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TIME TABLE—IN EFFECT AUG. 15, 1904. Daily except Sunday: Mail and Express, No. 8. Leave Aberdeen, 8:30 a. m.; leave Leavitts, 8:45 a. m.; leave Junction, 9:00 a. m.; leave Montrose, 9:15 a. m.; leave Timberland, 9:30 a. m.; leave Rockfish, 9:45 a. m.; leave Dundaroch, 10:00 a. m.; leave Arabia, 10:15 a. m.; leave Rockfish, 10:30 a. m.; leave Treadfall, 10:45 a. m.; arrive Hope Mills, 11:15 a. m.

FOR SALE—HOUSE AND LOT SITUATED in best portion of town. House contains seven rooms, water works and electric lights. Parlor room in attic for two more large rooms. T. A. Norman, Jr., au 30-11

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THE SKY PILOT By RALPH CONNOR

CHAPTER II THE COMPANY OF THE NOBLE SEVEN.

As we were dismounting the cries, "Hello, Jack!" "How do you do?" "Hello, old Smoke!" In the heartiest of tones made me see that my cousin was a favorite with the men grouped about the door. Jack simply nodded in return, and then presented me in due form. "My tenderfoot cousin from the effort," he said, with a flourish. I was surprised at the grace of the bows made me by these roughly dressed wild-looking fellows. I might have been in a London drawing room. I was put at my ease at once by the kindness of their greeting. For upon Jack's introduction, I was admitted at once into their circle, which to a tenderfoot was usually closed.

That night I was initiated into the Company of the Noble Seven—but of the ceremony I regret to say I retain but an indistinct memory; for they drank as they rode, hard and long, and it was only Jack's cure that got me safely home that night.

The Company of the Noble Seven was the dominant social force in the Swan Creek country. Indeed, it was the only social force Swan Creek knew. Originally consisting of seven young fellows of the best blood of Britain, "hand-d together for purposes of mutual improvement and social enjoyment," it had changed its character during the years, but not its name.

The chief of the Company was the Hon. Fred Ashley of the Ashley ranch, some time of Ashley Court, England—a big good natured man with a magnificent physique, a good in-coming from home and a beautiful wife, the Lady Charlotte, daughter of a noble English family.



The Duke, still smiling, caught the descending fist.

good fellow, well up to his work as a cattle man and too much of a gentleman to feel much less assert, any superiority of station. He had the largest ranch in the country and was one of the few men making money. Ashley's chief friend, or at least most frequent companion, was a man whom they called the Duke. No one knew his name, but every one said he was "the son of a lord," and certainly from his style and bearing he might be the son of almost anything that was high enough in rank. He drew "a remittance," but as that was paid through Ashley no one knew whence it came

nor how much it was. He was a perfect picture of a man, and in all western virtues was easily first. He could rope a steer, bunch cattle, play poker or drink whisky to the admiration of his friends and the confusion of his foes, of whom he had a few, while as to "bronco busting," the virtue par excellence of western cattle men, even Bronco Bill was heard to acknowledge that "he wasn't in it with the Duke for it was his opinion that he could ride anything that had legs in under it, even if it was a blanked centiped." And this, coming from one who made a profession of "bronco busting," was unquestionably high praise.

The Duke lived alone, except when he deigned to pay a visit to some lonely rancher who, for the marvelous charm of his talk, was delighted to have him as guest, even at the expense of the loss of a few games at poker. He made a friend of no one, though some men could tell of times when he stood between them and their last dollar, exacting only the promise that no mention should be made of his deed. He had an easy, lazy manner and a slow, cynical smile that rarely left his face, and the only sign of deepening passion in him was a little broadening of his smile. Old Latour, who kept the Stopping Place, told me how once the Duke had broken into a gentle laugh.

A French half breed freighter on his way north had entered into a game of poker with the Duke, with the result that his six months' pay stood in a little heap at his enemy's left hand. The enraged freighter accused his smiling opponent of being a cheat, and was proceeding to demolish him with one mighty blow. But the Duke, still smiling and without moving from his chair, caught the descending fist, slowly crushed the fingers open and steadily drew the Frenchman to his knees, gripping him so cruelly in the meantime that he was forced to cry aloud in agony for mercy. Then it was that the Duke broke into a light laugh and, touching the kneeling Frenchman on his cheek with his finger tips, said: "Look here, my man, you shouldn't play the game till you know how to do it and with whom you play." Then, handing him back the money he added: "I want money, but not yours." Then, as he sat looking at the unfortunate wretch dividing his attention between his money and his bleeding fingers, he once more broke into a gentle laugh that was not good to hear.

The Duke was by all odds the most striking figure in the Company of the Noble Seven, and his word went further than that of any other. His shadow was Bruce, an Edinburgh university man, metaphysical, argumentative, persistent, devoted to the Duke. Indeed, his chief ambition was to attain to the Duke's high and lordly manner, but, inasmuch as he was rather squat in figure and had an open, good natured face and a Scotch voice of the hard and rasping kind, his attempts at imitation were not conspicuously successful. Every mail that reached Swan Creek brought him a letter from home. At first, after I had got to know him, he would give me now and then a letter to read, but as the tone became more and more anxious he ceased to let me read them, and I was glad enough of this. How he could read those letters and go the pace of the Noble Seven I could not see. Poor Bruce! He had good impulses, a generous heart, but the pernick nights and the hunts and the round ups and the poker and all the wild excesses of the Company were more than he could stand.

Then there were the two Hill brothers, the younger, Bertie, a fair haired, bright faced youngster, none too able to look after himself, but much inclined to follies of all degrees and sorts. But he was warm hearted and devoted to his big brother, Humphrey, called Hump, who had taken to ranching mainly with the idea of looking after his younger brother. And no easy matter that was, for every one liked the lad and in consequence helped him down.

In addition to these there were two others of the original seven, but by force of circumstances they were prevented from any more than a nominal connection with the Company. Blake, a typical wild Irishman, had joined the police at the Fort, and Gifford had got married and, as Bill said, "was roped tighter 'n a steer."

The Noble Company, with the cowboys that helped on the range and two or three farmers that lived near the Fort, composed the settlers of the Swan Creek country—a strange medley of people of all ranks and nations. But while among them there were the evil hearted and evil living, still for the Noble Company I will say that never have I fallen in with men braver, truer or of warmer heart. Vices they had, all too apparent and deadly, but they were due rather to the circumstances of their lives than to the native tendencies of their hearts. Throughout that summer and the winter following I lived among them, camping on the range with them and sleeping in their shacks, bunching cattle in summer and hunting wolves in winter, nor did I, for I was no wiser than they, refuse my part on permit nights. But through all not a man of them ever failed to be true to his standard of honor in the duties of comradeship and brotherhood.

CHAPTER III. THE COMING OF THE PILOT. HE was the first missionary ever seen in the country, and it was the Old Timer who named him. The Old Timer's advent to the foothill country was prehistoric, and his influence was in consequence immense. No one ventured to disagree with him, for to disagree with the Old Timer was to write yourself down a tenderfoot, which no

one, of course, cared to do. It was a misfortune which only time could repair to be a newcomer, and it was every newcomer's aim to assume with all possible speed the style and customs of the aristocratic old timers and to forget as soon as possible the date of his own arrival. So it was as the Sky Pilot—famously the Pilot—that the missionary went for many a day in the Swan Creek country.

I had become schoolmaster of Swan Creek, for in the spring a kind Providence sent in the Muirs and the Bremans with housefuls of children, to the ranchers' disgust, for they foresaw plowed fields and barbed wire fences cramping their unlimited ranges. A school became necessary. A little log building was erected, and I was appointed schoolmaster. It was as schoolmaster that I first came to touch the Pilot, for the letter which the Hudson Bay freighters brought me early one summer evening bore the inscription:

THE SCHOOLMASTER, Public School, Swan Creek, Alberta.

There was altogether a fine air about the letter. The writing was in fine, small hand, the tone was fine, and there was something fine in the signature—"Arthur Wellington Moore." He was glad to know that there was a school and a teacher in Swan Creek, for a school meant children, in whom his soul delighted, and in the teacher he would find a friend, and without a friend he could not live. He took me into his confidence, telling me that though he had volunteered for this far away mission field he was not much of a preacher and he was not at all sure that he would succeed. But he meant to try, and he was charmed at the prospect of having one sympathizer at least. Would I be kind enough to put in some conspicuous place the inclosed notice, filling in the blanks as I thought best?

Divine service will be held at Swan Creek in ——— at ——— o'clock. All are cordially invited. ARTHUR WELLINGTON MOORE.

On the whole I liked his letter. I liked its modest self depreciation, and I liked its cool assumption of my sympathy and co-operation. But I was perplexed. I remembered that Sunday was the day fixed for the great baseball match, when those from "Home," as they fondly called the land across the sea from which they had come, were to wipe the earth with all comers. Besides, "divine service" was an innovation in Swan Creek, and I felt sure that, like all innovations that suggested the approach of the east, it would be by no means welcome.

However, immediately under the notice of the "Grand baseball match for the pain killer," a week from Sunday, at 2:30; Home versus the World," I pinned on the door of the Stopping Place the announcement:

Divine service will be held at Swan Creek, in the Stopping Place Parlor, a week from Sunday, immediately upon the conclusion of the baseball match. ARTHUR WELLINGTON MOORE.

There was a strange incongruity in the two, and an unconscious challenge as well. All next day, which was Saturday, and, indeed, during the following week, I stood guard over my notice, enjoying the excitement it produced and the comments it called forth. It was the advance wave of the great ocean of civilization which many of them had been glad to leave behind—some could have wished forever.

To Robert Muir, one of the farmers newly arrived, the notice was a harbinger of good. It stood for progress, markets and a higher price for land, albeit he wondered "how he would be kept up." But his hard wrought, quick spoken little wife at his elbow "hooted" his scruples and, thinking of her growing lads, welcomed with unmingled satisfaction the coming of "the minister." Her satisfaction was shared by all the mothers and most of the fathers in the settlement, but by the others, and especially by that rollicking, roistering crew, the Company of the Noble Seven, the missionary's coming was viewed with varying degrees of animosity. It meant a limitation of freedom in their wildly reckless living. The permit nights would now, to say the least, be subject to criticism; the Sunday wolf hunts and horse races, with their attendant delights, would now be pursued under the eye of the church, and this would not add to the enjoyment of them. One great charm of the country, which Bruce, himself the son of an Edinburgh minister and now secretary of the Noble Seven, described as "letting a fellow do as he blanked pleased," would be gone. None resented more bitterly than he the missionary's intrusion, which he declared to be an attempt "to reimpose upon their freedom the trammels of an antiquated and bigoted conventionality." But the rest of the Company, while not taking so decided a stand, were agreed that the establishment of a church institution was an objectionable and impertinent as well as unnecessary proceeding.

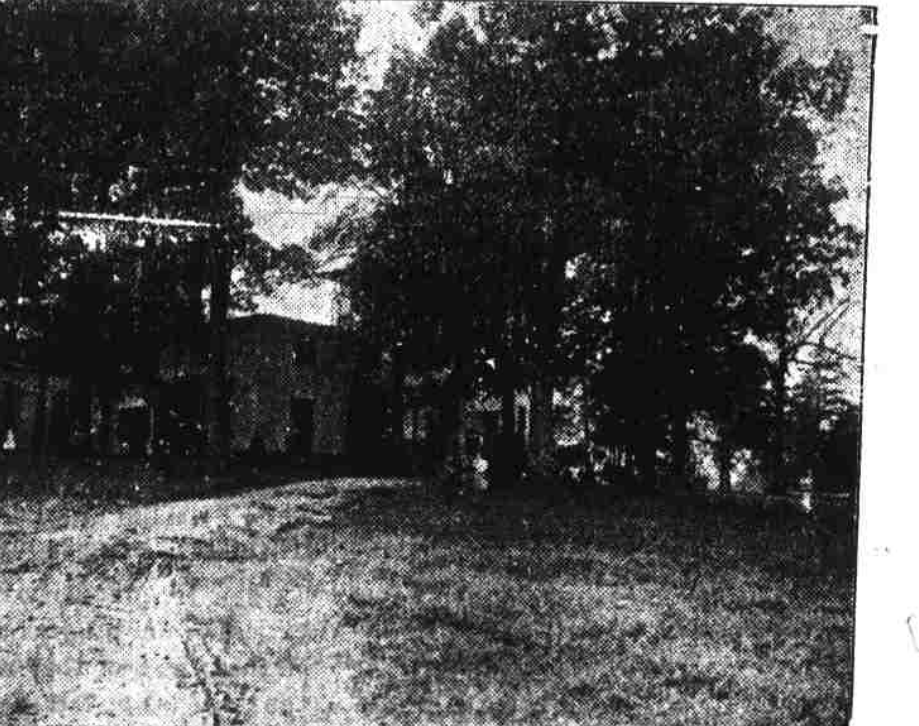
Of course Hi Kendal and his friend Bronco Bill had no opinion one way or the other. The church could hardly affect them even remotely. A dozen years' stay in Montana had proved with sufficient clearness to them that a church was a luxury of civilization the west might well do without.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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