Mrs. Tuckerman, 1870

A STORY OF SOCIAL LIFE IN EARLY COLONIAL DAYS.

Mrs. James Tuckerman, whose home for a good many years was at 907 Sixth street, Greeley, was one of the few pioneers who kept a record of the early days when history was in the making. Some of the daily happenings were jotted down on paper, some only stamped on memory, but all were ready when, a few years later they passed into reminiscences and became bedtime stories for the young grandchildren. Later at the earnest request of grandchildren and others the stories were gathered together and printed in booklet form. This was not for circulation, but only for the preservation of the stories for the family. The writer of this History was favored with the opportunity of reading the pages and of appropriating any part of them. So the story that follows will be a combination of these thrilling "bedtime stories" and other facts gathered from dependable sources. Since giving these stories, Mrs. Tuckerman has passed from earth, but the memory of her cheerful helpfulness through the trying years of early colonization have left their impress, and her memory will ever be treasured in the community she helped to build.

The stories of the booklet are like the scenes of a play; they fit into the picture of Union Colony days and could fit into no other; so when the grandchildren, no matter how far down the line, read the stories, though other history were lost, they will be able to re-construct the picture of these thrilling pioneer days.

First, something of the author, then the stories.

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Mary Emma Barclay was the daughter of Dr. J. B. Barclay of Brownsville, Pennsylvania. At the time of her arrival at the colony ground she was the wife of W. R. Norcross. Young, vivacious, full of life and imbued with the spirit of adventure she had fallen in quite readily with the plans of her husband to join the Union Colony and take a whirl at life in the romantic and promising West. What if it did involve possible hardships

and privations? It would also involve expanding life, absorbing interests, a future of promise, a new world in the building. She accepted it all. Will the world ever know what it owes to the daring and dauntless spirits who blazed the trail to civilization?

So, with plans all completed down to the last detail, the little party consisting of the Norcross couple and their baby, Dr. Barclay and his son Charles, were ready for the start to far away Colorado. Prevented by delicate health from chancing the rigors of the great adventure, Mrs. Barclay reluctantly remained in the family home.

This enterprise really began when Dr. Barclay, who, his daughter said, had for years read the New York Tribune as he read his Bible, read the Call of Nathan Meeker for the organization of a Western Colony and regarded it as "a summons from a Supreme Power" to go forth to the building of a Western Empire. The contagion of his enthusiasm soon caught the young Norcross couple and the son George, and early in August 1870, the start was made.

They traveled by boat down the Monongahala River to Pittsburgh and there took train for Colorado. In the little booklet written by Mrs. Norcross-Tuckerman the writer said she had come to suspect that the train on which they took passage might have been an "emigrant" train, for there were a number of passengers on board carrying baskets of provisions, skillets and other cooking utensils and even feather beds. These, however, they soon found were not enroute to Greeley, but to Fremont, Nebraska; they were mostly Dutch families with all the foresight for eventualities common to their people.

On the train were none of the modern conveniences that make travel easy and luxurious in this day; no sleepers, no diners, nor even reclining chairs; so, as the Norcross-Barclay band began to get their first taste of the primitive life by eating from baskets and sleeping on no beds at all, they began to appreciate the superior foresight of the feather bed and skillet owners. Mrs. Norcross held her baby in her arms all night and in the morning served breakfast to three hungry men who were wholly unskilled in the fine art of eating without dishes or table. But

all took the new method as gracefully as possible, regarding it as simply a first part of the new adventure on which they had embarked.

At Council Bluffs the travelers crossed the Missouri River to Omaha on an open ferry. On board they met two other families whose baggage bore the red tag of "Union Colony." This at once established a bond of sympathy between the three families that continued through all the years of close relationships that followed. The two families were the Paines and McClains. The McClain baby took sick on the way and Dr. Barclay attended her, adding new strength to the bond.

After four days and nights of travel by train over sunbaked prairies the green cottonwood trees along the banks of the Cache la Poudre burst upon the view of the tired travelers as the Land of Promise must have burst upon the eyes of Moses and the weary Children. Finally the train slowed up and stopped—at Greeley; the end of a long, long journey and the beginning of a new life. The station was a box car and a platform made from discarded railroad ties.

The wind was blowing at hurricane speed and a fierce sand storm was raging. The proprietor of the Greeley House met the train and one of his first acts was to take the Norcross baby from the mother's aching arms. The McClain baby, not yet fully recovered, could not be relinquished by the still somewhat anxious mother, to any one.

The Greeley House stood where now stands the Hotel Camfield. It was a one-and-a-half story structure built of rough boards set up and down. It lacked all there was of magnificence, but to the weary travelers it seemed a haven of rest after nearly a week of unrestful travel.

A good hot supper was served, on real tables with real dishes and chairs, and it seemed a banquet, though chairs and tables were of unpolished wood, and dishes of plainest porcelain. By and by the wind ceased its raging and the sun set in splendor on the perfect ending of a weary but hopeful day. The newly arrived colonists gathered around the front door of the primitive

hotel and gazed in wonder and something akin to awe at the beautiful sunset.

But Dr. Barclay's face betrayed disappointment which even the gorgeous sunset could not dispel. While others tried to express their unbounded enthusiasm he turned to his daughter, Mrs. Norcross, and said: "Well, Em, I must go back. But I suppose you and Will will have to stay and 'root, hog, or die' ". Looking backward over the years between that day and this, and observing the commodious home and tidy fortune that came to "Em" and her family, it seems safe to say they must have "rooted" to good effect.

But the Greeley House, being the aristocrat of the settlement, was somewhat expensive and few colonists felt able to avail themselves of its luxuries very long; so the Norcross-Barclay family and their traveling companions and co-colonists soon left it and moved to the Hotel De Comfort, a fuller description of which is given in the Chapter on *"Colonization."*

One day there came to this famous hostlery a young wife with a babe in her arms and tears in her eyes. She looked in blank astonishment at Mrs. Norcross who at that moment was crossing to the "bachelor's quarters," strumming her "grand piano" which looked to the new-comer like a washboard, and gaily singing as she tripped along, "Oh, Susanna, and don't you cry for me, for I'm going to Colorado with my washboard on my knee."

Incredulously the young woman gazed through her tears at this apparition, the like of which she certainly had not expected to encounter in this woe-begone place. The singer stopped, too, and, seeing in the new-comer herself as she must have appeared—sans the tears—not so long ago, experiencd instantly a fellow-feeling for the stranger and cordially invited her in to have a cup of tea.

The stranger who had evidently mistaken her hostess for a professional cheer-leader or colony booster, under the influence of the "cup that cheers but not inebriates" became quite confidential and told her new-found friend that she feared that she and her husband had made a mistake in coming to the colony,

because he was a "bar-jigger," and she feared he would never find work. But her genial hostess, without the slightest notion of what a "bar-jigger" might be assured her that her fears were groundless, because everybody who came found work. And, maybe he did, though he may have had to wait for about sixty-four years for the kind he was looking for. But the young wife was comforted. Later work of some kind was found; and the young couple stayed and became enthusiastic colonists. Mrs. Tuckerman's little booklet states that the friendship started that first day enduring throughout the years, her friend always coming with cheer and service whenever sickness or trouble threatened. After all, might there not be something in the old fashioned theory that "Bread cast upon the waters" may return, many fold, after many days?

The Norcross-Barclay family stayed in the Hotel de Comfort until their own two room house was roofed and floored and then moved in. Dr. Barclay recovered from his first disappointment and stayed on, himself "rooting" successfully; he took up land north of Longmont and became an important factor in the life of that neighborhood.

HOW THE COLONISTS ENTERTAINED THEMSELVES.

In the early 1870s there were no ready made entertainments in Greeley; and there were discouragements. But no matter how lowering the clouds the young folks could always laugh and sing as they carried their share of the pioneer's burden. Winsome Emilie Morris sang "There is Music in the Air—" as she washed the dishes for a family of nine. Uncle John, of the family of William Foote, played "Coronation" on his "fiddle" and the congregation sang "All Hail The Power of Jesus' name" at the first Sunday School service, while the ushers took up a collection for books and other supplies. There was cheery little Ella Nye with always a song on her lips, who later became the wife of Governor Adams and the First Lady of the State. Among the colonists of that day were some of the brightest minds that have ever graced the town of Greeley. Lecturers, musicians, entertainers; the great enterprise drew that kind together.

Within the year of 1870 the Greeley Lyceum was established, its meeting place Ranney Hall. There the colonists met and discussed "every thing under the sun," said Mrs. Tuckerman, "and did it well." There were Captain Boyd, Max Clark, Sam Wright, Oliver Howard, A. J. Wilbur, M. B. Knowles and others, whose wives were equally as talented as they. A fine quartette of singers was composed of Mr. and Mrs. Cory Sanborn, Alice Washburn and Charles Barnes. Charley had a deep bass voice that made shivers run up and down the spinal column when he sang "Old Sexton" and that bulged the rafters when he sang "Rocked in the *Cra-del* of the DEEP." And there was the Dramatic Club that did not have to take its hat off to such as Edwin Boothe or Sara Bernhardt when Ed Clark played "Bill Sykes" and Helen Ecker "Nancy' 'in Oliver Twist. And when Uncle Tom's Cabin was put on, so life-like and real were the characters that tears coursed unchecked and unashamed down the faces of the audience.

OTHER INCIDENTS.

There was one Indian scare that proved to be groundless but furnished all the thrills while it lasted; hunting for hiding places, getting out the old musket, etc. At another time there was a grasshopper scare that was by no means groundless; the insects came in a cloud so dense as to obscure the sun and when the cloud had passed the colonists found no green thing left growing. They met the situation by replanting whatever crops had a fighting chance of maturing, and standing the rest of the loss the best they could. The government was not then standing by, helping to meet such emergencies.

A MERRY-MAKING TRIP TO LONGMONT

In the 1870s thirty-five miles was a long distance. But given a farm wagon with a straw filled bed, a spring seat for the driver and a bunch of boys and girls on the sunny side of thirty who could draw the joy of life from the cactus of experience as the busy bee draws honey from the blossoms of the prickly pear, and there was just thirty-five miles of pure delight.

Mrs. Tuckerman said that while the driver beat time with his whip on the dash board the song of the boys and girls echoed over the hills and far away, and almost too soon the journey ended. The sun was just going down over the mountains as the merry crowd drove into the grounds of "Ury Hall," the home of Dr. Barclay at Longmont; and there new joys awaited them.

WHERE CHILDREN PLAYED IN THE 1870s

The youngsters of 1938 can hardly get a mental picture of the playground of the children of the 1870s. Where smooth concrete sidewalks stretch between velvety lawns and parkings today, children of that yesterday played along ditch banks and waded in running water. No electric lights illuminated the streets that day—or night—and if anyone had to be out after dark that one had to carry a lantern. No shady parks invited the children to play or grown-ups to rest in summer or youngsters to skate in winter. No College with its beautiful campus crowned the hill to the south of town, but in its place herds of wild antelope roamed undisturbed. Curfew rang at nine o'clock and the thoughtless boy or girl caught out must hurry home to escape the frown of authority.

FUN FOR THE CHILDREN, BIG OR LITTLE.

Mrs. Tuckerman's booklet ends with these words:

"We had no swimming pool nor movie, but we did sometimes have a circus, and oh my, oh my, how we did enjoy it. Father, Mother, brother, sister, all turned out to see the street parade, then hurried home for a quick lunch and back so as not to miss a single set of the aftenoon performance. Then what fun we had afterwards when we mimicked the clowns, swung from the homemade trapeze and roared like hungry lions; for, after all, you don't have to have everything, if you can only *make believe.*"

A fine bit of philosophy for any age or time.