and desolation.

Imagine one broad and level stretch of land, with a sky closing over it like a dome, and sky and land apparently meeting and forming a perfect circle. The sky is of Italian blueness, not a cloud in sight, and the air as soft and balmy as on a perfect October day. But all the land lies desolate, covered with the yellow stubble of corn-stalks that never matured and grain that never came to a head. The dust in the roads is many inches deep, and one finds it difficult to realize that it is winter.

Cheered by the blueness of the sky and the balminess of the air, I thought Nebraska not a bad place to live in until I remembered to look for signs of life. I could see for miles, but not a single sign of life, man, beast or plant, met my gaze. Trees there were none.

After driving several miles we saw in the distance a homestead. A lit-

tle sod house, with one window and one door, a sod stable and the inevitable windmill. The windmill was still, an old wagon lay turned up near the stable and all about everything lay barren and yellow. There was no need to go further. The place was deserted. One after the other we passed with the same result – all the earth was barren and desolate and the people had fled. Fortunate were they who had friends to help them out of this God-forsaken country. For I see no help for those remaining.

After travelling many miles until I began to feel as if all the people had fled from a land cursed, we saw a sod house and a man nearby in a red flannel shirt. We drove directly to him, there being no fences to stop our progress. We asked who lived there and he replied "Days," and without waiting for an invitation we alighted and went to the door.

The house was built completely of sod that had been cut in large squares. From a distance it looked like black mud, the turf of the sod being turned underneath. The sod is used this way because the rain does not go through it as readily as when turned upright.

Through a narrow door that would not admit a large-sized man we entered this humble sod house, and I sat down on the only chair, a cheap wooden affair, and looked about me. Before me stood a woman, an American. A good, honest creature whose blue eyes faltered before mine as I turned to her after looking about. She was ashamed of her poverty, wrongfully so, because Heaven alone is responsible for it.

There was no floor to her house. We stood and sat on the bare ground. In one corner of the hut a miserable bed tried to stand, but the ground was uneven and the bed was lop-sided. There was a very small stove with a pipe running up through the sod roof, and there was an old table, a skillet, a few dishes, probably half a dozen all told, and nothing more, except the unhappy woman and her children.

Some neighbor had spared her enough flour to make a baking, and that was all she had to eat. She was making the bread when I went in.

"You are very poor?" I asked sorrowfully.

"There is no use trying to deny it," she replied, as a burning blush spread over her face. "We couldn't be poorer and live."

"How long have you been in this state?" I asked.

"We've been here over four years now. We thought we'd have a chance to own a house; that's what brought us here, but we've never had a single good crop in all that time, though we did manage to get along. But last summer we didn't raise a thing; the hot air burned everything up."

"Have you any cattle?"

"We have two horses and we had a cow," was the sad reply. "We mortgaged the two horses to buy a cow a year ago, and a month ago the

cow was taken for debt, and the time is up on the mortgage. We thought when you came you were coming to take the horses away."

"How have you managed to feed your horses?" I inquired. The woman smiled sadly at me.

"They had to 'rustle,'" she answered.

"'Rustle'?" I repeated. "What is 'rustle'?"

"Pick up a living as best they can on the land," she explained. "That's what they call 'rustling for a living.'"

I can't imagine what this is derived from, unless it be from "wrestling." I did not see the husband and father, as he had driven to Valentine to get aid from the Relief Committee.

"Had you no chickens?" I asked Mrs. Day.

"We had, but there was nothing to feed them, and as they began to die off from starvation we sold what we could and ate the rest."

It would be impossible to get coal away out to these people even if it were given to them, but they go to the Government reservation and cut wood and haul it home to burn.<sup>6</sup> This and the mild winter has kept them from freezing.

Of course they have no clothing. It is easy to understand, with no crops, that clothing would be a minor consideration, and now when they have been reduced to the last extremes they find themselves naked as well as hungry.

I asked Mrs. Day if she knew of others as badly situated as herself. She said that the suffering was universal except among a few who had come out years ago, or those who had friends to aid them. Although these farmers had no crops either, still by receiving aid from their friends they will be able to stay on during the winter, and with assistance may be able next spring to make a new start in the world.

But there is no such hope to hold out to those who have no friends. No seed, no stock – nothing but the barren land. Seed there was none, and stock has gone at ridiculously low prices to keep life in them up until this time. It is a hopeless condition.

It must not be considered an easy matter to visit the homes of these afflicted people. They have all taken up land, and own anywhere from 160 acres upward, so that to travel from house to house is the work of months, no two houses being closer than three miles. Remembering this, and that two out of three homes are deserted, it will be easily understood how I could drive over thirty miles and only visit three families.

The next family I found lived in a tiny frame house. There were six children in the family, and the mother, who was making bread, seemed like a very intelligent and respectable woman. She was an American. I had to do some talking before I could persuade her to confide in me, so dreadfully do these people feel their poverty.

"We have never asked for aid," she said; "but there is no reason why

I should be ashamed to tell you how poor we are. We are not to blame. All that labor could do we have done, but the hot air last summer burned everything up. Yet we did not suffer from extreme heat, but it just seemed that every time a few drops of rain fell the wind rose and drove the rain away; just as it's done with the snow. We've only seen a little snow in the air, but the wind drives it away. It does seem as if Nebraska is going to dry up completely."

"Won't you give me some idea of what you raised last year?" I asked.

"I can tell you in a moment," replied the woman with a bitter smile. "We planted six bushels of potatoes, and we got in return just one bushel, and not one of them was as large as a hickory nut. We planted ninety-six acres of corn, and we did not get a single ear! Why, the stalks only grew about a foot – too short even to make fodder."

"How have you been living?"

"I had some chickens, but, of course, they wouldn't lay when they weren't fed, and they began to starve, so we traded some for flour, and the rest we ate. We haven't one now."

"Have you any horses?"

"Yes, five."

"How do you feed them?"

"We haven't anything to feed them; they merely 'rustle.'"

"You mean, eat what they can get?" I asked.

"Yes. You see that dried stuff? They stray all over the table-land and nibble at that. What cornstalks there were they ate close to the ground."

"Couldn't you sell your horses?"

"We can't give them away. We offered to trade two for a cow, but the man wouldn't trade. Our cow was taken from us for debt."

"How much is a cow worth?"

"Anywhere from \$12 to \$20."

Imagine offering two horses for a cow, and not even then being able to make the trade!

"What have you and your family to eat?" I asked.

"We haven't had a bite of meat since Christmas. Christmas dinner – (and here she smiled pitifully) – was our last meat, and that was a jack-rabbit! I don't think there's a jack-rabbit left in the county."

"What have you eaten, then?" I persisted.

"Onions and bread," she answered. "We haven't had another thing. But – (proudly) – we haven't asked for aid. We have always considered ourselves above the county poor, and I don't know how we would go about asking help. My husband has gone to town now to apply for grain for next year's crop. It was said that the State meant to give ten bushels of wheat, five of corn, ten of oats and five of potatoes to every family."

"If you get this seed, when will you be able to live on it; that is, providing you have rain this coming summer?" I inquired curiously.

"It would be next August or September before we'd get anything," she answered.

"And how will you live until then?"

"I don't know," she answered, hopelessly and helplessly.

The woman has no shoes and is next to naked for clothes. Her children are a mess of rags. They did without clothing from time to time, hoping when the crops were in to be able to buy, but there were no crops, and hunger since then has made them regardless of appearances. It is easier to be cold than hungry.

This family also haul wood from the military reservation. The woman says the Government used to keep the woods patrolled, and to get wood was a difficult matter, but this winter little or no watch is kept, and the suffering people have taken wood without interference.

Several miles from this place I found another sod house. A number of ragged children ran out and gazed at us curiously, but in silence as we alighted. Inside the sod hut we found a sick woman, on whose face seemed to rest the light of death. A neighbor had come a long way to take care of her.

"She caught a cold," explained the neighbor, "and she went to work too soon, and that made her take another. Then it turned into inflammatory rheumatism, and the medicine the doctor gave her made her deaf, so she can't hear you unless you lean over and yell in her ear."

The look on the woman's face, the pallor, and the strange, glassy glitter in her eyes, gave me a cold chill, and I begged the neighbor to speak for me - to tell the woman I would like to know how long she had lived there and how things were going. The sick woman seemed to be carried back to other days by my question, and, though the strange, settled expression did not change, she spoke to me slowly and distinctly.

"We were married in Iowa," she said. "We were poor and my husband wanted a home, so we read about Nebraska and we decided to come out here. That was eleven years ago. We were among the first settlers." Here she stopped, and, though the strange calm of her face did not change, she sighed wearily.

"We were young then - just married," she continued. "Our first child was born here; he is ten years old. We worked hard. We had a land claim and we added a timber claim; that gave us 320 acres. We didn't own one thing when we came; we had to get everything by hard labor. My husband worked hard; so did I. I got cows and sold butter, and I raised chickens, but we never got ahead."

"Everything was mortgaged. If we wanted a cow, we had to mortgage a horse to get it. But some way we managed to pay the interest on our mortgages until this year. Now we're going to lose our timber claim, and nothing can save the homestead."

She stopped again and sighed, and I looked around the homestead. Eleven years' hard labor, and that sod house, with its two or three pieces of miserable furniture, was all they had! I could picture how hopefully they started out, young and newly wedded, hand in hand, to earn a home for themselves. The brave wife had shared the toil, and now she lay there on the brink of the grave; and the toilworn, hopeless man –

Well, I asked where he was, and the kind neighbor told me. Since the crop failure, yes, nearly a year past, the family has lived on the money they made from their cows, four in number. The cows had to "rustle for a living" like the other animals, but cows can live on less and last longer than anything else. Besides, the faithful creatures come home at night to give their milk to the family.

The family was too poor to use milk, but they saved it and managed to get from twelve to eighteen pounds of butter every two weeks. For this butter they got 20 cents a pound. This was given in exchange for their groceries. But the wife has been sick three months, and one cow is dry, and the doctor, who charges \$5 a visit, said he couldn't come any more unless he was paid something on account. The husband had no money. He was mortgaged overhead, so the doctor said he would take a cow, and the husband had gone to drive the cow to its future owner.

The mortgage on their timber claim is held by Mrs. Pierce, Rev. Mr. Cross's mother-in-law. Rev. Mr. Cross is missionary at the Rosebud Indian Agency. The interest is 2 percent per month; about 24 percent yearly.

They had hogs which were killed and traded for groceries. They had chickens – 500 of them – and after they began to starve to death the rest were killed and went in trade.

And that was their miserable story. Eleven years of hard work and at the end destitution. Stock, seed, everything, gone and the broken-down wife dying!

"How could all you people get so poor with one year's failure?" I asked, incredulously. The neighbor repeated my question to the sick woman.

"We only had two good crops in eleven years," was the pathetic reply.

Tell me of the heathen in Africa and I will tell you of the people in the West who have not seen a church in years. Tell me of the poor in Ireland, and I will tell you of poorer in the West. Tell me of the labor in Siberia, and I will tell you of the harder labor in the West. Send your missionaries West; keep your money for your own, and it will be better for us all.

Although I travelled so many miles in this thinly settled country, and from which so many have gone, I only managed to see three families in my day's work. But the sights I saw in their sod houses, and the car-



*Relief supplies being unloaded and distributed at Elm Creek, Buffalo County, in 1894.*



casses of starved animals lying along the way, I am told is only what I would see all over the stricken part of Nebraska. The hot wave travelled over the State in one line, and everything fell desolate and dead before it. Other parts of the State are all right.

Mr. George Crager, the noted Indian interpreter and the United States Special Agent, was my guide. No man knows this part of the country better. Doubtless the readers of the *World* will remember him as the man who captured Big Turkey during the late Indian uprising in 1891 and brought him in to Gen. Miles.<sup>8</sup> Mr. Crager says that thirty-one miles from Valentine, in Rewanee and Sparks, there is great destitution among the German and French settlements, but as one can only get there by driving, and as the sand is over the hubs, to get there and back is a matter of extreme difficulty.<sup>9</sup>

When we came back from Valentine to-day we found that a supply of goods had been shipped to this point from the East, and twenty-eight barrels of clothing, 100 barrels of flour, twelve barrels of potatoes and two steers had been divided among the destitute families who had driven into town for aid.<sup>10</sup> What provision is to be made for those whose horses are dead or who are otherwise unable to get to town I know not.

On Thursday last I went to Omaha, where I had a talk with Mr. Nason, the President of the State Relief Commission.<sup>11</sup> "We have more stuff now for the sufferers than we can possibly use," he said. "We have provided clothing for everybody and have carloads of it packed in our store-house. We don't want any more clothing or food; what we need is money."

Thereupon Mr. Nason showed me bills to prove that for \$184 and some odd cents, money sent to him from Boston, he had bought from the railroad company 100 tons of coal, which, at market price, would have cost \$700. The railroad company merely charged Mr. Nason what it cost them for labor, freight to points of delivery was free. But I have since found that coal cannot possibly be delivered to the greatest sufferers, such people as I have visited to-day, and if the Relief Commission has more clothing than it needs, none of it has been sent out this way.

After my talk with Mr. Nason I went to see the warehouse in Omaha, and, as I expected from Mr. Nason's talk to see it jammed to the doors, I was thunderstruck to find myself in a large room containing the following articles: Three bags of coffee, four of rice, four boxes (small) of groceries (all bought at some store in Omaha), six barrels of old clothing, four bags of potatoes, and that was all. The entire lot would not have more than filled a quarter of a car.

From Omaha I went to Lincoln, and had a talk with the secretary, Rev. Dr. Ludden.<sup>12</sup> Dr. Ludden is very courteous and kind and dreadfully overworked. He was ready and willing to tell me anything and to

help me all he could. But all he could say was that plenty of relief had been received and distributed. Mr. Nason says that between \$1,500 and \$2,000 had been received up to the time I saw him. They both spoke of the complaints that had been made against the committee, and while I am ready to see faults on both sides, I must still try to impress donors with some idea of the difficulties before even those whose only desire is to aid the sufferers.

Charity is a difficult matter to deal with. The sufferer usually receives the smallest share. But in this case there are thousands of families, even according to Mr. Nason's list, in Nebraska who will have to be fed until next September. That is a big work, and caution is necessary, or the sympathy and money will be exhausted before the people are really helped. Indiscriminate money-giving is bad. Dr. Ludden has already had numerous complaints from people who have sent money to private individuals in different towns. The money has never been used.

Still, it is a big thing to put all the money and relief in the hands of the Relief Commission. My experience to-day, and it is my first, shows that their efforts to aid have not been thorough. They may have, as Mr. Nason affirms, more supplies than can possibly be used, but if Mr. Nason thinks they have, in his warehouse, he is mistaken. I could distribute all the clothing he has among the three families – consisting in all of twenty-three persons – I saw to-day.

From this I will go to other counties afflicted by the drought. By the way, the State Commission informs me that it is useless for persons to send supplies for any particular families, as they cannot be troubled in making distinctions.

## NELLIE BLY ROUGHING IT

*FAIRFAX, S. Dak., Jan. 21* – I am just finishing the longest day of my life. I got up at 3 o'clock to take the train that was to carry me away from Valentine, Neb. They have only one train a day out of Valentine, and that's at 4 A. M. I really believe they have it at that hour for fear everybody would leave if the time were more convenient.

I saw a little of Nebraska weather. Saturday when I drove around to see the destitute people the air was as soft and warm as a day in September; Sunday it was 8 degrees below zero. The wind was travelling at such a rate that it was almost impossible to go out, but when I saw a number of Indians drive in and prepare to go into camp within fifty yards of the hotel, I could not resist the temptation to make them a visit.

Accompanied by Major Crager, the United States Agent and Indian interpreter, I paid my visit. There were two wagons, three Indians and

one squaw in the first lot. While the men were unhitching their horses the squaw put up the tent or tepee. First she tied three long poles together with a rope, and after standing them upright in the sand she added other poles, walking around the whole thing and drawing the rope so as to make the poles secure.

Meanwhile Major Crager was holding a conversation in grunts with the Indians. I was pleased to see that they were rather gentle with their poor ponies, one Indian taking his own blankets to cover them. I was not introduced, but Major Crager said the men were High Shield, Little Day and Red Breast.

I got so cold standing in the sand that my guide said he would take me over to a fire, and accordingly we went across where five tepees were already erected and had smoke issuing from the open space near the top. On my hands and knees I crawled through the wee opening into the tent. I was charmed with the interior. Around the edge of the tent lay bed clothing. In the middle of the tent was a black iron kettle suspended on three iron braces over a bright wood fire. Before the fire sat a squaw, and tied closely in one corner was a large dog.

The squaw greeted us with a friendly grunt, eying me curiously, but shaking hands with Mr. Crager. Then we were joined by her husband. I don't know who he was, but there were four Indians in the one crowd, and their names were Bull-Goes-in-the-Lead, Andrew-Loud-Thunder, His-Voice and Looks-Back.

The Indians and I didn't try to converse, but the dog and I became friends. He tried his best to reach me, talking to me in dog language, and when he found he was tied too short to reach me with his forepaws, he turned round and tried to touch me with his hind legs. I moved up close to oblige him, and he laid his head on my knee and wailed.

"Poor fellow! You don't like to be tied, do you?" I said to him, and he laid his paws on my shoulders and, looking into my eyes, wailed pitifully. I felt sorry for him.

"What is wrong with him?" I asked Mr. Crager. The Indian smiled and said something to Mr. Crager, and Mr. Crager smiled, and said the Indian said the dog had a bad heart, meaning he was sad at heart. I took it that he was unhappy to be tied and tried to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted, only looking at me reproachfully, as if I should understand. But I didn't.

The squaw made something in a blackened coffee-pot, and Mr. Crager told me that the Indian was saying that he would like to be free, to be privileged to live like the white men. He would like to be a farmer, and his two sons wanted to help him farm. They had that day bought some pigs from some of the destitute farmers and meant to carry them back to the reservation.

I was invited to share their dinner, but I didn't quite like the looks of the stuff boiling in the pot, so I declined, and as they were about to eat I

proposed returning to the hotel, lest we be persuaded against our will.

After supper Mr. Crager told me the dinner I had been offered was dog! Think of it! It would be like eating an intimate friend. Too late it flashed upon me why the dog was so unhappy and why he refused to be comforted. A friend of his was in that pot, and he knew it. I dare not think of his fate since then. The very thought made me so wretched that I couldn't sleep, and at 3 A. M., when the boy knocked on my door, I was still awake.

Two men and myself took the train at 4 A. M. It had come on from Deadwood, and a strange picture it presented. Instead of an ordinary day coach, it was a reclining-chair car, and five men and one woman and a baby were lying there asleep. All the men had removed their boots, and two men snored frightfully. The baby had a bad cough. I was sleepy but the novelty of the scene interested me. Like everybody else, I occupied two chairs, filling one with my satchels, a rug and a bundle.

Hardly had the train started before I made my first acquaintance with a species of the wild and woolly. A voice at my elbow said: "Let me have this blanket (meaning my rug) to spread over that poor man."<sup>13</sup>

I looked at the "poor man" and at the rug. The car was very warm and the man had his great coat spread over him.

"I would rather not," I answered coldly.

"Oh, I was just a kiddin' you," the fellow answered with a laugh.

I looked at him in amazement, and saw that he was the brakeman. Then I did not know what to think — whether he was drunk or mistook me for someone he knew. Before I could decide he lifted all my packages out of the chair and sat down beside me.

"Well, they've found Scott," he said calmly, not heeding my surprise.

"Indeed!" I ejaculated, coldly, not knowing who or what Scott was.<sup>14</sup>

"Yes; found him in the river yesterday. Guess there'll be some fun at O'Neill to-day. They'll find the men that killed him, and then you'll see a thing or two. They're going to bury him to-morrow. Are you going?"

"I see no reason why I should. I don't know the man," I returned, icily.

"What's wrong with you?" he asked in perfect innocence. "Have you got a cold?"

I was angry, and still I felt like laughing. I hardly knew whether to be insulted or amused. It somehow reminded me of a guileless girl who told me once how a strange man tried to kiss her.

"And I had been reading some novels," she told me, "and so I just

knew what language to use in speaking to him; so I said: 'How dare you, sir? Have you no respect for a helpless girl? I thought you were a gentleman!'"

So I said to this Western species: "All that's wrong with me is that I hate a fool and a bore!"

"Do you?" he replied, as simply as if I had observed that I hated blizzards.

"You ought to have gone over to Harris's funeral yisterday," he resumed, cordially. "You heard about Morrison killin' him? Well, we run a special train over there yisterday. Everybody had a great time. If they'd been able to find Morrison I reckon they'd made short work of him; but the Sheriff had hid him somewhere."<sup>15</sup>

"Is it the style out here to afflict strangers in this manner?" I asked him, coldly.

"Doye mean speak to girls? There ain't a girl travels on this road that I don't know. Do you know the girls in Valentine? Not much society there, but I used to know them all when I was firin' on a cattle 'pusher.'"

I was exhausted. So I told the Western knight-errant that he would oblige me if he sat somewhere else; that I did not care to be talked to. He went away, but when I was leaving the train he asked where I had bought my cape and how much it cost.

At 6, while it was still dark, I got off for breakfast. We were given twenty minutes to eat the best meal that one can find in the West. At 9 o'clock I reached Stewart, Neb., where I changed from the train to a stage, which carried me fifty miles inland to Fairfax, S. Dak., where I am at present.<sup>16</sup>

The stage was an ordinary grocery wagon, drawn by two small ponies. It was completely filled with freight and mail. There were the driver and a boy on the front seat amid the mail-bags, and a man and myself in the second seat, so crowded with freight that we became cramped and stiff. I was awfully sorry to see the horses so overloaded, and it gave me an idea of starting some society for the benefit of the Western horses. They are shamefully abused.

The man and I had a lantern between us to help keep us warm. Besides we were wrapped in bed comforters, but as it was considerably below zero, our trip was anything but pleasant. The driver fastened a cloth up in front so the man and I were shut in from everything and had nothing to do but talk about the drought.

He had lived in Missouri, but the doctors thought he had consumption and told him he must come here. First he located in Nebraska, and, though he regained his health, he found with laborious and unceasing work it was impossible to earn a living. Owing to the continual drought he could not raise a crop, and after seven years he gave it up as hopeless and moved to South Dakota, because he heard it was better there. He

lives in a sod house and has worked hard, but it is no good; crops will not grow without rain. The man is thoroughly disheartened with his nine years' unrewarded toil. If he can get money enough he will go away with a thorough knowledge of what Western life means.

"It is the desire to own a home that brings people into such God-forsaken countries," he told me. "We listen to the stories land agents and railroads circulate, and filled with a desire to own our own home, a thing that is scarcely possible to the workingman in the East, we move here. And what do we get? Our labor goes for nothing. Crop after crop fails. We borrow money to help us out and the 2 percent a month soon eats up everything. We have no schools for our children, who are raised in ignorance, and if they have no liking or ability to be farmers there is no other avenue open to them. We have no public works. In fact, this life out here is simply hell. We cease to be human, and all we ever knew we forget, and life simply becomes a struggle for enough to eat. Why, our children are growing up in such ignorance that we forget our pride and have sent in a petition to the Government to allow our children to be educated in the Indian schools."

At 11 we stopped at the "Half-Way House" to leave the mail and warm up. An hour later we stopped again to throw off some mail-bags. At 1 we stopped at a house called The Rapids for dinner. There I learned that a woman had received supplies for the destitute, and that she had sold the supplies instead of giving them. A half dozen persons were willing to swear to her selling the food she received. One man has promised to take me to the sufferers who borrowed money to buy from this woman. At least she sold cheap - 75 cents for a pair of shoes and 50 cents for 100-weight flour.

The woman defended her actions by saying she had to sell the goods to pay the freight on them, and the mail carrier with whom I travelled said she had paid him \$7 for freight, but another man says all she has to do is to return the freight bills and the Relief Committee will refund her money. However, I shall see this woman as well as those who bought from her in a day or so.

At 8 to-night, having travelled since 4 this morning, I reached Fairfax, S. Dak. I have only seen the people in the house where I am staying. It is called a hotel and consists of three rooms. They tell me that people are suffering dreadfully about here and I have made arrangements to drive about to-morrow and see for myself. No relief has been sent here yet, but everybody, even the village people, are destitute.

## LAND OF THE DESTITUTE

*FAIRFAX, S. Dak., Jan. 22* - Unless you wish to do penance for your sins, stay East! Life in the West is one dreadful routine of hardships

and privation without any compensation, unless it be the blue sky and endless stretch of level land.

I drove all day for thirty miles among the farmers around and about Fairfax, and I have returned to the village frozen and more than ever convinced of the alarming condition of the people in the drought-stricken regions of Nebraska and South Dakota. Hundreds of families will starve and cattle will freeze if there comes a snowstorm. To the mildness of the winter is due the fact that human beings and stock have so far been able to live on pure air and scenery.<sup>17</sup>

That may sound like an exaggeration, but it is largely true. Horses, cows and pigs have been turned out to "rustle" for themselves on the bare prairies. And somehow the poor animals have managed to live in this section. In some places the prairie is covered with buffalo grass which is said to be nutritious even when apparently dead. To these places the animals have instinctively strayed, and as I look for miles across the prairies I see dark spots here and there, which I have learned to know are herds of cattle.

I am told that the cows and horses that have been born West know enough to break the ice when they want water. There is a small stream some miles from here where they go for water. Still, if a snow comes all the cattle will perish, as the farmers are absolutely without feed.<sup>18</sup>

Among the many families I visited to-day was a German family in whom I became greatly interested. Around about the homestead everything was neat and tidy; even the inevitable wood pile was laid up with neatness and precision. The house, although built of sod, had a look about it that almost made me feel that the inmates were comfortably fixed. But a look at the empty stable, the absence of animal life around the yard and no sign of hay or straw, made me realize that the drought had not spared them.

A bright-eyed little German woman met me at the door and invited me to enter. I did so and was pleased at once. The interior was nicely plastered and whitewashed until the sides of the house looked like snow. Half of the floor was boarded and half was the hard earth. There were cheap bedsteads, but the beds were neatly made and looked well in spite of their very old covering. There was a small table, one chair, a rocker at that, and several boxes and a roughly made bench to do duty as chairs.

In one corner of the little house some shelves had been nailed and with coverings of crimped paper and the dishes, old and broken, it is true, set nicely upon them the effect was very pleasing. Several big ridge logs crossed the little house, showing the straw and sod roof above. The logs had been scraped clean and answered for shelves. Upon one were some old and worn books. Upon another were a gun and a violin.

The five children and the mother were clean, but their clothing was

much patched. The children had shoes, worn and old, but no stockings. Underclothing they did not possess.

Little by little I persuaded the woman to tell me about herself and family. She and her children had books in their hands, and she explained that she was teaching them. She had been a teacher in Germany.

"When we first came to America we lived in Omaha," she told me. "We had a dairy. We owned fifty cows, for which we paid \$60 and more a head, and we paid \$600 a year rent. Just when we got all our cows paid for they got sick and thirty-six died in three weeks and the rest we sold for \$9 each, because the authorities would not let us sell their milk. We felt pretty discouraged; so we decided to come to Dakota and take up a claim.

"We went to the Sand Hills first. For three years we lived there and never raised a crop. So we decided to move here. We were told the land was better. We've been here four years, and I thought at first we'd get along.

"We'd only our furniture, such as you see, two horses, a wagon, in which we came, and 67 cents in money when we got here. We took this claim and traded off our wagon for a cow. Then my husband broke prairie for another man and got a horse for his work. The first year we were here I paid our expenses and bought chickens and pigs, all on money I made washing. I washed for 50 cents a day, or cleaned house and sewed, or farmed – anything I could get to do – and the money went towards getting us a home.

"Then I helped my husband farm. We have six children, and the largest ones (the eldest is eleven years) helped. Our old house fell down; so we built this. My husband and I cut the timber for it, cut the sod, and I helped him build it. Then I plastered the inside and whitewashed. I wanted to make it as homelike as I could, but my hands were a mess of sores from the lime for weeks afterwards."

"Have you had a crop since you came here?" I asked.

"Not what could be called a crop," she replied. "We got a little, just enough to keep us from starving through the winter, until last summer. We didn't get anything then."

"What have you lived on since?"

"We have lived on bread since last summer. I did make some butter from my cow, but every ounce of it went to buy soap and oil and salt. Then the cow had a calf, and then she went dry because she didn't have any feed. The calf was only three weeks old, but we had to kill it to keep it from starving. The meat didn't agree very well with us, but we only ate a little at a time. The cow is still dry, but if it doesn't snow, she'll be able to rustle through till summer. We haven't had any oil for many months now. I'll show you my patent lamp."

She brought me a tin can, in the bottom of which she poured some

grease. Around the can she had drawn two wires which held upright a bit of a rag. I don't know what kind of a light it made, but that was her lamp.

"What have you to eat now?" I asked.

"We have bread. The Ancient Order of United Workmen sent my husband a sack of flour and some clothes for the children.<sup>19</sup> Before that they had nothing to wear but grain sacks. For two days last month we had nothing to eat. I went around everywhere to borrow some flour, but nobody had any. Then the lodge sent us some. When it's finished I don't know where we'll get more."

"Do you eat your bread dry?"

"Yes; we're glad enough to have it so, but sometimes I scorch some flour and mix it with water, and then we dip our bread in that. It makes a change."

She told me that it is over a year since they have had any tea, coffee or sugar in the house, and as she cannot afford yeast she mixes the dough and fries it in a pan. The first year when she washed (no one can afford to hire a washwoman now; that's why she's idle) the family lived on cornmeal and beef heads and "lights," which she begged from the butcher.<sup>20</sup> Their coffee was made from the grounds which were given to her by families after having been used.

Their one horse is starving. It came from Omaha, and was used to heavy feed. It does not understand "rustling" on the prairie, and now, she says, it can no longer stand up.

But this woman does not mean to give up. She says she will do the farming in the spring, and her husband will go away to work for others.

"It's very hard," she said simply, "but we have to pay for living in such a beautiful land." How she can see any beauty in it under the circumstances I fail to understand.

Near this farm I found an American family, consisting of husband and wife and two children and a stray orphan boy who is sharing their hunger. The sod house was most miserable inside. One little bed stood on the bare ground. A stove, some boxes and a washtub was about all. The woman and children were in rags.

Four years ago this young couple married and came West to make a home for themselves. They had money enough to buy two horses, two cows, some chickens and a pig; but when that was spent they got no further. They have worked hard, but they have had no crops. They had a little each year, very much less always than the seed they had put in the ground, and they managed to exist. Last summer they got nothing. The seed was put in the ground, and not an ear of corn, a stalk of wheat or a potato rewarded their efforts.

First the pig was killed and given to the storekeeper in exchange for groceries. Then hunger compelled them to kill and eat their starving

chickens. Finally the horses were turned out to "rustle," and the family had nothing but milk and bread. Then the cows went dry from lack of food. Now they are "rustling" on the prairie.

Long ago the storekeepers in the nearby villages refused to give "trust" any longer. It was pay or do without. They did without. Often there was not even flour, and flour was the only kind of food they had known in a long time.

There was no work to be had. In a farming land there is nothing to do in winter. But winter made people cold, so the husband decided to cut wood. It takes him a day to chop a load of wood and haul it to his house. It takes another day to saw this wood into stove lengths, and it takes still another day to haul wood to Butte, where he sells the entire wagon load, the product of three days' hard labor, for 75 cents!

And although there are six days in the week during which he might manage to secure two loads of wood, he does not succeed in selling a load every week. For people are poor, and wood, their only fuel, is used sparingly. As soon as the 75 cents is earned it is spent for flour. A sack, fifty pounds, does the family one week. It is their only article of diet, so more is consumed than would be otherwise.

Not long ago some charitable friends shared with the family some wheat which had been given to them. This wheat is put in a frying-pan over a hot fire and scorched and burned black. This burned wheat is then used as coffee, and is called "wheat coffee." The families who have "wheat coffee" consider that they have a luxury. The great majority of them have nothing but water.

But poor as this family is, they share their little with an orphan lad twelve years old. His name is Roy Gordon and his home was in Deland, Pipe County [De Land, Piatt County], Ill. His mother married a second time after his father's death and his stepfather was not kind to him.

"One day he put me on a train in charge of the conductor," the boy said, "and the conductor handed me over to a man in Chicago. The man put me on another train in charge of the conductor, and I rode till the conductor put me off at a station in Clark County, Dak. There a man met me. No, mom; I never seen the man afore, an' I don't know how he knew about me, but he took me to a ranch and bound me out to herd cattle."

"Bound you out?" I repeated.

"I guess so, 'cause he got the money for my work. I didn't get anything. I had to herd thirty head of sheep and twenty-five head of cattle all day afoot. Other boys were given horses, but I had to herd afoot."

"Who were the other boys?" I asked, curiously.

"I don't know. They were boys like me who had no home. But they were some older than me. I was the youngest; I was nine years old then."

"Were you used well?"

"No. They used to beat me; the man beat me with his horsewhip 'cause I'd let the cattle get into haystacks. But I couldn't help it. I had to herd afoot, and it kept me runnin' every minute; still, they'd get into the hay."

"So at last he ran away," interposed the woman, "and he travelled about, working for his food wherever he got a chance, until he came here. We're letting him stay till he can get work with some farmer."

"It's a pretty sad life for a boy of thirteen," I observed, pityingly, and, to my surprise, the boy burst into tears and cried as if his young heart would break. I fancy that was the first word of pity the child had heard in many years.

All the day I travelled from farm to farm, seeing everywhere the same poverty, and hearing everywhere the same tale of woe. The destitution is universal, with little exception.

I was delighted to stumble upon a colony of Russians. The people in the West called them "Rooshins." The moment I saw their houses I was struck by the difference. They build larger sod houses than any other settler in the West. In the front of their houses they build an entrance, and their doors are all made in two parts, an upper and lower.

After the houses are built they plaster and whitewash both outside and inside and the effect is lovely, making the houses look in the distance like stone. It is a style that the other settlers might copy with credit. The majority of these Russian houses have the stable built in one end. But so neat and nice are both the houses and their occupants! Green plants grow in all their deep windows, and small white curtains are tied back with gay ribbons. Their floors are made hard with some sort of substance they compose of short straw and mud. They bake the same substance in the summer, then chop it into squares and use it for fuel.

Strange to say, none of these people are asking aid. They have the choice of land in South Dakota, and were the first settlers in the district. In the four years they had one good crop, and so carefully have they managed that only one family, new settlers, are in absolute need.

I found one Russian who spoke English very well, so I went into his house. It was the perfection of neatness inside, and showed what really pretty homes could be made of sod. It was carefully plastered, and the plaster was whitewashed a blue tint that was delightful. Even the logs in the roof had been given a coat of blue-tinted whitewash.

Around the table were gathered about eight boys and girls, with books in their hands and serious and interested expressions on their clean and intelligent faces. I glanced at their books to see what they were reading. It was the Bible.

"The children have no school," explained the Russian, "and we can't let them grow up in ignorance, so they gather here and study together. The Bible and hymn-book is all they study."

"Are you or any of your people in need?" I asked the man.

"Not in need of aid, I thank you," he replied simply. "We've all had one good crop since we came, four years ago. Our land is the best in this part of the country. If there are any rains we get them. Still, we didn't have any crop last summer. Not a seed came out of the ground. But we've all killed our pigs and cattle and chickens, and with the help of God we'll try to pull through. We have no feed for our cattle. They have to care for themselves, but if it doesn't snow we will live. The slightest snow will finish all our stock.

"We are poor; we can't deny it," he said, as I was going, "but so long as we have flour it isn't right to take help when others need it worse."

"How will you manage to get seed in the spring?" I asked.

"I cannot say, but we must trust God to show us a way," was the affecting reply.

In the entire Russian colony I found the people honest, God-fearing, neat, saving, intelligent and honorable. I am delighted with them, and consider them the best settlers I have met.

On the opposite side of Fairfax is a settlement called Bonesteel. The people there are all Americans and hard workers, but if possible, they have had worse luck than those I have already spoken of. Farmers in other sections have had in the four years a little bit of crop, a few bushels of corn, few potatoes and so on, enabling them to "hold out," as they say, over the winters. But at Bonesteel the farmers got nothing, and they are in absolute want.

Their land is not yet surveyed and they are not able, after four years' labor, to raise a dollar on their homestead. What stock they have is mortgaged over its value, and they have nothing left to sell, even if such a thing as a market for horse or beef existed in Gregory County.

Up to this time no aid has been sent to Gregory County, S. Dak. The people are not more than squatters in the eyes of the law, for though they have lived four years upon their claims the Government has not made a survey of the county and has been tranquilly indifferent to the demands of the most needy of people.

Of course, being across the line from Nebraska, the people here have received no aid from the Nebraska Relief Commission, and do not expect any. A number of the settlers held a meeting and decided to send two men as solicitors for aid to other States, but the scheme fell through from lack of funds.

An investigation committee, composed of well-known and trustworthy men – James Reed, Joseph Gibson, Mr. Homer, and B. N. Piper, an old soldier from Ohio – has made a house-to-house canvass,

and their reports coincide with mine that eight families out of ten are destitute, and that the other two will fall in before planting time.

I am not in favor of the Nebraska State Relief Committee. I have studied the situation carefully and seriously, and I am thoroughly convinced that it is not competent to handle this serious question of relief. The people throughout the drought district cannot be aided by a few barrels of flour, and the State Relief Committee is not competent to distribute even that flour.

The seriousness of the whole matter is in this: The generous public throughout the United States will send carloads of relief this month and probably next. A month later they will tire of the very idea of the drought sufferers, and no aid will be forthcoming.

The suffering of these people is only begun. It is not at its worst, and will not be for a month or so yet. If no snow comes, and they manage to live until the spring, then comes the great question of grain seed. Without that there is no hope. Starvation by the hundreds is inevitable. Farms are to-day absolutely clean of everything. It is difficult to realize the full extent of what I state, but I cannot describe it better than to say that the country is swept as clean of food and grain as the forest fire swept Hinckley of houses.<sup>21</sup> It is the exception to find a farmer with a single ear of corn, a solitary potato, a grain of wheat.

Now, how the committee proposes to take care of this I do not know, but I would suggest the appointment of three capable men – men of large views and managerial abilities. Then every town and small village should have a local committee of three, a woman and two men, with a sub-committee of three for every precinct in the county.

Western people are naturally honest, although roughs are among them, the same as everywhere else. But these sub-committees would be able to make a house-to-house canvass, and, as everybody knows everybody else for miles around and his exact circumstances, it would be an easy matter for the sub-committees to be able to tell the central committee exactly who was needy and who was not.

This method would greatly lessen, if not entirely exclude, frauds, and only the needy would receive benefit. When I say only the needy it is not to be inferred that the drought did not use one man as badly as another, but some have other sources of aid, and a man who has cattle or liberal friends in other States should not share in the general relief.

I do not think that aid should be sent immediately to Bonesteel and Fairfax. The people are fifty miles from the nearest railroad, and if they should have a snow-storm, as they say is likely next month, or even in March, no aid could be hauled across the country, and everybody would starve.

I know that anything sent to Mr. J. S. Strait, Bonesteel, or the other men I have mentioned in Fairfax, would be distributed carefully and to

**GRAND CHARITY**  
**MUSICAL ENTERTAINMENT**

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For the purpose of procuring Seed Corn for the destitute farmers in the vicinity of

**WALLACE, LINCOLN CO., NEBR.**

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The Business Men's Aid Association of Wallace, will give a Charity Musical Entertainment at Richman Hall on

**April 24, 1895,**

for the above purpose, and ask all charitably inclined people to purchase one or more tickets to assist farmers made destitute by loss of two crops from drouth, and now unable to help themselves.

We ask the person to whom this circular is addressed to interest themselves among their friends in disposing of the enclosed tickets and remit the proceeds to MR. A. J. MOTHERSEAD, Post Master, Treasurer, at Wallace, Lincoln county, Nebraska.

Please return all unsold tickets in the enclosed return envelope.

J. P. HARDING, Sec'y.

A. M. LIPSEY, Chairman.

A. J. MOTHERSEAD,

F. J. NICHOLS,

GEO. A. METZ,

P. L. HARPER,

P. B. GAVIN,

Ex. Com.

REFERENCE: Any Bank or Business House in Wallace.

the most needy. The most prosperous families in Gregory County may be able to pull through all right, but they have nothing with which to aid their hungry neighbors. The stores have long since refused a penny's worth of goods without cash payment.

I met two settlers who are considered the "best pay," but, as they have no money and no food, they had to give their notes to the miller for flour. The notes bear 10 percent interest. "It is hard," said one to me, "but it beats starving!"

To-morrow I leave here to travel back towards the railroad. I intend to take a private conveyance, instead of travelling by stage, so that I can stop at the farms en route.

### NELLIE BLY SEES MISERY

*BUTTE, Boyd County, Neb., Jan. 24* – In Butte there is a well-organized committee that call themselves the Boyd County Central Relief Commission. They have three competent people on the main board, and one of them is a woman. Their county consists of eight precincts and they formed sub-committees of three each to make house-to-house visits in their individual precincts.

The Central Committee went systematically to work to get aid. They do not countenance solicitors, but send out printed circulars stating their needs. Up to date they have received four or five loads of provisions as the result of their work. The State Relief Committee have given them only two and a half carloads so far.

When the cars reach Stuart, the nearest railway station, the committee go among the farmers and get them to go for the goods. They pay the hotel and barn expenses of these men and give each man for his labor and his team 100 pounds of flour. That amount of flour they value at \$1.50. For this these men are glad to make the trip, a matter of 100 miles before they get there and back.

Of course, it means two or three days' travel. The road is very bad in places, as I know, and the horses, having been without grain since last spring, are ill fitted for their task. In many cases the poor animals have almost died from exhaustion.

When the provisions finally reach Butte they are divided equally and fairly into eight portions and given to the eight sub-committees for local distribution. So it would seem that, so far as mortal ability goes in matters of charity, the committee at least will do good work, and will after a few days be able to give only to the deserving.

Of course, they are at a great expense. Every carload of stuff arrives with heavy freight charges. They must be paid before the car is released, and in this county, where people are getting postage stamps on trust, it is no easy task to find enough cash to meet expenses. The

expenses alone for men and teams to the railroad and back amount to considerable. Even the two cars which were sent from the State Committee at Lincoln came with freight charges. The Elkhorn Road has been very nice in the matter so far as they are concerned.<sup>22</sup> They will ship the goods free of charge, but the other railroads that handle the goods first are not so charitable.

The Central Committee realize just what I have predicted – that the worst is not yet. It is many months until a crop comes in, and every day people are growing poorer. Those who have managed to eat up all their chickens and hogs and cattle have reached their limit. They are rapidly being added to the list.

At first there were 500 families seeking relief. Now there are over one thousand. Before six weeks pass it is believed that four-fifths of the population of Boyd County will be in need of food. The population is estimated at 7,000 families.

It is too soon to even consider the question of seed. Food is the necessary thing, and in sending supplies it is well to send wisely. Potatoes freeze on the way, and are not worth the freight. Fresh meat is troublesome and expensive to ship. The best things to send are flour, bacon, beans, rice, wheat, and coffee and tea as luxuries. Boots and shoes are very much needed, and none have been sent that are worth the sending.

There is another article I would suggest sending – beef extract. Never in the history of the country has there been as much sickness. People are ailing with all sorts of complaints. They do not know what is wrong with them, but the doctor does. He tells me it is all due to insufficient food. If the people were Eastern people they would have died long ago, but the inhabitants here are like their horses – they can last a long time on fresh air.

Sickness naturally makes this poverty harder than it would be otherwise. The druggist, in common with other business houses, insists upon cash payments. He will not make up a drop of medicine until the cash is first placed upon the counter. This is on the verge of inhumanity, but the business men contend that they will themselves go under if they give trust to the destitute, who will, so far as any one can judge, never be able to pay.

It is also frightful to know that people will get sick and die, and that the doctor – the only one in the village – will not attend them. He told me frankly that he knows he will never get any pay and, as he has enough sick people in the village to look after, he does not propose to visit the sick among the farmers.

He says that he has outstanding \$4,000 now, and that so long as he was able he would make up medicine himself and send it to those whose friends come to get him to visit them. When calls are made on him he tells me he asks the symptoms of the sick, and prescribes as

best he can. If the people are able to buy the medicine they do so and return home, and let their sick ones run their chances.

So, I think, a supply of some sort of beef extract would be the most charitable thing to send. The sick will not last long on a diet of flour and water mixed, baked flat on a frying pan, and called bread.

The most charitable man I know is the postmaster's assistant. People come begging stamps, paper and postal cards and he turns none away, but pays for them out of his own small salary.

I experienced some of the pleasures of Western life these two days and nights. The last night I spent in Fairfax I undressed when I went to bed just as one is accustomed to do in the East.

The hotel contained three rooms – the sitting-room, in which I slept; the dining-room, in which the proprietor, his wife and child slept; and the kitchen, where the girl slept. There were two stoves in the house. The kitchen stove and the stove in my room. In my stove a big wood fire blazed, but still I was not comfortable. Several times I woke to see the proprietor, like a tall, thin spook, slipping in to pile fresh wood on the fire, and every time I was shivering from the cold, but would always drop asleep again from sheer weariness.

Some time in the night I woke suddenly in a state of shaking that convinced me that I could not endure it much longer. I was so cold that I was stiff, but with difficulty I managed to crawl out of bed and put on some of my day garments. I began gradually, believing each additional garment would succeed in giving me warmth. Before many hours I was completely dressed and with my sealskin and hood on, lay down to sleep until daylight.

When I got up for the day I found the water that had stood by my bedside was frozen solid. As for myself – well, I was cheered by being told it was only 20 degrees below zero. Only? I could not believe it.

At 9 o'clock the sun was shining in a sky of cloudless blue, and I started on a twenty-five mile drive through the country. When we started we had a sorrel team, little ponies, with long black tails and manes. Before we had gone many miles the ponies were silver white. They were completely covered with frost, just as a pane of glass gets in very cold weather. They glistened and sparkled in the sunshine until the effect was exquisite, if I could have got rid of the thought that the coat of frost must be extremely painful to the willing little fellows.

Still, with all the prettiness of the frost, there was also a laughable feature to the picture. At the corners of each pony's mouth long icicles formed and hung there rigidly. It looked funny, but I couldn't laugh. My face was frozen stiff. I could only enjoy the thought of how I would laugh if I only could.

I was so cold that I lost courage and told my driver to go on without stopping. I did not even care if by so doing everybody in Nebraska starved. I had only energy enough to want to reach the end of my jour-

ney and be given a chance to thaw.

But even my selfishness, born of the bitter cold, could not hold out against it. I suddenly felt that if I went another mile I would die, so I managed to say: "Stop at the first house. Can't stand it any longer."

The first house was merely a hole in the ground, with a few layers of black sod coming out two feet above the surface of the ground, and finished with a roof of sod, hay and branches.

"That looks like a bach's," observed my guide uneasily through his icicled beard. A "bach" is a God-forsaken object, once a man that came west to take up a claim and who lives like a hermit upon his miserable 160 acres.<sup>23</sup>

As we approached, this particular "bach" made his appearance, coming suddenly up through the door of his sod house, just as a prairie dog pops out of his ground home, and stood there looking wonderingly at us. A yellow dog, lean and lank, stood defensively before him, as if it meant to protect him from possible harm.

"Can we go in an' warm? This lady's almost froze," shouted my guide and driver.

"There isn't much fire, but you can come in," was the listless reply. Without waiting to assist us he dove down into the door again and disappeared from view.

My driver lifted me out, for I was so bundled up that even if I had not been stiff from cold, I still would have found it difficult to move. Besides my sealskin I wore a golf cape, arctics [overshoes], mitts, a woolen hood and was also wrapped in several rugs. I left my hat fifty miles away, at the railroad, and I was mightily glad of it. This is certainly not a country for hats and style.

Without waiting for my driver, I stumbled down the steep incline dug in the ground, and, without the ceremony of a knock, opened the low door and walked into the bach's home. He was busy putting some branches into a small uncertain stove, but turned to make me welcome.

"Won't you sit down?" he asked, as he offered me his only chair - a dry-goods box. I sat down and tried to put my arctics and their contents upon the stove. It was a difficult feat, and, when accomplished, was certainly not a position a queen could have maintained with dignity. The stove was set high on elevated ground and to reach it with my arctics was not easy, but there are times when one's only consideration is personal comfort.

Then I looked around and felt my nerves quiver with pain. I never before looked upon human existence in as miserable surroundings. The "bach's" home was only a hole in the ground, and that hole a very small one, dug out just in the corner and to the depth that a medium-sized man might stand upright in it. The stove stood upon the surface of the earth, about two feet below the thatched and sod roof. On the

other side of the hut the "bach" had dug three steps in the earth which led up to his bed. His bed was merely some loose straw and small rags laid upon the surface of the earth and coming but two feet below the roof, as did the stove.

In the spot that had been hollowed out the "bach" had propped up some boards, with the sod wall on one side and a log on the other. That was his table. On this table was a tin pail containing about a pint of unstrained milk and a pan with a heavy black-looking cake in it.

There were no clothes about the place. It was very evident that all the man owned were on his back, and he was in rags. Unshaved and unwashed, with the pallor that comes from insufficient food showing through the dirt, the man was indeed an object of pity. There he sat, in a drooping, despondent attitude, upon the lower step of the black earth, his shapeless hat pulled over his face, showing there was still enough spirit left to feel ashamed of his glaring misery.

"What have you to eat?" I asked simply, no other word having been spoken since I sat down.

"What you see," he replied shortly.

"Milk and bread," I observed, looking at the table.

"Yes."

"How did you get the flour?"

"I traded two pigs for the last sack."

"How many pigs have you now?"

"None; I traded the others off some time ago. I had no feed for them and I needed groceries."

"It's well you have a cow. That helps out splendidly," I observed encouragingly.

"She's mortgaged. I suppose they'll be after her any day," was the slow reply.

"And then?" I questioned.

"And then?" he repeated with a short laugh.

I did not press the question. But I questioned him closely in regard to other things, and in short replies got the gist of the "bach's" simple but pathetic history.

He was the only child of poor parents. He worked as his father had, all his life, but even living closely and sparingly the ordinary expenses left them very little to lay away for a rainy day. He had heard of the wonders of the West. To him it seemed that it was a dream of fairyland. A poor man, they told him, could come West and take up a claim and in four years be the possessor of 160 acres. As for crops, why, all that was necessary was to throw the corn on the sod and sit down and smoke his pipe while watching it grow to prodigious heights and abundant bearing.

To own a home was the dream of his parents, so with them he worked and saved until altogether they were able to give him a start. Five hun-

dred dollars in cash, and with the tearful blessings of the old folks, he started for the glorious West to get a home for them.

He got his claim; he built a house and barn; he bought stock – chickens, cows, pigs and a team; he bought seed and sowed it upon the sod, being unable to break much prairie the first year. He worked outside and in; was his own cook as well as his own farmer. His money was hoarded carefully, but what he had already bought had caused a large decrease in it, and he had to buy his supplies until his farm brought forth a crop.

But his land was the best and he had nothing to fear, so cheerful letters full of promises went back to the old people.

The crop came up beautifully. It made his heart glad to see it. Indeed was the West the land of promise and the home of the poor man.

One day in July there came a storm. Hail fell, and it fell as it never fell before. For a week after it lay in the gulches, and children gathered it in buckets to make ice-cream. It meant fun for the children, but it meant ruin for the farmers. The crop was cut to the ground. Not even a bushel of seed was left to tell of labor wasted.

This is not exaggerated. It happened to many people, the hailstorm covering a section of land, just as the hot wave did last summer, and absolute ruin lay in its path.

But the “bach” did not despair. He wrote the old folks that they’d have to wait another year. Writing that letter was harder even than facing his ruined crops.

The second year the last of his money went to buy seed grain. He planted plentifully, and though the crop only promised a small return, still it was enough to make him sure of sending for the old folks. Besides he had 500 chickens, some cows and calves and a good team.

He had harvested some and was completing the rest, when one day he saw a red flame racing across the prairie. He stood in horror, hardly able to realize what was upon him. Then he grabbed his violin and fled, followed by his dog.

Of course, he returned to his land. That was all he had, except his team, which had escaped in some way where it was browsing. Cattle, chickens, house and crop were swept from the face of the earth. Only the black bare ground was his.

He wrote home again. He bade the old folks be of good cheer – things must change and bad luck could not last forever. He went to work and dug a hole in the ground – a very small one. He banked up two feet of sod and covered it all with a roof of sod and twigs and hay. He built a sod barn and he waited for spring to begin over.

All his money was gone now. His seed was procured on a note bearing 10 percent monthly. He worked, planted and waited.

Meanwhile, as he waited, afraid to face what he saw before him, the

utter waste of the crop, his parents died, one following shortly after the other. Then there came no rain, there was no harvest, no crop and he sat down with his dog, his violin and his misery.

That's where I found him. The violin hanging on the log that supports the roof. He got a cow last summer on another note bearing enormous interest, and so he has milk to drink. Coffee he hasn't tasted in a year. Milk and bread compose his diet and have for many months. He had left probably three pounds of flour. When that was finished he knew not what to do.

I asked him what he meant to do? He hung his head and laughed aloud. I told him if he dug the hole in his house bigger and tried to fix up he'd feel better and he laughed again. I observed that his bed must be very damp and cold and he laughed the more. I said it would be well for him to sleep with the dog; that it would help keep him warm, and he still laughed! Then I said I was warm enough to start. He followed us to the door and listlessly watched us get into the buggy.

"I hope you will have good luck this year," I said, and added: "Good-by." Then for the first time he raised his head and looked at me, and I saw his eyes were filled with tears that had begun to roll down his bearded cheeks.

"Go on!" I said hastily to my driver. "You see the icicles still hang to our ponies' mouths!" After we had gone a long distance I turned, and the man and the dog were still standing where we left them. It was a position of hopeless misery that I'll never forget.

All along the way we made short stops, peeping into houses and finding want everywhere. A glance at the barns and barnyards showed us that the drought had spared no one. Empty barns, empty pig pens and very few chickens. Very little stock of any kind we saw during our long drive, and what we did see was "rustling."

But we saw nothing dead except dogs. Everywhere along the roadside I saw dead dogs. I stopped the only man we met and asked him if people were poisoning dogs. He said no, he believed they starved; that families could not spare even enough of their bread to feed their dogs.

It would make a long story, and a monotonous one, to repeat story by story, as I heard it on my way. It was all the same thing, absolutely no crops, and, if not hunger, very close to it. All along the roads we saw the deep cracks which have come from dryness. In some very dry places the cracks were several inches wide and at least two feet deep. In the majority of places they are smaller.

At noon we reached Spencer. I got very little satisfaction from the people. To have heard what they said I would have believed there wasn't a poor family in Boyd County and that the land flowed with honey and milk.

## THE WISH TO OWN A HOME

*BUTTE, Boyd County, Neb., Jan. 25*—I never realized before what a strong feeling is the love of home and what a universal one. It is the desire to own a home to which is due the untold misery of the settlers in Nebraska. They were poor people who saw no chance of owning a home, and they read the flowery tales that emanate from the Western land boomer, the railroad's employee, that tell how men can take up a claim and live thereof at no cost and in perfect ease and comfort.

It is a horrible and ghastly delusion. The poor settler little realizes that his claim is many miles from the railroad. That his house must necessarily be of sod, that his fuel must be got at a great expense and hauled many miles. That water becomes gold, because of its scarceness and because they must travel so far for it. That there are no churches, no schools and no industries. That his children must grow up in ignorance and of necessity become farmers, there being no other work. Nor does he realize when told of his 160 acres that if he raises cattle they must be driven many, many weary miles to the railroads; that if he raises chickens or sheep or pigs he has no market for them. No; the only thing the settler thought was that he wanted a home, and to take up a claim seemed to be his only hope.

I hear one pitiful tale after another until I feel that I never met so wretched and miserable a people. The doctor told me of a case to-day that has almost broken my heart. It was that of a Boston girl, born and bred, and who had no knowledge of country life except what she got from books until she came out here, the bride of a settler.

The man and his father had come before and had taken up a claim; so the bride traveled alone from Boston to Stuart. At Stuart she left even the remnant of civilization behind. Over forty miles she traveled in the uncertain grocery wagon, dignified by the name of stage, to Butte, and there the young husband was waiting with a wagon to carry his Boston bride to her future home.

They say she did not lose heart even at the sight of the old wagon in which she was to ride. Wagons are all shipped here from the East, as they call Omaha and Chicago, and are extremely high priced. The majority are bought at second hand, and a new wagon or stylish one would be a novel sight, indeed. So it is safe to assume that the wagon the bride rode in would have disgraced any modern village.

For fifteen miles out in the country she drove from Butte, and at last she was at home! Home? A sod house with a ground floor, and the bed and kitchen stove touching sides!

But she made the best of it. She was brave, poor thing, and the doctor said no one ever heard her speak a word of complaint. She set to work to make her sod house as pretty as possible, and so well did she

succeed that everybody speaks of it as the neatest and prettiest home in that section of the country.

Still they did not prosper. Every year her husband got poorer. Crop after crop failed, and one bit of stock after the other went until he has only his land and an old team of horses left. No cows, chickens or pigs; they all went long ago.

For many months these three people have considered themselves fortunate if they had flour. They baked some, and for variety, made a water gravy. Often they were hungry. And I fancy that poor Boston girl did not even eat as much bread as she wanted. At any rate she fell sick. Diphtheria, the doctor says, and, he adds bluntly, all due to starvation. For weeks the poor thing has been on the verge of death. Her husband and his father nurse her as best they can. She has not seen the face of a woman since she became ill.

Flour and water are not an appetizing diet even to the well, and it is easy to imagine the horror of it to the sick. Still, that brave Boston girl did not complain. She was unable to eat, and the doctor told the husband she must have something else or she would starve. The doctor said an egg would be a good thing for her, and the husband travelled miles in a vain search for one, but he could not borrow and none would give, so he was forced to return empty handed.

That is not the worst of it. The doctor will no longer visit the sick woman, though he says she should have medical attendance twice a day. He says she cannot recover. The other day when the husband came for him the doctor wrote out a prescription, and said that would have to do instead of a visit. The husband went to the drug store, but the druggist refused to give him the medicine without cash payment. The amount was only 75 cents, and after a great deal of worry the distracted husband got the money by giving the obliging banker a note bearing a monthly interest of 10 percent.

I would have visited the poor, God-forsaken woman, but the doctor warned me not to. I did not fear danger for myself, but as he rightly reminded me, it was wrong for me to visit her and then go to see other families afterwards.

Another family that interested me particularly (and naturally some appealed to me more than others), was one I found in a tumbling-down sod house on another man's homestead. I have been to see the homesteader's family, having been told they were very needy. I found their house unusually well built. It was new, the woman said, the old house being occupied by the newcomers. The house had no floor, but there was an unusual amount of furniture. Two beds, unmade and dirty, a splendid ingrain carpet hanging up for a curtain, some good chairs, a rocker and a good stove.

Two little girls and a very small babe, that lay in the rocking-chair, was all that were in when I arrived. But the wife, a fat, flabby, dirty crea-

# AID the SUFFERING

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At a called meeting at the court room in Sigourney, Thursday evening, Jan. 17 '95, committees were appointed as follows to solicit aid for the

## Nebraska Sufferers.

**EXECUTIVE Com.,** S. W. Brunt, J. F. Gibbons and W. H. Needham.

**SOUTH East ward,** Miss Belle James.

**SOUTH West ward,** Mrs. D. D. Moore and Mrs. James Randall.

**NORTH East ward,** Mrs L. A. Funk and Mrs. G. Klett.

**NORTH West ward,** Mrs. Alex. Neas and Mrs. James Mackey.

**TO Solicit farmers,** J. F. Abernathy, Frank Pfaff, Henry Turner and J. A. Everman.

**TO Solicit Business Men,** J. S. White and C. L. Crocker.

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The Boegel room, opposite the Arlington Hotel, has been secured to store the goods and will be in charge of W. S. Booton, who will receive contributions any day during the coming week.

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Send in contributions whether you are Solicited or not; the committees can't see all in so short a time. Clothing, Corn meal, Flour, Salt meats, Bed clothing or anything to eat or wear will be acceptable.

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There will be a meeting at the court room, Tuesday evening, January 22, 1895.

*Residents of Sigourney, Iowa, contributed toward Nebraska drouth relief.*

ture, with uncombed hair and untied shoes, came in shortly, carrying an enormous bundle. She explained that a neighbor had received a donation of clothing and had divided it with her. Everywhere I looked she had bundles of clothing, all being donated to her. It was very evident, and she so confessed, that she had received enough clothing to last them three years.

Still, she begged for money and aid! She aroused my temper; so I told her that I thought a little work would make a great change in her house, and that if she looked after what she had, she would find it more than sufficient.

At this she flew to the untidy beds, and, tossing them around, exclaimed fretfully to the child: "Did pa go away without making the beds?"

She had a small child die a few days before. The doctor said the boy had not been fed enough, and that his death was the result of poor and insufficient food. Still the woman wept about the boy.

"Oh," she cried, "you should have seen the lovely coffin we got him. It cost \$20, and the neighbors have promised to help pay for it. It was lined with pink muslin, and had 'Our Dear One' on the lid."

"No, it was 'Our Darling,'" interrupted the small, pale daughter, as she rocked the whining baby to and fro.

I read the woman a lesson on what I considered cruelty to the living and folly for the dead, which she accepted with bad grace, crying and saying she didn't care if he hadn't much to eat before he died she would see him well buried.

I found that she was from Vermont, and was the daughter of a minister. She told me that her husband was trying to trade the claim of the family in the nearby sod house in return for several town lots in Florida.

I went to visit the other family, and I never saw greater misery. The walls of the house were falling in and had been propped with roughly hewn trees. The husband sat at the table eating some newly baked bread, beside which stood a dish of gravy. On a bed of rags sat a pale, thin woman in a miserable gown, shapeless, colorless and threadbare. She held to her breast a small, puny child that never opened its eyes or made a sound. Clinging to her was a girl of about eleven years, the whitest, thinnest, most starved-looking child I ever saw.

Now, this poor family had come West for a home. They had drifted from one place to another, constantly getting poorer. First they had a claim in one place, but after a few years wasted upon it they removed to another.

From having furniture, cattle, clothes and a small sum of money, they were reduced to nothing. As a last hope they had offered their Florida lots to the homesteader for his claim, which he represented as being a good farm. They had driven their team, all they had left, from

the farm they abandoned to this place, and here they were starving. Even if they knew they could find work elsewhere, they were too poor to get away.

I was much attracted to another family because they loved their dog. So you see how we are swayed by little things. The man and his wife and six children have had absolutely nothing for months but flour. It is hard to realize the full extent of that statement. Only flour! That means not even little things like salt, pepper, yeast.

Everything they owned was given away for groceries long ago. They did not always have flour, for, as the man said pitifully: "A sack of flour can't be made to last over a week for eight people. You know we eat so much bread when we haven't anything else.

"We eat sparingly," he added. "We never eat as much as we want, or a sack wouldn't last the week. And then," in a trembling voice, "I've got to give something to my dog. I can't see him starve. I suppose I ought to shoot him, but I haven't the heart. You see, he's been a great friend to the children and a help to me. He knows as much as a man and he shared all our work. His work was never done. When I had cattle it was his work to watch them, and keep them from straying away; it was his work to bring the horses in when I needed them and to bring the cows at night. And then, when there's nothing else to do, he tends the children. There never was a better nurse, or friend. Always willing, always faithful and always good-tempered. I can't shoot him, but I s'pose I ought."

"Oh, don't!" I begged anxiously. "Share your last crust with him, and if you all must starve, let him starve with you. Don't kill him. I would hope you'd get no aid yourself if you hurt him."

And the dog looked at his master and looked at me and wagged his tail. He understood.<sup>24</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Addison Erwin Sheldon, *Nebraska: The Land and the People* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing, 1931), 1:739. For an explanation of the geographic and climatic factors underlying the 1894 drouth and of its political repercussions, see chapters 1, 18, and 19 of James C. Olson's *History of Nebraska*, 2nd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966).

<sup>2</sup>*New York Times*, 24 December 1894, p. 1, col. 3; 18 February 1895, p. 9, col. 1; 19 February 1895, p. 15, col. 1. *New York Herald*, 18 December 1894, p. 5, col. 3. *New York World*, 25 December 1894, p. 2, col. 2.

<sup>3</sup>Mignon Rittenhouse, *The Amazing Nellie Bly* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1956), 237.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 243.

<sup>5</sup>Nellie Bly's unfamiliarity with "to rustle" as a synonym for "to forage" is curious. The *Dictionary of American English* shows it to have been in use in this sense at least by 1846.

Webster-Merriam's *Third International* assumes that the word came into use as an analogue with "to hustle."

<sup>6</sup>A reference to the Niobrara Military Reservation (site of the present-day Niobrara Game Reserve), which from 1880 to 1906 controlled the Rosebud Reservation in nearby South Dakota. See Thomas R. Buecker, "Fort Niobrara, 1880-1906: Guardian of the Rosebud Sioux," *Nebraska History*, 65 (Fall 1984), 301-25.

<sup>7</sup>The Timber Culture Act of 1873 allowed a homesteader to claim a quarter section of land (160 acres) in addition to his first quarter section claim, provided he plant a certain percentage of it in trees. See Olson, *History of Nebraska*, 158.

<sup>8</sup>Apparently Big Turkey did not figure prominently in the Wounded Knee Massacre Troubles. A search of histories of that event and of several contemporary newspaper accounts yields only one mention of him and none of George Crager. Robert M. Tutley lists a Big Turkey among the chiefs whom Father Jutz persuaded to confer on 5 December 1890 with Brigadier General John R. Brooke at the Pine Ridge Agency. See *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 137-38.

Crager may be the Captain George Crager to whom reference is made in Ronald M. Gephart's "Politicians, Soldiers and Strikes," *Nebraska History*, 46 (June 1965), 89-120. See p. 100.

General Nelson Appleton Miles (1839-1925) was senior commander of the U. S. Army forces engaged in the campaigns against Apache and Sioux Indians.

<sup>9</sup>No "Rewanee" appears on old Nebraska maps or in standard gazetteers. Nellie Bly probably means "Kewanee," a Cherry County post office site from 1888 to 1934. See Elton Perkey, *Perkey's Nebraska Place-Names* (Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1982), 38.

<sup>10</sup>"Back from Valentine" should be "back to Valentine."

<sup>11</sup>Named president of the State Relief Commission in November 1894, W. N. Nason of Omaha seems to have been only nominally in charge during the first months of the commission's work, with most of the real responsibilities devolving on Secretary Luther Ludden. By late February, however, so many charges had been made against Ludden that Governor Silas Holcomb had to pressure Nason into taking a more active part in the distribution of relief. See "Their Pitiable Plight," *New York Times*, 22 February 1895, p. 14, cols. 1-2.

<sup>12</sup>The multitudinous duties of the Reverend Luther Ludden of Lincoln were described in a contemporary newspaper article, "Nebraska Drought," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 13 January 1895, p. 9, col. 4.

"Their Pitiable Plight," cited in note 11, indicates that much criticism of the commission was leveled at Ludden personally; that he was accused of general incompetence, negligence, and favoritism towards destitute fellow Lutherans.

But Stephen Crane, on a two-week stopover in Nebraska while on a news-gathering tour of the Southwest and Mexico, interviewed Ludden and saw in him a much-maligned but highly dedicated public servant. "Nebraska's Bitter Fight for Life," Fredson Bowers, ed., *Tales, Sketches, and Reports*, VIII, *The University of Virginia Edition of the Works of Stephen Crane* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1973), 414. The article was published simultaneously in eight U. S. newspapers including the *Nebraska State Journal* (Lincoln), 24 February 1895, p. 14.

<sup>13</sup>"Rug" is another name for "lap robe."

<sup>14</sup>Barrett Scott, former Holt County treasurer, accused of stealing over \$60,000 but free on bail, was kidnapped by masked, armed vigilantes near O'Neill on New Year's Day in 1895. On 20 January his body was found, a rope around the neck, in the Niobrara River on the Boyd County side near a bridge. See "The Victim of 'Vigilantes'" and "Hempen Rope About His Neck," *New York Times*, 2 January 1895, p. 1, col. 6; 21 January 1895, p. 5, col. 2.

It is surprising that Nellie Bly should not have known what the brakeman was talking about since the Scott story was national news. In fact, the editors of the Nebraska volume of the American Guide Series state, "Years later an eastern map company . . .

listed O'Neill as one of the three important cities in the state, largely because of the notoriety of the Scott case." *Nebraska: A Guide to the Cornhusker State* (New York: Viking, 1939), 309.

<sup>15</sup>On 17 January in Crawford, A. V. Harris, a prosperous and well-liked Dawes County farmer, was killed in an argument with City Marshal Arthur Morrison. Morrison stood off an angry crowd and escaped to Lincoln, where he surrendered to the sheriff. When Harris was buried at Crawford on January 20, a train was chartered by the Knights of Pythias so that his Chadron friends could attend the funeral. See *Omaha World-Herald*: "He Kills an Unarmed Man," 18 January, p. 2, col. 6; "Morrison Faces the Music," 19 January, p. 7, col. 5; "Morrison Says Not Guilty," 20 January 1895, p. 1, col. 2.

<sup>16</sup>The customary spelling is "Stuart."

<sup>17</sup>The first blizzard of the winter occurred on 25 January, the day Nellie Bly wrote the final installment of her series. It struck all of the Midwest heavily and brought to Nebraska its first real snowfall of any consequence in a year. A second blizzard occurred on February 6, catching Stephen Crane in Eddyville and providing him with the background for "The Blue Hotel," one of his best short stories. See *Omaha World-Herald*: "Snow All Over the State," 26 January 1895, p. 7, col. 7; "Heaviest Snow for Years," 27 January, p. 6, col. 3; "Wheels Clogged by Snow," "Is Swept by Icy Blasts," 7 February, p. 1, col. 7 and p. 2, col. 2.

<sup>18</sup>In his memoir of Nebraska pioneer life, Cass G. Barnes observed that the widespread loss of cattle in 1895 was not all bad: "But what seemed then to be a great calamity, in the end proved a lasting benefit. All manner of scrub stock of horses, cattle and hogs had been brought to the state by the settlers. It all had to go because scarcely a bit of stock forage remained after the lack of rain and the hot winds that came up from Kansas about the middle of July in 1894." *The Sod House* (1930; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 93.

<sup>19</sup>The Ancient Order of United Workmen (AOUW) was the first social organization to provide life insurance to its members. It donated generously to charitable causes. See "Fraternal Life Insurance," *Dictionary of American History* (New York: Scribner's, 1976), 3:435.

<sup>20</sup>"Lights" are the lungs of slaughtered animals.

<sup>21</sup>On 1 September 1894 a forest fire (a consequence of the dry summer) destroyed Hinckley, Minnesota, killing 500 persons.

<sup>22</sup>The Fremont, Elkhorn, and Missouri Valley Railroad.

<sup>23</sup>"Bach," pronounced "batch," slang for "bachelor."

<sup>24</sup>On 10 May 1895 Governor Silas Holcomb officially announced that the emergency was over, "that the wants of the people . . . had been supplied to such an extent that further contributions from sources outside the State are unnecessary, and that there remain in the hands of the Treasurer of the commission sufficient funds to care for any isolated cases that may arise." "Nebraska Can Take Care of Herself," *New York Times*, 11 May 1895, p. 5, col. 4.