

thing that carcasses are removed and buried? Is it worse that a beetle should feed on long-dead bodies than that we should feed ourselves on recently-dead ones? Meat is meat, flesh is flesh, and everything in the world lives on some other thing. If we do not like those terms, we are on the wrong planet. Vomiting may signify unhealthiness when it happens among *us*; but among a great many creatures it is as sound and sunny a part of natural living as the singing of songs. Hummingbirds, after their fashion, vomit food into their nestlings. Are they any the less lovely in their delicacy and grace? The "pigeon's-milk" of the poets is discharged cellu-

lar matter from the birds' crops. Are doves any the less dove-like and delightful, for all that? Still, still — it is not always easy to be sensible philosophers. We don't like the smell of death; we don't like any sort of funereal suggestions; and doubtless it is not odd that sexton beetles, among those who have ever heard of them at all, should inspire a kind of horror.

It is probably futile for a naturalist to hope to dispel that queasiness about the sextons. But it does lie open to him, anyway, to indicate why the answer to the perennial query, "Why do we find so few dead birds and animals?," has at the very least a singular interest.

TANK TOWN

BY LESLIE NELSON JENNINGS

Tank Town, they called it. Once a day the train
 Roared through, and there was nothing much to see
 But a few shabby store fronts where the main
 Street struggled against dust and apathy.
 Windows were mostly dark at nine o'clock;
 The signal tower beside the tracks showed green;
 The Diesels' throaty hooting seemed to mock
 Those huddled houses racing by unseen.

Still east and west the streamlined sleepers rolled
 Across brown prairie; in the club car's bright
 Complacency the drinks came tall and cold,
 Cornland and windmill fading out of sight
 As wheels ticked off the super-extra fare.
 And Tank Town might as well have not been there.

WINNIPEG: PORTRAIT OF A BOOM TOWN

BY STEWART H. HOLBROOK

FORTY years ago Winnipeg seemed to me the most exciting city imaginable. I arrived there fresh from high school in an old and staid New England village to find a frenzied metropolis that contrasted, most favorably in my eyes, with the genteel and leisurely pace of Montreal and Boston, both of which I had visited many times. Winnipeg advertised itself as The Gateway to the Golden West. It was and is all of that, and more.

The excitement began at the railway depots, where some thirty-odd horse-drawn hacks met all the trains. The cries of the drivers, in accents ranging from Yorkshire to Bow Bells, extolled the merits of the Queen's, the Clarendon, the Wellington and other hotels, and created thereby a terrific din. Main street from City Hall north to the shacks and tenements of Little Russia and Little Poland was lined with small hotels, all with large bars, that alternated with real-estate offices, penny arcades, and movie and variety theatres. Com-

bination tobacco and newsstands occupied every hole in the wall, displaying posters announcing "British Mail Has Arrived." Bewhiskered men and shawled women straight out of Chekhov stood on street corners bemused by the clanging trolley cars and the blinking lights. On South Main was the austere yet romantic store of the Hudson's Bay Company, and the remnants of old Fort Garry.

Portage avenue had a higher tone than Main street. Here was Timothy Eaton's great store; here, too, Revillon Freres, Dingwall's, Renfrew's, and the *Free Press*. But the real-estate men infested the avenue, and their windows displayed immense oil paintings of the scores of new cities waiting to make fortunes for judicious investors. Many of these future centers of population were little more than "projected," but there they were before the eye in staggering colors — magnificent Moosomin, Athabasca Landing, Swift Current, incomparable Moose Jaw, and Medicine Hat — the

STEWART H. HOLBROOK'S last article for the *MERCURY*, "*The Life and Times of Reed College*," appeared in October. He is the author of *Yankee Exodus* and other books.