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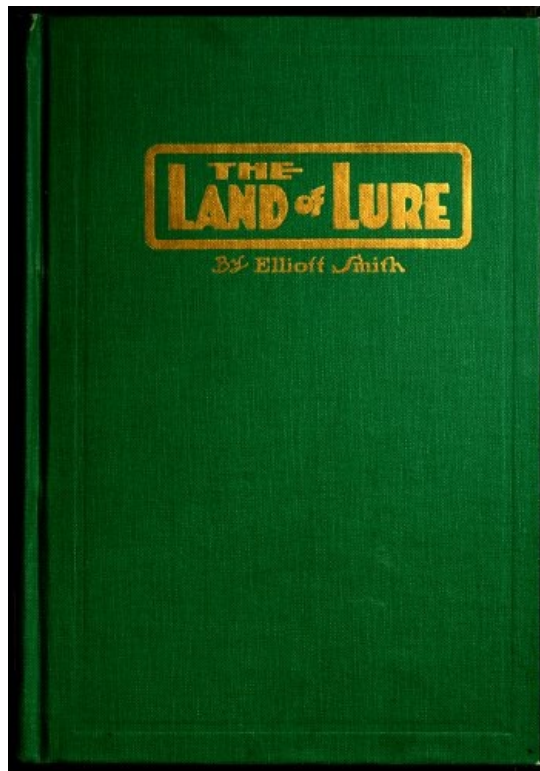
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THE LAND of LURE

A STORY OF THE COLUMBIA RIVER BASIN

By ELLIOTT SMITH

Author of "THE BELLS OF THE BOSQUE," "HULL 97."



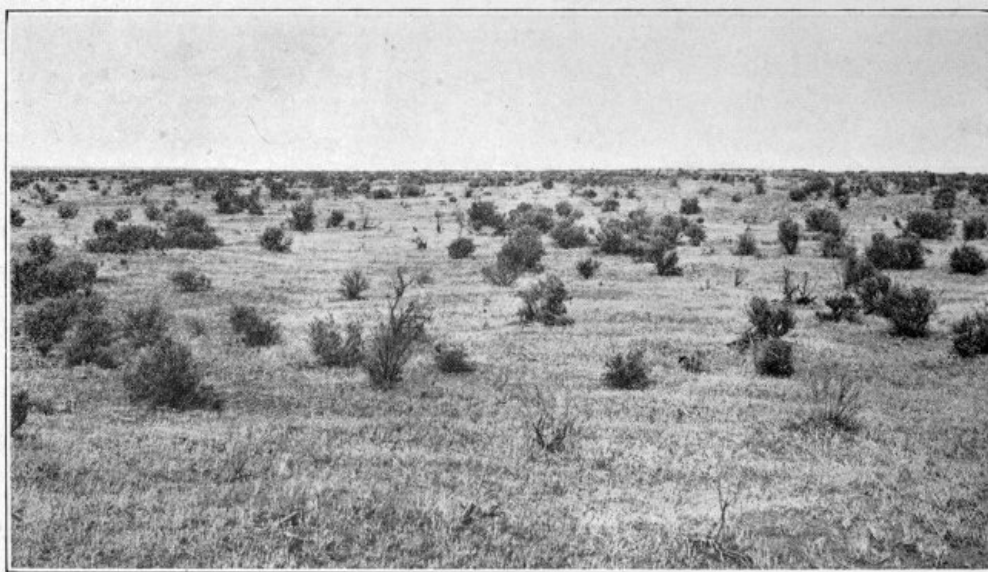
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DEDICATED
TO MARIE SMITH—HIS WIFE

Although I was one of those who "Tried, failed and went away to try and forget, if possible," her unfaltering faithfulness, and endurance, made it possible for me to see and feel the things that I have written in this—HER BOOK.

—ELLIOTT SMITH.



Misshapen and dwaft by the pitiless rays of the desert sun.

INDEX TO CHAPTERS

Chapter I.	9
Chapter II.	20
Chapter III.	29
Chapter IV.	37
Chapter V.	42
Chapter VI.	57
Chapter VII.	64
Chapter VIII.	70
Chapter IX.	80
Chapter X.	90
Chapter XI.	96
Chapter XII.	104
Chapter XIII.	113
Chapter XIV.	123
Chapter XV.	136
Chapter XVI.	149
Chapter XVII.	163
Chapter XVIII.	179
Chapter XIX.	193
Chapter XX.	206
Chapter XXI.	223
Chapter XXII.	236

CHAPTER I.

The early March wind was blowing with its usual force, and white wisps of clouds were scurrying across the barren waste that lay between the rough canyon, through which the raging torrents of the Columbia River forced its way to the Pacific Ocean, and the range of hills thirty miles farther south. The clouds seemed to mount higher, and take on greater speed, while crossing this scene of desolation, and graveyard of buried hopes, as if anxious to leave behind them the glare of the desert sands, and the appealing eyes of the few unfortunate homesteaders, who were compelled to remain on their claims until they had complied with the demands made by a beneficent Government before they could become sole owners of the spot upon which many of them were now making their last efforts for a home of their own.

The ever present sage brush and tufts of scant bunch grass, dwarfed by the ages of drouth and the pitiless glare of the hot sun's rays, bowed before each gust of the sand laden wind and emitted weird and unearthly sounds, as if the departed denizens of the desert were warning the white man against the hopeless task of trying to wrest from the jack rabbit and coyote the haunts over which they had held undisputed sway for ages.

[Pg 10]

Deserted shacks, formerly the homes of earlier settlers, broken fences posts, with tangled strands of barbed wire, each told their story of a struggle for existence, defeat and departure, more pitiful than all the stories of Indian massacres ever written. Here was a battle field, the opposing forces being poverty, courage and determination, arrayed against the elements.

Reinforcements, in the way of hardy homesteaders, were being constantly drawn into this unequal contest, armed with no other weapon than the ever abiding hope that nature would so alter her laws as to conform to this particular locality, lured by the sound of those magic words: "A home of your own," were ready to come into this deserted territory and take up the legacies of blasted hopes, equipped with new ideas, and seemingly fortified by the unfortunate experiences of others who had made the trial, failed and gone their way to try and forget, if possible, the ordeal through which they had passed. Trusting that the touch of the magic wand, in the form of irrigation, would cause the crystal water to flow, and convert the region into a garden of untold wealth.

The winter preceding the March, during which our story opens, had been an exceptionally hard one in the Central and Middle Western states, floods and other unfortunate conditions having almost completely destroyed the crops and thereby entailing a loss that was keenly felt throughout the region, and causing a spirit of unrest among the poorer element; a desire for a chance to throw off the yoke of dependents, as wage earners, and to seek fields of greater opportunities. The newspapers and magazines were filled with articles lauding the "Back to the Soil" movement, and the country was flooded with pamphlets and folders, in which glowing descriptions of the opportunities afforded the homeseekers in the far Northwest was given.

[Pg 11]

The railroads whose lines reached this vast territory were making special rates to prospective home builders, and daily homeseekers' excursions were being run over these routes. Trains loaded with eager tourists, bound for the land of their dreams, the mecca of their hopes, the happy land of somewhere; firmly believing that they, at least, had within their reach the goal for which they, and many of their fathers, had striven for years. To some, and in fact to a great many, this dream was to become a reality, and to those whose hardy constitution and indomitable determination has made such a transformation possible, is due the development of an Empire in the far Northwest.

It is with one of these tourist families that our story has to deal. Travis Gully, a man of middle age, had been born and reared in the county of Champaign, Illinois, and had lived but a few miles from the town of that name, he had seen it grow from a small village to its present state of importance. In the neighborhood where he had lived he was well known, and generally liked. He had taken but casual interest in things socially, and had mingled but little with the young people of his set. He had always worked as a farmhand, and had acquired but little in the way of an education. At the age of twenty-three, he married Minnie Padgitt, the daughter of a country minister, and had settled down to the life of a farmer, on a rented farm. At the age of thirty-eight he was the father of four girls and one sturdy boy, and was still renting, having made but one change in location since his marriage. Content to toil for his family, never having had aroused in him a desire for a better lot in life. The ambition for a home of his own, having lain dormant for so long, it is not surprising that, when once awakened, it was all consuming. The awakening came suddenly during one of his regular weekly visits to town.

[Pg 12]

On this occasion, being attracted by a crowd on the station platform, Gully wandered down toward the center of excitement, and beheld a number of his friends, shaking hands and bidding goodbye to others of his acquaintances, who he judged from their dress and excited appearance, were evidently leaving on the train, that had just pulled in and now stood with engine panting and clanging bell, waiting for the signal to leave with its long string of coaches, the windows of

which were raised on the station side, regardless of the cold snow-laden March wind that came in fitful gusts into the eager faces that peered in twos and threes from each window. Faces that bore the smile of comradeship, whether beaming on friend or stranger. Some were an enigma; back of the smile could be seen traces of sadness, sorrow at leaving old homes and friends, combined with expressions of firm determination to go brave-heartedly into the great unknown country.

[Pg 13]

With questioning gaze, Gully approached a group of his acquaintances, who stood apart from the crowd. As he came up, and before he could ask the cause of the excitement, he was greeted by one of the party:

"Hello, Trav! Going with us?" he asked, with outstretched hand.

Gully seized the proffered hand of his friend, William Gowell. "Going where?" he asked. "I did not know you were leaving, Bill."

"Sure," replied Gowell, "hadn't you heard about it? Going to the Northwest to take up a homestead. Lots of the people from here are going," and he named over several of their mutual friends, who had sold their possessions and were taking advantage of the homeseekers' rates. He told him of the great advantages offered by the new country, and added: "Better come on, Trav."

Travis Gully, after talking with his friends, was astonished and bewildered by what he learned. A special car had been sent into Chicago, loaded with a display of the products of this new country, specimens of timber, minerals, grain and fruit, apples, pears and peaches, the like of which had never before been seen. "And just think, such land as produced this fruit was free, open for settlement. All one had to do was to live on it for a while, and it was theirs."

As he listened to these astounding statements, he asked himself: "Why was it not possible for him to take advantage of this golden opportunity? Why could not he, like so many of his friends, sell out and follow in a few weeks? He would see what could be done." And with this resolve, fired by this new ambition to possess a home of his own, prompted by the advice of those of his friends who were casting their lot with those of the homeseekers, he eagerly sought out each source of information, even to making inquiry as to the probable cost of tickets for himself and family, and after bidding those of his friends who were going goodbye, he watched the train until it rounded a curve that hid it from view, and promising himself that he would follow at the earliest possible moment. With pockets bulging with folders, maps and descriptive literature, he hurried home with the eagerness of a child, to prepare his family for their first move into the land of unlimited possibilities.

[Pg 14]

Gully, upon his arrival home, was met at the gate by his two eldest girls, who, after opening the gate, received the few small bundles brought by their father, and scurried away to the house to announce his arrival. He watched them as they raced to the door. Ida, the eldest, a slight girl who had just entered her teens, had been her mother's help in caring for the younger members of the family, had taken up her share of the household duties since she could stand upon a chair at the kitchen table, and wash the few dishes after each meal, and then care for the ever present baby, while her mother took up the never ending duties of her sordid existence. This constant strain on the girl had robbed her of her natural childhood and aged her prematurely. This fact was noted by the father in his present frame of mind as it never had been before. He thought of the advantages of the freedom of the far Northwest, and pictured to himself the fields of waving grain, and over-burdened orchards, as shown in the booklets he had hastily scanned, and thought of them as his own, as a play ground for his children.

[Pg 15]

Driving into the barn yard, Gully cared for his team; each little chore, as it was done, was accompanied with thoughts that heretofore had never been taken into consideration. As he hung up the harness he viewed it critically, and wondered how much it would bring at a sale. He walked around his faithful team and asked himself if their age would impair their value. When he went to the crib for corn he estimated the quantity on hand, and calculated its probable worth. Never before had he considered his small possessions from such a view point.

So absorbed was he in this new mental activity that he took no note of time, and he was suddenly aroused by the children, who had been sent to tell him that supper was ready. On the way to the house, in response to the summons, his hand constantly clutched the papers in his pocket. Nervous and abstractedly he entered the kitchen, where his wife was busily engaged placed the supper on the table. So absorbed was she that she failed to notice his coming in; not until they were seated at the supper table did she note the change in his appearance, and then only after he had made some reference to the fact that he had seen William Gowell while in town, and that he was leaving the country; that the Moodys and Lanes and several others of their acquaintance had also gone on the same train. He then told her of all he had heard of this great country to which so many of their friends had gone, of his wish to go with his family and share the opportunities. He went into detail and explained what the cost of going would be; what he hoped to realize from the sale of their possessions, even if sold at a sacrifice.

[Pg 16]

He talked on feverishly, forgetting the frugal meal set before him, forgetting the tired children, who, little knowing the important part this proposed move was to play in their future, had eaten their supper, and all but the two eldest were nodding in their chairs. He showed his wife and the two oldest girls the illustrations in the folders, showing the pictures of just such farms as the last few hours had convinced him he might own.

Seizing a teaspoon from his untouched cup of coffee, he used the handle to point out rows of—to

them meaningless—figures, compiled to show the millions of feet of timber, tons of grain and fruit produced. To him it was equally meaningless, except in a vague way. His untrained mind was incapable of grasping the extent of the information conveyed, but he had accepted it all as simple facts, for had not Gowell, Moody and Lane acknowledged their faith in it by going. Thus he talked on until exhausted. The family retired at an unusual hour, the wife and children to wonder what it was all about, and he to toss restlessly from the effects of an over exhausted mind.

[Pg 17]

He arose early the following morning, having formulated his plans during the restless night, and immediately began to put them into execution. He had decided to hold a public sale the following Saturday, and if successful, would be on his way to his future home the next Monday, on which date he had learned another homeseekers' excursion would come through his home town. To accomplish this would require rapid work, and before breakfast on the morning following this resolve, he was up assembling his few belongings, getting them in shape for the sale. Old farming implements were pulled from long forgotten nooks and corners, incomplete sets of harness and bridles were being over hauled and made fit to bring the best possible price, the flock of poultry was counted and an estimate made of their probable value, the two cows, with their calves, the three pigs, kept over to provide the following winter's supply of meat, his team, wagon and harness, together with his household goods, constituted his earthly possessions.

The few days following the hastily made plans were filled with incidents that tried the patience of the tired wife and mother. To her it was all like a dream. It was the first time she had ever been taken into her husband's confidence or been consulted as to his plans for the future. She did not realize that she was expected to express an opinion as to the wisdom of the proposed move; if he said it was advisable the matter was settled.

The constant demand on both her and the older children for assistance in assembling the various articles intended for the sale was met with unquestioning silence, and not until her aged father and mother came to see if the rumors of their departure which had reached them were true, did she realize to the fullest extent what her going away really meant; that it meant the leaving behind those aged parents, from whom she had never been separated except for a few miles; that it meant the severance of all the ties and scenes with which she had been associated from her earliest recollection to the present time.

[Pg 18]

The realization of this fact came upon her with a sudden shock that stirred within her the first semblance of rebellion that her simple nature had ever shown. To this feeling of remonstrance she gave way but for a moment, then with violent weeping she threw herself down at her mother's knee, and with her head buried in the aged woman's lap, the cradle of comfort she had always known, she vowed she would not go. "Travis was wrong; they were doing well enough where they were; father must stop him, and not let him sell everything and go away," but when the aged mother placed her trembling hand upon the bowed head and assured her that "Travis knew what was best, it was probably a wise move, she and father had talked the matter over as soon as they had heard that they were going, and regretted that they were not at an age, to accompany them. She must do as her husband said for his and the children's sakes, and then too," she added, "perhaps father and I can come later, after you are settled in your new home." With this assurance the kind old mother comforted her weeping daughter, who, after recovering from her first and only outbreak, arose and resumed her duties with such an attitude of utter indifference that her husband and father, who had been looking over the articles arranged for the sale the following day, saw no evidence of her grief upon returning to the house a few moments after the occurrence.

[Pg 19]

Gully's enthusiasm, as he discussed with his wife's father and mother the advantages of the new country to which he was going, knew no bounds. He had acquired from his constant reference to the descriptive literature he had in his possession a fund of facts and figures that were most convincing, and he referred them unhesitatingly to persons who had seen this exhibition car while on its tour, and who could verify the statements as set forth in the circulars. Thus he talked on until long after the supper, to which the old people had stayed, was over, and after promising to return the following day to be present at the sale, they had driven home.

CHAPTER II.

[Pg 20]

The notices of sale, which had been posted throughout the neighborhood, was held the following day. The attendance was good, and its success, financially, exceeded Travis Gully's expectations, bringing him a much larger amount than he had hoped to realize. This was no doubt due to the spirited bidding of numerous relatives and friends, who chose this method of aiding the departing family.

After the last of those who had bought had taken their purchases and departed, and but a few of the idle curious remained, viewing the small pile of articles that had proven unsalable, the reaction came to Travis Gully in a manner that fairly staggered him. As he beheld this remnant of his years of accumulation of personal effects laying discarded and rejected by all, he glanced in the direction of his huddled wife and children, who were awaiting the departure of the vehicle which was to carry them to her parents home. Haggard and dejected they looked. He had not counted on the effect on them, and it smote him. "Oh, well, they would soon be settled again, and

in a home of their own, where every nail that was driven, every tree that was planted, would be for them, and would be theirs." With this consoling thought, he thrust his hand into his pocket and walked toward the barn. He started as his finger tips came in contact with the money, the proceeds of the sale. Drawing it forth, he held it for a moment and stared. This, then, was the price of his wife and children's content; t'was for the acquirement of this that he had dispoiled their poor little home, and they were, at that very moment, looking regretfully at the little pile of rubbish, each and every article of which, though refused by others, could be associated with some pleasant moment of their lives.

[Pg 21]

Returning the money to his pocket, and with such thoughts as the above filling his mind, he entered the barn. There, too, he was overcome with a feeling of loneliness; the empty stalls where for years his team had stood, the unfinished feed of hay in the manger just as they had left it when those faithful creatures had been led away by the hand of new owners; the cobs from which the corn had been eagerly bitten were still damp from contact with the mouths that had yielded so willingly to his guiding hand. Noting each little detail as it gnawed its way into his soul, he broke down, and with bowed head he wept as only a grief stricken man can, and thus they found him when he was sought, to tell him that they were ready to take him and his family, for the last time, from the home they had occupied for so many years.

The few unsold articles of household goods and those reserved to be taken on the trip, together with the family, were taken to the home of Mrs. Gully's parents, where they were to remain until final preparations for the journey were completed. The evening after and the day following the sale were both long to be remembered periods in the lives of those concerned. At intervals friends or relatives would call to bid farewell, and to wish the Gullys Godspeed on their journey. At such times the subject of the trip was taken up and discussed, but was referred to at other times as seldom as possible.

[Pg 22]

The term "The Northwest" was usually applied in a general way. None of those directly interested seemed to appreciate the vast area comprising this territory. Their conception of it was confined to an area about the size of the county in which they lived, or at best, a portion of their home state. They readily received and promised to deliver messages to those of their neighborhood who had preceded them on the journey.

The selection of a final destination was the question of most importance. The states of Montana, Idaho, Washington and Oregon each offered exceptional opportunities to the homesteaders with limited means. So after deciding to buy through tickets to a coast point, with stopover privilege, there was nothing to do but await the day of departure.

At last the Monday came that was to be an epoch in the lives of Travis Gully and his family. It being but a few miles to the station, an early noonday meal was eaten, bounteous supplies of lunches were stored neatly away for the travelers who, with their various trunks, satchels and bundles, were loaded into a wagon and sent to the village earlier in the day, the family following after lunch. The intervening time between their arrival at the station and that of the train upon which they were going was one of intense excitement. The unaccustomed ordeal of purchasing tickets, reserving berths in the tourist sleeper, and checking the baggage, together with constant interruptions with offers of well meant advice and suggestions from their friends, kept nerves strained to the breaking point.

[Pg 23]

At the sound of the whistle of the incoming train, hearts throbbed wildly, or missed a stroke; the children were hurriedly embraced, the parting kiss and tender final pat given; the mother and father came forward to bid Gully and his wife goodbye; then pent up feeling broke their bonds and mother and daughter wept in each others arms. Amid this scene of sorrow, excitement and flurry the train, with grinding brakes, hissing air valves and clanging bell, drew up to the station and stopped.

The time between the stopping of the train and the conductors deep, guttural, "All aboard," seemed but the briefest, yet 'twas ample, and with final good-byes said and tears hastily dried, they were bundled helter skelter into their seats, and with the waving of many hands from the station platform, they were on their way.

As the train's speed increased and familiar objects were being rapidly left behind, with new and strange landscapes being reeled off, the children, with eager faces pressed closely to the car windows, gave joyous expressions of childish delight, while the mother sat silent, oblivious to her surroundings.

[Pg 24]

Travis Gully, with his newborn spirit of independent manhood struggling within him, sat stolidly awaiting the approaching conductor, as if uncertain of the fact that he was really going, until he had submitted the mass of yellow and green strips of cardboard, which he was firmly clutching in his hand, to that official for inspection.

Settled down at last for the long journey over new country, the constant change of new scenes and experiences kept the family entertained and their minds diverted from their personal discomforts, and they soon gave evidence of interest and delight. The wife's spirits being thus revived, she viewed the panorama of passing scenes with ever increasing interest, and discussed her future plans and hopes with feverish eagerness. As their first night as tourists approached, and the outer world was shut out by darkness, the berths were made ready by the deft hands of the train porter, and both upper and lower sections were huddled full of drowsy and fretful children. The unaccustomed noise and noisome atmosphere gave but little promise of rest for the

tired father and mother. Long into the night they lay awake, their minds filled with hope, fear and uncertainty, that crowded their way to the front with such rapidly changing sensations that exhaustion finally overcame them, and with the constant rattle of the train, as it crossed the joints in the rails, dinning its way into their benumbed brains, they sank into unconsciousness.

Morning found them but little refreshed, but after partaking of the steaming coffee, prepared on a stove with which the car was equipped for the purpose, and eating a hearty meal, they took note of the changed appearance of the country through which they were passing. Miles and miles of flat level country, partially covered with snow, drifted by the winter wind, with an occasional spot swept bare, which showed the brown stubble of the wheat field or plowed ground made ready for the spring planting. Fences were rare, and looking out across the country, the home could be seen, and they appeared miles apart; straw stacks, around which frowsey haired horses and cattle stood, dotted the landscape.

[Pg 25]

The afternoon of their second day out the blue foothills of the Rockies could be seen in the distance, and as they gradually drew nearer, they were whirled through miles of barren waste of sage brush, the shrub that was to play an ever active part in their future lives.

The three days following were much the same; over mountains, valleys, plains and steams they were speeded until, becoming inured to the constant changes, they ceased to comment. The grandure of the scenery did not appeal to their undeveloped finer senses; they were simply awed by its vastness.

The morning of their arrival at Wenatchee, Washington, the point chosen for their first stop, was bright and clear. The fresh mountain air swept down from the pine covered slopes of the hills that surrounded one of the most fertile valleys in the state, in the heart of which nestled the little city, justly famed for its magnificent fruit. Miles of splendid orchards, starting at the very threshold of the business blocks, extended back to the hills on both sides of the valley. The low drone of the bees as they swarmed forth among the fast swelling buds in quest of the first sip of nectar, mingled with the roar of the turbulent Columbia river, and made music that soothed the tired travelers as nothing else could.

[Pg 26]

Travis Gully was impressed with the signs of plenty that were visable at every hand. By inquiry, he learned that hundreds of acres as valuable as that contained in the surrounding valley were available for homesteading. All it needed was water. He soon made the acquaintance of a professional "Locator," a human parasite that hovers around the border of all Government land. In this particular instance the "locator" was a venerable patriarch, with flowing white beard and benign countenance, who assured Gully that "He had just the place for him. It was about fifty miles back over the route he had come. Did he not remember that beautiful stretch of rolling land through which he had passed? That was the place. Thousands of acres of this fine land was now being taken up by homesteaders. He must act quickly or his opportunity would be gone." After listening to a glowing description of this paradise, Gully agreed to accompany him to see the land, which he did the following day.

There are times when it seems that fate plays into the hand of the trickster, and on this particular day nature was extremely lavish with her blessings. Never had the spring sun shone more brightly, the balmy air was laden with the elixir of good will and contentment, every soothing draught taken into the lungs spread like an intoxicant, filling the brain with dreams of success and achievements that danced just ahead, almost within reach, yet still to be striven for.

[Pg 27]

Gully, whose mind was filled with the contents of the circulars he had read, and who had seen the statements made therein, verified in the locality he had chosen to make his first stop, firmly believed in the possibilities of the land shown him, and made filing on it immediately upon his return to the town. He did not question the possibilities of irrigation or take into account its remoteness; neither did he investigate the results of past efforts put forth by others in this conquest of the desert. It was not a desert to him. The winter's snow, that had just disappeared, had left abundance of moisture in evidence. Grass was springing up in profusion, and countless wild flowers attested the fertility of the soil.

So after the necessary arrangements had been made, he came with his family, all eager to do their part in the preparation of their future home. Kind neighbors, though few there were, came with offers to help erect the house. The family was provided with shelter until such time as the structure was habitable, and they were happy under these new conditions; they who had never known a harsher fate than the demands of an exacting landlord for his annual toll, the regular routine of settling the yearly account with the trusting merchant in the nearby village, and a frugal existence through the winter on what remained of the year's yield. Oh! happy renter, there; should his yield be scant or insufficient, there was someone to appeal to for assistance, which was gladly given. The homefolks were there, and others to extend help and sympathy at the time of misfortune, but on the desert, what? A home of your own.

[Pg 28]

At last the home was completed; just two rooms, with a board roof, the outer walls adorned with tar paper held in place with laths, and when they moved in joy reigned in this primitive home. A rough board table, two benches and a cook stove, cooking utensils, still shining with the burnish of new tin, shone upon the walls just outside the kitchen door, a shelf with new tin basin and water pail were provided. The remaining room was furnished with two beds, built of scraps of lumber, the corners of the room forming one side and the head, discarded balewire, woven across, took the place of springs; three family portraits, done in crayon, a gaudy calendar of the year before, bearing the general merchandise advertisement of the faithful old merchant at

home, a nickel alarm clock upon a shelf, and the home was furnished. But it was a home of their own.

CHAPTER III.

[Pg 29]

The journey of thousands of miles, the excitement of getting settled, and cool fresh breezes that swept down from the snow capped peaks of the Cascades, made sleep easy, and no thought of the morrow disturbed the rest of this emancipated renter. Morning came, and with it the bright sunshine and oppressive silence of the desert; not a dog to bark, nor a noisy fowl to break the stillness. As the sun rose from the horizon, and before it assumed its brassy glare, a mirage formed across the level plain, magnifying the humble homes of the neighboring homesteaders into palatial mansions, and the sage brush into forests, and glistening lakes with twinkling waves upon their surfaces. Travis Gully, with his family, stood awed by the magnitude of the panorama unrolled before their gaze, and looked with feverish expectancy into the vista of possibilities the future held in store for them. The sun mounted higher into the blue dome, the mirage passed, and objects assumed their normal proportions, while the faithful wife told of the hopes for good this vision foretold.

The weeks that followed, each day of which was fraught with hours of patient toil, clearing away the brush for the first spring planting, the honest father hewing a spot in the wilderness of sand and sage brush, the eager children rushing in at each stroke of the mattock, seizing the uprooted particles of brush and bearing them triumphantly away, to be placed on one of the many piles of rubbish that marked the path of this industrious toiler; the patient mother, appearing at the doorway, looking out across the miles of unchanging gray toward the far east with that indefinable expression of homesickness depicted upon her face. Of such scenes as this is the material made of which the everlasting monument, in the form of a prosperous farming district is built. *Every fruit tree that grows in the far famed Northwest should be looked upon as a sprig in the laurel wreath with which to crown the brows of the sturdy homesteaders—those departed and yet to come.*

[Pg 30]

At the close of each day, and after the evening meal, huge bonfires were lit in the clearing, around which the children danced gleefully, their shadows casting fantastic shapes in the background, where the gaunt and hungry coyote lurked, and at intervals mingled its voice in discordant note with their merry laughter, as if in vain endeavor to impress upon their minds the narrowness of the space that lay between their joyous anticipations and deepest gloom.

Planting time arrived with all its hopes for a bounteous yield. Each day was devoted to preparing the ground and planting. The winter just passed had afforded sufficient snow and moisture to produce perfect planting conditions, and many were the plans made for the expenditure of the proceeds of this first harvest for a good home, farming implements, and other necessities for successful farming.

[Pg 31]

The grain was sown, and the kitchen garden planted in precise rows and nicely shaped beds. A wagon load of scabrock was hauled from a dry coulee that wended its way diagonally across this vast area of sand and sage. These were used to form the border of prim walks and flower beds, each stone being placed in position and carefully embedded in the soft sand, *each a cornerstone for the castle of hope*, soon to be displaced by an inexorable nature, and to allow the upper structure of dreams to fall about the builder, a pall of utter disappointment.

Just a few days of alluring sunshine, only a few balmy nights, and the tiny plants were raising their tender shoots above the surface of the sand, which through its ages of shifting now refused to remain under control of mere man, and was growing restless, rolling in fiendish glee down the sides of the nicely formed flower beds and rollicking in sparkling bits across the walks, filling, with maddening persistence, every opening made in its surface by the upspringing plants.

The age worn battle between the Goddess Flora and the relentless desert was being fought over. She with all her garlands, was trying to wreath the brow of this gray monster, while he, with his withering sunrays and constant battering with tiny particles of sharp, flinty sand, was repulsing her every advance.

The Gods, Jupiter, Pluvius and Boreas, standing sponsors for the contending forces, intervened and changed at times what seemed certain victory. One with his gentle showers or torrential downpour would rush to the scene of the fray, settling the tiny grains of sand and thereby quelling the galling batteries that were assailing the tender plants, at the same time administering to their bruised and quivering stems and foliage; then, conscious of a kindly act, he sails away, seated upon his fleecy crafts of air, emitting an occasional growl, warning his enemy, the wind, against his return. Scarcely has his frown disappeared over the brow of the hills to the south, followed by his majestic guard of chariots, with billowing gold and silver plumage, when a faint whisper is heard in the grass. Hark! 'tis louder! See the tops of the bunchgrass moving restlessly; Old Boreas is stalking his enemy. He creeps prone upon the ground, like a serpent he raises his head with a hissing sound; on, upward to the top of the tallest reeking sage brush he crawls; maddened by the presence of those hated sparkling drops of crystal water that bedecks this misshapen shrub, he shakes them in myriads to the ground and laughs with glee. But in so doing he is restraining one of the arch fiends of the desert, the sand. At this discovery he shrieks

[Pg 32]

with anger, and seizing the precious drops, hoists them into the air, scattering them in misty spray and hurries them miles through space, back to their natural haunts, where they are left to assemble themselves and await another call. Thus left to their own, again the sun and sand renew the attack, and wear down, by constant onslaught, every particle of vegetation not originally intended to laugh to scorn their every effort.

[Pg 33]

But the fortitude of those alien plants was noble; gallantly they withstood the siege. For days and weeks, constantly scorched and blistered during the day, they came up smiling in the morning, with heads erect, to greet the same sun their parent plant had known and thrived under, but stung, whipped and tortured by the never ceasing, ever shifting myriads of cutting particles of sand, bleeding to the last infinitesimal mite, they had to die; they hung their noble heads, became discolored and withered, and when the morning sun shone forth it was upon the same dwarfed sage brush and hissing bunchgrass it had always known. The scabrock border, the horned toad that sought shelter beneath the protecting edges, all one color, gray, monotonous gray.

Small indeed would be the area of reclaimed land in the great northwest if each homesteader had given up hopes and abandoned his dreams with his first disappointment, and had he not awakened to renewed effort at each stroke of misfortune administered by what seemed to be a relentless fate.

Nature, in her lavish distribution of blessings, had not wholly forgotten this seemingly neglected spot. The nights were cool and refreshing, the air pure and uncontaminated, and both he and his family being blessed with rugged health. Travis Gully looked upon the havoc wrought with undaunted courage and determination. He submitted to the loss of his first planting with resignation, and hastened to seek means whereby he might provide food and other necessities for his family. To the north lay the never failing wheat fields of the Big Bend country; east, the Couer d'Alene mining district; and west of the Cascade Mountains the lumbering industries of the Puget Sound region. These each offered a solution of a means of livelihood, ample employment and good wages; but with the departure of the family from the homestead went the cherished dream of a home.

[Pg 34]

Often at night when the children, now grown sunburned and inured to the intense heat and blistering sands, were on their pallets, enjoying the peaceful sleep of tired but happy childhood, Gully and his wife would sit for hours and try to devise means whereby the coming winter might be lived through with some semblance of comfort. During these heart to heart talks, while seated before the door of their humble home, Gully's gaze would wander out across his broad acres, which under the pale starlight in this clear desert air, could easily be transformed, in vision, to fields of waving grain; conversation would cease; a restless move made by one of the children would attract the attention of the watchful mother, who, upon entering the house cautiously stepping with stealthy tread among the little sleeping forms, would approach the table, give the flame of the one small kerosene lamp a gentle turn upward and throw into bold relief every evidence of abject poverty within the confines of that one sparsely furnished room. With wide staring eyes she would hastily scan the face of each sleeping child as if in dread of finding the fiendish hand of hunger clutching at some innocent throat; but all is quiet. Passing a trembling hand across her weary forehead, she slowly turned, and as she did so, read in every object that met her gaze one word, *sacrifice*. The little blue overalls, with their numberless patches, and frayed and tattered hem, the little gingham aprons, worn threadbare by the constant nipping, picking and catching on the scraggling branches of the despised sage brush, all shrieked sacrifice. Suddenly, with a quick movement, a little foot is thrust from beneath the scant cover, and at the same time a varicolored sand lizzard scurries across the bare floor and disappears through a convenient crack. Seizing the lamp, she hurries to the side of the sleeping child, takes the little brown foot in her loving hands and seeks in vain for some mark of injury inflicted by the frightened lizzard; finding none, she places the little foot tenderly on the pallet and reaches for the cover; stops, and stares. What does she see? Only a little toe, the nail gone, a partially healed wound, showing where the cruel snag of the hated sage brush had torn its way into her very flesh and blood. With a groan she bows her head for a moment, then hastily scanning the room, she misses the little shoes and stockings so much needed for the protection of those little feet. Arising, she replaces the lamp upon the table, turns it low, and returns to her husband's side, prepared to make one of the greatest sacrifices ever made by a woman, and one of which little has even been said or written. She must tell him to go, and leave her and the children alone and unprotected in the desert. He must go, that they might live, go until the winter snows drive him home. O God! it would be lonely, days of constant watching across the quivering sea of unchanging gray, nights of wakeful listening, broken by the sound of the ghoulish yip of the hungry coyote and the mournful hoot of the ground owl.

[Pg 35]

[Pg 36]

Give honor to the famous women of our land, if you must. She who first made our glorious flag, those who devoted their lives to nursing back to health and strength our nation's heroes, and the sainted mothers of distinguished men; but, oh! remember the wives of the pioneer and homesteader, and ask yourself; is she not entitled to a place among these?

Travis Gully, being completely lost in his dreams of independence, had not missed her from his side. The good wife stole softly up to him, and placing her hand upon his knee, slipped down beside his chair. He, being thus suddenly aroused from his reverie, and noting her appearance of abject misery, assisted her to arise, drew her trembling form near him, and spoke cheerfully of the situation, assuring her all would be well in the end. He forbade her to discuss his departure at that time, and there beneath the broad expanse of star bedecked sky, surrounded by the vast and desolate desert, they renewed their faith in each other and resolved to continue the battle,

and with revived hopes they planned for the future, and for hours rebuilt the castle so ruthlessly destroyed by the desert storm.

CHAPTER IV.

[Pg 37]

The month of June had arrived, and with it came the intensified summer heat, now almost unbearable in the shadeless glare, and as the time approached for Gully's departure, it was finally decided that the wheat fields of the north would be the easiest of access for his journey in search of work. The question of water for domestic use being the most difficult to solve, it was decided to build a cistern sufficiently large to hold enough to last until his return, and for the next few weeks the time was devoted to this work. It was while thus engaged that the family received its first ray of hopes for the ultimate consummation of their dream, and the hope to which their minds would frequently revert during the long fall and winter months that were to follow.

After the cistern had been dug and Gully, with painstaking care, was trying to cement the interior, patiently replacing each trowel of wet cement as it rolled from the sides, as the sand gave way and allowing it to fall repeatedly to the bottom, each time being taken up and carefully replaced, gradually setting, inch by inch, until the task was accomplished; his wife on the surface, mixing the sand and cement in small quantities and handing it down to him, as required; doing her part to conquer the wilderness as valiantly as any man; when there was a hurried scampering of little feet, and the children came breathlessly up, calling to their parent that "Wagons were coming, lots of them." This announcement to the uninitiated would seem but small cause for comment, but to those who live for weeks and months without the advent of a stranger within miles of their habitation, the approach of an unknown horseman or vehicle is hailed with excitement and wonder.

[Pg 38]

Gully hastily emerged from his work beneath the surface and looked inquiringly in the direction indicated by the excited youngsters, where a few miles to the west a dense cloud of dust could be seen. An occasional horseman, driving loose stock, or a covered wagon or buckboard, could be distinguished through the dense pall of dust that hung with maddening persistence over the approaching caravan. Speculation was rife among the now excited family, and many were the theories advanced as to the cause of this unusual sight. It being definitely determined that the approaching wagon train was wending its weary way along the road that terminated at their humble abode, hurried arrangements were made to greet the strangers, the children were assembled at the kitchen door, and their faces washed to remove, if possible, a small portion of the desert grime; their sunburned locks, that the wind had whipped into wild confusion, were hastily untangled, and arranged into semblance of order. When this task was completed and each little bronzed cheek shone with the too strenuous application of common laundry soap, that only resulted in bringing out in bold relief the myriads of copper colored freckles with which they were covered with generous profusion, they were admonished by their mother to "keep clean," and were allowed to scurry away, to watch in wide eyed wonder the approach of the strangers. The mother, with purely feminine instinct, removed all evidence of the white splashes of cement from her hands and shoes, changed her dress, and after these pitiful efforts at making herself presentable, joined with the waiting children.

[Pg 39]

Many of my readers have, no doubt, waited with feverish expectancy the ringing up of the curtain on some notable drama, or looked forward with a mingling of joyous anticipation and dread to the arrival of a relative or friend whom they had not seen for years. But few indeed are left who can describe or define the sensation of commingled joy, dread and uncertainty that fills the heart of the lonely homesteader on an occasion like this. Hours seemed to pass during the interval between the discovery of their approach and the arrival of the strangers, the hundreds of questions that rushed, unbidden, to the minds of the isolated desert dwellers. Who were they, and what was their motive for coming? Were they transient visitors on an idle tour, or some wandering band of nomads, drifting derelicts, who had strayed from the beaten paths to evade if possible, contact with civil authorities; or better yet, were they new neighbors coming to cast their lot with them, to assist in the reclamation, the conquest of the desert? Such were the multitude of questions recurring to the minds of the anxious watchers, each, in its turn, being cast aside to be replaced by others, in bewildering succession.

[Pg 40]

Travis Gully, who, owing to the narrowness of his self constituted domain and the wild desert environments, had allowed himself to drift backward, and contact with conditions with which he was unfamiliar had awakened in him the spirit of alert defensiveness of primitive man. He felt the sting of resentment at the approach of the strangers, and it was with a forced smile, and hesitating handshake that he greeted the foremost of the party, who had at last ridden within the front dooryard. Glancing over his shoulder, he assured himself of the safety of his family. The wife and three eldest children had remained standing near the door, while two little towheads, that protruded from behind the building, showed where the two youngest had taken refuge.

Gully invited the stranger to dismount, but the latter, thanking him curtly, remained mounted until the entire party, consisting of some twenty-five or thirty men, equipped with a complete field outfit, wagons loaded with tents and provisions, abundance of stock, both draft and pack animals, had arrived within hailing distance. Turning in his saddle, the chief, or man in charge,

raised his gauntleted hand with a commanding gesture, and with brakeblocks grinding against glistening and heated tires, rattle of chains and shouts from the teamsters, the procession came to a stop. Dismounting, he gave a few instructions to his men, who remained on their wagons; then returning to the waiting homesteader, asked as to the conditions for making permanent camp in the neighborhood. On being assured that there was no water for the stock nearer than three miles, the windmill overtopping the well at that point being in full view, was pointed out to him, and minute directions for finding the road that ran tortuously through the miles of sagebrush to this oasis, was given. With a courteous bow, the chief mounted, gave orders to his men to follow, and moved off in the direction of the well.

[Pg 41]

As the last sound of the departing cavalcade was stifled in the muffling sand, Mrs. Gully came to where her husband was standing, gazing absently in the direction the strangers had gone. Who were they and what were they here for, was the absorbing and unanswered question; who was this clean, trim man, dressed in his khaki suit and neat leather leggings, who had such absolute authority over this thoroughly equipped expedition; not a homesteader, this was evident by his professional appearance; not a fugitive, because his manner was too gentle. Who was he, and what was his business?

CHAPTER V.

[Pg 42]

As the season approached for the exodus of homesteaders for the harvest field, hurried preparations for the departure was made, the cistern was completed, huge piles of sage brush was gathered for fuel and placed conveniently near the house. Thus was Travis Gully's time taken up for the next few days following the arrival of the campers at the well. Many were the inquiring glances that were cast in the direction of the group of glistening white tents. Parties of men could be seen going and coming, morning and night, some walking, others mounted or in vehicles. Once a band of what seemed to be loose horses was seen to be approaching the home of the Gullys, but when within a short distance of the house a mounted man, emerging from the tent village, followed them and turned them westward, soon being lost in the sea of gray sagebrush, but not before it was discovered that it was a pack train, going out for supplies.

At last the day came when the mystery of their purpose was to be solved. On his first trip to the well for water with which to fill his now completed cistern, Gully noted a fact that had been overlooked by him on the occasion of their visit to his home; each wagon and all the equipment was stamped U. S. G. S. This fact, however, left no clue in his crude mind as to who they were, and not until he saw one of the party with an instrument on a tripod, mounted upon a small knoll near the road to his home, did he awake to the realization of the fact that they had something to do with a survey.

[Pg 43]

The task of filling the cistern consumed many days, and required numberless trips to and from the well. During these frequent visits the acquaintance of some of the men around camp was made and the information was volunteered by one of their number that they were a party of United States Geological Surveyors sent out by the Government to make a survey of the desert with the view to ascertaining if it was feasible to irrigate the region by gravity from some of the numerous lakes and streams that lay hidden away in the mountains that surrounded the entire valley.

Irrigation! So this was the reason for all this activity. Gully's heart leaped at the sound of this magic word. Here was the realization of his dream. It was to be—and why not? Was not the Government making the survey, had not the authorities awakened to the fact that here was a country of some seven hundred and fifty thousand acres of valuable land laying idle. Why not convert it into homes for thousands, who, like himself, though less venturesome, were dreaming of a home of their own. With gladdened heart, forgetful of poverty and past disappointments, he hurriedly filled his barrels with water and drove home eager to tell his wife the good news.

"I knew it was coming," he told her. Had he not talked with the men who had been sent to bring about this transformation? "Just think, Minnie," he exclaimed, "we are among the first. Others may follow, but we have our land."

[Pg 44]

Water, bright sparkling water, flowing in rippling streams; all they wanted; no more wearisome trips across the dry parched waste, with the constant drum, drum of the empty barrels dinning in his ears—no more return trips with the barrels filled at starting, but now sadly depleted, and the wagon box reeking and dripping with the waste caused by the splash, splash of the precious fluid. Irrigation—and a home of his own.

A few days after the discovery of the object of the party encamped at the well was made, it became generally known, and the glad news was being discussed in every home throughout the sparsely settled neighborhood. Men could be seen loitering around the camp or mingling with the surveyors in the field, eagerly gathering such scraps of information as was given out and hastily departing to add fuel to the already inflamed imagination of the settlers.

It never occurred to them that even though the survey resulted in a favorable report, it would probably take years before the accomplishment of the purpose for which it was being made, and the added strain of uncertainty, waiting and watching made the life of the homesteader more

unbearable.

When the morning came for the departure of the little band of harvesters for the broad wheatfields of the big bend country, it was an unusual sight that greeted the vision. It had been previously arranged that they should assemble at the well and make that the starting point for their journey. Small puffs of dust might be seen arising miles away, each marking the approach of one or more of the sturdy homesteaders, many of whom had made the trip the fall before and knew of the many long hours of toil that awaited them. Yet they were marching forth, with grim determination to put as many hours into each day as mortal man could stand. It was their harvest as well as the wheat growers; their season for retrieving the few hard-earned dollars lost in seeding and planting during the spring just passed; theirs, to accumulate the necessary food and clothing for the wives and little ones they were leaving behind in the desert, to watch longingly for their return when the harvest was ended.

[Pg 45]

The party with which Gully was going had decided to take one wagon with four horses to convey their crew, with the camp equipment, to the grain fields. The men came in every conceivable means of conveyance, accompanied by a member or, in some instances, by the entire family, who were to return with the rigs to their homes, after seeing them safely on their way. Each came with his blanket roll neatly tied with a cord or strap. Two dilapidated telescope grips, made of canvas, were provided to carry the extra clothing of the party; a writing tablet and a package of plain white envelopes, by means of which the messages, scribbled with pencil, and often by lantern light, of love, sorrow, success or defeat, were to be conveyed to the lonely ones in the desert wilds; a spool of black cotton thread, some needles and a few extra buttons, for an emergency, were carefully stored deep in one corner of the grip. All to be used in common, all brothers in the wilds; there was no business rivalry, no competition there; just an equal desire that all might live.

[Pg 46]

They were late in getting started, owing to the distance some of them had to come, and when the last of the party rode up, seated upon a horse fully harnessed, complaining that his delay was caused by the collapsing of one of the wheels of his vehicle, the poor old weather beaten buggy rendered unserviceable by its constant use on many trips to and fro across the sandy waste; the spiteful particles of sand, gnawing, cutting and grinding their way into each tiny crevice, between the rim and spoke, into the hub and under the tire, until its wheels, after days, weeks and months of rattling, squeaking and groaning, could no longer stand the strain, the inanimate thing sank helplessly down, to be cast to one side, among the harsh, rasping sagebrush, and left there to sizzle, shrink and bleach in the blistering sun rays, until called for and taken helplessly back to the home of its owner for repairs, in the way of having hard bits of sun parched leather, cut from well worn and discarded shoes, forced between its once perfectly fitting rim and tire, the whole being wound and rewound with the indispensable balewire. Such an end; what could be expected of a thing of flesh and blood?

"Never mind," cried his waiting companions, cheerfully. "You can soak the old critter up in the irrigation ditch pretty soon." And with this merry jest, at the same time recalling to their minds the condition of their own means of conveyance, and also one of the many uses to which the abundance of water could be put when once turned loose, to run rampant across the stretch of barren waste. They prepared to start on their journey.

[Pg 47]

Each of the party, with sad heart and quivering voice, all doing their best to present an indifferent exterior, bade the waiting members of their families, the gathered neighbors, and the members of the survey crew a hearty goodbye, and drove northward, knowing full well that their toilsome progress across the valley would be followed by tear stained eyes and aching hearts, until the evening shades settled and the thin spiral column of dust, watched for a time after the object which caused it to mount high into the heated atmosphere had been hidden by a cloak of darkness.

The first night out the travelers spent at a small spring that flowed in a feeble stream down the rock ledge that formed the northern boundary of the desert, and sank from sight, being swallowed by the thirsty sands. It was a hard drive that brought them to this place, and during the hours that intervened between their departure from the well and arrival at their first camp, was spent in almost silence. Each of those present seemed lost in silent contemplation of the difficulties that confronted him. Various subjects had been brought up for discussion, followed for a few moments, and then were allowed to drop. All except Travis Gully, who was driving, seemed lost to their surroundings.

[Pg 48]

It was a varied assortment of which this little group of men was composed, taken at random from various points, from different walks of life, no common interest in the way of mechanics or profession, yet bound together by stronger ties, a mutual understanding of each other's absorbing ambition to build a home; appreciating to the fullest extent the difficulties and hardships endured, the disappointments and suffering caused by the one common affliction, poverty.

There was the muscular iron molder from Pittsburg, who would sit, with half closed eyes, and liken the heat of the desert to the fiery glow of the familiar furnaces; the clouds of dust to the dense smoke of his home city, and ask himself: "Had he moved wisely?" The pressman, from one of the largest printing establishments in Denver, who would in dreamy silence listen to the constant clatter of the wagon, and in fancy hearing the rumble of his once favorite machine, the press, rolling out in endless sheets items of news, gathered from all over the world; suddenly the wagon wheel strikes a stone, and with a lurch, he starts with outstretched hand to adjust a roller,

replace a belt, or take up the torn web. Smiles feebly at his absentmindedness and resumes his seat. The professor, who for years taught in a college in Kansas, watched with earnest gaze each specimen of desert plant life that struggled for existence beside the dusty road, unable to release himself from the desire to increase his botanical knowledge. An exsoldier and Travis Gully, the farmer, completed this incongruous party.

[Pg 49]

Upon their arrival at the spring just before sundown, they arose from their seats in the wagon, cramped and dusty from their long ride, and shambling to the rock ledge, relieved their parched throats with copious draughts from the spring. Knowing that the scarcity of water on the road over which their route lay would necessitate a forced drive on the morrow, they hastily unharnessed the horses, gave them water and picketed them to munch the scant herbage until sufficiently cooled to be given their ration of grain, they then prepared their own frugal supper, after which, with pipes lit, and each seated around the smoldering sagebrush fire, their faces turned homeward, watched the shades of evening settle, and noted the twinkling lights that shone from their humble homes miles away across the level plain. Conversation no longer lagged; each was eager to express his views as to the result of the survey now being made, and the certainty of the wealth to follow the reclamation of the thousands of acres of fertile land that lay stretched for miles to the south. No one doubted for a moment but what it would come. Was not each of the railroads that extended across the great Continental Divide, advertising the fertile valleys of the Northwest as the goal of the poor man? Was not every Commercial Club in the cities through which these avenues of commerce and forerunners of civilization ran, sending out and scattering among the inhabitants of the entire territory from the Atlantic seaboard to the Rocky Mountains, pamphlets in which was set forth, in glowing word pictures, accounts of the possibilities of the undeveloped lands now laying idle, yours for the asking? Were they not morally responsible for the welfare of each family who, lured by their flattering descriptions, had given up their means of a livelihood, and sold their small accumulation of personal property, in most instances for what they could get; frequently scarcely enough to reach this land of dreams, and at best with but a few hundred dollars?

[Pg 50]

Would these mighty forces that were being brought to bear for the purpose of converting the undeveloped resources of this vast country into a merchantable article, going to accomplish their end by the sacrifice of thousands of human ambitions, and even lives? Certainly not; give them a chance.

This survey was being made with the view to placing within the reach of the settlers the means whereby wealth and affluence might be obtained.

Such was the opinion of all, and with optimistic views and hopes renewed, the blankets were unrolled and spread upon the bare ground, and with a cheery "Goodnight," each of these champions of right and justice lay down to enter the enchanted land of dreams, and live through the realization of all they had hoped for.

Just before daylight the following morning all were astir and the horses fed, and with the never to be forgotten acrid smell of burning sagebrush permeating the cool air, which, gathered amid the eternal snows that lay undisturbed for ages on the glistening sides of the mountain peaks to the west, was wafted and filtered through miles of spruce and pine forests and delivered in all its exhilarating morning freshness to fill with health and vigor the lungs of these conquerors of the wilderness; breakfast was eaten, blankets rolled, and just as the rosy tint of the pitiless sun shone in the east, the start was made.

[Pg 51]

The road which had led them for weary miles across the desert the afternoon before came to an abrupt ending at the spring. The solid cliff of basaltic rock formed an impassible barrier to the north. There seemed no reason for the road leading squarely up to the ledge other than to gain access to the scant water supply the small spring afforded, this spot having been for years the stopping place for weary travelers and hordes of thirsty stock. No road leading from the spring being visible, a return drive was made until a road leading directly east was encountered. This road was followed for several miles, when a break in the range of hills afforded an exit verging a little to the northeast. After a few miles the road turned directly north again, leading into a break in the barrier of hills and out through a coulee to the plateau, where lay the wheat fields that were the destination of the little band of harvesters.

The trip through the coulee, once made, would never be forgotten. Immediately at the entrance of the funnel like gorge, with its precipitous walls of stone towering in heights from a few hundred to two thousand feet, the way seemed blocked by a lake several miles in length. Clear and cool it lay, constantly lashed into fury by the strong current of air rushing from the chasm above. The white, foam crested waves, spending their force upon the sandy shore at the lower end, retreating after each attack, leaving behind a deposit of white frothy foam that was picked up by the wind and scattered far beyond the reach of the next incoming wave, there to be dried by the sun, and the residue, a white crystal, powdered salts, left sparkling in the sunlight. Nothing in the way of vegetation except a species of harsh quackgrass grew within the radius covered by this deposit. The waters of this lake possessed strong mineral properties that were fatal to plant life, also rendering it extremely nauseating and unfit for drinking. Owing to this fact, it had been known to the Indians of Chief Moses' tribe as "Poison Water." Yet cool and sparkling it lay, a gem in the barren gulch, relieving the eye of those who chanced to pass that way, but often proving a sad disappointment to both the travel worn man and beast, who, unacquainted with its peculiar qualities, upon first beholding its rippling surface, hastened to its brink to appease a desert born thirst.

[Pg 52]

As the lake was approached by the party, the members of which had previously heard of its existence and the nature of its waters, no stop was made. A passage around it was sought and soon discovered in a well worn trail that followed a dry ravine which led down to the lake, and extending around its head, reentered the coulee some miles above. They continued their journey along this ravine, the route being marked at intervals by the bleached bones of animals which had perished of thirst within a short distance of abundance of cool dear water that a caprice of nature had rendered, like fools gold, alluring, but of no value.

[Pg 53]

For fifteen or twenty miles the road ran tortuously among the huge boulders that had fallen from the crest of the solid walls that arose hundreds of feet on either side, the crevices and nooks of which were the haunts of the rattlesnake and lizard. The projecting ledges that occasionally occurred showed signs of being the nesting place of hundreds of hawks that circled in an aimless manner at dizzy heights above this giant crevice. Limpid pools of alkaline water lay teeming beneath the blistering suns rays, their white salty rim unmarked by the footprints of any living thing, accursed by nature and abhorred by all God's creatures, wasting their contents by evaporation during the summer, and replenished by the torrents that rushed through this abandoned water course during the annual spring thaw.

That it had been a water course was evidenced by the beds of well worn gravel, devoid of all soil, and the marks of the constant wash of the waves on the face of the cliffs on either side. Who knows but what at some remote period the mighty Columbia river had flowed through this grand coulee, emptying into an inland sea, the bed of which now formed the desert of almost a million acres, destined to be the home of half as many people? Flowing thus for ages, nourishing plants now unknown; its limpid waters, cooling and refreshing the prehistoric monsters that came daily to drink at its brink; sheltering beneath its rippling waves species of fish now extinct, their fossilized forms only remaining to remind us of the mighty changes that have taken place. Flowing peacefully on, secure in its mightiness, yet all the while somewhere along its course was being assembled the power that wrought this change, the terrific force in the nature of gases generated far in the depths of the earth. It might be thousands of miles away, conducted through unknown channels and crevices, seeking the point of least resistance, forced hither and thither by the ever increasing pressure, until a subterranean cavity is formed by a slight upheaval or displacement of the stratification. Into this rush the gases, followed by the raging fires, until further resistance is impossible. The imprisoned demon crouches in narrow confines, trapped at last; and with a mighty shudder, the effects of which are felt on the surface, causing the ponderous mastodon to halt unsteadily, and raising his gigantic head in alarm, sounds a note of warning, and followed by his herd, rushes madly through the mass of huge ferns in search of safety.

[Pg 54]

The imprisoned force, no longer able to confine its strength, furiously gathers its reenforcement, and with terrific, thunderous roar, forces the crust and breaks through, tearing asunder this sphere that has taken eons to form, disgorging in fiery torrents upon the surface of half a continent the contents of its seething cauldron.

Back rush the floods of the Columbia, as if aghast at the havoc wrought; stays its flow but for a moment, and charges this indomitable foe that dares to impede its progress, and pours its waters, now made black and muddy by the tons of ashes and stone sent hurtling into its waves, into the thousands of crevices and fissures trying in vain to throttle this fiery demon who greets the oncoming stream with flaming tongue, converts it into steam and additional power with which it throws out huge volumes of mud that seal the crevices and cool the lava about its glaring throat, thus using its enemy to erect a barrier against itself. Hopelessly defeated, the mighty river seeks a course whereby it may reach its former terminus, the inland sea. It wanders on with indefatigable persistence, taking the abandoned beds of some of its former tributaries; follows it until overtaking the original stream at some unaccustomed place, absorbs it and hurries on its way over boulders and through canyons and gorges, rapids and cataracts harrassing its waters in a manner heretofore unknown. In its wild flight it makes a detour of more than a hundred miles, appropriates the channel of another stream, and turns back toward the inland sea, still determined to do its part in replenishing this vast storage place.

[Pg 55]

Upon reaching its western boundary, oh! what a change had taken place. Stretching away as far as could be seen was a mass of oozing matter, decaying seaweed and pools of slimy water, heated to almost boiling, reeking with the stench of dead fish, the whole being sprinkled with cinders and ashes, and teeming with muck and filth.

[Pg 56]

A break in the southern boundary of the former body of water showed where a fissure had been opened up, through which its contents had drained, following the outlet until it had emptied into the Pacific Ocean. The noble Columbia, unable to gain access to refill the basin, took up the course of the liberated deluge and followed resignedly in its wake.

CHAPTER VI.

[Pg 57]

The third day out the harvesters reached the scene of action in the grain fields, and by noon of that day had found employment, the entire party being engaged for the season with promise of work for their horses. This was indeed an agreeable surprise. They had expected to remain in the same neighborhood, but to be employed together was more than they had hoped for.

The afternoon of the same day they drove to the home of their employer. Here the scene that greeted them was something of a disappointment to them, as the home of the wheat grower was but little better than their own desert shacks, save that it had one redeeming feature, an abundance of water. A well, surmounted by a large windmill, was located near the center of a large enclosure, and was the attraction for a number of horses and cattle. A few lazy hogs wallowed contentedly in the mud beneath the long watering trough, into which flowed, with fitful gushes, at each stroke of the slender pumprod, a stream of pure cold water, which was consumed by the waiting stock or allowed to overflow at will from the trough. The large barn, the dilapidated machine shed, and the typical home of the wheat grower was complete. No, not complete. There was yet another object. It was located in the further corner of the barn yard. It was an old wagon, with huge frame mounted upon it. This frame was covered with flimsy, dirty canvas, and had a stovepipe protruding from the top. From a door in the back, three narrow rickety steps reached down to the ground as if inviting one to enter, and at the same time daring them to take the chance. Off to one side was a pile of sagebrush, with a broken handled axe near by, and a barrel of stale water with a tin cup hung by a piece of wire over its chime, two tin basins laying upon the ground, while to a nail driven in the corner post of the canvas covered structure hung a piece of sack twine with a twisted aluminum comb dangling at its ends, and a dirty towel which the constant action of the wind kept from becoming rigid and stiff. This was the "cook house," where the toilers were to get their meals during the harvest.

[Pg 58]

With faint misgivings at the uninviting prospects the strangers, beholding the broad acres of grain now just turning to gold on the high ground, and gradually shading to a dark green in the swails and hollows, and extending over from one and a half to two or three sections of rich land, asked themselves why conditions were not better.

The men already engaged at harvesting on this wheat ranch not yet having come in from their day's work, our party cared for their horses and strolled about the place, wondering at the absence of signs of life, but being unfamiliar with such conditions, among the stalks of heavily headed grain that reached to their shoulders, and taking the plump, well filled heads in their hands, fondled them lovingly, and their minds went back to their own desert homes, to their lonesome wives and children, and asked themselves if the time would ever come when their land would produce such a bounteous yield, and thought with proud satisfaction of how, in case of such an event, they would remain at home and enjoy the sweet sound of the harvest machinery as it garnered for them and theirs.

[Pg 59]

Wonderingly they waited for someone to come, some friendly voice to greet them, if not in profuse welcome, to at least tell them where they were to put their few effects and where they were to receive the accommodation that, being strangers, they had every reason to expect. They had brought their blankets, it was true, but it was with the view to using them while camping out. They little realized that, had they not brought them, they would have been provided with little more accommodation than a beast of burden.

The sun went down and they sauntered back to the barn yard, where they had left their wagon, and loitered around it with a fondness due the only familiar object in sight. Still no one came. From the grain field the clicking of the sickle as it mowed down the grain could be plainly heard, wafted from afar on the rapidly cooling twilight breeze. Travis Gully arose from his seat on the wagon pole as if moved by some uncontrollable impulse, and going around to the side of the wagon, threw back the rolls of blankets and drew forth the old canvas telescope grip. Taking it fondly in his rough hands, he knelt beside it on the ground, unloosened the straps, removed the tablet and envelopes, and taking from his overall pocket a stub of a pencil, resumed his seat and began to write, with a slow cramped movement, the first letter home. Slowly he poured out from his own burdened heart the cry of a distressed soul.

[Pg 60]

The remaining members of the party, realizing that this was to be the anxiously looked for first news, sent loving messages to their homes. No mention was made of the tiresome trip, of the forbidding aspect of their first employment; just a letter of encouragement, reassuring them of their success, and hopes for a profitable season and safe return. "Simple enough," you might say, but oh! what relief to the pent up feelings of those sturdy homebuilders.

Think, if you can, of what might have been written and read between the lines, of the anguish and uncertainty that was tugging at the heart strings of each of them, knowing, as they did, the conditions under which they had left their families; out alone on the desert, realizing that they, themselves, knew absolutely nothing of the duties they would be called upon to perform on the morrow, and tell me if you do not agree with me when I say that there, in the evening shades, under environments that would try the strength of the bravest, was not endured to the fullest extent, misery.

The letter was finished, and after placing it in the envelope, Gully sat with it in his hand and gazed thoughtfully at the address. The iron molder lit his pipe and moved off in the direction of the barn; the professor and the soldier arose and strolled to the well; all silent, lost in their own thoughts, the nature of which can only be guessed.

[Pg 61]

The sudden opening of a door at the main house aroused them from their reverie, and turning in the direction of the noise, they saw a woman come out and secure an armful of stovewood and reenter the building. In a few moments a dense smoke was emitted from the stovepipe, an indication that supper was being prepared. Darkness was fast obscuring the landscape, and from the distant field the conversation of the men returning from their work could be plainly heard, and mingling with it were the sounds of rattling chains and creaking harness. Upon their arrival

at the barnyard, and while some of the horses were still drinking at the well, a man was seen to emerge from the house bearing a lighted lantern, and go to the barn, where other lanterns were lighted and carried about by the men.

Our friends went to the barn and upon making their presence known, were greeted with a tired "Howdy do" from the workers, as they unharnessed and distributed grain among their horses.

The owner of the wheat ranch, for it was he who had come from the house with a lighted lantern, came hurriedly up, and after pointing out a row of empty stalls, instructed the strangers to put their horses inside. This they gladly did, after which the lanterns were hung on pegs outside the barn and the workmen disappeared in the darkness. Our friends, hearing sounds at the well, went there and found several of the men stripped to their waists, washing the dust and perspiration in the trough and drying their faces on large red handkerchiefs with which they had mopped their faces during the heat of the day. As they completed their ablutions, they disappeared, until there was but one who, upon raising his streaming face from its immersion in the trough, inquired of our friends: "You fellows had supper." Upon being assured they had not, he advised them to "wash up, and come on down to the cook house," the location of which was easy, owing to the light which shone through the canvas cover, bringing out in bold relief the silhouette figures of several men seated at the table, with elbows in the air, working industriously, making way with generous portions of food, as was indicated by the shadows of dark objects before them.

[Pg 62]

Thoroughly tired and hungry, not being accustomed to waiting until this unseemly hour for their evening meal, they followed their new acquaintance and mounted the rickety stairs leading up to the entrance of the cook house. They were astonished at the arrangement of the interior; every available inch of space was taken up and made to serve some purpose. The forward end of the canvas structure was partitioned off and used for a kitchen—the rear portion, with a table running the full length, served as the dining room—while boards, fastened with hinges to either side, could be either raised or lowered, doing duty as seats. The sides of the structure was so arranged that the upper portion could be swung outward and propped, thus being converted into awnings and at the same time affording ventilation. Immediately over the table and drawn up to the top of the canvas canopy by means of a rope fastened to each corner, and running through pulleys, was a woven wire bed spring. This could be lowered at night and was the sleeping place of "my lady," the cook, a haggard, sad-eyed individual, the widow of an unfortunate homesteader who, unable to endure the hardships of a pioneer, had gone to his reward the summer before.

[Pg 63]

When the first two members of our party had entered the cook house the rest were compelled to remain outside until some of those who had finished vacated, for when the table was filled those who went in first had to remain seated until the last one who entered had finished his meal.

The food was abundant and good, well cooked and served, when you take into consideration the difficulties under which it was prepared, and was eaten by the tired and overworked harvesters in a manner indicating a complete indifference to after effect. When supper was finished, there being no opportunity for gaining information, the hour being late, our friends returned to their wagon, unrolled their blankets, and lay down to ponder over this unheard of way of treating hired help. But not for long. Being fatigued to the limit of human endurance, they fell asleep, with the faint sound of the clatter of tin pans and cups that emanated from the cook house and the incessant rattle of the windmill dinning in their ears.

CHAPTER VII.

[Pg 64]

When morning came—not morning proper—but it was sometime after midnight, Travis Gully was awakened by the sound of someone cutting wood. Peering from beneath his blankets, he saw a lighted lantern at the cook house. Other lanterns were being carried to and fro among the horses in the barn. Sleepy individuals were crawling out from every conceivable place—from the hay mow and machine shed, carrying their inseparable blanket rolls. At the well men were busily pumping water by hand, the wind having died down during the night. Not being sufficiently awake to fully realize the meaning of this activity, Travis Gully stretched his tired limbs, rolled over, gave his blankets an extra tuck and drifted away in slumber. Not long, however, was he allowed to remain in this condition, for he was suddenly startled from his dreams by a gruff voice shouting: "Roll out, here, you fellows," and started to a sitting position, with tired sleepy eyes blinking in the bright glare of the lantern light, he beheld the boss standing over them, smiling amusedly at their bewildered looks. Their first day in the harvest field had begun, the first of many just such days that were to follow before they could return to their homes, and during the long winter evenings recount to the eager listening wife and children the varied experiences through which they had passed, embellishing each little incident with a tinge of humor that could not be appreciated at the time of its occurrence.

[Pg 65]

Dressing hurriedly, they went to the barn to care for their horses and found them munching contentedly at their morning feed, which had already been given them. Seeing the other men busily harnessing their teams they, without question, did likewise, resolving to be governed in their actions by the example of the older hands; they waited expectantly for each move. One of the men, more congenial than the others had proven, asked them how they had slept. Upon being told, he suggested that they bring their blankets into the hay mow where, he assured them, they

would be more comfortable. This was the first intimation they had that they were not to be provided with a bed, but must choose their own resting place. They were soon to realize that the hours for rest were as scant as the accommodations for enjoying them, and adapted themselves to prevailing conditions. So after converting the watering trough into a lavatory for making their morning toilet, they proceeded with the rest of the men to the cook house for breakfast; after which, having no special duty assigned them, they were at a loss to know how to proceed. It being yet dark, they stood awkwardly around, while some of the men brought out their teams, watered them, and springing upon one of the horses rode back in the direction from which they had come the evening before.

[Pg 66]

They did not remain long in doubt, however, for the owner of the ranch came from the house and instructed them to follow the road over the hill, where they were heading grain, and to await his arrival, adding that their horses would be sent out later by one of the boys, who would drive them while on the job. This arrangement was a disappointment to Gully, who had hoped that he might be permitted to drive them, but he made no complaint, and they did as they were bidden.

When they arrived at the place indicated by the owner, they found the header with the horses hitched ready for starting. Three header boxes were awaiting the arrival of teams and drivers. A circle had been cut in a large area of ripe grain and a few loads piled in the center, indicating where the stack setting was to be made. The driver of the heading machine, or "header puncher," as he was called, was groping around in the uncertain light, oiling up or adjusting the drapers or elevator canvas.

In a few moments a wagon came from the house with a barrel of water, a few additional pitchforks, and some extra parts of machinery that might be needed in case of a breakdown. Our friends were assigned their respective duties; Gully was to be stacker, the molder as "spike pitch" or helper in the stack yard, the professor was "loader," and the soldier was given a pitchfork and sent to turn the grain in the "backswarth," a narrow strip cut around the entire field before the regular heading is begun. This is usually cut green and allowed to cure for hay. So with their horses being driven to a header box the siege had begun.

[Pg 67]

For five weeks, each day being identical, days of constant grind, short nights, and three trips to the cook house, days of blistering heat, the sunrays being intensified by concentration and reflection from the shining surface of the glistening straw. The light soil, mostly volcanic ash, being pounded and loosened by the constant tramping of the horses in their many trips to and from header to stack; lifted high at each turn of the "bullwheel" of the header and sent flying in stifling clouds, clogging the eyes, ears, nose and mouths of the workers, while trickling streams of perspiration from beneath their hatbands washed furrows through the accumulated mass on their faces.

The first week of this toil tried the spirit of our party almost to the breaking point. Night would find them bowed down with aching backs from the unaccustomed strain of pitching the heavy grain; hands numb and cramped, with blistered palms; throats dry and parched from the intense heat and dust from the straw. They would sink down upon their blankets in the hay mow and sleep the sleep of utter exhaustion, but the hopes of our homesteaders were being constantly revived by the receipt of encouraging letters from home.

Opportunities for getting these letters mailed were few, it was explained, but by sending them to the camp of the surveyors they were taken to the distant town and forwarded; and such news as they brought. "All are well at home. Do not worry; we are doing splendidly. Of course we miss you very much and want you with us, but when you do come home, you can stay. Just think, a party of the surveyors were on our land today and have driven stakes showing exactly where the irrigation ditch is to run." Thus wrote Gully's wife, and others would tell of rumors of large land deals, whole sections and half of townships, being purchased by big companies, all to be immediately improved. Houses were being erected in every direction; parcels of land heretofore considered worthless were being filed on; a school house was being built and, really, things were beginning to be quite homelike.

[Pg 68]

Upon receipt of these cheerful missives the disappointment of the first season was for the time forgotten, and the men entered into their daily toil with cheerful hearts, filled with the anticipation of the realization of their dreams. Thus on through the ensuing threshing season up until the later fall, when it seemed that a snowfall might occur any day, did our sturdy homesteaders toil on until the last of the golden grain was sacked and hauled to a place of safety. Then only did they turn their faces homeward, with the indispensable blanket rolls, the old canvas telescope grip, now more dilapidated than ever, thrown at random in the wagon; with overalls out a knee, the frazzled threads of many colored patches indicating the earnest efforts of their wearers to make them last the season through; hats out at crown, and well worn shoes, they were indeed a travesty on the party who had left their homes only a few months before. But each sun tanned face was wreathed in smiles, for securely tucked away in those well worn overalls was a snug sum, their harvest wages, that insured them and their loved ones against want during the coming winter.

[Pg 69]

They were going to their "own homes." They did not have to move or worry about a new location for the following year; things were different now. This money they had earned, hard earned, it was true. Think of the many comforts it would buy—shoes for the little ones, and much provisions, and by judicious expenditure additions might be made to their homes. They could at least weatherboard them and make them more comfortable. Such were the thoughts and

suggestions that filled the minds of these faithful home builders throughout the first day of their journey home.

CHAPTER VIII.

[Pg 70]

I have often wondered, as no doubt many of my readers have, what there is in a man's nature that makes him blush and feel ashamed of doing a little act that is in every respect perfectly natural, and one, that if publicly known, would raise him in the estimation of his fellow men, and yet while condemning himself for his weakness, his heart actually throbs with the pleasure he derives from doing as he has done.

The first day on their return journey from the harvest field was a joyous one, the relaxation from the strain and the diversion acting as an elixir. Freed from the noise of clattering machinery out upon the highway, and relieved of the sight of miles of brown fields of stubble, our friends rejoiced at the sight of the desert with its thousands of acres of bunch grass and sagebrush that stretched far ahead of them to the foothills, there to be met by the dark green shade of the mountain pine and fir, above which shone in all its glittering splendor the eternal snow on the mountain peaks. They spoke in endearing terms of the mighty wilderness as theirs, as if little realizing that the small portion of that vast domain to which they actually held claim was insignificant.

They had chosen a different route by which to make their return, one that led them through a small village situated at the edge of the desert. It was here that the last night out from home was spent, and here too was demonstrated the peculiar traits of man's character referred to at the opening of this chapter.

[Pg 71]

After the establishment of the camp for the night and after the team had been cared for, Travis Gully was noticeably restless, and at length wandered away from his companions and entered the village store. No thought of his own disheveled appearance entered his mind. It was of the dear wife and little ones he thought. The morrow would see him with them, and the long summer's watching and waiting would be at an end. What more natural than that he should wish to take some little token to the children and to her, who had borne the burden of the long summer's separation that they might retain their homestead?

He thought of her as he had last seen her, as she stood at the camp near the well, struggling to withhold the tears that he know too well had flown many times since he left. He recalled the pitiful effort she had made to dress for the occasion of his departure; of her brown dress, her best dress, the one that had been carefully made, stitch by stitch, in preparation for their long journey from their old home to the land of promise; how it had withstood the days of constant wear while she was cramped up in the tourist coach, being whirled away across the continent, and how guardedly she had spread the cloth upon her lap to protect the precious fabric from being soiled by the touch of many little fingers made greasy by clutching the huge sandwiches of fried chicken, ham and cheese, with which the spacious hamper, their traveling companion, was bounteously provisioned; and how after their arrival, and while seeking a suitable location, it had been subjected to countless brushings and spongings, until at last it bore all too plainly the evidences of the hard usages to which it had been called up to submit. And yet, it was still her best.

[Pg 72]

She should have a new dress, one that he himself had bought, and without hesitating he approached the expectant merchant to make known his wants, and here his confusion was made evident. Never having made a purchase of this nature, he was at a loss as to quantity, quality and color. After numerous suggestions from the over-anxious merchant a selection was made, the required number of yards guessed at and measured off. Then after purchasing a small carton of animal crackers and some peanuts and candy for each of the children, he paid the amount of his purchase, and with his precious bundles tucked beneath his arm sought the camping place.

As he approached the camp fire around which his companions were seated, he was seized with a desire to hide his bundles lest they might jeer him good-naturedly about his extravagance. He tried to reach the wagon by a circuitous route to avoid observation until he had hidden his bundles. In this effort he was partially successful, but the others had seen him in time to arouse their suspicions, and they accused him of buying a new suit. To this he entered a strenuous denial, but looked guilty and felt uncomfortable the remainder of the evening. He did not join in the conversation that followed his arrival, but sat, as the firelight died down, and watched across the barren waste for the first twinkling light that might give evidence that human beings inhabited this vast region of hidden possibilities.

[Pg 73]

Thus he sat long after the other members of the party had gone to bed, sat dreaming, as his watchful gaze centered on the darkened space made more dense by the rays of the fitful flicker of the dying fire, space that for the lack of distinguishable form might be likened unto a yawning cavern, a bottomless abyss, whose only known content was stygian darkness. Was it into the unsatiable maw of this monstrous dungeon by night and inferno by day that he had allowed himself and loved ones to be drawn; unwittingly, it was true, but as irresistably as a disabled craft into the vortex of some mighty whirlpool, carried around and around the outer circle, fascinated by the charm of the smooth gliding movement. Suddenly the arc of the circle

decreases, and looking further toward the center, other objects are seen, but it is noted that they seem to be moving more rapidly. Why this increased speed? Is the goal in sight, or has their proximity to the desired end given them a vantage view? Ah! they will keep speed with the large object just ahead of their craft; perhaps they can learn what motive drew them to this delightful place. But a moment, a pause, a quiver and a plunge downward; one mighty wail of despair, followed by a gurgling sound of gluttonous satisfaction, and they realize too late their fate. Casting a despairing look backward to warn those in sight not to follow, but on they come, heedless of their warning, offering themselves unconscious sacrifices to the ever increasing demand for new territory for new outlets, for the ever populated districts of the world.

[Pg 74]

It was the same old story. The pioneer fighting the first great fight, blazing the trail and marking the route with suffering, tears and even death, that future generations might follow at their ease.

Travis Gully wondered if he, as its helmsman, had allowed his craft to be drawn into dangerous waters, bearing with him his family, the precious passengers whose lives had been intrusted to his care. Had he, at the first narrowing of the circle, gone and left them in this vast wilderness. Was it justice? Were they safe? A few more hours would tell. And let the conditions in the future be what they may, he would never leave them again. With this resolve, and with a feeling of comfortable assurance that his leaving would not again become necessary he, with one more look to see that his bundles remained where he had hidden them, went to his rest.

Taking advantage of an early start, the following morning the party was well on its way when the sun shone above the jagged ridge of hills that marked the eastern boundary of the desert, shown as mellow and as soft as the spring sunshine in their old eastern homes. The lateness of the fall season had robbed it of its brassy glare and the cool wind that had swept over the valley during the night had driven out the quivering heat units with which the blistering sands had been surcharged.

[Pg 75]

The drive home was a pleasant one and good progress was made. Everyone was intent on locating at the very earliest possible moment the windmill, surrounded by its village of glistening white tents, that they were sure could be seen for miles. Numerous windmills were in sight far across the plain, but none that they could distinguish as the one marking their journey's end.

As they drew nearer to their homes, and after they had reentered the road over which they had made their outward trip, evidence of a changed condition was everywhere apparent. New houses, their unpainted outer wall reflecting the bright sunrays, could be seen for miles; hundreds of acres had been cleared of sagebrush, and small mounds of white ashes surrounded by charred ends of brush over which the reawakening bunch grass waved, showed where the bonfires had been made. In some instances many acres had been plowed and harrowed, made ready for the sowing of grain that would immediately follow the first of the winter's rains. This evidence of advancement gladdened the hearts of our worthy friends and speculation was rife among them as to the probable value of land under these changed conditions.

In their eagerness to reach their homes no stop was made for lunch. Water for their horses was obtained from a newly made cistern at the edge of a large area of newly plowed land. Evidence of a recently abandoned camp was near at hand, but no sign of life. The journey was resumed after watering the horses and in a short while familiar objects could be pointed out, and in some instances their individual homes could be located. There was the old windmill, its weather stained wheel and vane contrasting strangely with other windmills that glittered with their newness on adjoining sections, the old landmark that had withstood the onslaught of the terrific wind and sand storms for years, warped by the intense heat of the blistering desert sun, drawing with tireless energy the cool sparkling water from the depths of the well over which it stood guard, and beckoning to the chance wayfarer to come and partake of its refreshing draughts. Thus it had stood, known as "The Windmill," the friend of every stockman, homesteader, land owner or wandering Indian that chanced its way since the day, many years ago, a progressive sheep man, seeing the value to his herds of this extensive grazing ground, had caused to be hauled for many miles, across mountain, stream and plain, the machinery for its erection, for the establishment of this oasis in the desert. Unconscious of the fact that he was erecting a monument to himself and a source of comfort and blessings to hundreds of human being for many years to follow.

[Pg 76]

Upon their arrival at the windmill they were disappointed to find that the tents were gone; the party of surveyors had left the field. The only remaining evidence of their having been there was an occasional white stake driven into a mound of earth, marking a corner, or an iron pipe with a brass cap on which was recorded the elevation above sea level. The busy groups of men, the hurrying camp wagons and pack trains, were missing, so the anxiously awaited information as to the probability of irrigation in the near future was not to be gotten.

[Pg 77]

The families of the homesteaders having been informed of the day and time of their probable arrival, had assembled at the well to greet them. Travis Gully's wife and three of his children were there. Being unable to find the horses that had gotten loose upon the range, they had walked the three miles to the well to meet him. Ida, the eldest girl, had remained at home to care for the youngest child, who was too small to take the trip.

Here, at the same place where they had assembled a few months before, they separated and went to their several homes. A neighbor whose horses had been taken on the trip to the harvest field assisted Gully and his family to reach their home. As they approached the house the children who had been left at home came running out to greet them with joyous shouts of welcome.

Thanking his friend for the ride, Gully threw his blanket roll from the wagon and sprang down, seized his boy in his arms, lifted him high on his shoulder and marched triumphantly into the house. His wife having taken possession of the canvas grip, and with the rest of the children eagerly crowding around, they followed him. A shaggy tramp dog who had come unbidden, a self constituted guardian of his family during his absence, came from beneath the kitchen table, sniffed suspiciously at Gully's overalls, and scenting no evidence of danger, wagged his tail in approval and returned to complete his nap. The three chickens of which Joe was the proud owner, feeling that some event of importance was taking place, crowded noisily around the door.

[Pg 78]

All these little incidents were unnoticed by the tired father who, now being seated, was in a fair way of being smothered by the demonstrations of his devoted children. Boisterously they crowded around and over him, plying him with a constant volley of questions and recitals of happenings during his absence. The mother, forgetting for the time the long months of anxious waiting, beamed with satisfaction on this happy scene. Curiosity to know the contents of the canvas grip soon aroused the children, and after Gully had emerged from the mass of clinging arms and tangled locks, he directed Joe to bring the grip to him.

Upon receiving the grip, and with his children seated around him on the bare floor, with eager and expectant faces, he opened it, and as he handed each their little bundle they scampered away to investigate its contents. He handed his wife the package he had brought for her and asked if she could guess its contents? After several attempts to do so, all of which ended in failure, she opened it, and realizing at a glance the nature of his gift, she was speechless with pleasure, and with her eyes filled with tears, she threw her arms about his neck and laughed with girlish glee. For the first time in the course of their married life Minnie Gully had a glimpse of her husband's heart.

It was a happy family that gathered around the supper table that evening. After the meal was eaten and the dishes removed the smaller children brought their boxes of crackers, cut in grotesque forms of various animals, and arranged them in rows to correspond with their idea of a circus parade, of which they had once seen a picture. The mother and two eldest girls unrolled the goods for the dress, and holding it to the light, admired its beauty and discussed how it had best be made. Gully sat silently smoking his pipe, enjoying for the first time a feeling of absolute independence. He was in his own house, on his own land, with funds to provide for the winter, and being undismayed by the failure of his first effort on his homestead to raise a crop, dreamed peacefully of the future.

[Pg 79]

Late into the night, long after the excited children had gone to sleep, Gully and his wife sat and planned for the expenditure of the sum he had earned during the harvest season. They talked of the many requirements of the children, of the supply of provisions that would be necessary to do their family until spring. Feed had to be purchased for the two horses with which it had been necessary for him to provide himself when he came upon the homestead. If the snowfall was light the amount of feed required would be correspondingly small, but should the snow become sufficiently deep to hide the bunch grass it would be necessary to feed the whole winter through. Thus they planned, making numberless lists of necessary purchases, and after comparing the amount required with the funds on hand, revised and readjusted the list until finally giving up, bewildered but happy, they went to their rest.

CHAPTER IX.

[Pg 80]

Travis Gully having acquired the habit of early rising during his sojourn among the harvesters, was awake the following morning before the rest of the family was astir. He lay for a short time drowsing and enjoying the unaccustomed rest, but being unable to content himself, arose, and after dressing stepped outside in the crisp morning air. Daylight was just appearing over the brow of the hills to the east, a narrow thread of silver light with a faint tinge of rosy dawn. The deep shades of night, disappearing behind the peaks of the Cascade mountains to the west, cast their purple hues over the snow covered expanse at their summit, faded away and were lost amid the gloomy blackness of the heavily timbered gorges that cut deeply down their sides to the Columbia river.

Lighting his pipe, Gully strolled out near the cistern, where, seated upon an upturned barrel, he breathed with exhilarating delight the morning air and tried, in fancy, to picture to himself what the reclamation of the thousands of acres that lay before him would mean. He could see miles of just such grain as he had been helping to harvest, and long avenues of fruit trees, extending across the clearing he had made the spring before; trees like those he had seen growing in the orchards at Wenatchee, where he had made his first stop. The little strip of land that lay between his present humble home and the dusty road, then no longer dusty, but a glistening well kept highway extending away in the distance until lost to view by its ever decreasing narrowness; this little strip of land would be a waving mass of luxuriant alfalfa through which would wander his cows, horses and pigs.

[Pg 81]

His flights of imagination suggested to his mind a number of comfortable cottages in close proximity to his own then pretentious home, in which were domiciled each of his children. They should have homes of their own.

Travis Gully sat dreaming his delightful dreams of the future, when he was suddenly brought back to a realization of his surroundings by a hot breath, immediately followed by a cold, damp muzzle being thrust against his hand. Starting suddenly at this rude awakening, he frightened away the faithful old dog who, having discovered his presence, had approached to make his acquaintance. Appreciating the situation at a glance, Gully spoke kindly to the dog, calling him back; he patted him on the head and laughed good naturedly at his shaggy, woe begone appearance, and promised him better times for the future than he had evidently been accustomed to in the past.

It was now day, and the smoke was coming from the stoves within the homes of some of his neighbors. Upon noting this fact, he went inside the house, and after kindling a fire in his own kitchen stove, called to his wife, who having been awakened by his movements, immediately came out and joined him in the kitchen door, where they together watched the rising sun shed its splendor over the scene.

[Pg 82]

The delight of having their father with them once more clung to the family throughout the day. His every movement was followed by the joyous band of happy children. They led him to the point where the surveyors had set their instruments on their land and showed him the little stakes upon which the plumb bob had been centered, and which they had carefully preserved, telling him it was there the water was to flow. They told him of the many little kindnesses bestowed upon them by these good men who were to provide them with the much needed water, of how they had carried their letters to and from the distant post office, and had distributed pennies among the smaller children.

Thus the constant chatter flowed, each little incident doing its part to reconstruct the tower of hope that was being built, and in which Travis Gully and his family were to fortify themselves during the coming long winter months. The remaining few days of pretty weather could not be wasted in idleness. The trip to the distant town for supplies must be made; the cistern must be refilled, and more ground gotten ready for seeding before the frost came. All this Gully realized, and with hopes and aspirations at their highest point, he was eager to begin activities.

The horses that had been astray for several days returned for water and were taken up and held in readiness for daily use. The second day after Gully's return being Friday, it was decided by he and his wife that the trip to the town should be made first, as the supplies were running short. They were to go the following morning, and as it was to be a gala day the whole family was going.

[Pg 83]

At this announcement the children danced with glee, as they had not been further from home than the well since they came the March before, and little realizing how tiresome the long trip across the desert would be, they anxiously awaited the arrival of the time to start. Everything was gotten ready that evening in preparation for the trip, Gully knowing that the going and coming over the long sandy roads would consume most of the day. It would require an early start to allow time for their trading.

Sunrise the following morning found them well on their road to the town, which could be seen in the distance, although many miles away, and as the morning hours passed the enthusiasm of the children gradually exhausted itself, and the last few miles of the trip were made in almost complete silence, broken only by the monotonous squeaking of the harness and rattle of the wagon, the box of which was a home made affair, almost completely wrecked by the strain of being overloaded with barrels of water, but which had been wired together with bale wire in order that the boards extending from side to side would sustain the weight of those seated upon them.

When they reached the town, which consisted of a few residences, a railroad station and some half dozen stores, Gully drove to a vacant lot a short distance from the main street, where a number of wagons were already standing, with horses contentedly eating hay while their owners were transacting their business.

[Pg 84]

After assisting his wife and children to alight he unhitched his team, and then making them fast to the wheels, that they might eat, returned to where his family had assembled and assisted them to brush from their clothing the accumulation of sand and volcanic ash that had transformed them into gray figures that blended with the buildings, fences and sagebrush with which they were surrounded, all gray, the eternal gray of the desert.

Had those of their friends who had known Travis Gully and his family in their old home met them in their present condition, it is doubtful if the most intimate among them would have been able to recognize them. The changes that had taken place were in some respects advantageous. Minnie Gully was no longer the tired, care worn mother of the year before. She had thrown off that spirit of lassitude that marks so unmistakably the drudge, the farmer's wife. That she had health was evidenced by the tinge of color that shone through the coat of tan produced by the desert wind and sun, and also by her buoyant step and actions. The children had grown hardy and rugged by their unrestrained freedom in the wilderness, and while showing a disposition to be more timid, were as yet unspoiled by their isolation.

It was in Travis Gully that the change was most noticeable. He was no longer the disinterested slave, the irresponsible renter with no higher ambition than to grow an abundant crop for his landlord, that he might be allowed to remain on the premises another year and thereby avoid the exertion of a forced move. His summer spent in the harvest field had netted him other than financial returns. It had developed in him a firmer resolve to own a home of his own, and

[Pg 85]

hardened his muscles for the fray. His bearing was more independent, and the fire of a newborn ambition shone in his eyes.

He was now the aggressor, and had dropped the role of a passive follower. It was his first awakening, and never having been compelled to feel the sting of defeat, was as yet undaunted. Thus it may be seen that while the first year's planting on the homestead was a failure the venture, as a whole, had its element of success.

The next few hours of their stay in the village was devoted to shopping, and were filled with many incidents both amusing and trying. The constant care of the children as they tugged at their mother's skirts, calling her attention to various articles that caught their wondering eyes, the trying on of shoes and selection of gingham and calicoes, with one ever present thought, that the purchases must be confined to a certain amount, made the task a tiresome and nerve racking one. At last it was finished, and when Travis Gully, who had gone for his team, drove up to the store and loaded on his purchases, it was a tired and hungry family that climbed into the wagon and took their places among the many bundles and boxes with which it was piled and turned their faces homeward, to drive back over the same dusty road; to listen for hours to the rattle of the particles of sand as they were lifted high by the revolving wheels and then allowed to drop upon the paper wrapped bundles with which the bottom of the wagon was strewn; to listen to the continuous crackling of the dry sagebrush as the wheels passed over it, pressing it deep into the yielding sand, and which sprang back into position after the vehicle had passed and awaited, with a patience born of years of solitude upon the desert, for the next onslaught, continuing this torture until ground to powder and mixed with the sand that had lashed it for years. Take, if you will, a pinch of sand from the sage covered desert, and seek out from its many particles the tiny atoms of sagebrush and examine them. They are all the same misshapen, dwarfed and gray.

[Pg 86]

It was far into the night before the Gully's reached their home and were greeted by the faithful old dog who had remained behind, but little notice was taken of his demonstration of welcome, so after he had assured himself that all were present, and had tugged at the blanket in which little Joe was brought, sleeping soundly, into the house, he retired to his place under the kitchen table. Gully lost no time, after caring for his horses and seeing that his purchases were safe for the night, in going to his rest, conscious of the fact that an eventful day in his life had passed.

It now being late in November, Gully knew that but a short time could be expected before the first winter snow would come, and he had learned that it sometimes came in such quantities as to drift in the roads and make it very difficult to travel, and not caring to be caught unprepared in such an event, left the following Monday in search of a place where feed for his horses might be purchased. Accompanied by one of his neighbors, he went back into the hills, and there they purchased a sufficient amount to do them both. The roads being very sandy and the distance great, it required several days with both their teams to haul the hay to their claims. After this was accomplished and the winter's supply of wood procured, the rest of the time before the snow fell was devoted to clearing land in preparation for plowing the following spring.

[Pg 87]

At last, upon awakening one morning Travis Gully found that the long looked for snow had arrived, several inches having fallen during the night, and it was still snowing quite hard. He looked out across the level plain, and thought he had never seen a more beautiful sight. Not a breath of air was stirring, and the huge flakes were coming down in myriads, falling on the high tufts of bunch grass and remaining where they had fallen. The unsightly sagebrush was transformed into every conceivable shape, and its stubby, unyielding branches bedecked with soft, fleecy snow that completely hid their identity and brought their grotesque forms out in cameo like relief. The changed color and altered conditions from its former sameness gave the landscape a weird, ghastly appearance.

Gully stood fascinated by the dazzling whiteness, and wondered in a vague, uncertain way why, if such a change was possible in so short a time by a simple variation in climatic conditions, would it not be possible to make the change permanent and productive of some good. Why not change from the torturing dull gray to green and then a golden hue, to be followed by the spotless mantle of white? Was it within the power of man, with his advanced ideas and modern methods, to bring about such a transformation? If so, would the change be permanent? That they had in some instances, and over small areas, accomplished this feat it was true, but it was noticeable in every instance of this kind new complications had arisen to test their ingenuity, new difficulties were constantly arising for mankind to combat.

[Pg 88]

Could it be possible that Dame Nature in her magnanimity in giving the greater portion of the earth had reserved these few, isolated places for the gratification of her whims, for reconstruction by her hand alone, to be handed down in ages yet to come to a different, better and wiser race. If it was possible for this once inland sea to be transformed into a blistering barren waste, why would it not be equally possible for this same power to tear down and remove the barriers that now arise between this desert and its natural source of water supply, the mountains that so change the currents of air and rend asunder the vaporous clouds, and thereby render condensation impossible. What right had man to dictate the conditions that shall obtain in certain localities, and would nature concede their demands?

To Travis Gully the possibilities of irrigation were unknown. He had never seen its results, except on the one occasion when he had stopped for a few days in the little city, surrounded by its extensive orchards, that had marked the end of his journey in quest of a home. That similar conditions as those he was now called upon to combat once existed in that now fertile valley he well knew, and the scenes of beautiful homes surrounded by miles and miles of orchards, with

[Pg 89]

occasional patches of green alfalfa, was so indelibly impressed on his mind that they were constantly recurring to his memory, and were easily within the bounds of possibility as applicable to the locality in which he had chosen to cast his lot. Would the change be made, would he and his neighbors be given an opportunity to demonstrate to the world, the results of intelligent handling of these greatest productive agents, water, sunshine and soil?

He was sure they would. The coming of the Geological Surveyors was proof that the authorities were at last going to reclaim this arid district and bring it into a state of productiveness. That they had left the vicinity of where he lived was true, but he had learned that they had established a new camp farther into the desert, where their work was to be continued, and as soon as the result of their investigation as to the feasibility of the plan had been reported to the Department of the Interior at Washington, D. C., actual work would start, and he would soon see the realization of his dream, "A home of his own."

CHAPTER X.

[Pg 90]

The first snow was of short duration, although the fall was heavy. The sun shone brightly before the end of the week and as it melted the moisture was hastily consumed by the thirsty sands. The days that followed the disappearance of the snow were ideal. No clouds of dust arose to obscure the vision, and the quivering, dancing mirage that had transformed the desert into a veritable fairy land appeared regularly each morning and lingered, as if loath to deprive the desert dwellers of the pleasure of its hypnotic influence, until compelled to retreat before the advancing army of glinting sunbeams.

The invincible bunch grass, aroused from its lethargy by the magic touch of moisture, sent forth from its withered roots tender shoots of green that peeped shyly from the mass of sun parched stalks that, unable to withstand the summer's heat, had fallen helplessly back, thus forming a shield for their parent turf.

These days of sunshine were taken advantage of by Travis Gully and his family, and rapid progress was made in clearing the land. With the coming of the shades of evening his place, like those of hundreds of others, was aglow with bonfires, the pyre of the burning sagebrush that sizzled, crackled and fried as the blazing torch was applied, and when the last faint glow of the remaining embers had died out and only ashes were left, they could still feel the penetrating leer of the ghastly gray that would not down.

[Pg 91]

As the winter approached every possible preparation was made for the months of enforced idleness, and when it finally came the family, who had never acquired the habit of reading, and were lacking in other forms of amusement, the time hung heavily on their hands. The letters that came from their old home at irregular intervals were anxiously awaited, and upon receipt of them a sense of homesickness seemed to overcome the family. Little incidents were recounted that recalled scenes and recollections that during the busy season would have been lightly passed and soon forgotten.

They had never met any of their former friends since coming to the northwest, but had learned that the Gowells and Moodys had settled somewhere in Montana, and word had been received from the Lane boys, who had taken up a homestead in Washington, but the address given was a remote point from the Gullys. The letters stated that those mentioned were all doing well and were satisfied with the change. Not a word of complaint had ever been written by Travis Gully or the members of his family. They had failed the first year, but it was probably due to unusual conditions, they thought, so they made no mention of the fact.

They had written home at regular intervals, stating that all were well, the happy, healthy growth of the children was noted, and an amusing description of their home, and experience in building the cistern and hauling water with which to fill it, was faithfully chronicled. An account of the trip to the harvest field was written, telling of the enormous yield and the methods used in saving the grain, also of how a sufficient amount was earned to meet the winter's requirements, but never a word of the heart breaking failure of their first planting nor of the tortures endured in the grain fields, feeling that the possibilities of a reoccurrence of these unfortunate conditions was remote. They looked only to a more successful future.

[Pg 92]

The little district school house, the erection of which had been started early in the fall, was now complete, but no teacher could be found who was willing to come into the wilderness to teach the few children of which the district boasted. The neighborhood finally by common consent organized what they called a "Literary Society," and a Sunday School. The society met twice a month, and these meetings were looked forward to as events of great importance, the program usually consisting of debates by the older members and recitations, dialogues and songs by the children of the community. The Sunday School met weekly, and the homesteaders came with their families for distances of from ten to fifteen miles to be in attendance.

As the holiday season approached; arrangements were made for a neighborhood Christmas tree, contributions were taken up at a meeting of the society, and a committee of arrangements appointed to take charge of the affair. Someone being the fortunate possessor of a catalogue from an eastern mail order house, it was brought into requisition and a selection of decorations

and trinkets for the tree was made and the order for their shipment forwarded. A census of the community was taken and no one forgotten.



At dusk faint lights twinkled from the scattered homes in this sea of eternal gray sage.

For days before that memorable Christmas Eve an air of mystery surrounded the actions of everyone concerned. Packages that came through the regular mails from the home folks in the east were carefully hidden away, not to be opened until Christmas. The age worn spirit of the season's cheer had invaded the desert, bringing with it a feeling of comradeship not possible to engender in a community without the desert environments, the vastness and the solitude impressed upon the homesteader a sense of his individual smallness and the necessity of association with one another. They were there for a common purpose, the conquest of the desert and the building of a home.

[Pg 93]

When the anxiously looked for package from the mail order house arrived it was left at the Gully home until time to get the tree in readiness. The morning of the day before Christmas was ushered in by a blizzard that drove the finely powdered snow in blinding sheets into the faces of Travis Gully and the two of his neighbors who had been chosen to meet at the school house and make preparations for the assembly in the afternoon. Gully, after hitching his team to the wagon in which had been placed the packages and bundles, covered them snugly with old blankets to protect them from the blowing snow, and drove to the school house, where he found his two neighbors awaiting his arrival. They came out to meet him with forlorn and hopeless expressions depicted on their faces. Noting this, he asked them the cause of their distressed appearance, when, both speaking at the same time, they exclaimed: "How about the tree? We have no Christmas tree." Gully was amazed. Here they had made arrangements for a befitting celebration, with the decorations to adorn a Christmas tree, the time was at hand, and everyone had forgotten to provide a tree for the occasion.

[Pg 94]

With crestfallen expressions, the men turned slowly and allowed their gaze to sweep the plain in every direction, but could see no way out of their difficulty. Not a shrub in all that vast area raised its scrawny head to a height above four feet. What would they do? The wives and children must not be disappointed. They had set their hearts on this event as the nearest approach to a Christmas with the home folks. Here at this Christmas celebration would be opened packages containing tokens of love and thoughtfulness. The very knots in the cord that bound them, and the creases in the paper with which they were wrapped, had been made by fond hands that were separated from them by thousands of miles. No! they must have a Christmas tree.

At this point in their dilemma, the resourcefulness of the true pioneer asserted itself. With an exclamation of "I have it, boys," Gully sprang from the wagon, and throwing back the blankets from the packages he directed that they be taken inside, and after using the blankets to protect his horses from the cold, he went to a huge pile of sagebrush that had been hauled into the school yard for fuel, drew from its midst and shook the snow from several of its largest branches. These he and his companions carried into the school room. Gully's friends, not knowing his ideas, fetched and carried at his command like eager children. From beneath the newly constructed building was procured a piece of discarded scantling which was appropriated and cut to the desired length. The branches of the sagebrush were then cut from the stalk and nailed with painstaking care to the smooth surface of one side of the two by six inch scantling. Starting near the bottom with short branches, the longer ones were worked in near the center and tapering as

[Pg 95]

the top was approached, the whole structure being topped with one crowning bough; and thus completed, the crude affair was placed in position, with the flat side securely nailed to the back wall of the building. Upon stepping back to study the results of their efforts, the men were surprised at the effect, the oddity of its appearance.

Procuring the box of trimmings, they proceeded with their task. By means of the generous distribution of cotton batting which was originally intended to create the effect of a snow drift at the base of the tree they succeeded in hiding the background and the rough bark of the boughs, and at the same time producing a decidedly wintery effect. Upon having completed the tree thus far they decided to return to their homes for their families, and to leave the final touches to the deft hands of their wives.

CHAPTER XI.

[Pg 96]

Owing to the great distance it was necessary for some of the homesteaders to come, it had been agreed upon to meet at the school building during the afternoon, bringing their lunch and eating, after which they would light the Christmas tree as soon after dark as would give the best effect, and to distribute the presents early that those who came from afar might return home at a reasonable hour.

It was shortly after the noon hour that Travis Gully and his two friends returned with their families, as they were anxious to have the tree as nearly completed as was possible before the arrival of those from a distance. The wives of the designers of this novel Christmas tree, having been in a measure prepared by having been told of its nature, were astonished, upon entering the building, at the attractiveness of the tree. They had expected to find some crude arrangement as a substitute for the usual evergreen, but when they appreciated the possibilities of the unfinished work before them, they were delighted, and went eagerly at the task of its completion.

Taking up the work where the men had left off, they readjusted the indiscriminate distribution of the fleecy cotton, sprinkling it with the glistening powder so commonly used to produce the sparkling, frosty effect, clipping an unruly bough here and there, placing the glittering tin candle holders, with their assorted colored candles, so as to avoid contact with the cotton when lighted, and after filling many small red, green and blue stocking shaped mosquito netting bags with candies and nuts, after which a tag bearing the name of some child of the neighborhood was attached, these they distributed among the branches of the tree, festooning the whole with a bewildering mass of yards of pure white popcorn strung on a thread for the occasion, tissue paper designs and sparkling tinsel that reflected the lights of the many candles in rapidly changing hues and giving it the effect of a dazzling fountain that persisted in its activities, though in the grasp of the frost king.

[Pg 97]

Before the completion of the decoration of the tree and for several hours after the neighboring homesteaders began to arrive with their families, each bringing their share of the Christmas packages and boxes of lunch. Many and varied were the expressions of amazement and delight that greeted the workers upon the arrival of each family. "Isn't it lovely, and made of sagebrush, too. How did you do it?" Some, more inquisitive than others, would have to handle the branches to convince themselves that it was purely a local product. "Well, it beats the trees we used to have back home. I wish they could see it," many would exclaim.

As the neighbors arrived, their packages were taken and either hung on the tree or placed conveniently near its base.

[Pg 98]

It was a happy gathering of pioneers. The little school building, though being used for a purpose other than for which it was built, radiated with warmth from the one huge sheet iron stove that stood in its center and into which was being constantly fed handful after handful of crushed and twisted sagebrush. As evening approached and the last of those who were expected arrived and were met at the door and relieved of their bundles and wraps, places were made for them near the stove that they might warm their frosted fingers and toes.

It was soon growing quite dark, and the excited children were eagerly clamoring for the candles to be lighted. Benches were drawn away from the walls, and after being placed together, the lunch was spread, and the Christmas festivities were begun. There was no snow white linen or sparkling silver nor cut glass, no wines or imported beverages, not a flower or sprig of green graced this banquet board. The benches were covered with the paper removed from such of the packages as had been unwrapped, and plain porcelain, granite and tin were the plates. The knives, forks and spoons were the iron handled or plated varieties. All evidence of stately ceremony was absent, but over all a spirit of good fellowship reigned. Faith, Hope and Charity were their guests and hovered close around this isolated gathering and directed their every thought, word and action. The plain food was eaten with a relish, and the steaming coffee, served from a granite pitcher that was constantly being refilled from a large boiler on the sheet iron stove, was drank with an appreciation of its warmth and invigorating effect.

[Pg 99]

The supper over and all evidence of it removed, with the benches so arranged that all could get a view of the tree, the lighted lanterns that had been hanging upon the walls, were lowered, and the tree lighted. Breathlessly both young and old awaited the effect. Faintly the little candles

flickered and sputtered, trying with their tiny wicks to allow the consuming flames to survive. A few went out, but were quickly relighted, and as the hand that applied the match was withdrawn and a slight current of air created, they flared and fluttered, but as the pointed tip of each candle was burned away and the little cups of molten wax formed around the wicks, they shot forth their flames. One by one they came, like stars as night rapidly falls; more quickly they came, and as the last one flared up and revealed the tree in all its sparkling brilliancy, bated breathing ceased, and with a sudden chorus of many childish expressions of delight and much noisy handclapping of their parents in appreciation of the spectacle before them, the little school room was filled with din that was taken up by the icy night wind and wafted for miles across the snow and mingled with the swish of the treacherous currents of the Columbia river, or mounting higher were lost amidst the phantomlike whispering of the souging pines on the rugged mountain side.

There were among those who had assembled there that Christmas Eve many who had in their earlier childhood attended many Christmas tree entertainments, both community and family trees, but none were present who could recall ever having seen one more beautiful. Their minds flew back for just one fleeting moment to scenes in the past, trying in vain to recall the most beautiful tree they had ever seen, that they might compare it with the one they now beheld, and wondered at the possible effect the sight of such a one as this would have upon the home folks.

[Pg 100]

Travis Gully was chosen to distribute the presents, and this he soon accomplished. As each person's name was called they arose and the parcel was passed to them, and when the last of the packages had reached the hand of its excited owner and had been opened and admired, they were passed to curious onlookers for their inspection and comment. The tree was denuded of all its gaudy decorations. The candle holders, with their short bits of candle, were distributed among the children, and the long strings of popcorn and sparkling tinsel, together with the cotton, were carefully stored away in a box for future use. While mothers secured their wraps and shook to a state of wakefulness many sleepy little tots, each step they took resounding with the crunch of peanut shells with which the bare floor was strewn, the first Christmas tree the desert had ever known had come and gone.

The men went out, and hitching their teams, drove to the entrance for their families, and as each stepped inside the building to say good-night and wish for his neighbor a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, he took a final look toward the back of the room and shuddered. One smoky lantern hung on a nail near the tree, now robbed of all its tawdry loveliness; sagebrush, just a skeleton of a thing, once made beautiful for a transient moment but now back to its original state, a product of the desert, a diabolical fiend clothed in its haunting gray.

[Pg 101]

Gully with his family were the last to leave, and the hour being late, the drive home was made without comment by either he or his wife. The older children chattered away about what they and their friends had gotten from the tree. Little Joe, tucked snugly away among the blankets, one chubby hand clutching the now almost empty mosquito net stocking, the other, with fingers stuck fast together, was thrust beneath his head amidst a mass of tousled locks of sunburned hair, now smeared with red dye from a moist stock of peppermint candy, slept unconsciously throughout the trip home.

Christmas morning, when it dawned, was accompanied by a terrific blizzard that kept Travis Gully and his family indoors. But being happy with the success of the Christmas tree, they were content to stay by the fire and discuss that event and plan for the weeks of fair weather that they hoped would follow the storm.

Gully realizing that his family was comfortable, his only care was for his horses. These he had provided with as good protection as he had been able to construct after his return from the harvest field, but he knew that the flimsy structure he had erected and on three sides of which he had piled sagebrush as a windbreak, could not long withstand such a storm as was now raging. Upon going to the barn he discovered that the brush had already blown away and he set to work to replace it and to make it more secure by weighting it down with numerous old discarded railroad ties that had been hauled out for fuel. The stinging fine snow and icy blast of the blizzard made his task a most difficult one, and he was repeatedly forced to go to the house to thaw out his frosted fingers and toes.

[Pg 102]

As evening approached the fury of the gale increased, and huge snowdrifts formed around the little home and completely cut off exit by means of the kitchen door. The front door opened directly facing the blizzard, and at its every opening the two small rooms were filled with the cold wind and drifting snow. The shrieking and howling of the wind warned Gully of the wild night through which he and his family had to pass, and he made ready by providing an abundance of sagebrush for fuel. He fed and blanketed his horses early, and after spreading the straw for their bedding, he left them as comfortable as was possible under the circumstances.

Supper being over and he and his family seated comfortably around the roaring stove enjoying the genial heat that was now filling the rooms, and laughing merrily at the novel experience of being snowbound out in the desert. Incidents of other Christmas nights back in the old home were recounted by both Gully and his wife, to which the children eagerly listened. Laughing and chatting, the evening was spent in this snug little retreat, while outside the storm raged.

[Pg 103]

One by one the children became sleepy and were tucked away for the night, and the fastening of the front door was made more secure by having a crude bench turned on end and braced against it, and the cracks around its casing, through which the cold wind was driving the snow, was stopped by an old piece of canvas that was fastened at the top with nails and allowed to extend

down to the floor. Thus fortified against the elements, Travis and Minnie Gully returned to their places near the fire and sat for a long time in silence, listening to the regular breathing and dreamy mumbling of their sleeping children. For them the storm had no terrors.

The wife placing her hand upon her husband's knee aroused him from his reverie, and she expressed her satisfaction with their changed condition, not that their material wealth had increased, but that she had been taken into his confidence and had become a factor in his life. In the old home she had been content to be the mother of his children, the keeper of his house. But now things were different. She was appealed to in all affairs, her suggestions were asked for the expenditure of the few dollars he had earned, she was consulted as to the plans for the improvement of their home, and she was happy in the thought that her ideas were of value, and were of assistance to him. She was experiencing her awakening, and while it was not as startling nor as sudden as his had been on that first day when he had determined to have a home of his own, it was just as real, and she was spurred on to new hopes and new ambitions, and was happy in their contemplation.

CHAPTER XII.

[Pg 104]

The wail of the wind grew louder as the night advanced, and the constant peppering of the particles of snow as they were being hurled in never ceasing volleys against the tar paper with which the outer walls of the building were covered could be distinctly heard. The old dog came from his accustomed place beneath the kitchen table, and going behind the stove seated himself amidst the shoes and stockings that had been placed there by the children. After sniffing the air he yawned, curled himself up, tucked his head with a contented sigh, blinked his watery eyes and was soon snoring contentedly.

Scarcely had he dozed off when suddenly he sprang to a sitting position, and pricking up his ears, emitted a vicious growl. Gully, fearing that he would awaken the sleeping children, spoke to him, commanding him to lay down and be quiet. This order he disregarded, and hurriedly went into the kitchen, with hair bristling. Suddenly the startling yap of several coyotes was heard above the din of the wind and pelting snow. A pack of these skulkers, driven from their lairs by hunger and the biting cold, had in their desperation overcome their fear of mankind, and emboldened by numbers, had entered the very dooryard in search of food or shelter.

Gully, after assuring his now thoroughly frightened wife that they were harmless, took the lamp, and going to the window pulled aside the curtain and allowed it to shine on the outside to frighten them away. At the same time he recalled the fact that little Joe's three chickens were roosting insecurely in a box in the barn and would fall an easy prey to the coyotes should they return. Taking his coat and hat, he pulled aside the canvas covering from the door and slipped out into the storm, returning in a few moments with the box containing the chickens, and put them in a place of safety in the kitchen.

[Pg 105]

Saying nothing to his wife about the fierceness of the blizzard, he resumed his place by the fire, and wondered if their little shack would withstand the strain. He thought of his poorly protected horses and how they must be suffering with the intense cold, and consoled himself with the thought that he had done all within his power to make them comfortable, even to covering them with the sadly worn blankets that could be used to an advantage on his own poorly provided bed. As for him, he could stay awake and keep the fire burning, and provide warmth for himself and family. With this thought he suggested to his wife that she retire, as the hour was growing late, and he would replenish the fire and follow as soon as he assured himself that all was well.

To this arrangement she protested mildly; she felt that should anything go wrong her place was by his side. After assuring her that everything was safe and that he would call her if she was needed, she finally consented, and going to where the sleeping children lay, placed each little straggling arm beneath the cover, and after smoothing their pillows she placed their scattered garments on the foot of the bed for additional warmth, and preparing her own bed, in which little Joe was sleeping soundly, she partially undressed and lay down.

[Pg 106]

Travis Gully, left alone, sat dreaming by the stove, while outside the blizzard raged and tore at the walls of his home. Its intensity was increasing, he thought, or it might be that his loneliness made its varied sounds more audible. Blast after blast was hurled against the structure, and its every timber creaked and groaned with the strain. The canvas covering at the door became inflated and collapsed at irregular intervals, flapping lazily against the door, rising and falling like a sail amidst errant breezes.

Gully was soon lulled to drowsiness by the warmth of the stove and varied sounds produced by the gale, and was soon dozing peacefully in his chair. How long he remained in this position he never knew. He was suddenly aroused by a call from his wife, who asked as to the cause of an unusual sound that had awakened her. Gully, thus awakened, noted the chilliness of the room, and renewed the fire, after which he listened intently for a repetition of the sound. He had not long to wait. A sudden fierce blast made the building quiver, and he could distinctly hear a lashing, tearing sound on the north wall.

Approaching the window to ascertain, if possible, the cause, he noticed the crunching sound of

the trodden snow upon the floor, and felt the cold wind. He instantly realized what had happened. The wind in its maddened fury had torn the tar paper from the outer wall and was driving the finely powdered snow through the cracks and was forming it in slender drifts across the floor. The break was slight at the time of its discovery, but each new onslaught increased the size of the rent and was opening new inlets for the snow and icy wind.

[Pg 107]

Gully knew full well that to repair the break from the outside would be impossible, as the paper would be torn from his hands, and to drive nails in the dark, with numbed fingers, was out of the question. The havoc that was being wrought by the wind was rapidly growing in extent, and snow was being driven into the house through new openings at every gust. Sheets of paper were being torn off and could be heard rattling away across the snow and ice, being driven before the wind. Prompt action of some kind was imperative. The bed occupied by little Joe and his mother being built against the north wall of the room, it was necessary for them to move, as the snow was pouring in and covering the bedding, which would soon be made damp by the melting snow.

Joe was placed in the remaining crowded bed with the other children and Minnie Gully, hastily dressing, came with the broom to sweep back the advancing snow drifts.

The now vacant bed was hurriedly cleared of its bedding and the frame work torn from the wall to give access to the openings. Travis Gully worked feverishly, filling the cracks in the wall with paper and torn rags, pressing them in securely with a case knife, his wife bringing for this purpose every available scrap of material. The unused bedding was tacked up to temporarily stay the advance of the snow and wind. The melting snow in the room required constant sweeping back, the fire was kept burning brightly and the battle raged on. Not a complaint or wail of discouragement escaped either Gully or his wife. With set faces and determination they fought back the storm, and a smile of satisfaction greeted each successful effort, as inch by inch the cracks in the wall were closed and the advance of the enemy checked.

[Pg 108]

The children having been awakened by the unusual commotion were told to keep quiet and stay covered up, as everything was all right. Being thus reassured, they were soon fast asleep. Daylight came with the Gullys victors, but brought with it no abatement of the storm. The blinding snow obscured the vision and no idea of the extent of the damage done could be had.

Exhausted by the loss of sleep and the excitement, Minnie Gully had sunk into a chair near the stove. Her husband, noticing her tired look, tried to persuade her to lie down and rest for a while, but this she refused to do, so throwing an old coat over her shoulders to keep out the chill, he left her and went out to investigate the condition of his horses. These he found had fared much better than he had hoped. The drifting snow had been blown into the sagebrush windbreak and formed a solid and almost impenetrable mass, behind which the horses, protected by their blankets, stood in comparative comfort.

[Pg 109]

The task of digging from his meager supply of hay, now almost covered by a huge snowdrift, a sufficient amount for their morning feed was a hard one, but upon its completion he felt fully repaid by the hearty manner in which it was eaten. Upon his returning to the house he found that his wife and daughters were up and busily engaged preparing breakfast. They asked eagerly as to the condition of the horses, and upon being assured that they had fared splendidly, they laughed and joked over their wild night's experience.

All through that day and the day following the blizzard raged without any appreciable lull in its terrific force. No effort was made to repair the torn paper on the outer wall. The cracks that had been hastily filled with paper and rags were gone over and made more secure, the blankets that had been used as a shield in their emergency were taken down and dried, and the crude bed that had been so ruthlessly torn away from the north wall was temporarily reconstructed on the opposite side of the room and held out inviting prospects to Gully, who was now beginning to feel more keenly the effect of his long vigil of the night before.

All efforts at accomplishing anything on the outside were abandoned, and meals were prepared and served at irregular hours. The chickens had taken kindly to their new quarters, and becoming quite tame, were a source of amusement to the children. Travis Gully devoted his time to the care of his horses and providing fuel, the latter occupation requiring most of his time, as the enormous quantity consumed soon exhausted the supply near the house, and as more could not be gotten while the storm raged he was forced to dig out the old railroad ties from the wind break at the barn and to use them for fuel.

[Pg 110]

The storm spent its fury on the desert dwellers sometime during the third night. The lull came while Gully and his family, now inured to its sound, were soundly sleeping, and when they awoke the following morning they lay for several moments listening for the roar of the wind; not hearing it, Gully knew that the long wished for calm had come. Dressing himself, he kindled the fire, and calling to his wife that the storm had ceased, he went out to view its work.

The sun had risen, but was unable to penetrate the haze of thin clouds and snow left floating along the horizon, and looked down on the desolate scene without warmth. The air was cold and penetrating, huge piles of snow had drifted behind every stationery object, and in places where the ground had been cleared of brush and grass the snow was swept entirely away and the wind had eaten its way into the sandy soil and scattered it over the adjoining snowdrifts, giving them a yellow, dingy appearance. Loose sagebrush that had been left piled and ready to burn had been taken up and blown before the wind until finding lodgement against some object, had become the base for the formation of additional snowdrifts that extended in long mounds in the direction the

wind had blown. The whole landscape had a changed and unnatural appearance.

[Pg 111]

Gully could see the homes of some of his neighbors, but they seemed far off, and no signs of life were visible except in one or two instances where streams of thin, blue smoke was issuing from their stove pipes. Not a horse nor cow could be seen upon the range, and the ever present hawks that were wont to soar at dizzy heights above the plain were missing. Noting these changes in detail, Gully wondered if these same conditions existed throughout the vast area. After feeding his horses, he returned to the house, where his breakfast awaited him.

A few days after the passing of the storm the sun resumed its brilliancy, but with little increased warmth; the days were clear and the nights frosty. No effort was made by Gully toward venturing away from home. He replenished his supply of fuel and covered the exposed cracks in the wall of his shack by nailing over them laths. The space between the cracks where the tar paper had been torn away was left bare, and the new boards thus exposed glared in the bright sunlight.

During the time they had been forced by the storm to remain in the house many letters had been written to the home folks, in which a description of the Christmas tree and the blizzard had been given. These Gully was anxious to get to the post office, as well as to receive the mail that he felt sure was awaiting his coming.

Deciding one morning that he would try to reach the village, he set about arranging his plans to go the following day. To undertake to drive through he knew would be useless, as the snow was drifted so badly he could not follow the road. As the village could be plainly seen from his house and there were no fences to obstruct his way, he thought it best to take one of his horses on which to pack out some provisions, and go straight across the wide snow covered plain.

[Pg 112]

Knowing that the trip, without mishap, would require the whole of the following day, he decided to start as soon as it was light enough to get his bearings. All preparations for the trip were made the night before, the little bundle containing his lunch, the letters that were to be mailed, and a list of the purchases that were to be made were placed where they would not be forgotten, and when Gully awoke the following morning he quietly arose, and after feeding his horses prepared for himself some strong, black coffee, which was all the breakfast he required, and without awakening the members of his family started on his trip.

CHAPTER XIII.

[Pg 113]

It was a strange sight to behold, in the dull gray of the winter morning, a man floundering through the snowdrifts, leading behind him an unwilling horse that could hardly be induced to leave its unattractive but comfortable stable. In Travis Gully, garbed as he was, the horse could not be expected to recognize its owner. Over his hat he had tied a large red handkerchief that held the brim down over his ears and caused a peak at front and rear like an old fashioned cockaded hat, his mackinaw was bound around his waist with a piece of rope, and strips of burlap wound around his legs extended over and completely hid his shoes. His appearance was more that of a typical tramp than the sturdy homesteader he really was.

Owing to the many difficulties encountered, caused principally by the sagebrush that lay hidden beneath the snow into which his feet sank at every step, he did not reach his destination until shortly after noon. There were many in the village who expressed their surprise at his undertaking such a trip. None of his neighbors had been in, and no word had been received from the district that lay far to the south as to what the result of the blizzard had been. It was feared that there had been great suffering among the homesteaders, as it was well known that many of them were poorly prepared for the rigor of such a storm.

[Pg 114]

After attending to his business no time was lost in starting on the homeward trip. With his few groceries securely wrapped in two compact bundles and fastened to each end of a rope, they were thrown across a comfortable canvas pad and lashed to the horse's back, the weight being as nearly equally divided as was possible, the crude pack was adjusted and the tedious retracing of their tracks begun.

Gully had not taken time to eat his lunch, but had placed it in the pocket of his mackinaw, intending to eat it as he traveled, thereby avoiding the loss of time. The mail that he had found waiting for him was tied in a packet and placed securely in his inside pocket, that it might be kept dry in case he was overtaken by another blizzard. He had not read any of the letters or even glanced at the headlines of the little home weekly, several issues of which had accumulated at the post office, and as he trudged his weary way through the deep snow he tried to imagine to himself what messages they bore, whether their contents were joyous or sad, and in his wandering thoughts he compared his present plight with the winters he had spent in the East and asked himself if he would be willing to exchange the present hardships and inconveniences for the old condition, and laughed at the thought.

"No, I will not go back to the life of a renter under any circumstances. I have hardly started on the task of making a home," he told himself, and the thought of abandoning the dream was ridiculous. "Minnie and the children are well and happy, and even if we did not raise good crops for the first year or so, think what it will be when the irrigation ditch comes through," and as he discussed these questions in his mind he ate his lunch, never stopping for a moment.

[Pg 115]

The horse, now that he was headed in the direction of home, kept pace with its master, and with his nose at his elbow was ready to receive the occasional piece of crust that was given him, and not satisfied with his scant allowance, nipped at his sleeve and teased for more.

Upon looking back Gully noticed that the pack had slipped and stopped to replace it and to tighten the rope. He then saw that evening was approaching, and glanced back toward the village to estimate the distance he had covered. His own home he could plainly see, and he noted the smoke as it poured from the stovepipe and realized that this meant the preparation of a warm supper with which he would be greeted upon his return.

He pushed on. The constant snagging of the burlaps in which his feet were encased, as he sank deep in the snow and sagebrush, had torn it away until his shoes were exposed, and as he wore no rubbers, his feet were wet and numb, and he knew that later the cold would become more severe. The sky was overcast with clouds, and he realized the dangers of being lost on the desert on such a night as this promised to be, so he put forth his every effort to reach his home before the darkness fell.

[Pg 116]

The horse, now eager to reach home and enjoy the long deferred feed and warmth of the stable, was crowding his master's footsteps and threatened at every faltering movement to be upon him. Gully was soon forced from fatigue to give up all hopes of reaching his home before dark, and was satisfied to think that he was near enough to be guided by a beacon light that he felt sure would be placed in the window. Stopping for a few moments to recover his breath, he looked longingly toward the little black dot that could be dimly seen against the background of snow, knowing that it was but a mere speck on the desert. Yet it was his refuge and contained his world.

As he rested and watched the shades of evening settle and creep down the distant mountain side, he took his horse's nose between his hands and, caressing it, enjoyed the warmth of the hot steaming breath. Then he cast one more glance in the direction of his home; it had faded from his view and was lost in the corresponding darkness, but in its stead a small twinkling light gleamed feebly across the snow. It was scarcely larger than the flame of one of the Christmas tree candles and was many miles away; yet it warmed his heart as no other flame could have done.

Speaking encouragingly to his horse, they resumed their toilsome journey, and never faltering or stopping, followed the guidance of the little light for another hour, and Gully staggered into his yard, his trip ended. But conditions had been reversed; the horse had led him home. Warily he removed the pack, and placing it upon the ground near the kitchen door, was in the act of reaching for the mail to hand to his wife when his strength gave out and he collapsed. Numb with the cold, and with his trousers frozen fast to his shoes, he was helped into the house. The horse, upon gaining his freedom when his master's hand had released its hold on the rope, went to its place in the barn and munched hungrily at the hay that had been placed there to await his coming.

[Pg 117]

The warmth of the room and a cup of steaming hot coffee soon revived Gully, and after being provided with warm dry clothing he ate supper with his family and listened in a dazed manner to the reading of the news from home. But the stupor induced by the exposure and tremendous exertion finally overcome him, and he was forced to retire.

After Minnie Gully had assured herself that her husband was comfortable and sleeping soundly, she quietly slipped from the room, closing the door that led into the kitchen as she came out for fear that the chatter of the children might disturb him. Clearing away the dishes from the supper table she brought out the letters and papers that had been received that day and carefully reread every line of the letters from home. An occasional smile would brighten her countenance as she came upon some bit of homely advice or some suggestion from her dear old mother, suggestions that would have been applicable to the Minnie Gully of old, the tired, haggard daughter her mother had last seen, but to the robust, cheerful woman she had now grown to be they were amusing.

[Pg 118]

After having read the last of the letters she dropped her hands upon the table before her and sat staring at the open pages, reading between the lines. How plainly she could see the old home, the very room in which this letter was written. 'Twas evening, probably Saturday. Yes, it was Saturday, for there was father's Bible and scattered notes. He had been preparing his sermon for the morrow. His spectacle case was laying on the loose pages. He had got up and moved his chair to the opposite side of the table, and was seated by mother, who with toil stiffened fingers was laborously writing this letter. How plain it all was, and how her heart ached, not from homesickness nor from a desire to see and be with them, but rather to cry out to them and tell them what they had missed. They, in their crowded communities, even in the rural districts, knew nothing of the wild delights of perfect freedom and unlimited space. She had always been crowded; she knew it now. She had never known or felt until now the exhilarating thrills of doing something, doing something worth while. Fighting, yes, that was the word; fighting the elements, doing battle with unadorned nature, free from the artifices of mankind.

Oh! if she could only make them understand the inexpressable joy of conquest. The joy of breathing pure air; breathing it out in the open; air that had probably never come in contact with the nostrils of a living creature. Even though the air at times might be laden with sand that stifled and choked, it was dust that had been torn from a virgin soil, and was uncontaminated from having been trodden under foot by a hurrying multitude of human beings. And the mountains—how she loved them—she never tired of their ever changing beauty and grandeur. Still retaining

[Pg 119]

the hold on the letter, Minnie Gully arose from the table, and going to the outside kitchen door, threw it open and stepped out. Not until she was met by the cold air and the blackness of the night did she realize how completely she had been lost to her surroundings.

Laughing aloud at her foolish flights of thought, she hurriedly tossed back the few strands of hair that had been displaced by the cold breeze and returned immediately into the room. She gathered up the letters and scattered papers and put them away, after which she joined in the conversation and games with the children; but the thoughts of the home folks remained with her. She wanted them to feel as she felt and to reap some of the benefits of this land of health, and be a factor in its development.

Long after she and the children had gone to bed she lay and thought of her girlhood friends, whom she knew would live their prosaic lives without ever having known the joys, miseries, delights and sorrows that enter into the daily life of a pioneer, and she wanted to help them; she went to sleep with visions of herself as a great benefactress distributing happiness to thousands of her kind.

The passing of the blizzard marked the turning point of the winter, and the weather throughout the month of January was nice, and while the snow did not disappear, there was only an occasional flurry added nothing to the quantity on the ground. The social meetings at the school house were not resumed after the Christmas tree, owing to the extreme cold, but the neighbors visited with each other and met frequently at the store in the village. At such times when two or more were together the principal topic was the blizzard. Although the country was comparatively new in its settlement there was always the proverbial "oldest inhabitant" who could recall "Just such another winter," but to those who actually knew, it had been by far the worst blizzard the country had ever known since the advent of the white man.

[Pg 120]

There was a legend told by the Indians of the Northwest of the winter of the long ago when the snow was so deep in the mountains that the deer, driven from their natural haunts in the mountains, had crossed on the surface of the frozen Columbia river in search of food and died by the thousands on the plain. This, to a certain extent, was verified by the occasional finding of antlers, bleached white by years of exposure to the rays of the desert sun.

The matter of irrigation was now seldom mentioned. That the party of Government surveyors who had worked on the project the summer before had left with their equipment at the first approach of winter was known, but as to whether they were to return, or had completed their investigation, was left to conjecture.

With the arrival of February came the first real spring weather. A chinook wind came, and after blowing for two nights and a day, had melted the snow to such an extent that the only traces of it to be found was where it had drifted into an abandoned badger or coyote den and escaped the warm breath of the chinook. There being no frost in the ground the moisture created by the melting snow sank deep into the soil and was stored away for future use. The sun, as it rose higher with each lengthening day, dispensed its increasing warmth, thereby reviving the earlier varieties of plant life with startling rapidity.

[Pg 121]

Gully having cleared a number of acres of sagebrush, was anxiously awaiting seasonable weather for plowing, that he might sow his grain early and get it up and well rooted before the spring winds came, thinking that by adopting this method it would survive. There was plenty to do before the ground was in a condition for plowing. Seed grain and feed was to be hauled from the wheat growing district of the Big Bend country, and a supply of provisions procured, that a trip to the village would not be required of the team during the plowing and seeding time. The cistern was to be filled and as much more ground made ready for the plow as was possible before the rush.

Plans for the accomplishment of all this had been carefully made by Gully and his wife, and they were eager to begin. As the roads were in excellent condition while the sand was wet and settled, Gully borrowed a team to work with his own from one of his neighbors and went for his seed grain, the trip requiring two days.

[Pg 122]

Upon his return from this trip he and his entire family drove to the village. There was no great amount of shopping to be done, as Gully's funds were about exhausted, but one of the merchants in the town had promised to supply him with provisions until the harvest season. The family was taken along that they might enjoy the outing, and as the weather was bright and there was no dust or blistering sun, the trip was often looked back to as one of the most pleasant they had ever taken.

CHAPTER XIV.

[Pg 123]

By the last of March the grain had all been sown and the first of the planting was beginning to force its tender shoots through the surface. The sun was growing brighter with each day and everything pointed to an early spring.

Travis Gully, with his wife and children, toiled early and late, making the best of the favorable season. Grudgingly they stopped for their meals and time for their horses to feed. Night brought

no diminishing of their labors; brush was piled and burned, and even trips to the well for water were made by moonlight.

It became the custom of the settler that when one of them went to town to bring out the mail for the neighbors who lived along their route home, and to call and deliver it when passing. Almost daily mail came to the Gullys by this means, letters from people with whom they had been but slightly acquainted, asking for information in regard to the Northwest, of the chances for a man with but limited means, and the possibilities of their procuring a piece of the free land for a home.

Gully made no effort to reply to all these inquiries, nor did he feel justified in holding out alluring prospects to the writers, although he himself had absolute faith and confidence in the ultimate success of his undertaking. He was not certain as to whether all the anxious seekers for a home would be willing to endure, or could withstand, the hardships incident to the establishment of a home in the desert. [Pg 124]

He would sit and talk the matter over with his wife during the evenings and at other spare times, and they agreed that while it would be nice to have some of their old friends as neighbors, the pleasure of their coming would be marred should conditions prove unsatisfactory upon their arrival.

They could recall a few of those among their former friends whom they felt assured would be easily convinced of the splendid future this country had, but there were others, many others, who they knew would expect to find conditions such as would guarantee immediate profitable results from their efforts. Of this latter class they were afraid, as evidence of their kind having been there and tried, failed and gone their way, was at every hand visible, and they did not care to be held to blame for their disappointment.

So they finally decided to write a letter to the editor of their little home paper, that it might be published, a letter setting forth bare facts. Conditions as they existed, without embellishment, the good and the evil alike, and let those who might read choose for themselves.

The preparation of this letter was a source of both worry and amusement to Travis Gully and his wife, and required several nights for its completion. Worry that in their enthusiasm and optimism they might make it too favorable in its tone, that they might infuse into it too much of their individual hopes and aspirations of which they had dreamed until they had become almost a reality. And again they would burst into hearty laughter at the recounting of some of their experiences, never realizing that these little incidents must be lived through to be appreciated. [Pg 125]

When the letter was written, and after having been read and altered and rewritten a number of times, it was finally pronounced satisfactory and sealed, ready for mailing. Nearly a week elapsed before an opportunity to send the important packet to the post office came, and then only by the merest chance.

The news of the activities of the Government surveyors in the region the summer before had been spread broadcast throughout the East, and unscrupulous land boomers had announced that the reclamation by the Government of the vast area was an assured fact, some even going so far as to announce the exact amount of the appropriation made by Congress for this purpose and so, as a result of this, and also to the fact that the railroads had again put on a homeseekers excursion rate, the early spring brought an unusually large number of prospective settlers into the community.

They came in parties, toiling their way across the level stretch of country, now still moist from the melted snow, showed no evidence of the clouds of sand and dust that would follow after a few short weeks of sunshine. The surface of the unplowed ground was thickly carpeted with a specie of fine grass, known as sheep grass, that always came first in the spring, to be followed by the more succulent bunch grass. [Pg 126]

Myriads of tiny plants were pushing their way through the surface and many were bursting into full blossom before they had lifted their dainty heads more than a few inches above the grass roots. Many and varied were their shapes and colors, each vieing with the other in hastening to bloom, that it might flaunt its beauty for the longest possible time before being forced to close its petals by the ever increasing heat of the sun.

To those of the tourists who came at this season of the year the prospects were most inviting. Never had they, in their homes in the East, had such a range of vision, such an unlimited expanse to sweep with their bewildered eyes, and the kaleidoscopic changes came so rapidly, as they turned to admire it.

It was like a dream. Starting with the snow capped peaks of the mountains, they could follow the scene downward past the snowline, over the barren space that intervenes between it and the timber, which starts in with its varied shades of green, the peculiar, yellowish green of the tamarack, that seldom grows at an altitude of less than three thousand feet. Intermingled with this would appear the spots of dull brown, showing the clumps of sarvic berries and choke cherries, the favorite haunts of the bear and deer. Towering above these thickets the slender white trunks and branches of the quaking asp could be plainly seen. Farther down the shades of green become darker as the forests of fir, pine and cedar come within the range of vision. Flaming patches of sumach adorn the edges of the rocky spots that occasionally occurred in the picture. On downward the dull gray of the sagebrush marks the upper rim of the breaks of the [Pg 127]

Columbia river, then a blank of smooth rock wall that drops for hundreds of feet to the water's edge. The river itself is hidden from view by the undulating hills that lay immediately adjacent to the plains. Here the scene changes from its wild rugged beauty to one indicating the presence of mankind. The vast expanse of sagebrush is dotted here and there with square patches of a new and different shade of green, the green of the freshly growing grain, each of these being marked by the presence of a newly constructed home. The green of the grain fields and the bare, unpainted walls of the homes refuse to harmonize with the color scheme of the desert and are easily distinguished as not being a part thereof, and do not figure in the picture. Passing them by with a hasty glance, barely sufficient to note their remoteness, one from the other, the beholder allows his gaze to gradually take notice of objects nearer at hand, and finally to lower his eyes, with a sigh of satisfaction, and looks with wonder into the faces of the little desert flowers blooming happily at his very feet, and asks himself what connection there is between these two, the glacial peaks and the tiny desert flower, so different in every way, and yet both so necessary for the completion of the picture.

[Pg 128]

Travis Gully and his wife anxiously awaited the arrival of the copy of the paper in which their letter was to be published and given to the world, and when it came they reread every word, and felt reassured that it contained no misleading statements, no invitation to others to come unprepared to take up the hardships of the life of a homesteader, but the entire article teemed with the elements of hope and optimism that showed their faith in a successful end.

During April and May the influx of homeseekers was at its height, and almost daily parties of prospective settlers stopped at the Gully home for information as to directions and locations of pieces of land they wished to secure. Gully's first year's experience had given him knowledge of conditions that had enabled him to overcome to a certain degree some of the difficulties with which he had to contend. During his enforced idleness of the winter just passed he had planned the course he proposed to pursue during the ensuing year. He had decided to introduce some of the dry land farming methods that had been successfully tried out in other sections of the Northwest, an idea of which he had gleaned from some Government Bulletins that had been given him by the postmaster of the village.

As a result of his experiments along these lines, and due to a most favorable season in the way of absence of hard winds and seasonable showers, Gully's homestead presented a most creditable appearance. His field of wheat was by far the best in the neighborhood, and as he had planted nothing but the most hardy varieties of corn and vegetables his garden promised to be a success, and as a result of the showing he was making, his place became one of the points of interest to which most of the visitors were directed by the people of the village, or to which the real estate agents always brought their clients, and would exclaim: "What this man has done in this country others can do."

[Pg 129]

Spurred on by his success and the ever increasing feeling of independence, Travis Gully toiled on thruout the spring. The constant recurrence of visitors to view their home was a source of diversion to the Gullys, and a means whereby many dollars came into their possession.

They made no charge for the hospitality extended to the strangers who came their way, but the offering of a glass of water or, as was often the case, a lunch and an hour's rest to the tired, dusty travelers who could not but see and appreciate their condition, was always rewarded by liberal offerings of change, made in most instances to the children. Thus the immediate requirements of the family were met and a small amount saved.

As the summer approached and the unusual showers became less frequent, the fitful gusts of wind started the restless sand, but too late to harm the grain that was now beginning to assume the golden tint that foretold an early harvest. The garden was beginning to wilt beneath the hot sunrays, but the ingenuity of Gully saved it. At the root of the melon vines and other plants empty cans were imbedded into which the waste water was poured and allowed to filter slow through, and by this method sufficient moisture was given the plants to mature them, and the yield was abundant.

[Pg 130]

The favorable season in the desert region had renewed the hopes of those who had chosen to make it their home, and scenes of unusual activity were apparent at every hand. New tracts of land were being cleared and plowed, and new buildings sprang up overnight; their glistening bare walls could be seen in many directions.

The services of a Miss Anderson as teacher for the little school had been secured, and though the season was late for starting, it was opened, and each school morning, early, the Gully children went joyfully across the sagebrush plain to the little school building, where they were joined by some half dozen other children who came from as many different directions.

The glint of the sunrays on their brightly shining dinner pails flashed heliographic warning of their approach long before the small pupils could be seen. The Sunday School was reorganized and the meetings of the literary society resumed. The hardships of the past winter were almost forgotten and were seldom referred to.

The middle of the month of June brought the harvest season. The grain in the desert maturing and ripening several weeks in advance of that in the grain belt to the north, thus affording the homesteader an opportunity to harvest their grain at home before leaving for the grain fields for their regular season's run.

[Pg 131]

Gully, whose harvest at home had yielded exceptional returns for which he found a ready market

among his neighbors, was undecided as to whether to make another trip into the Big Bend country or remain at home and improve his place. But the desire to have a well, with abundance of water, which would give him an opportunity to irrigate and develop his home, soon caused him to decide to go. He had not forgotten his experience of the fall before, and his firm resolve never to leave his family alone in the desert again, but conditions had changed since then. They were better provided for, and there were neighbors, many of whom would have to leave for the winter, but still there were among them many who would leave their families behind. Besides he had bought another team and what they could earn, together with his earnings, would enable him to secure the coveted well, and he would not have to leave again.

As for the work, he was better equipped now and would know what to expect and consequently make the best of it. Thus he reasoned, and after fully determining to go, he wrote to the grower for whom he had worked the previous fall and arranged for work during the coming season.

The summer now being on, the heat of the sun was terrific, and no effort was made to accomplish anything during the day. When trips to the village became necessary the start was made early, and the home coming frequently postponed until after sundown, to avoid as much as possible the midday drive over the hot dusty roads. Rains were a thing of the past now, and the desert began to assume its accustomed dry, parched appearance. Many of the newcomers who had moved in during the early spring, when conditions were most favorable, were now becoming alarmed, and questioned the wisdom of their choice, and had it not been for the positive evidence of the possibilities of the district as seen at the Gully place, many of them would have become discouraged and given up in despair.

[Pg 132]

To many of these unfortunates the village was the only source of comfort. They would congregate there during the day and discuss the various subjects pertaining to home building in the wilderness. Many of them had had no experience at farming even under the most favorable conditions, and these presented a most pitiful appearance and woebegone manner. Fresh from within the confines of shop or office and launched upon a life of hardships and exposure, upon a sea of blistering sands, sizzling sagebrush and bunch grass, it was no wonder they blistered, peeled, freckled and tanned and seemed to shrivel and slouch when they had lain aside their neat fitting business suit and donned their overalls. It was a cruel test of stamina and manhood, and a surprising few that withstood it.

Many of the earlier settlers adhered to the belief that help would come to them through irrigation, and the fact of the surveyors having been in the field the summer before was related to the new settlers with convincing arguments that it had to come. Still no one had ever heard the slightest intimation of what the surveyors had accomplished in the way of favorable results or the nature of their official report.

[Pg 133]

The fact of this silence was looked upon by many as a good omen, and wild rumors were set afloat that the survey had been successful, and the plans for the installation of the gigantic system were then being prepared. On one occasion, while gathering driftwood along the shores of the Columbia, a homesteader saw a man working among the rocky cliffs far above him. He hastily drove home and reported his discovery to his neighbors, who added their ideas to the importance of this discovery, and by the next day it was a matter of common talk upon the streets of the village that work had started on the foundation for a huge power plant, to generate electricity for pumping. And so it went, every mysterious move or unusual occurrence immediately became the subject for speculation, and was supposed to have some bearing on the reclamation of the land with which they were now battling to bring into a state of productiveness.

Travis Gully was looked upon as a wizard, and his accomplishments under the existing conditions were the wonder of the neighborhood. Each little real estate office and many of the stores contained specimens of the stalks of grain, corn or other varieties of products grown by him. Many articles appeared in the papers published throughout the territory telling of what he had accomplished under his system of farming, and he frequently received communications asking for information as to the methods or kind of seed he had used. To all such he could only reply that his success was as much of a surprise to him as to others, and he took no special credit to himself. But it pleased him to think that it had fallen to his lot to prove to the world that his faith in the productiveness of the soil was well founded.

[Pg 134]

To Minnie Gully the effect of their success for the year was entirely different. She knew, or thought she knew, that it was due to the superiority of Travis' management. "Had he not studied the matter, and learned the exact time for plowing and seeding? Had he not so arranged the clearing of the land as to leave the sagebrush intact upon the high ground, that it might break the force of the wind, thus protecting the tender plants? And who but he would have had the forethought to save every condensed milk can that had been emptied, and had even brought hundreds of others to utilize in his novel method of irrigation for the vegetables and few nicely growing fruit and shade trees? Had she not saved every particle of waste water, even to the water used for the weekly laundering, and she and the children poured it carefully into the cans at the roots of the plants and covered them that the sand might not drift in and absorb the precious moisture?"

It was not chance to her. She felt that if they had acquired the distinction of being the most successful homesteaders in the district, they were entitled to it, and she prided herself on the fact; and she resolved that in the event of their securing a well, with abundance of water, even though irrigation never came, she would show the world further proof of what could be done, and would devote her life to making their home an ideal one.

[Pg 135]

Her blood would surge through her veins, and with flushed face and sparkling eyes she would go out into the yard and approaching one of the growing trees, then mere switches, would fondle its few green leaves and look upward, as if measuring the vast expanse above to see if she might imagine the height to which it would attain. She would go to the grain stack, and rubbing out in the palm of her hand a few of the well filled heads, blow away the husks and chaff, and admire the plump red grains, finally casting them to the patiently waiting chickens, and return singing joyously into the house and resume her household duties, a different Minnie Gully of a short year before.

CHAPTER XV.

[Pg 136]

By the last of July the heat had become so intense that it was decided to close the school until the cooler weather in the fall. The children had made good progress, and as Miss Anderson had taken up a homestead near by, her services for the winter months were assured. So it was planned that when the school was closed she was to visit her home for a few weeks, returning before the harvest season, and was to remain at the Gully home until his return from harvest, after which she was to take up her abode upon her own claim. This arrangement pleased Gully, as it assured him that his family would not be alone during his absence.

The few remaining weeks before his departure Gully devoted to the improvement of his house. Material for this purpose was obtained by his having purchased a building erected upon a claim a short ways from his own by Jack Norton, a young man, who having become discouraged, had proposed to accompany Gully to the harvest fields and to use the proceeds of the sale of the building, together with his earnings while harvesting, to purchase a return ticket to the East, thereby abandoning his claim.

The price paid by Gully for the material in the building was insignificant, but added very materially to his unpretentious home when reconstructed in connection with it, and assured him against the recurrence of his experience of the winter before.

[Pg 137]

The conditions under which Travis Gully made his second trip to the harvest fields were entirely different. Now he knew where he was going and exactly what to expect upon his arrival. The horses he drove were his own, and he reserved the right to have absolute control of them during the entire trip. He had been requested by his former employer to bring as nearly as possible the same crew as had come on the former occasion. In this he was successful, with the exception of one of the party who had become discouraged and left the country soon after the passing of the severe blizzard of the winter before.

The iron molder, the pressman, and the professor were there, and as the progress each had made on their homestead was fair, it was a more jovial party that had left on this occasion. The start was made from the Gully home, where the party had assembled the evening before, and instead of the tear stained cheeks and pitiful sighs that had marked their first departure from the well, there had been a happy gathering of all the neighbors for miles around who had assembled at Travis Gully's home to bid the harvesters farewell. This gathering was not only for those who were going with the Gully party, but was for all the men of the neighborhood who were going forth to replenish their funds ere the winter came.

Each had brought their lunch basket, and the scene of the feast at the Christmas tree was reenacted, only under more favorable circumstances and on a much larger scale. The festivities continued until far into the night. Rollicking games of blindman's buff and others of its like were played out in the open under the brilliance of the huge, desert moon. Young and old alike joined in the spirit of the games, and merry peals of laughter proclaimed their evident enjoyment.

[Pg 138]

When the time came for the merry makers to go to their several homes, and after the final good-byes had been said, those of the party who were to remain overnight and start the following morning chose their sleeping places, and unrolling their blankets, lay down and were soon lulled to sleep by the sound of the distant singing and talking of the departing guests which was wafted back by the cool night air for miles across the silent desert. The sounds were broken at intervals by the sharp staccato yap of the startled coyotes.

The following morning the men were all astir just at the break of day. The horses were fed and harnessed and everything made ready for the start. Ample lunch was put up to last the entire party until they reached their destination, and when breakfast had been eaten the start was made.

The sun had not yet appeared, but the jagged ridge of hills to the east was plainly outlined, and Gully, now being thoroughly acquainted with the lay of the country and not caring to lose time by making a long detour to reach the main road, went directly across the plain to the gap in the hills that he knew would afford him an exit.

[Pg 139]

Minnie Gully and the children, as well as their guest, Miss Anderson, who had now returned from her visit home, were out to see them off. The old dog was leaping frantically at the horses' heads as if he too understood the importance of the occasion. His loud barking and frisky capers caused little Joe to shriek with laughter, and amidst all this din and shouting of good-byes they rolled

away.

Jack Norton, who had remained at the Gully home from the time of the sale of the building on his own claim until its removal and reconstruction as a part of the Gully residence, was seated with Gully on the driver's seat when the party started on their journey.

Knowing the road as the party now did, the trip was not nearly so tiresome as on the former occasion. Time passed much more rapidly, and a constant flow of conversation and quips and jokes were kept up by those of the party except young Norton who, though usually full of life and ordinarily a good companion, was on this occasion sullen and morose. Travis Gully was quick to note this change in Norton's demeanor and watched him closely to see if he could find its cause. Thinking perhaps it was due to his disappointment at his failure at success as a homesteader, he jibed him good-naturedly upon his giving up so easily.

Jack Norton turned, and taking one more long look at their starting point, allowing his gaze to wander out across the desert and after a few minutes pause answered Gully's remark by saying: "It might be that I have not given up." Travis Gully, who rather liked the young fellow, slapped him on the back and exclaimed: "That's the spirit. You might take a notion to come back with us. Well, if you do, your claim will still be safe. You know you have six months off." Jack Norton did not reply to this. He evidently did not know or had not thought but what his temporary absence from his claim would forfeit it. He sat silent for a few moments, looked back in the direction from which they had come, and remarked, "Looks good to me," and was noticeably more cheerful during the remainder of the day.

[Pg 140]

The early morning start and favorable conditions enabled them to cover the worst of their journey the first day, and the camp for the night was made far up in the grand coulee, within a few miles of where they would emerge upon the plateau where the grain fields began.

A small stream trickled down from the face of the bluff that formed the east wall of the coulee. The spring from which it flowed was inaccessible, so it was necessary to catch the water in pails as it dripped from the rock ledge far above, for it disappeared as soon as it reached the sandy bottom of the coulee.

Beautiful grasses grew at the bottom of the cliff, where the water wasted away, and rare specimens of ferns adorned the face of the rock over which it flowed, far above the reach of man. The place had been noted by those of the party who were on the trip the fall before, and the professor had expressed a desire to obtain some of the ferns for specimens during their stay in the camp. Knowing that they had ample time, as they were not due at their destination for two days, and that they could reach it the following afternoon, they decided to remain in camp the forenoon of the following day and rest their horses.

[Pg 141]

It was just before sundown when they went into camp, but knowing from past experience that the twilight between those towering walls was short, they hurriedly accumulated a sufficient quantity of sagebrush for fuel during the night, and after placing their only water pail beneath the drip of the trickling stream, awaited its filling for water with which to make coffee.

After this was procured and the coffee set to boil, Travis Gully led his horses to the patch of grass and allowed them to browse while the water dripped into the pail, and as it filled he gave each horse in its turn a drink. The evening shadows were slowly creeping upward and could be clearly outlined upon the face of the cliff that formed the west wall of the coulee. An occasional bird fluttered into one of the crevices that marred the face of the cliff, seeking shelter for the night. The only sound that disturbed the oppressive silence was that produced by the horses cropping the succulent grass and the drip, drip of the water in the pail.

The conversation at the camp fire had ceased. Gully noticing this glanced toward the small group of men assembled there in search of the cause; apparently there was none. The lunch box had been brought from the wagon and stood open near the camp fire; the blanket rolls had been thrown into a pile off to one side, and reclining against this, with his back toward the fire, young Jack Norton sat and gazed wistfully down the coulee. Gully noted the expression on the young man's face and wondered at its seriousness. He had never questioned Norton as to his affairs, and such knowledge as he had gained of the young man's life had been volunteered by him.

[Pg 142]

That he was from the south, Texas he thought, and that he had left his home the year before, when he had reached his twenty-first birthday. No reference had ever been made by him as to his relatives or home. He had come into the neighborhood where Gully met him with a party consisting of several different families, none of whom had known or seen him until he happened to drive out from the station with a number of prospective settlers under the guidance of a real estate agent who had located the majority of them.

His pleasing personality had won him much favor at the literary society, where he took an active part. Being the possessor of a splendid voice his singing was highly appreciated, and Travis Gully recalled the fact that Miss Anderson, the school teacher, had at one time expressed the opinion that his education was far above the average. Yet knowing as little as he did, Gully's heart went out to the lonely young fellow, and he attributed his failure as a homesteader to the lack of advice and encouragement, so he determined, if the opportunity presented itself, and it probably would on this trip, to speak to him and to try and persuade him to remain on his claim and try again the following year.

[Pg 143]

Darkness had now fallen, and when additional fuel had been thrown onto the dying embers of the

camp fire and flared up, illuminating the surroundings, Gully called to Jack Norton to come and lend a helping hand with the horses and to another member of the party to get the pail of water that had accumulated, after which he returned to the wagon, and when his horses had been fed he joined the others at the fire.

No time was lost. After supper the blankets were spread and all were soon sleeping soundly. Nothing disturbed their slumber. The prowling coyote, scenting the remains of the supper on the cool night air, sent up its mournful wail to the dim stars, and the flutter of birds wings, as the owls routed them from their refuge in the rocks, were the only sounds to be heard.

The campers were aroused the next morning by the restless pawing of the horses who, realizing that they were in a strange locality, were anxious for their feed, that they might be on the road. Travis Gully was awakened by one of his companions calling to him and saying that he was afraid something had gone wrong with the horses. Springing from beneath his blankets, he hurried over to where they were tied, but could find no cause for their nervous actions. He gave them their morning allowance of hay and after they had quieted down and begun eating he returned to the camp, and it being then broad daylight, he raked together the charred ends of the partially burned sagebrush and started the fire. Calling to his companions to "Roll out," he took the pail and started to catch some water at the dripping spring; as he did so, he noticed that Jack Norton was not in camp.

[Pg 144]

His neatly rolled blankets were laying at the point where he had chosen to make his bed. Gully knew that he had slept there, for he had spoken to him after going to bed. Thinking that he had probably gotten up early and had strolled a little way from camp, he gave the matter no further concern. Upon his return from getting the water his companions asked him if he had seen Jack; replying that he had not, but that he had noticed his absence and that he supposed he had gone for a walk, they passed the matter by and proceeded with the preparation of the coffee for breakfast.

No hurried preparations for their departure were made, as they intended to remain in camp until noon. The sun was several hours high before its rays reached the depth of the coulee, the walls of which cast their shadows across its full width. It was a delightful place to camp and while away a few idle hours. There were no trees or brush under which to lie and enjoy the shade, and the only spot of green that gladdened the eye was that of the grass at the foot of the cliff, but it was this very novelty that made the location so fascinating. Laying prone upon their backs they could gaze into the blue sky without being dazzled by the brilliancy of the sun or having a thing to obstruct their view, like viewing the heavens from the depth of a well without that same cramped or crowded feeling.

[Pg 145]

After awaiting Jack Norton's return for a reasonable length of time without his coming, breakfast was eaten, and the coffee pot replaced near the fire that it might be kept warm. Travis Gully took the pail, and leading two of his horses to the grassy spot, was allowing them to graze while the bucket was being filled when someone called to him: "Bring the horses up here, Mr. Gully; there is lots of water." Recognizing the voice as that of young Norton, Gully tried to locate him, but the resounding echoes along the coulee walls made it difficult to catch the direction from which the call came. The professor, who had strolled over near the cliff and was picking up and examining the pieces of rock that had fallen from above, had also heard Jack Norton's call, and knowing that it came from the coulee wall above, was searching the face of the cliff in order to locate him.

Gully, seeing the professor's gaze centered on the cliff, knew at once where the boy was and called to him to come down, lest he fall and get hurt. To this Jack replied that he would soon be down, and as he moved they could easily distinguish his form, a mere speck it seemed at that dizzy height, flattened out with his back to the wall as he worked his way cautiously along the slippery ledge over which the water flowed. His hands were filled with ferns and plants, and he shouted jesting replies to the anxious watchers as they called to him to be careful. After a few moments he disappeared behind a jutting point; a few minutes later only the top of his head could be seen protruding from a crevice; after a half hour he came into camp, disheveled, tired and hungry, but all excitement over his adventure.

[Pg 146]

He ate his breakfast while Travis Gully and the others each took their turn at telling him of the dangers that lurked in those cliffs in the way of loose boulders, hidden crevices and rattlesnakes. Gully expressed himself in no uncertain terms about his leaving camp without first having told them of his intention, and pictured to him the possibilities of a fall or other accident that might have befallen him and they, not knowing where he was, could render no assistance. Jack Norton submitted gracefully to this scolding and explained that he had heard the professor express a desire to obtain some of the specimens of ferns, and as he too was interested in the geological formations of the coulee he could not resist the temptation to explore the bluff.

He had left camp before daylight and gone down the coulee in search of a place where he might scale the wall; after he had reached the ledge he assured them it was no trouble to work back to the point where he was discovered. His only regret was that he had caused them any uneasiness, and that he did not have more time for his investigations, as the locality afforded splendid opportunities for geological research.

He had brought back with him some beautiful specimens of rare ferns and other plant life for the professor, and his pockets were bulging with pieces of various kinds of stone with which, he told them, he proposed to amuse himself later.

[Pg 147]

The professor was profuse in his thanks for the ferns, but expressed his regret that he had taken such a chance in getting them for him, and all the while his face beamed with his appreciation of the motive, the desire of the student, that had prompted young Norton to explore the coulee. He too could devote many happy days with these environments to the gratification of this same desire.

The party resumed their journey immediately after the noon lunch was eaten and camped that night at the home of the wheat grower for whom they were going to work during the harvest season. When they entered the harvest field two days later, to commence the season's run, it was the same old scenes and endless days of toil and strain with which they had contended on their former trip, and nothing occurred to break the monotony.

The professor and Jack Norton became inseparable companions, and planned many excursions together at some future time, when they proposed to explore the coulee. The idea of abandoning his claim and returning to the East was given up by Norton, and he talked incessantly of the wonders of the coulee and the desert. Travis Gully smiled at the young fellow's enthusiasm and encouraged him to renewed effort with promises of assistance to construct another building on his claim and with such other help as he might require.

The party of homesteaders were not worried by the thoughts of the conditions at home as they had been during their first absence. They wrote and received letters regularly, and in every instance the reports received from their homes were most encouraging. Minnie Gully's letters to her husband were filled with recitals of incidents that showed very plainly that she was very much alive to his interests and had assumed the management of affairs on the homestead during his absence with a thoroughness of detail that was surprising. "I have bargained," she wrote, "with a new neighbor for two pigs and a half dozen more chickens," this neighbor having brought chickens and pigs into the newly settled district without first having investigated the source of the supply of feed for them, and was now compelled by its scarcity to sell some of his stock. Gully's wife, seeing the opportunity, had traded some wheat for the chickens and pigs, and as she wrote in her letter, had "made the place look more like a farm." Miss Anderson, she continued, "had proven herself a jewel. She did not see how she could get along without her. She had taken complete charge of the children and was teaching the girls to sew and cook, while she was leading a life of ease." Travis Gully read her letters with an amused smile and wondered at the change in her that had taken place. The constant flow of home talk kept him from getting homesick. And so the harvest season was passed, and when the morning came for the harvesters to return to their homes each had planned his work for the coming winter and was eager to begin.

[Pg 148]

Travis Gully was to see the realization of his dream of a well on his claim and was anxious to reach home that he might complete arrangements with the well drillers and have them begin work before the snow fell.

CHAPTER XVI.

[Pg 149]

When the party reached the Gully home upon their return they found the members of their families had assembled there to await their arrival. Minnie Gully and Miss Anderson had prepared a good supper, which was waiting, and which was heartily enjoyed by the returned harvesters. They did not linger long at Gully's, however, as the men were worn out by their long siege and were anxious to reach their own homes.

The second morning after their return Gully drove to the village in search of a man to drill his well. In this he was successful, and completed the deal before his return. The selection of a site for the well and the assembling of the machinery occupied his time for several days following. As the well drilling crew consisted of three men besides Jack Norton, who had arranged to stay with Gully until the well was completed, it would entail considerable additional work for Mrs. Gully, so Miss Anderson agreed to remain and assist her during their stay. In return for this service Gully was to haul the lumber and erect a small house on her claim.

With these arrangements all complete and the arrival of the driller the work progressed nicely, and in less than a month from the time of his return from the harvest field, Gully's well was completed. The flow that was struck by the drillers differed but little from that reached in the dozens of other wells that had been sunk at various points throughout the area; the only variation was in depth, and this was due to the difference in elevation. The flow was abundant, as was proven by a test that failed to lower it, and the water was the purest.

[Pg 150]

The sinking of the well had almost exhausted Gully's supply of funds, and fearing the recurrence of another severe winter, he was on the alert for employment. While hauling the lumber for the erection of the houses on the claims of Miss Anderson and young Norton he had learned of the intention of a large company who held extensive land interests in the desert to clear and prepare for seeding several hundred acres during the winter. Securing the address of the company, he wrote to them, proposing to take the work under contract.

The small shack was soon erected on Miss Anderson's claim near the school house and school was opened for the winter. With her comfortably settled her earnings as teacher were ample for

her requirements, and a sufficient amount was left to hire the necessary improvements made. This work was given to Gully, who cleared several acres, fenced it, and put her down a cistern similar to the one he had constructed on his own place. In the performance of this work he was assisted by Jack Norton, who had now settled down on his own claim, a determined and confident homesteader.

[Pg 151]

The attendance at the little school had more than doubled since the winter before by the arrival of additional families with children. It had become necessary to erect another school house some miles distant to accommodate the increased population. This new school district was in charge of our old friend the professor, and the meetings of the Sunday School and literary society were so arranged as to alternate between the two districts, and debates and old fashioned spelling bees were conducted with the separate districts as contestants.

Thus was the social life of the community kept alive and much simple pleasure added to the lives of the homesteaders. The arrival of a few young people in the neighborhood added to the dignity of the social functions, and as distance was a matter of secondary consideration with these hardy pioneers, it was no uncommon thing during the winter months to see a wagon being driven from the home of one settler to that of another, picking up a load of jolly people, both young and old, that were for some point, it might be ten miles distant, where a surprise party or some such gathering was to be held. They were always accompanied by an abundance of lunch.

Ida Gully, who was not attending school, as she had grown to be quite a young lady, was a great favorite, and was always eager to attend these gatherings and was usually accompanied by Jack Norton on these occasions.

The winter season was now well advanced and there had been no snow; the nights were growing colder but the days were yet clear and warm. Travis Gully had given up hopes of hearing from the company to whom he had written in regard to clearing their land and was working on his own place. He did not have sufficient funds to erect a pump and windmill over his well, but had substituted an old hand pump in hopes that he could make it answer his purpose for securing water for domestic use until the irrigating season came. He had installed this makeshift of a pump and was trying to devise some scheme whereby he could make its operation less laborious by attaching a longer lever, when upon looking up from his work he saw a party of men approaching in a vehicle that was being driven along the road that led to his place.

[Pg 152]

The advent of a stranger being no longer a matter of interest he proceeded with his work after looking to see if he could by chance recognize the team. A few minutes later the barking of his dog announced the approach of the vehicle, and he saw that they had driven within his inclosure and were coming toward the house. Leaving his work at the well, he went to the house, where he awaited their coming.

Gully did not recognize any of the occupants of the vehicle, of whom there were four. He supposed that they were some persons who were looking over the country, probably with the view to investing, as they did not look like the type of settlers he was accustomed to seeing. Three of the men had the appearance of business or professional men. One of them was well advanced in years, but the remaining three were very much younger. One of these he recognized, as they drew nearer, as a man whom he had seen on frequent occasions when he had visited the village, and supposed that he was only the driver.

[Pg 153]

The party had by now driven up to the yard and Gully stepped out to meet them. Upon being asked if he were Mr. Gully, and after answering in the affirmative, the elderly man took from his pocket a card which he handed to Travis Gully, who, glancing at it, recognized the name of the company to whom he had written. He invited the visitors to "get out and come in." This they said was not necessary, as they had only a limited time in which to state the purpose of their visit, which they did by explaining to him that they had gotten his letter and had come with the view to looking the proposition of clearing the land over, and if they found him ready to undertake the work and his terms satisfactory they were prepared to enter into an agreement with him. First, however, they wished to visit the land in question, which they proposed to do before returning to the village.

Taking from a wallet a blue print of the locality, they traced the lines and looked over the section numbers for a few minutes, and then asked Gully as to the roads leading to their lands. He gave them directions and stated that roads across the plains were not necessary, as a person could not get far out of the way.

They explained further to Gully that they had brought with them from the East tents and surveying instruments which had been left behind in the village and asked that in case of an agreement being reached with them, if he was in a position to accommodate them with meals during the few days that would be required to survey the land they wished to put into cultivation. Gully explained that his means of accommodation were crude and limited, but they were entirely welcome to such as his home afforded.

[Pg 154]

After arranging with him to come to the village with his wagon the following day, when they would talk the matter over, and if satisfactory would have him return with them and their equipment, they drove away in the direction of their land.

Travis Gully stood and watched them for a few moments, his mind filled with the problem of the terms of the contract that he knew he would be called on to submit the following day. His wife having noticed the presence of strangers and seeing the thoughtful attitude of her husband after

their departure came to him, and after learning the nature of their business, was greatly relieved and much delighted at the prospect of his securing the big contract. They both realized, however, that the success of the venture would depend very largely upon the continuance of the favorable weather, and spoke of the probability of it remaining fair.

Returning to the well where he took up his interrupted work, Gully discussed the proposition of the contract with his wife. Never having undertaken anything of the kind, he was at a loss how to begin. He knew what it was worth per acre to clear and plow the land and approximately how long it would take, everything being favorable, but he could not get it in tangible form. Finally his wife suggested that he call on young Norton, who could probably assist him as to arranging the details. This was a happy thought! Gully had intended to give Jack employment if he got the work, so why not let him be a party to the deal, and let him handle the business part of the transaction? He would see Norton and talk the matter over with him, he told her.

[Pg 155]

It was now getting well on toward evening and Ida had gone to Miss Anderson's to await the dismissal of school, as she frequently did, and would return with the children when they came home; and as Jack Norton usually walked home with them, Gully awaited their return in hopes he would do so on this occasion. In this he was not disappointed, for a short time afterwards the children were seen returning from school, and Norton was accompanying them home.

Upon Jack Norton's arrival Gully told him of what had occurred, of the coming of the strangers and the arrangements he had made for the morrow, and told him if he would remain until after supper he would like to talk the matter over with him. Jack listened attentively to what Gully told him, but could not understand why he should be consulted in the matter. Thanking Gully for the invitation he told him he would be glad to assist him in any way he could.

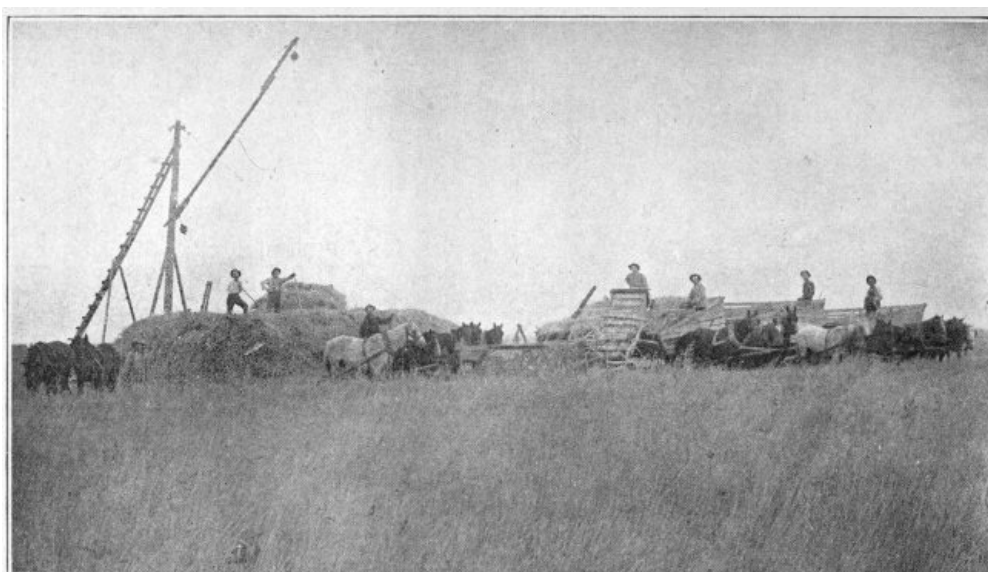
Continuing his work at the well, Gully did not again refer to the matter, and Norton went to the house, where he amused little Joe and the other children by romping with them until they were called to their supper. After the supper was over and Gully and Norton had strolled to the barn. Gully told him of his desire to have him take an active interest in the proposed deal, and explained why. He told him plainly that he needed the assistance of someone who was better equipped in the way of an education than he himself was, that they might look after the business features, and he made young Norton an offer of a partnership under the conditions of which Jack would greatly profit should they get the work.

[Pg 156]

Jack Norton listened to the plans and proposal that Gully had to make. After Gully had finished he turned to Gully and asked: "Do you mean that you want me to take hold of this affair and look after your interest, and is it for this purpose that you are making me this liberal offer? If such is the case, Mr. Gully, I will tell you now that although I were only working for you by the day, as a laborer, I would still have your interests at heart as much as if I were your business partner."

Gully being taken by surprise at the young man's earnestness, replied that such was his intention. "If you care to take an interest in the transaction, I need you to look after the accounts, the handling of the funds for the purchase of supplies that will be necessary, and securing the help that will be required, for you are worth more to me as a business partner than on a daily wage," he told him.

Norton smiled, and extending his hand to Gully, said: "That being the case, I will help you," and added: "May I go into town with you tomorrow?"



For weeks they toiled with blistered palms and aching backs.

"Certainly," replied Gully, "I want you to draw up the contract, and be present at the signing."

[Pg 157]

"Then you have drawn no agreement yet," asked Norton.

"No," replied Gully.

"Well, we will go to the house and see what can be done. We will at least have something ready in the way of a proposition to offer; and say, Mr. Gully, have you given them an idea of the charge per acre you are to make for this work."

"No, I had not fully determined what it would be worth, and depended on your assistance in making an estimate," replied Gully.

"Well, we will figure that out too when we get at it," and so saying, they returned to the house, and clearing off the table, sat down with pencil and paper to draw up the form of their first contract.

To the uninitiated the process of removing sagebrush from and plowing land would be simple enough, and under ordinary circumstances and over a small area it would be, but in this instance it was different. The land was not a great ways off, a few miles at best, from Gully's home, but too far to go and come each day, as the working hours during the winter were extremely short, and too much time would be lost on the road, and besides, the amount of the land to be prepared was unusually large for one undertaking, as an entire section, some six hundred and forty acres, were to be gotten ready for seeding at the very earliest possible time.

Gully and Norton had taken all this into consideration, and the extra preparation that was required for the work was an additional expense that must be considered. They knew that should they get the contract they must establish a camp on the land in question from which to carry on their operations. There must be shelter erected for both those engaged in the work and the stock that would be required for plowing, for they knew that the snow might come at any time. Gully did not expect another blizzard as severe as the one encountered the winter before, as he had learned that they were not of yearly occurrence, but he had told Jack of the terrible one they had experienced on that occasion, that in case one did come they would not be unprepared.

[Pg 158]

Long into the night they worked, figuring out each little detail and drawing a diagram of the land. They allotted certain parcels of it to separate individuals on whom they expected to call for assistance. They knew that any of their neighbors on whom they called would be only too glad of the opportunity to earn the money by clearing their allotted portion. To those of their acquaintances who had no horses was assigned the task of gathering and piling the brush for burning.

The arrangements as planned by Norton brought Gully to the front as a public benefactor, and the clearing of the land a community affair. He so arranged each little detail as to make Travis Gully appear as the moving spirit in this distribution of the opportunity for earning a few dollars among his neighbors, and so well did he contrive to eliminate himself from all but the responsibility that his own connection with the work was almost entirely lost sight of.

[Pg 159]

Mrs. Gully and Ida sat quietly by and listened to the discussion of their plans long after the children had retired. At times Norton's enthusiasm and interest in the work he was doing would become so great he would forget his surroundings, and with shirt sleeves rolled back and neck band unbuttoned, he would sit drumming upon the table with pencil poised, ready to record the result of some mental calculation, muttering to himself. Unconsciously he would use expressions that were foreign to the Gullys, who would watch him closely.

Travis Gully and his wife would wait patiently until Norton announced his solution of the problem, but with Ida the effect was different. She would watch his every movement, and as his thoughts became more concentrated the strain on her would become more tense and she would partially arise from her chair, with hands clenched until the nails left their imprint in her palms, and it would seem that she must call to him, and upon his first movement to record some figures or to announce some clause that he wished to insert in the contract, she would sink back in her chair, and glancing around nervously, resume her bit of fancy work, that she was learning under Miss Anderson's instructions.

Travis Gully was too much absorbed to note his daughter's actions, but it did not escape the quick eyes of the mother, who suggested to her that perhaps they had better retire and leave her father and Jack to finish their work alone. Minnie Gully had never thought of Ida as anything but a child, and she had not taken into account the change this life in the open had wrought upon her oldest daughter. She watched her as she carefully folded her bit of embroidery in obedience to her mother's suggestion that they retire, and as she watched the knowledge was forced upon her that she was the mother of a fully developed, robust young woman, and the thought of the additional responsibility this knowledge brought with it was made more gratifying by others of comradeship. She now had a companion for the molding of whose character she alone was responsible.

[Pg 160]

With a parting warning to the men, to "remember you are to start to town early in the morning and not to stay up too late," she and Ida went to their room. Gully and Norton needed no such warning. The fact of their going to town was a prime factor in the necessity for their working as they were, and as for staying up late, their work had to be completed before they could retire.

As the work progressed, after the ladies had left them, Travis Gully was surprised at the

knowledge of such work as Norton evidenced, and he realized that he had done wisely in taking him into his confidence and gaining his assistance. He listened without interruption to Jack Norton's plans as he outlined them, and to the results of his calculations as to the expense incurred and profits derived from the transaction as they were read with such an apparent familiarity with figures that he did not question their correctness.

[Pg 161]

There was one question uppermost in Gully's mind that would persist in its recurrence, and that was: "Who was this Jack Norton, this waif of the sandy desert, who with the last few hours, with apparently no other incentive than a desire to help one who had befriended him, had developed into a thorough business man, with unlimited capacity for facts and figures?"

While Travis Gully was asking himself these questions his wife, in the adjoining room, was busily racking her mind with the one thought: "Was Ida interested in Jack, and if so, to what extent, and had he noticed it?" She would know at the first opportunity. She would ask her, but she must be careful, and she smiled; Ida was such a child.

Jack Norton, oblivious to the thoughts that were filling the minds of his friends, worked on at the formulation of his plans. It had been months, it seemed like years to him, since he had been given an opportunity to work at something worth while. It was true that the amount in dollars and cents involved in this entire transaction would be at best but a few hundred, but it was business, and recalled to his mind other days when he had worked out larger plans; yes, very much larger, where thousands of dollars were involved.

He laughed whimsically to himself after he had handed the final product of his hours of work to Travis Gully to read. It was a recapitulation of the whole transaction, condensed and simplified in a manner that he was sure would bring it within his understanding, and as Gully read, his brow contracted with many wrinkles as his brain groped for an interpretation of the mass of figures, Jack Norton compared these existing conditions with other scenes in his past, when he had entered noiselessly through swinging glass doors and over dustless carpets into the presence of the older Norton, his "Governor," and submitted for his inspection a sheet of about the same dimensions containing, not a written agreement whereby one or more men do "agree to remove the sagebrush from, plow and make ready for planting certain lands beginning at, etc.," but a neatly prepared statement of his college expenses, supplemented with a request for an additional allowance for golf, yachting, etc.

[Pg 162]

When Travis Gully had finished reading the paper Norton had given him he handed it back, asked one or two questions about things he did not fully understand, and upon their being explained, said: "It's all right as far as I can see." Norton took the paper, folded it neatly, and placed it on the table, and after assembling the scattered sheets upon which he had been figuring, he placed them in a neat pile, using an empty coffee cup for a paper weight, he handed Gully the folded sheet, together with the pencil with which he had been working, and after asking what time he proposed to start for town in the morning, remarked that "He guessed he would go home."

To this Gully objected, telling him there was no need of his going; that he could sleep there and they would get an early start. This was agreed upon, and a few minutes later the Gully home was in darkness.

CHAPTER XVII.

[Pg 163]

Gully and Norton reached the village the following day about the middle of the forenoon, and driving directly to the one hotel of which the town boasted, found the strangers awaiting their arrival. The old gentleman was walking impatiently to and fro on the narrow board walk that did duty as a porch, and the two younger men were idly glancing through some well worn back number magazines with which the writing table in the one waiting room of the hotel was strewn.

After tying his team Gully approached the old gentleman who, having recognized him, had stopped his restless pacing and was nervously toying with his watch fob. Accompanied by Jack Norton, whom he introduced, he mentioned that "He regretted being so late, but the distance was great." This apology was offered more for the purpose of conversation than because he felt that it was due. The old gentleman acknowledged the introduction of Norton and remarked that their lateness had caused him no inconvenience, but added that he would like to get it finished as soon as possible.

He invited them to enter the hotel, where his companions were waiting. These, upon recognizing Gully, bowed slightly, but remained seated when Norton was presented. The latter having noted their lack of interest in Gully merely bowed in acknowledgment, and remained standing. Upon a suggestion from the old gentleman that they repair to the room which he was occupying to discuss their business, his two assistants arose, stretched themselves, and lowering their trouser legs, which they had thoughtfully drawn up to prevent their bagging at the knees, they strolled leisurely toward the stairs to ascend.

[Pg 164]

Jack Norton, who had noticed the actions of the younger men, one of whom could not have been much older than he, smiled indulgently as he thought how they, in their ignorance, did not deem it necessary to extend to them common courtesy, and mentally resolved to open their eyes on the first occasion that presented itself before their departure. Dropping back to allow the older man

and Gully to precede him on the stairs, he had just started up when the youngest of the strangers turned at the head of the stairs and asked if it was necessary for "that fellow Norton to be present." Jack Norton stopped and awaited Travis Gully's answer. This was not long in coming. "It certainly is," he said, "Mr. Norton is my associate in this deal, and he is the one who will do the talking." This statement from Gully did not seem to create the impression on the young man that Gully had hoped, and as he turned and continued his leadership toward the room, Gully waited and taking Norton by the arm said "Come on, Jack." Norton only smiled and accompanied them to the room.

Once inside the room, with the elderly man seated by a small table and Gully occupying the one remaining chair, the young strangers reclining lazily upon the bed, Jack was left to take care of himself, which he did by remaining standing with his hat in his hand. He realized that he was at a disadvantage. His name had not been mentioned in the original letter to the company, nor was he referred to during the visit of the strangers on the day before.

[Pg 165]

The fact of his unexpected stay overnight at Gully's had deprived him of the opportunity to change his clothes, and he had worn his overalls and flannel shirt to this conference; but this fact did not annoy him in the least, for he felt that he had judged the calibre of the younger members of the party correctly, and he rather enjoyed the novelty of being underestimated by them on account of his wearing apparel. He was thoroughly familiar with the type of business man that he knew the old gentleman to be and felt no resentment toward him for his brusque manner. He had a bargain to drive, either for himself or the persons whom he represented, and the accomplishment of this was his object, even though it took precedence over the demands of common politeness.

There was no loss of time in coming to the discussion of the subject of the meeting, and without any preliminary remarks Gully was asked if he had prepared any bid on the work that he wished to submit, and in case his offer was accepted, what would be the nature of the agreement he would be willing to sign.

[Pg 166]

As this volley of questions were fired at him unexpectedly, Gully did not immediately reply, but reaching in his pocket, he drew out the paper Norton had prepared, and after unfolding it answered that "He had brought with him this paper, that would give them an idea of what would be required and the probable cost of the work."

Jack Norton, realizing that there was data embodied in the memorandum that he did not care to have come into the possession of the strangers just yet, stepped forward, intercepting the paper as it was being passed across the table to the old gentleman, took it, and refolding it, placed it in his own pocket, remarking, with a smile: "I think, if you gentlemen will allow me, that I can expedite matters by explaining existing conditions without the necessity of delving into figures just yet."

The two men reclining on the bed, aroused by his action and speech, were now sitting up. The youngest, who had been introduced as Mr. Earl Stevens, had started to arise and interfere, when Norton, glancing in his direction, arrested his movements, and he had remained seated.

Jack Norton, realizing instantly that he had the situation well in hand, could not resist the temptation to launch his first shaft at Stevens. He continued: "Your friend Mr. Stevens is no doubt a stenographer, and perhaps he would like to make notes during our conversation."

Stevens flushed and admitted that he was not, and the old gentleman said he did not deem it necessary.

[Pg 167]

Travis Gully, who was wholly unprepared for this byplay on young Norton's part, sat quietly by and awaited for him to continue.

Excusing himself for a moment, Jack Norton stepped out into the hall, and entering an adjoining room, the door of which was standing open, he immediately returned with a chair, which he placed at the table, and began:

"In the first place, Mr. Palmer," this being the old gentleman's name, "what is the nature of the improvements that you propose to make on this land?"

"Well," Palmer began, "we intend to have it cleared of brush and prepared for sowing to grain."

"What amount of land do you propose to have put into a state of cultivation?" Norton asked.

"One whole section this winter, and probably more later," replied Palmer.

"You have visited this land and are familiar with the conditions, are you not, Mr. Palmer?" asked Jack.

"Yes, I was there yesterday."

"Knowing that the land is isolated to a certain extent and that there are no buildings on it or water for the men and stock who may be employed by you, do you propose to make the necessary improvements in the way of shelter and water, or does the contractor have to provide these requirements?" was Norton's next question.

"We had not contemplated improving the property to that extent until we had gotten some returns on our first planting," answered Palmer, "but should the prospect for a good yield look

[Pg 168]

encouraging the company might put on substantial improvements in the way of buildings and wells in preparation for the coming harvest."

"Then by your reference to the company, I am to understand that you and these gentlemen who are accompanying you are not the sole owners of this land. Am I right?" asked Jack, with a look in the direction of the two men on the bed.

"I am the agent of the owners, and these two young gentlemen are surveyors who have accompanied me for the purpose of establishing the lines with the view to fencing, and to take notes of the topographical features of the land, which they hope at some time in the future will be irrigated," explained Palmer. And he continued: "These gentlemen have come prepared to remain until their work is completed. As for me, I shall return as soon as the details of the preparation of the land for seeding have been settled." And drawing from his pocket a bundle of papers, extracting one from among them and laying it upon the table, he leaned back in his chair and added: "My credentials."

Palmer took the slip and glancing at the figures on it, turned it over and made some calculations, and seeming satisfied, asked if they had prepared an agreement.

Norton replied that they had simply outlined it, and if the primary feature, the price, was satisfactory, the other details could be worked out later, as he understood from Mr. Gully that they were to return with them provided an agreement was reached.

[Pg 169]

"Very well," answered Palmer, "if you gentlemen will remain and take lunch with us, we will be more fit for the long drive."

They both thanked him and accepted the invitation. Gully suggested that it would save time if he loaded their equipment before lunch and be ready to start as soon as it was over. With this object in view, he and Norton left the room, remarking that they would get the team and return immediately.

Travis Gully watched young Norton closely as they crossed to where the team was tied, but made no remark, as he knew that Jack was thinking and would soon express himself in regard to the interview that had just closed.

As they were preparing to climb into the wagon to drive to the hotel, Jack stopped with one foot on the wheel and said, "Do you know, Mr. Gully, that I believe I've seen that man Palmer before," and then he added, "That fellow Stevens is a cad. Well I kept him out of it, anyway."

Gully made no reply to Jack's remark about Palmer, but he thought Stevens was a "Smartalec."

Norton, knowing that his opportunity for talking privately with Gully would be gone after they had joined the others at the hotel, apologized for taking the paper as he did, explaining that Palmer would see at a glance what a less experienced man would have to figure out, and there were certain figures on that paper that he did not want him to have until he had learned the extent of his authority.

Gully told him that he had acted just right for he supposed that the paper was to be submitted as it was, and he told Jack that he would leave the arrangements of the details entirely in his hands.

[Pg 170]

It still lacking a few minutes to lunch time, they drove to the store where a few purchases were made by Gully that had become necessary from the fact that the strangers were to be his guests for a time. When this was finished and the amount of the bill had been figured, Jack Norton asked that it be receipted, and paid the cash. Gully remonstrated with him and asked his idea for doing so.

"We are partners are we not?" asked Jack.

"In some things," Gully replied, "but—"

"Never mind the buts," laughingly interrupted Jack, "remember you have the wagon and teams, while I have put in nothing and besides, their being there will make more work for Mrs. Gully and Ida. Understand that I intend to be a partner in every sense of the word."

Gully made no reply to this, and loading on their supplies, they drove to the hotel and taking on the tents, baggage and instruments of the strangers, tied their team and entered the hotel to await the call to lunch, which was soon announced.

The start after lunch and the long drive to the Gully home was devoid of interest. Norton had given up his seat with Gully to Mr. Palmer, and had contented himself with a less comfortable one in the rear of the wagon among the boxes and baggage. The strangers who had put aside their business suits and had donned their khaki, were being jostled and jolted in a most heartless manner by the rough wagon as it rumbled along, clattering over stones and bumping over the sagebrush that obstructed the road.

[Pg 171]

Conversation was a burden to these men, who fresh from the East, were accustomed to more convenient means of transportation. Young Norton, who was secretly enjoying their discomfort, was inclined to be social, and in his efforts to entertain them, kept up a constant stream of conversation. He told them of the advantages of the locality, of the prospects of its being irrigated in the very near future by the government, and how, if they were wise, they would secure a claim before it was too late, and remain on it. He gave them a glowing description of his

trip to the harvest field, and recounted his experiences while there, and as they showed unmistakable evidence of being bored he would point to the claim of some homesteader and tell them where they had come from and how long he must remain on his claim before he could make final proof.

The noise of the wagon prevented Jack from hearing how Travis Gully and Mr. Palmer were passing away the time. He could occasionally see one or the other point at some object in the distance, and he supposed that they were getting along nicely. As for him, Jack Norton frequently remarked years after that he never had a better time, nor the road seem so short.

They did not arrive at Gullys in time to establish their camp that night, as the road they had driven out necessitated slow driving. After the wagon had been unloaded and the horses cared for, supper was announced and the strangers accompanying Travis Gully to the house, were introduced to his family. Norton, who remained until after supper, knowing that Gully was not prepared to furnish beds for the three men, invited the two surveyors to accompany him to his shack, where he would make them as comfortable for the night as he could. He was careful not to mention the distance nor the scarcity of comforts at his home.

[Pg 172]

The surveyors accepted his offer of hospitality for the night, and before they left to accompany him, it was arranged that they were to return for breakfast the following morning, and the day would be devoted to preparing their camp, and a trip to the company's land.

It was less than two miles from Gullys to Jack Norton's shack, but to the surveyors who had been made tired and sore by the long rough ride of the afternoon, the walk through the darkness across the sage covered plain, with its numerous obstacles in the way of tufts of bunch grass, scraggling sagebrush and abandoned badger holes, into and over which they were constantly stumbling and falling in their efforts to follow Jack, who, taking advantage of the shorter route, had purposely left the road. To them the trip seemed interminable, and when they finally reached Norton's home they staggered in, and after he had lighted the small kerosene lamp, looked wistfully at the crude bed which Jack pointed out to them with the remark: "It does not look very inviting, but I suppose you gentlemen are tired enough to enjoy even these poor accommodations."

To which Thomas Dugan, the eldest of the two strangers, answered: "I feel tired enough to sleep anywhere," and added, smilingly, "I wish you boys could see some of the places where I have bunked while surveying with the U. S. Geological survey party in Alaska."

[Pg 173]

Norton's interest was immediately aroused, but knowing the hour to be growing late, and feeling rather played out himself, from the long hours of the night before, only remarked, "I would like to hear about it sometime, Dr. Dugan."

Norton then asked his guests if they felt as though a fire would add to their comfort, if so he would kindle one, as it would not take a great while to warm the room.

Earl Stevens replied that all he wanted was "To get to bed."

"Very well," answered Jack. "How about you Mr. Dugan, are you chilly?"

"Not in the least," Dugan answered.

"Then you and Mr. Stevens may occupy my bed. I am sorry I have such limited quarters that to provide you with separate apartments is impossible."

"But how about yourself, where are you to sleep?" asked Dugan.

"Never mind about me, I am provided for," laughed Jack, and reaching under his bed drew out his roll of harvest blankets.

"These," he said, "have been my only resting place for many long weeks during the harvest season just passed, and I rather enjoy the prospect of another night tucked comfortably away in their folds."

Earl Stevens, who during this time had been busily unlacing and removing his leather leggins and removing his outer garments, was now ready to retire, and with the remark, "Any port in a storm," he rolled over to the side next to the wall and crawled beneath the cover.

[Pg 174]

Dugan, after asking Norton if he could be of any assistance to him, in preparing his bed, and upon Jack's assurance that he could manage it alone, soon joined Stevens.

Jack Norton, after putting out the light and bidding his guests good-night, was soon snoring contentedly. If they were not comfortable, restless or his snoring disturbed them, Jack was unaware of the fact, for he did not awake the following morning until the sun was well up.

When he arose and went to the one small window with which his house was provided, and drawing back the piece of calico that Miss Anderson had neatly hemmed and with which she had presented him as a part of his furnishings, the room was filled with sunlight. His guests were sleeping soundly and were not awakened until the noise made by filling the stove with sagebrush aroused them.

Jack lighted the fire and asked them if they were ready to get up. Dugan immediately arose and after dressing, followed Norton out to the bench, where he was provided with a brimming basin of ice cold water with which to bathe his face. Jack laughingly told him "The ice water was

another reminder of his trip to Alaska."

Stevens, who soon followed, was also provided with this primitive means of performing his morning ablution, and seemed much refreshed after its completion. Upon being asked as to how they had rested, both he and Dugan replied, "Splendidly." [Pg 175]

Norton realized that breakfast was probably awaiting their arrival at the Gully home and not wishing to cause any additional delay, pointed out Gully's house, and asked his guests if they would mind going there alone as he had some chores to do, before he could come, but would follow as quickly as possible.

There being no objections to this, Dugan and Stevens left in the direction of Gully's. Jack Norton watched their departure for a few moments. He had made up his mind from the first that he did not like young Stevens but had decided that Dugan was a good sort, and was anxious to have an opportunity to know him better, and to hear of his experience while in Alaska. Going into the house, he straightened out the interior and supplying himself with pencils and paper for his use during the day, followed his guests to Gully's.

Mrs. Gully was just serving breakfast when Norton arrived, and he noting that the places at the table were all filled, insisted upon her not arising to prepare a place for him, that he "Had much rather wait and eat with the children." As the girls and Joe clamored with their mother, that Jack's wishes in this respect be granted, she smilingly answered, "Very well then, just as you and Jack say, but run along now, and let us eat in peace."

Jack was out near where the equipment of the strangers had been unloaded, preparatory to raising the tents, when a few minutes after, Ida came to where he was standing and asked if he had eaten breakfast so soon, she not having been in the room when Jack arrived, Norton answered that he had not, and that he proposed to wait and eat with the homefolks as he had gained her mother's consent to such an arrangement. [Pg 176]

Ida expressed herself as pleased and said she had avoided meeting the strangers and seeing him outside had taken this opportunity to ask him how he had managed to care for the two men as she knew his house was small.

Jack told her that they got along nicely, and he supposed that they had rested well, as he had heard no complaint and he related how he had led them across the sagebrush in the dark and expressed the opinion that if anything would induce sleep, such a trip as he had given them surely would.

Ida laughed merrily at Jack's description of the manner in which the two surveyors had stumbled along in the dark, but asked if it was not equally hard on him.

Assuring her that he was familiar with the route over which they had gone they chatted on until Joe came running from the house calling to them, "Mamma said come to breakfast." As they went to the house in response to this summons, they passed Gully and the strangers, who were on their way out to where the equipment lay.

Travis Gully, calling to Jack to wait a moment, came back and told him when he had finished eating, to send Joe out and let him know, as he wanted to arrange some plans for the day with him privately. Norton promised to do so, and as he turned to rejoin Ida, who was waiting, found her embarrassed and annoyed by the constant staring of Stevens, who had stopped to await Gully's coming, but as she did not mention the matter, Jack did not let her know that he had noticed it. [Pg 177]

After his breakfast was eaten, Jack sent Joe to tell his father, and when Gully, after excusing himself for a few moments, left the strangers, and came to the house, where Jack was awaiting him in the kitchen. He told him that he had been thinking the matter of the contract over, and thought it a good idea to have a talk with some of their neighbors and make sure of their help before binding themselves to an agreement.

"How do you propose to manage it?" asked Jack.

"I thought you might take one of the teams and go see such of those as you could, while I get the tents up, and upon your return we could drive over and see the land," answered Gully.

Jack thought for a moment before he replied to this proposition. "I'll tell you," he finally said, "tomorrow night the literary society meets. We will attend the meeting, leaving these men here. They would not be interested, and while we are there we can take the matter up with those we want to see."

"But how about the contract?" asked Gully. "Ought it be signed, or can it wait a day or two?"

"Let it wait," replied Jack.

So they went together where the strangers were waiting, and in a short time, two tents were raised, and made fairly comfortable, and the strangers had taken up their quarters. Mr. Palmer, with a rough board table, and his suit case containing maps and papers occupying one, and Dugan and Stevens with their surveying instruments, the other. [Pg 178]

It was now approaching the Holiday season, and there was as yet no indications of a severe winter. There had been sufficient frost to kill the grass, but stock was doing nicely on the range and little feeding was required.

No especial arrangements had been made for the seasons entertainment, everyone seemed to be interested in the progress of the preparations for work on the big contract. It was generally known that it was secured by Gully and Norton and the neighbors were anxiously awaiting the time for actual work to begin.

The call for help among them on the night of the literary meeting, had been gladly responded to, and almost daily requests for work were being received from persons who lived many miles distant.

The deal had been successfully consummated and Mr. Palmer had returned to the East. The surveyors Dugan and Stevens were eagerly endeavoring to complete their part of the work, in order to return to their homes in time for the Holiday festivities.

Travis Gully and Jack Norton who had secured additional teams, were busily hauling material for the erection of shelters, and feed, to the point on the company's land, that had been selected for the establishment of the main camp.

[Pg 180]

Fresh water was to be hauled daily from Gully's well in a huge tank that had been constructed for this purpose, and everything was to be gotten in readiness for work to begin immediately after the new year.

Jack Norton and Dugan became great friends, and the latter spent many nights with Jack when they would sit for hours by the roaring sheet iron stove, while Jack listened in boyish eagerness to the older mans accounts of his experiences while in Alaska with the Geological survey. Dugan soon discovered that Jack's hobby was geology, and he could talk learnedly on that subject, so it welded their friendship all the stronger.

Miss Anderson came almost daily after school, to assist Mrs. Gully in preparing a few trinkets for Christmas, and they would sit at night and plan for Ida's future. Miss Anderson was especially anxious to keep Ida, who was peculiarly adapted to, and took such an interest in fancy needle work under her care and instruction, and she also taught her how to prepare and serve such dainty dishes as the means at their hand permitted.

Minnie Gully could see, and appreciated Miss Anderson's interest in Ida, for the girl had never until now, had an opportunity to learn, and no one could find fault with Miss Anderson as a teacher.

In fact, Ida was rapidly developing into a very able young lady and was beginning to show the traces of refinement that she had no doubt, as Miss Anderson expressed it, inherited from her mother, although the latters natural inclinations in this respect had lain dormant up to within the last two years. She was proud of Ida and missed no opportunity to refer to the progress her pupil was making.

[Pg 181]

The lines having been all established and nothing left but the topographical map of the land to be completed, and most of the data for this having been obtained, the greater part of young Stevens work consisted of draughting and the compilation of the data. He did not join in the conversation with the men, and his only occupation while not at his work, seemed to be seeking an opportunity of forcing his attentions on Ida Gully.

In this he was frustrated by the young lady herself, who avoided him except at such times as he came to his meals. Occasionally he came to the house during the evening, ostensibly to talk with her father, but usually ignored Gully, but he gained no opportunity to speak with her except in the presence of either Miss Anderson or her mother.

On one such occasion he asked Miss Anderson why so able a person as she should waste her talent by remaining in such a wilderness, and then fixing his gaze on Ida, busily engaged on her fancy work, quoted:

*"Many a rose is born,
To blush, unseen,
And waste its fragrance;
On the desert air."*

Miss Anderson replied that she would not consider her time or talent wasted if she could restore to the world just one of these desert roses to which he referred, in all its native simplicity. For, she continued, without such talent as I possess, to protect it, the contaminating influence that surrounds the desert, might invade the retreat of the rose and cast its blight upon it.

[Pg 182]

Stevens was not expecting this thrust, and parried by saying that the contaminating influence, civilization, to which Miss Anderson evidently referred, would probably invade their retreat within the near future, for from what he had seen and learned, during his stay in the locality, the country would soon make rapid strides and would become an active agricultural center.

"We certainly hope so, and with that expectation, we shall continue to prepare ourselves to blend with the changed conditions, when it does come. But for the present we are contented," she answered.

Ida cast an appreciative glance at Miss Anderson and secretly resolved to place herself completely in her hand, in hopes that she too might acquire her dignified manner and conversational power.

At last the work of the surveyors was finished, and the tents were lowered and packed with their instruments, ready for their return. Gully was to drive them to the village. Dugan and Stevens had spent the last night of their stay with Jack, in his shack, under the same conditions they had the first, with the exception that they now knew Norton—Dugan to respect and Stevens to fear this young man who had surprised them both with his apparent business ability and his gentlemanly manner.

Travis Gully drove away with the two men, after the family had bidden them goodbye. Norton and Miss Anderson were present to pay their respects to the departing guests. Norton requested that they lose no opportunity to speak a favorable word for the reclamation of the desert, and Miss Anderson expressed her hopes to young Stevens that his predictions for the future of the country would come true.

[Pg 183]

The affairs at the Gully home soon resumed their normal stage after the departure of the surveyors, and as the preparations were completed for the work of clearing the land to be started, the matter of the holidays was taken up, and numerous suggestions for a befitting Christmas celebration were made. As only a few days remained before the time would arrive, hasty action was required.

At Sunday school the next Sunday, the matter was discussed, and a committee consisting of Miss Anderson, Jack Norton and The Professor were appointed to take charge of the affair, and all felt satisfied that in these competent hands success was assured.

The Holiday vacation of two weeks which Miss Anderson and the Professor gave their schools gave ample time for the preparations and a splendid time was had at the entertainment, but to those who were present the Christmas before at the old sagebrush tree, there was something missing. They could not define what, but the same neighborly feeling did not exist. This was probably due to their increased number and the introduction of new characters among them.

Snow began to fall in small flurries during the Holidays, but not in sufficient quantities as to interfere with the plans for work. Immediately after the New Year Gully moved with his family to the company's land where Mrs. Gully and Ida were to cook for the men employed on the work.

[Pg 184]

The fall of snow, though light, interfered with plowing, but the removal of sagebrush progressed rapidly. This was accomplished by hitching two or more horses at each end of a steel rail, procured at the railroad, and by means of which the sagebrush was dragged or broken from the land. The men and children followed this contrivance, gathering the brush and piling it ready for burning.

Everything progressed splendidly, the favorable weather kept the range open and thus the supply of feed for the horses was conserved. Most of the land was cleared of brush before the season for plowing arrived, and when it came, which was at an exceptionally early date, every team was available for this service and was put to work.

Travis Gully, whose duty it was to keep supplies in the way of provisions and water at the camp, was kept constantly on the road, either to the village or his well. Jack Norton looked after the allotment of parcels of land to be plowed and kept track of the work accomplished by each of those engaged. This, together with the accounts and correspondence incident to the work, required all of his time, but under his able management the work was so systemized that it was completed some weeks in advance of the time specified in the contract.

Encouraged by this fact he suggested to Gully that they put in a bid with the company for seeding and fencing the land, which they did and were awarded the contract for this also.

[Pg 185]

It was a very successful winter for both Gully and Norton. While they had been most liberal in their payments to their neighbors who had been employed by them, the final accounting showed flattering results.

Travis Gully had sufficient funds to install a much better pumping plant at his well than he had dreamed of. Instead of the windmill he purchased a gasoline engine and one of the most recently invented pumps, the capacity of his pumping plant was sufficient to furnish water for irrigation of forty acres.

Jack Norton bought a wagon and team for his own use, and made extensive improvements on his claim, among which was a well with a windmill, and a much needed addition to his house.

The seeding of their own places to grain, was but a small task as compared to the one they had just completed, and was soon accomplished. As the spring season advanced and the young grain came up and began to show a faint tinge of green that was noticeable at a distance, Gully and Norton decided to visit the companys land and view the results of their work.

The prospects there were even better than at their own homes. The grain having been sown

earlier, was farther advanced and made a much better showing. As the two men strolled over the immense field of young grain they could recall to their minds the scenes in the harvest fields that they had witnessed the fall before, and shifted the scene of action to their own immediate neighborhood.

[Pg 186]

Jack Norton, in his pride at the promising outlook, wrote to Mr. Palmer and gave him a glowing description of what the probable outcome would be.

A few weeks passed during which time Gully planted a number of fruit trees and prepared a nice field of alfalfa which had just begun to come up. Knowing that the snow fall had been light during the winter and noting the absence of the seasonable showers of the spring before, he watched the small amount of moisture which the ground had contained, and saw it rapidly being absorbed by the increasing heat of the sun, and least the growth of his young alfalfa be retarded, he set his engine to going and gave the patch a thorough wetting. His trees were beginning to put forth their tender leaves, and as the ditch through which the water flowed to the alfalfa passed near the trees, it watered them also.

The desert never looked more beautiful. The absence of severe wind storms during the spring and summer before had allowed the sand to remain smooth, just as it had been left beaten by the rains. Upon arising one morning, Gully noted far to the west, an occasional puff of dust, and then a spiral column of sand would mount heavenward and attain a height of several hundred feet, and scattering, would cause the air to become murky and hazy.

Travis Gully's heart sank within him, for he knew too well the meaning of these signs. That it foretold a desert sand storm he knew, and his only hope was that it would not be a severe one. Saying nothing he went about his work, knowing from his experience during the first year in the region that it would be hours before its extent would be known.

[Pg 187]

The children went to school as usual, but Gully kept constant watch on the approaching storm. By noon he knew by the increased movement of the clouds of dust that it was to be a terrific storm, and advised his wife of the fact. She suggested that he take the wagon and go to the school and bring the children and Miss Anderson home, which he did. On his way to the school he thought of Jack Norton, and knowing that there had been no real desert storms since he came, decided to drive by his place and warn him of its approach.

He saw Jack clearing more ground, working contentedly in blissful ignorance of the impending calamity. Calling to him to come to the fence Gully told him of his fears and advised that he lash down his windmill and make such other preparations as he saw fit, as the storm would probably last for several days.

Norton thanked him, and looking in the direction of the clouds, remarked: "I saw that coming, but thought it might mean a good rain."

Gully smiled and answered: "Just the opposite my boy, and if you do not feel like being housed up alone for several days you had better hitch up your team and come over to my place until the storm passes."

"O I guess it won't be quite that bad," answered Jack, "but if I see that I cannot weather the gale I'll try and work my way over, thank you."

[Pg 188]

Gully drove off to the school house, and as he did so, he shouted back, "Better take my advice, Jack, and go on over to the house."

Norton waved his hand and returned to his work.

When Gully reached the school house he told Miss Anderson of the impending danger, and advised her to dismiss school at once as he feared some of the children who lived at a distance would have difficulty in reaching their home if not given time to do so before the storm reached them.

Miss Anderson who had never witnessed one of these sand storms was now thoroughly alarmed at Gully's apparent earnestness, did as he had advised, and cautioned the children to hurry to their homes if they would avoid being caught in the storm.

After hurriedly placing the school room in order and securely fastening the windows and doors she was ready to go to her own home, when Gully, informing her of the probable duration of the storm, insisted on her going home with him and the children. This she did and they had hardly reached the Gully home when the fitful gusts of wind started the restless sand in motion, and before night, the storm was raging. It was impossible to see any distance for the blinding sand and dust.

All night it raged and as there was no sign of its abatement, Gully ventured out to attend to his stock the following morning. It recalled to his mind the winter of the terrible blizzard and it was just as severe, except that it was driving sand instead of snow, and they did not have the cold to contend with.

[Pg 189]

Miss Anderson expressed herself as truly thankful that she had taken Mr. Gully's advice, and came home with him and the children. She tried to be as cheerful as possible but she now understood what had retarded the settlement of this beautiful country with which she was fascinated.

She tried in vain to interest Ida in her fancy work, but this young lady persisted in standing at the window looking out in an effort to penetrate with her gaze, the mass of sand and dust, always looking in the direction of the school house and watching the road that lead to Jack Norton's home.

Miss Anderson who noticed this, went to her and placing her arm around the girl, asked, "What is it dear, does the storm frighten you?"

"No," answered Ida, "I was thinking of those in the desert who are alone and wondering if they were safe."

"To whom do you refer?" asked Miss Anderson. "None of those that I can recall are alone."

Ida's eyes instantly filled with tears and she exclaimed, "O Miss Anderson, had you forgotten Mr. Norton? He is alone and I know he would have been here by now if something had not happened to him."

"Why bless your dear heart," exclaimed Miss Anderson. "I had forgotten him, but you may rest assured nothing has harmed him and it is probable because he is busy taking care of his stock and other property that he has not been over. This storm would not stop him, I am sure." And thus she comforted the much perturbed girl, but to herself she thought, "I knew it would come to this, and I do so hope that the feeling becomes mutual. Jack is so nice and I know I can prepare this dear child to make him a wife befitting the station in life to which I know he belongs."

[Pg 190]

After this little scene at the window Ida clung closer to Miss Anderson, and while she had not confided in her, she felt that she understood and the bond of sympathy between them was established.

The storm continued for two days, and when it had exhausted itself and before the atmosphere had cleared sufficiently to see any distance, Jack Norton came tramping across the plain to the Gully home. He was greeted with shouts of welcome by Joe and the younger girls. Coming into the front part of the house, he asked if all were present, and how they had stood the storm. He told Gully that he had wished a thousand times that he had come with him the first day.

Travis Gully asked if he had been able to note the effect of the storm on the growing grain. Norton replied that he had not, for as he expressed it, "I have not been able to overtake the grain yet. The ground at my place is swept perfectly clean."

Gully arose and went to the window, looked out for a minute, and turning to young Norton, said, "Let's take a walk, Jack."

Norton, without replying, followed him out, and they walked down across the alfalfa patch. Occasionally they stopped and examined the ground and then came back to the trees.

[Pg 191]

In a few minutes they returned to the house and as they entered, Gully was heard to remark: "Well, it's a good thing I put water on when I did."

"What is it Travis," asked his wife. "Is everything ruined?"

"No indeed," answered Gully. "I find that my alfalfa and trees have not been injured in the least. The water I put on the ground has held the sand and I now have the secret of farming in this country."

"I shall get me an engine immediately," put in Jack. "Alfalfa, fruit and stock raising beats wheat anyway."

"Do you suppose the wheat is all ruined?" asked Miss Anderson.

"I am afraid so," Gully replied.

"Gee," exclaimed Jack. "What a letter I have got to write Mr. Palmer now. Well, it is not our fault."

They were right. The wheat was all killed and it was too late in the season to replant had they the means of doing so. A few days after the passing of the storm Gully and Norton drove to the company's land to view its effect.

Not a sprig of grain could be found, and the soil had been blown from the surface to the depth of the plowing. The whole tract presented a most disheartening appearance. Both men expressed the deepest regret and sympathy for the unfortunate owners who had sustained such a loss and agreed that they should be notified of their misfortune.

[Pg 192]

The letter was written by Jack, who in a plain, straightforward manner, explained to Mr. Palmer what had befallen the grain, and added that they were not alone in their misfortune, as those of the homesteaders who had no well equipped with machinery for irrigation, were also heavy losers. The more fortunate, however, among whom was included, their mutual friend Mr. Gully, who could get water on the ground, had suffered but little. He suggested to Mr. Palmer that he take the matter of irrigating their land from a well, equipped with pumping machinery, up with his clients.

Sometime later Jack received a letter from Mr. Palmer, thanking him for the interest he had shown in their behalf, and assured him that in due time the company would realize the necessity

of doing as was suggested in his letter. Sinking wells and drawing their water supply from the abundance that, it had been proven, lay beneath the surface.

CHAPTER XIX.

[Pg 193]

It was a bright November morning three years later that two heavily loaded automobiles were tearing their way along the Scenic Highway that had been constructed from St. Paul to Seattle. Each car contained three passengers besides the drivers, and piled high on the running boards and strapped on the back of each car was the baggage and camp equipment of the party.

At a point in the desert along the eastern boundary of which the Highway ran, it paralleled the railway, and ran thus for several miles, and was intercepted by roads leading from homes that could be seen farther back across the sagebrush covered plain. These homes were not numerous, but each in the bright sunlight that caused the shimmering, dancing mirage to hover over the patches of dark green alfalfa and orchards that surrounded them, showed the tourists plainly that the conquest of the desert, in some instances, had been accomplished.

On this particular morning, a wagon, drawn by four splendid horses and loaded high with bales of alfalfa that still retained the green of the field from which it had been cut, so perfect had been the process of curing, was being driven from one of these homes by a man by whose side sat a chubby faced boy of some eight or nine years.

[Pg 194]

The wagon had just turned into the highway a short distance ahead of the rapidly moving cars, and as they approached with their horn coughing a dusty warning, the driver drew out to one side to await their passing. The first car rushed by and disappeared in a cloud of dust, and the one in the rear, seeing the trouble the driver was having with his now thoroughly frightened team, came along beside the wagon more slowly and asked if they could be of assistance in straightening out the tangled horses.

Travis Gully, for it was he and Joe who were on the wagon, said if someone would go to the head of the leaders until he could get down, he thought he could manage them until the car had gone by. One of the men sprang from the car and was advancing to seize the horses' bridles, when looking up, he stopped short for an instant and reaching his hand up to Gully, exclaimed, "Well, well, if it isn't Mr. Gully. How are you?"

Travis Gully, taking his attention from the horses which had now quieted down since the car had stopped, looked at the man on the ground for an instant, and bursting into a laugh as he recognized Thomas Dugan the surveyor, he half climbed and half fell from the wagon, and grasped Dugan by the hand and shook it cordially.

By this time another occupant of the car, who proved to be Mr. Palmer, came forward, and after greeting Gully, inquired as to the health of the rest of the family. Upon being assured that they were doing nicely, Mr. Palmer said, "I am certainly glad to hear it. We will probably be out your way tomorrow. We left Spokane early this morning and are going through to Wenatchee for lunch. The owners of the land you cleared are in the car that just passed."

[Pg 195]

Dugan had helped Joe from the wagon, and was commenting on his growth, when Mr. Palmer asked Gully if they could assist him with his horses, if not they would go on as they wished to overtake the other car in the village just ahead.

Gully assured him that he could manage the team, and with the promise that "we will see you tomorrow or the next day," Mr. Palmer and Dugan entered the car, and proceeded on their journey.

Travis Gully watched them as they disappeared down the road in a cloud of dust, and wondered what motive could be bringing them back to the land on which they had already lost so heavily, but, with the hope that they probably had some information relative to the irrigation project that had now almost become a forgotten subject, he placed Joe back on the wagon and climbing back to his own seat, spoke to the horses and drove on to the village, with his load of hay.

Travis Gully had prospered, and his dream of a home just as he wanted it, was fully realized. He had not developed all of his land, because the original forty acres upon which he had pumped water from his well, had proven so productive that it was more than he could handle alone, so he did not see the necessity of developing more.

His home, as it was, seemed an ideal place. The trees which he had planted at the root of which he had buried tin cans, were now affording ample shade and serving the purpose of a wind break for his house—not that the wind had any terror for him now. It did not harm him now as he had mastered the situation and was reaping the reward of his perseverance.

[Pg 196]

He could now gratify his cherished ambition for nice horses and his alfalfa fields and paddocks were the play grounds for some beautiful colts he was raising. Numerous cattle roamed at large over the open sagebrush range, and fattened on the succulent bunch grass, coming daily to the Gully home for water. They all bore the Gully brand and were a source of income to him.

His wife and family were happy, and retained their health as all those who lived in this favored

country did. Ida was now a finished young lady. She had gone to school in one of the coast cities, a school, the selection of which had been left to Miss Anderson, who had accompanied her during her first term.

Jack Norton had fulfilled his threat made the morning after the storm three years before, to install a pumping plant on his place, and under the guidance of Gully was doing well. Miss Anderson, though never having put down a well, was residing on her claim, and with what she earned teaching the little school, was comfortable and happy. The main source of her happiness, however, was in watching the course of the lives of Jack and Ida, there was no longer any doubt or secret of their devotion to each other. It had come about as naturally as the other changes had come, and was looked upon as a matter of course. There had been no ardent wooing, no rivals with which to contend, just a companionship that had grown dearer as the year passed, and the time for its final culmination in a marriage had been set for the coming Holiday season.

[Pg 197]

Minnie Gully was happy. She had never known that such happiness was possible. She only asked for one other blessing and that was that her parents would come and share their home. She and Travis had written repeatedly, making this request, but always the same answer came from the old people. They felt that they were too old to make the change, and wanted to spend their remaining days among the surroundings they had known so long.

When Travis Gully returned from the village on the evening of the day that he had come so unexpectedly upon Mr. Palmer and Dugan as they were passing in the car, he eagerly told of what had happened, and upon his telling his listening family of their intended visit to the company's land within the next few days, they all expressed their satisfaction at the changed conditions that would enable them to extend to the visitors the hospitality that they had been denied on their former visit.

Mrs. Gully and Ida, with true feminine instinct, immediately began to plan, and offer suggestions for the most befitting way in which to entertain. In this they were at a disadvantage, as they did not know whether they intended to make a visit of several days, or would return immediately after looking over the land. In any event, they decided that they would prepare for them one splendid meal, the material used in the preparation of this meal should be from the products of their desert home, and with an unlimited supply of fresh eggs, young and tender fowls, vegetables and milk and butter, the feast promised to be a bounteous one.

[Pg 198]

In the mean time Joe had recalled the fact that Mr. Dugan promised him a ride in the automobile, an experience he had never enjoyed, and he was excitedly telling his sisters how much faster it ran than Daisy his pony could go.

The morning after Gully had brought the news of the probable coming of the party he went to Jack Norton's to acquaint him of the fact and he and Jack discussed the probable cause of their visit, and agreed that it must be for the purpose of irrigation, as they had never attempted to cultivate the land since the first year that had proven such a dismal failure. So they decided to get together that evening and prepare a concise statement of their experiences and methods that would contain all the information for which the land owners would probably ask.

For Gully and Norton this would be a comparatively easy task, for they had kept an accurate record of the items that effected the peculiar conditions in the locality in which they lived, and had applied them in a manner that had been very largely responsible for the success they had attained. The accumulation of this data, such as the varieties of seed to be used, time for planting and the conditions under which water should be applied to the land had been brought about by the introduction into their literary society, which still held regular meetings, of the reading weekly of a paper prepared by some homesteader as an educational feature.

[Pg 199]

Miss Anderson was also told of the return to the neighborhood of Mr. Palmer and Mr. Dugan, and returned from school with the children that afternoon to learn more of their coming.

And when young Norton drove over to the Gully home after supper that evening, his arrival completed the circle of faces that had gathered at the same place on the day of the surveyors departure three years before, and the thought that was uppermost in the minds of those present was: "What will they think of the change that has been wrought?"

It was agreed that should the party of visitors arrive the following day, and their arrival could be plainly noted from both the school house and Norton's home, Jack was to come over immediately and Miss Anderson was to accompany the children home. After plans for their reception had been completed, Jack with Miss Anderson accompanying him in his buggy, left the Gullys, and after seeing her safely home, the night being fine, Jack drove for several miles along the dusty road in the bright moonlight, and as he allowed the horse to choose his own gait, he took no notice of his surroundings or the distance he had come.

He wondered to himself what motive had prompted his actions, he might have remained at Gully's and spent a happy hour or more with Ida and plan for the future with her, as was their custom when together. But tonight he wanted to be alone.

[Pg 200]

The announcement of the unexpected return of Palmer and Dugan had recalled his experience with these men on the first day they had met at the hotel and he smiled as he thought of the opportunity it had afforded him to match wits with them, and the satisfaction he had derived from the occurrence.

Since their departure he had not allowed his mind to be diverted from his one purpose, the subduing of the desert sands and the forcing of the land to yield as his analysis of it had proven it capable of doing. He had, on two occasions during the past two years, accompanied the Professor on a trip to the Grand Coulee and had spent days of delightful research that had resulted in more firmly convincing him that the country as a whole was a wonderland.

But this night, while alone on the desert, driving aimlessly along a most miserable road, his mind would dwell on his old home, on his past, and his old Dad, whose only child he was, of how he had left and had now for over four years, kept his whereabouts a secret, just to satisfy a hastily made resolve to make proper restitution for a boyish prank. Now that he was in a position to make good this resolution, another factor had come into his life—Ida Gully.

At the thought of Ida, Norton's blood tingled, and tightening up his reins suddenly, stopped his horse. "I am foolish," he said to himself. "I must return and get some rest," and turning his horses head toward home, thought how proudly he would stand by Ida's side and receive congratulations of Palmer and Dugan for they should know of their engagement, and he would watch with pleasure, the expressions of astonishment their faces would betray when they noted the stately bearing she had acquired, and heard with what grace and ease of manner she acknowledged their expressed wishes for her future happiness.

[Pg 201]

Reaching his home Jack cared for his horse, and going into the house saw that it was almost midnight. He smiled and said, "Quite a visit I have had with myself," and lost no time in retiring.

Owing to the expected arrival of the strangers and the part he was to have in their entertainment, Jack had not planned any work for the morrow, so he lay and rested the following morning, much longer than was his custom. Upon arising, he went leisurely about preparing his breakfast. After eating he attended to his horses, and left the barn door open so that all except his driver could go at will into the alfalfa field. Returning to the house he dressed more carefully than usual, for he realized that the Gullys, whose real guest he was to be on this occasion, would put forth exceptional efforts in honor of the strangers arrival. His toilet completed to his satisfaction, he concluded that he would drive over to Gullys, in advance of the arrival of the party, and have an opportunity to explain to Ida his hasty departure of the night before, feeling that his appearance a little ahead of time would not be a breach of etiquette under the circumstances.

Upon his arrival at the Gully home, he found the family assembled out in the yard, looking in the direction of the village a few miles out from which, along the Scenic Highway could be distinctly seen the dust being raised in clouds by two moving objects.

[Pg 202]

Travis Gully turned at Jack's approach and pointed in the direction of the moving objects, and remarked: "Guess they are coming, all right." Jack answered that he supposed it was them, and bidding Mrs. Gully and Ida good-morning, approached Ida, and taking her by the hand led her into the house.

Gully upon noticing that Jack had left his horse tied where the automobiles would probably be driven, and fearing that he might become frightened, took him to the barn, and after seeing that he was cared for, was just returning to the house as the first of the cars came up the driveway that led to his gate.

Gully went out to meet them and recognizing Palmer and Dugan as the occupants beside whom a stranger sat. As they drove up and greeted him and introduced the third member of the party, Gully invited them to get out and await the arrival of the other car, and then go into the house. This they did, and as the driver of the car prepared to move ahead to make room, he, through force of habit no doubt, sounded his horn.

Jack Norton, who was still in the house, was startled by the familiar sound of the auto horn. It was the first intimation of their arrival he had been given, so busy was he talking to Mrs. Gully and Ida. Being anxious to greet Mr. Palmer and Dugan, he asked the ladies to excuse him and went immediately out to the group of men who had now entered the yard. Recognizing his acquaintances he approached them with outstretched hand and was laughing and chatting. As the second car drove up and stopped, he turned slightly and seeing Gully approach to welcome them, continued his conversation with Dugan.

[Pg 203]

The clicking of the latch on the gate, after the party had entered, reminded him that it was time for him to meet the new comer, and as he started to turn, someone remarked: "You have a nice place here, Mr. Gully." Jack Norton's face blanched, and the words of greeting stuck in his throat, for just one instant, and turning quickly around with a cry of "Dad," stood face to face with his father.

The elder Norton stopped as if paralyzed, but instantly recovering exclaimed, "Jack, my boy," seized Jack in his arms and pressing his head back, the father brushed Jack's hat from his head and pushing his hair back, began rumpling and toweling it, just as he was wont to do when Jack was a small boy. Then recovering himself, glanced behind him as if in search of some thing, and simply said, "I must sit down."

Jack Norton and Mr. Palmer assisted the old gentleman to the house, where they were met by Mrs. Gully and Ida, who had witnessed the meeting of Jack and his father, but not understanding the meaning of the strange proceedings, had started to come out, thinking something was wrong. They had only reached the door when they met Jack and Mr. Palmer, and returned to prepare a

comfortable place for the stricken old gentleman they were supporting between them.

[Pg 204]

Ida, immediately sensing that the occurrence had in some way materially affected Jack went, as soon as the old gentleman was comfortably seated, to Jack, and placing her hand upon his shoulder, inquired what was wrong. Jack laughingly assured her and told her that everything was far from being wrong, that the old gentleman was his father, and that they had met by the merest chance, adding that he would explain in a few moments, as soon as he was assured that his father was all right.

Mrs. Gully hastily secured a glass of cold water, which revived the old gentleman, and the rest of the party came in with Travis Gully and Mr. Dugan. Introductions immediately followed the entrance into the room of the strangers, and as Mr. Norton had sufficiently recovered to be able to arise, he went to where Jack and Ida were standing, and with an amused twinkle in his eyes asked of his son: "Am I entitled to an introduction to this estimable young lady, Jack?" Jack was plainly embarrassed by his thoughtlessness in not having taken Ida to his father at first, and introduced his father to her, with apologies for his oversight.

The occurrence had taken place in so short a time and so unexpectedly that the importance of it, except to Jack and his father, had not had time to impress those present.

Travis Gully was at a loss to understand the situation, but felt sure that an explanation would be given in due time. His wife's greatest concern was that the excellent dinner which she had prepared for the expected guests was in a fair way of being spoiled by the delay caused by the occurrence. The simple fact of Jack and his father having met after an extended separation did not impress her as being very extraordinary. As for Ida, she realized fully the meaning of the happening, but did not take into account the probable effect it would have on the future as far as she and Jack were concerned. She had noticed, however, that Jack had introduced her to his father as Miss Gully instead of Ida, and in her simplicity she had not known that he had but conformed to the usages of polite society. She had never heard him speak of her as Miss Gully except in jest, and she was annoyed.

[Pg 205]

The party of strangers, accompanied by Gully and Jack, the latter clinging to his father's arm, had again gone out in the yard and were admiring the beautiful scenery of the mountains that could be seen at an advantage at the noon hour under the bright glare of the fall sunlight.

Jack and his father stood apart from the rest, and Jack was pointing with apparent pride in the direction of his place, while his father stood in an attitude of listening to his evident enthusiasm.

CHAPTER XX.

[Pg 206]

Burns Norton, Jack's father, was of Irish descent, and had been born and raised in the south. His father, who had been a prominent cotton broker before the war, had amassed a fortune that consisted principally of stocks and bonds, with occasional bits of land scattered throughout various southern states, that had been acquired by him through deals of such magnitude that frequently the land was absorbed and reverted to him in lieu of cash that he had advanced to his clients.

The war was the cause of the loss of the fortune thus acquired, and the elder Norton, Jack's grandfather, had died soon after its close a poor man, having turned over to those who had tried to help him survive these strenuous times all the property, real and personal, that he possessed. Among the tracts of land thus acquired was one which consisted of several hundred acres situated in what was known as the Panhandle, in Texas, then arid and considered worthless except for range purposes.

When he had turned the deed to this over to his creditors, the board of appraisers handed it back with the remark: "That is too far away. It is valueless and we will not take it into consideration," and then added: "Put it away for your boy; it may be worth something by the time he is a man."

[Pg 207]

Burns Norton was just past fifteen when his father joined his mother, who had never recovered from the shock sustained when their fortune was lost, and with this tract of barren waste land, covered with curly mosquito grass, as his only property inheritance, he was set adrift in the world.

He accompanied a party of human derelicts, who drifted hither and thither during the reconstruction days following the close of the war, and finally landed in Texas, where he worked on a stock ranch, and rode the old Santa Fe Trail from Quanah, Texas, to Topeka, Kansas, for years. As time passed, and the Fort Worth & Denver Railroad was being constructed, it passed through this land of Norton's. He had never mentioned the fact that he owned the land to any one, and it had been fenced as a part of an immense pasture, and when he went to the owners of this pasture and demanded that his land be thrown outside by the removal of their fence, they questioned his right to the land. Young Norton had no difficulty in proving his ownership, and went immediately to work improving it, and from this start sprung the immense wealth he now controlled. It was this experience that had prompted his investment in the land he had come to inspect at the time he discovered his lost son Jack, living over the life that he had led when he was Jack's age, and he understood where the adventurous disposition had originated, and he did

not blame the boy. In fact, he had never blamed Jack for anything. He had been an indulgent father, and even now he was gratified by the boy's spirit, and although he felt that he had been badly treated he did not reproach him.

[Pg 208]

Mrs. Gully came to the door and called to her husband that dinner was ready, and he invited his guests to come in. Mr. Palmer and Dugan, who felt more at home than the rest, answered the summons promptly, and as they were passing the well they noticed a barrel of fresh cold water which stood temptingly near, and jokingly called to Mrs. Gully that if she would provide them with a towel they thought they would enjoy washing outside as they had done on their former visit.

Ida brought them towels and tin basins, and the entire party prepared themselves for their dinner at the well while Gully explained the workings of his pumping plant.

Jack and his father were the last to come to the well, and as Mr. Norton splashed his face with an abundance of cold water he laughingly told Jack that he did not blame him for being so enthusiastic about the country if that was a fair sample of their water, "for," declared he, "although it seems to have been sitting here for quite a while, it is still sparkling and cool."

Jack assured him that he had never seen or heard of a bad well of water in the country. Going into the house, they were seated at their dinners, while Mrs. Gully and Ida served. It was a revelation to these tired business men, this good wholesome food, that had been brought fresh from the soil and cool pantry and served in the simplest homelike manner, and they did justice to Mrs. Gully's and her daughter's culinary art by eating most heartily.

[Pg 209]

After the meal was finished, Mr. Norton called to Jack and told him to look in the front of the car in which he had come and bring him the small satchel that bore his name on the tag. Jack secured the satchel, and upon his return and handing it to his father, the latter took from it a box of cigars, and after passing them around said that if the ladies had no objections, they would visit a while, and postpone their trip to the land. "You see," he continued, "with the discovery of this young rascal," with a fond look at Jack, "there has been a great burden relieved from my mind, and I want to enjoy it in my own way, for there is no dependence to be put in his next move."

Mrs. Gully replied that she would be pleased to have Mr. Norton feel enough at home to choose his own method of celebrating the restoration of his son, but she did feel that she must protest the remarks about Jack, for they had always found him a most dependable young man.

The old gentleman smiled at her defense of Jack, while that young worthy arose from his seat, and with mock gravity thanked her for her effort in his behalf, and turning to his father, quoted:

"I stand at the bar of justice,
Condemned in the cause that you plead;
My only defense the simple request
That you judge by the motive, not deed."

Mr. Norton, now in the best of spirits, turned to those present and asked: "Shall we listen to his plea?" A chorus of voices exclaimed: "Go ahead; let's have the story."

[Pg 210]

It was a trying moment for Jack Norton. He had not expected events to take this turn, but he saw that his father expected an explanation of his conduct, and there was no alternative. It must be made in the presence of those who had assembled at the home of his dearest friends, the Gullys, and he knew that in view of the relations that existed between him and the family, an explanation was due.

Withdrawing his chair from the table, he placed it conveniently near for Mrs. Gully to be seated by her husband, and securing a seat for Ida, he stood directly facing her and began the recital of his story.

"I do not know," he began, "that it was Dad's original intention that I should inflict upon you innocent persons present a recital of my boyish prank that has resulted in this self imposed exile for the past four years, and I wish to impress on your minds before I enter into details that I am not making a plea for sympathy or setting up a plea of extenuating circumstances.

"For the suffering that I have caused him I am sorry, and I too have suffered. No one will ever know the hours of torturing remorse and regret through which I have passed. My own sufferings I have borne, I hope, with fortitude, as will no doubt be attested to by my very dear friends, the Gully family, who have never heard me mention in the slightest way my affairs, and who have been most considerate of my feelings in not asking, as they had a perfect right to do, for any information relative to myself or family, and for this evidence of their faith in me I wish to thank them most heartily.

[Pg 211]

"With the circumstances attending my leaving him, Dad is thoroughly familiar. I had just returned from the Agricultural and Mechanical College of which my home state, Texas, is justly proud, and had joined him in Galveston, where he had moved his family to reside permanently after his retirement from the land and stock business, and at which place my poor mother lost her life at the time of the disastrous tidal wave which almost destroyed the city.

"Dad, at the time of the terrible occurrence, had gone on a short trip to the northern part of the state to look after business interests, as he frequently did. Why I escaped and was not taken with my mother I never could understand, but by some caprice I was saved and cared for as an

'unknown' until Dad returned, which he did as quickly as he could.

"After a search which lasted for days I was finally located by Dad, who has always been a most kind and indulgent father. Upon this occasion of my return from college, the event being my twenty-first birthday, I found him in a most generous mood, ready to grant my every wish. He took me to his office, he having resumed business activities after the loss of my mother, and led me through the various departments and told me that he was anxious to take me in with him and have me become familiar with his affairs, that I might succeed him, as he was growing old.

[Pg 212]

"I thanked him for this generous offer, but being imbued with the idea that I was a thorough yachtsman, I changed the subject and began teasing him to let me take his yacht, the 'Magnolia,' for a few days' cruise with some half dozen of my boy friends.

"The 'Magnolia' was a handsome craft, thoroughly equipped and furnished to accommodate ten or a dozen passengers, and as her crew usually consisted of three men, I had planned to take her out alone, with my friends as helpers, making two watches, there being six of us, and we would cruise to the coast of Mexico and return in about ten days.

"The yacht was Dad's special pride and his only recreation, and he had bought and fitted her up at a very great expense. He had interests at various points along the coast and in Cuba, and this was his means of combining pleasure and business, by visiting these interests twice a year. I had accompanied him on all these trips, as he arranged to make them during my vacation from school or college, and I felt that I was capable of taking her out and returning her to her slip on the strand in perfect safety.

"But Dad did not think so and told me I had better wait and accompany him later, at which time he would be pleased to entertain my friends on the cruise. This did not suit me, and right here I blame Dad for not being more firm with me. At any rate, he finally consented to let me have the yacht, but I was to take her regular crew to man her. This I agreed to do, but did so reluctantly.

[Pg 213]

"Dad gave me an order to the watchman on board to have her provisioned for a ten days' trip, and to be made ready for sailing the following Monday, at which time she was to be turned over to me. Thanking him, I hurried to the slip and gave the watchman Dad's orders. He took it, and after reading saluted, and with the familiar 'Aye, Aye, Sir,' sounding in my ears, I left him.

"It was then Thursday, and I had ample time to look up the members of my party and acquaint them with the success of my appeal to Dad. There was one among those who accompanied me on this memorable trip with whom I hope I may never come in contact. When I told him of the conditions under which Dad had given me permission to use the yacht, he laughed and said: That's easy; just forget to call her crew, and we'll take her out alone,' and I, feeling my newly attained manhood, answered: 'I'll attend to that; just you be ready at the appointed time,' and left him. But the seed had been sown that finally grew and produced the bitterest fruit I or any other misguided lad could ever taste.

"I never mentioned the fact to the rest of the boys that we were supposed to have others than ourselves aboard, as I knew there were those among them who would have refused to accompany me unless Dad's requirements were complied with.

"Well, to make a long story short, I did not call the crew, and as Dad was called away to St. Louis the Saturday before we were to sail he never knew of my failure to do so until after it was too late. I went with him to the station as he was leaving, and he took my hand and wished me a pleasant voyage, and handing me a generous check, he added: 'I shall expect you here on my return; be careful, Jack. Goodbye,' and that was the last time I saw or heard from him until a few hours ago.

[Pg 214]

"We left the following Monday morning, and I will never forget the feeling of importance I experienced as the yacht drew out from her slip at the end of a hawser and was towed out into the bay by a noisy little steam tug which I had employed for the purpose. I knew that I was disobeying Dad, but felt perfectly sure of myself, and I had those among my party who were well experienced in sailing; besides, Dad was gone and would not return until we had completed our cruise. Then I would tell him of what I had done, how successfully I had managed the 'Magnolia' and he would feel proud of me.

"When we were well out into the bay they let go the hawser and the little craft began to ride the swells. It was but a moment's work to run up a bit of canvas that soon picked up the breeze, and rounding to, we headed for Boliver Point Light, that marked the outlet to the Gulf, and as we entered the channel through which the huge ocean going vessels gained entrance to the bay, we navigated our craft successfully, and passed several of these, besides numerous tugs, lighters and revenue cutters, and this fact but convinced us more thoroughly of our ability as seamen.

"I had not taken the helm yet, but at the request of one of my guests whom I knew to be an experienced yachtsman, had allowed him to see us safely through the narrows that lay between Boliver Point and the Jetties. After clearing the channel and entering the gulf proper I relieved my friend, and taking the helm, steered directly south, a course that almost paralleled the Galveston Island, but as the miles increased the distance from the southern end of the island became so great that we were almost in the path of the South American liners.

[Pg 215]

"We were having a splendid time, and as the breeze was favorable, we decided to put into a little coast town whose buildings could be plainly seen glistening in the bright sunlight far ahead on

the main land. We made this port, and after going ashore for a few hours, decided to follow the coast, laying close in, and to put into the next village, Port Lavaca, where we would tie up for the night.

"I will not undertake to describe our trip, with its many stops and things of interest that we came in contact with at these quaint little settlements, half Mexican and half American, that lined the Gulf shore.

"Passing over the next two days of our cruise, we arrived at Matagorda Bay, and being desirous of visiting the point at the extreme inner end of the bay, where the little village of Indianola had been almost completely destroyed by the great tidal wave, we put in at the entrance and spent the night at the town of Matagorda, intending to visit the scene of the devastated village the following day.

"In this we were disappointed, for during the night a terrific gulf storm came up, and it became so severe before morning that we were compelled to abandon our berths aboard the yacht and go ashore. The next two days brought no signs of an abatement of the storm, and we were advised not to venture out until a more favorable time. Two days in this little fishing village caused us to lose interest in its novelty, and to a very great degree cooled our ardor and inclination to continue the trip.

[Pg 216]

"The third day was very much better, and we decided to abandon our trip and return home, and as the force of the storm decreased in its severity, we started immediately after noon, intending to round the point of Matagorda Peninsula before night and put into the first harbor we could make on the leeward side.

"We experienced no difficulty in getting well under way in the Bay, although the wind was against us, and by beating up first the inland shore and by tacking back and forth, we reached the point just at dusk, but we found the gale was almost as severe as it had been the day before, and we dared not venture too far seaward. As darkness came on we undertook to round the point to gain the leeward shore of the peninsula and thus be protected from the force of the wind.

"I was at the helm and had given instructions to my companions, who were all alert to help, to haul down most of the canvas before we attempted to make the point. They were busily engaged at this when we glided out to where we caught the full force of the gale, and it required all of my time and strength to hold her off the point. It was now quite dark and it was impossible to distinguish the land. The light off the point was plainly seen, but it lay so far out, to mark the course of large vessels, I dared not attempt to round it, but must make the space between it and land, which I knew was ample, but I misjudged the distance and in a few moments we were hard aground on the shoals and were in a fair way of pounding to pieces.

[Pg 217]

"Work as we would, she was immovable, except to plow further into the slimy mud, gravel and oyster shells of which the shoals consisted. We stripped her of every thread of canvas after trying to right her, thinking by so doing she would hold together for the night, but it was no use. We saw that she was doomed and prepared to leave her to her fate.

"We could hear the surf breaking off to port, and knew that we could reach land easily, so when she finally rolled over on her side and her hatches went awash, we gathered what we could of our effects and went overboard. I do not know how my companions fared after they entered the water. I had no difficulty in reaching land, for after being hurled shoreward by the waves a few times, I found that I was not beyond my depth, and after being knocked down and almost strangled as the breakers came in, I scrambled ahead and finally found myself beyond their reach.

"My first thoughts were for the safety of my companions, and I called to see if I could locate them. The sound of my voice was drowned by the roar of the surf, but in a few minutes I heard a voice calling very near me, and it proved to be one of the boys. It was no time for congratulating each other on our escape, so we set to work to try and locate the rest of the party. One by one we heard them answer our shouts, and as each came in they aided in the search, until the last was found. None seemed any the worse for their experience, and as we were wet and chilled, with no means of providing a fire, we did not know what to do, so we decided to move a little way back, and by keeping in motion dry our clothes as best we could, and at any rate keep warm.

[Pg 218]

"We agreed to remain until morning and see what condition the Magnolia was in before we undertook to work our way back along the peninsula to the mainland. As the night advanced, I could hear the groaning of the timber in our disabled craft as it was subjected to the strain of the storm, and I thought of what I had done, and of poor old Dad, and I knew that the loss of the yacht would not hurt him as badly as my actions. I called my best boyhood friend, who had come as one of the party, off to one side and told him of my trouble, of how I had disregarded Dad's wishes, and confided to him that if the Magnolia proved to be a total loss in the morning, I would not return to Dad, and gave him a message to deliver to him saying that I would not return or write until, by my own efforts, I could replace the yacht.

"My friends tried to persuade me to give up the idea, as such action would but add to Dad's trouble. But I was obdurate, and lest I be persuaded to abandon my purpose, I left them a few hours after our conversation without waiting to see the result of the wreck that had been caused by my folly.

[Pg 219]

"After leaving my friends I followed the ridge of the peninsula back to the mainland and

continued to walk until about noon the next day, when I was forced to seek rest, as I was completely exhausted. When I reached a little village, I purchased a flannel shirt and overalls, and my identity was lost. With the funds I had in my possession and the check Dad had given me, I managed to work my way out here, and you know the rest."

Jack Norton had not been interrupted during the time he was telling his story. His hearers sat deeply interested, but when he reached the end of his narrative it brought them back to their surroundings. After a moment's silence, Jack's father, who had been seated with his chair tilted back, came down with a crash, and seizing Jack by the hand exclaimed:

"Why, Jack, the 'Magnolia' was not hurt. Your friends brought her into port a few days later and she is now as good as ever."

Young Norton was dumfounded. "How did they do it?" he asked.

"By the aid of some fishermen and a small tug who sighted them in distress the following morning. She had only keeled over in the mud, and as there were no rocks upon which to pound she hung together and they soon had her righted and under sail. So you see, my boy, you have had all this suffering for nothing," explained his father.

"No, not altogether for nothing, for I have learned a very great lesson; not to jump at conclusions and to abide by an agreement; and besides," he said, smiling, "I have acquired a home of my own and," stepping over to Ida's side and taking her by the hand, assisted her to arise, "Miss Gully has done me the honor to promise to share this home with me, which more than repays me for my sufferings. I ask but one other favor in this world, and that is your forgiveness and blessings, Dad."

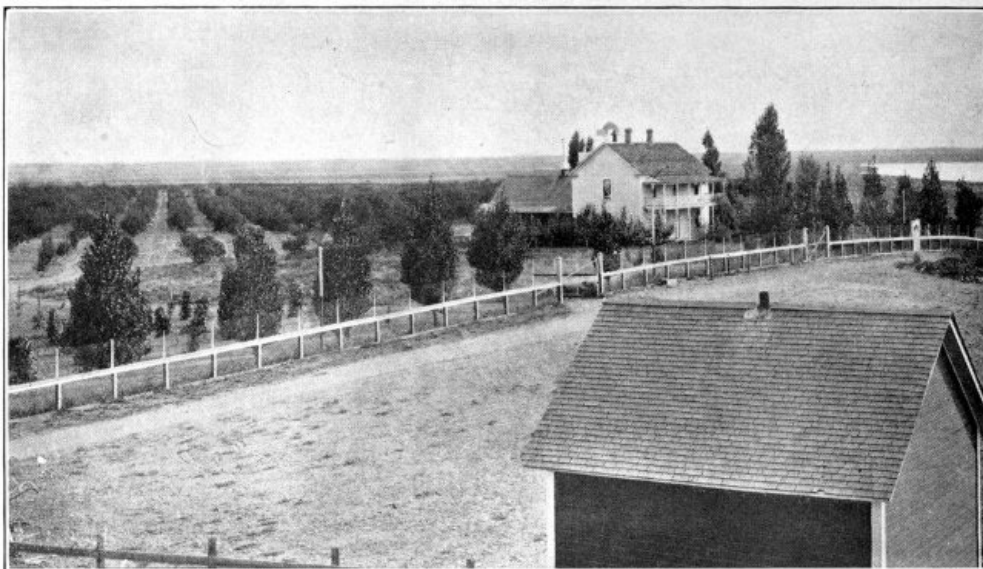
[Pg 220]

It was now Jack's father's turn to be taken by surprise, but he was too old a diplomat to be caught off his guard, and he wanted to know more of the step his son was contemplating before giving it his approval, so he bowed politely to Ida and answered: "As for my forgiveness, son, you have it, but it would be strange if I should go out into the world to look for a lost son and should return with both a son and daughter." But he did not commit himself.

The rest of the party who had heard Jack's story and its happy ending came forward to congratulate he and Ida, and express their hopes for their future.

Travis Gully and his wife, who had not yet been able to fully understand the situation, were happy because the outcome had seemed to please Jack, and they knew that after the strangers had gone he would tell them all about it in a way they could understand.

Mr. Norton arose from the table and asked Gully if he could find accommodations for the driver of his car, as he would like to spend the night with his son in his home alone. Mr. Palmer, he said, could take the other car and the rest of the party and return to the village and await his coming.



The change wrought by honest toil and that magic word, irrigation.

Gully said that he thought there would be no difficulty in providing for him, and so it was arranged. Mr. Palmer and Dugan, with the three remaining members of the party, who proved to be some friends of Mr. Norton's who had accompanied him on this trip with the view to investing in land, were to return to the village and await Mr. Norton's coming.

[Pg 221]

After thanking Travis Gully and his wife for their hospitality, they shook hands with them and the

young people, and with promises to see them again in a few days, left for the village.

Soon after their departure, Mr. Norton expressed a desire to visit Jack's homestead.

"All right, Dad," exclaimed Jack, "we will run over there, and I will return later and get my horse and buggy."

"I'll take care of them; you go with your father," said Gully.

Jack thanked him and he and his father drove off together. Just as they were turning from the road that led to the school house Jack noticed that Miss Anderson had just dismissed school, and asked his father's permission to take her and the Gully children home in the car, to which his father consented. Turning back into the road, they soon met them, and as the car was turned around to pick them up, Jack called to Miss Anderson and invited her and the children to ride; when she smilingly approached the car and before she could express her thanks, Jack introduced his father. Miss Anderson stopped short, and her bewildered look amused Jack, who had stepped out to assist her and the children to enter the car. [Pg 222]

"Don't ask any questions now," said he, laughing.

"But," she began, "I do not understand."

"Of course not, but Ida will tell you all about it when you get home," answered Jack.

As Miss Anderson entered the car and took the seat beside him, Mr. Norton remarked:

"This has indeed been a remarkable day, Miss Anderson; a day of wonders."

The children were assisted into the car, and Jack, with Joe upon his knee, sat with the driver.

After they had been taken to the Gully home, and the children scrambled out, all excitement over their first auto ride. Miss Anderson, after being assisted from the car, thanked Mr. Norton and expressed the hope that she would be in a better position on the morrow to discuss with him the important events that had occurred. "For you know," said she, "I am still in the dark."

CHAPTER XXI.

[Pg 223]

Jack and his father then drove to his claim, and upon their arrival there dismissed the driver with instructions to call for them the following morning, and Jack added:

"Please tell Mr. and Mrs. Gully that we will not be over to either supper or breakfast."

After the driver had gone, Jack turned to his father and said: "I have learned, Dad, that one of the first requisites of a successful farmer is the proper care of his stock, so if you will accompany me, I will care for mine before we go into the house."

Mr. Norton followed Jack as he went about his chores and noted with satisfaction the care he took in the performance of each in its turn, and passed favorable comments on the appearance of Jack's horses, their comfortable stables and abundance of feed.

Jack was proud of his father's interest in things, and with boyish delight showed him over the place.

When they entered Jack's house, the old gentleman was in an excellent mood, and had been joking his son about his prowess as a homesteader. He viewed the interior with a quizzical gaze and seemed to locate everything at a glance. He removed his hat and coat, and after hanging them on a chair, rolled up his sleeves and began removing the lids from the stove. Jack watched him for a moment, then took the bucket and went to the well. When he returned, his father had the fire going. [Pg 224]

"Pretty quick work, Dad," he said.

"It's not the first time, my boy," his father answered, and then he asked: "Where's the coffee?"

"In the box on the wall; I'll get it in a minute," said Jack. But his minute was too long, for his father got the can and was measuring out a handful of the contents before Jack finished washing his hands.

Jack watched him prepare the coffee, after which he fried some bacon and eggs, located some stale sourdough bread, and taking Jack's table cloth from the table, set the dishes on the bare boards, and setting back the chairs, pulled up a bench and an empty box, and looking at Jack nodded toward the table and said:

"Grub's ready."

"Comin' up," answered Jack. "Want some butter?"

"Nope, not with bacon grease," replied the old gentleman.

After they sat down to the meal, Mr. Norton helped himself and remarked: "This is the life." He

quaffed the steaming coffee with a relish, and looking across the table, asked suddenly:

"How about the girl, Jack, who are these Gullys?"

"I don't know, Dad," replied Jack in surprise. "I never saw them until I came here, but they are mighty fine people."

"Naturally," said his father, "but what makes you think so; the girl?"

[Pg 225]

"Not altogether," said Jack, "I have reasons to know."

"In what way?" asked his father.

"In more ways than one," was Jack's answer.

"Specify," said the old gentleman bluntly.

Then Jack told his father of his first meeting with Gully, of how he had sold Gully the lumber in his shack when he had become discouraged, and had then accompanied him to the harvest field, of how Gully had persuaded him to return and try once more, which he had done, and then when the contract for clearing the land was under consideration, Gully had taken him in on it and been the means of giving him a start.

He explained further that it had been under Gully's directions that he had accomplished the success he had, and when he had finished, his father asked:

"Is it out of gratitude for all this kindness that you propose to marry his daughter?"

"No," Jack replied.

"Don't you know," continued his father, "that in the station in life to which I can restore you, you can have your choice of hundreds of young ladies?"

"This is my station in life," replied Jack, "and the best thing about it, Dad, is that I did not have to have you put me here, and as for Ida, she does not know any other life, and I hope she never learns."

"Is this Miss Anderson a relative of theirs?" asked his father.

"No; just a friend who has taught this little school ever since I came here," answered Jack.

[Pg 226]

"A very able teacher," commented Mr. Norton.

"How do you mean?" queried Jack.

"This Miss Gully did not acquire her genteel manner from her parents, did she? And you say this is the only life she has ever known," said his father.

"Miss Anderson has taken a great deal of interest in Ida," said Jack, "and she learns very readily."

"Will you postpone this marriage until you have made final proof on your claim, and give me one year of your life?" asked his father.

"No, sir," Jack answered.

Burns Norton arose from the table and began to collect the soiled dishes and pile them together, and as he started for a pan in which to wash them, Jack said: "Let them go until morning, Dad." "All right, we'll go to bed then," answered the old gentleman, and the subject of the Gullys was not again referred to that night.

The following morning after Mr. Norton and Jack had eaten their breakfast they went out and walked over Jack's claim.

Mr. Norton asked him many questions about the climatic conditions and the possible future of the country. Jack answered his father as best he could, and handed him the paper he had prepared, giving an account of his experiences and observations, explaining to him that he had assembled the data contained therein for the express purpose of furnishing information to the owners of the land he and Mr. Gully had cleared, but added that he had no idea at the time who the owner would prove to be.

[Pg 227]

Mr. Norton glanced at the paper, and thanking Jack, said he would look it over. He took specimens of the soil and told Jack if things looked favorable he would arrange to have wells drilled on his land before returning to the South.

Jack assured his father that he would make no mistake in doing so, and upon hearing the auto horn, they turned and found that the car was awaiting them at Jack's house. After returning and arranging things for the day, Mr. Norton asked Jack how much time it would require to run over to his land, as he wished to see it in order to get an idea of what condition it was in and what improvements would be required.

Jack told him it would require but a few minutes, and they decided to go before returning to the Gully home, which they did, and while there Jack's father said to him:

"Jack, in view of the fact that you have made up your mind to marry this Miss Gully and remain on your property here, would you be willing to take charge of my interests?"

"Why, certainly, Dad!" Jack replied. "I only wish that I could grant your request to accompany you home for a year, but I am afraid I could not, in justice to all, do so."

Burns Norton turned to his son and taking him by the hand, said:

"I respect your feelings in this affair, Jack, and am glad that you gave me the answer that you did last night, for I feel now that you have a purpose in life, and the determination to see it through."

[Pg 228]

Jack simply said "Thank you, Dad," and they returned to the car and were driven directly to the Gully home.

It being Saturday, there was no school, and Miss Anderson, who had remained overnight at the Gullys, had not yet returned home when they arrived. She had been told of the occurrence of the day before, of how Jack and his father had been brought so unexpectedly together and the circumstances under which they had been separated, and when Mr. Norton and Jack entered the house upon their arrival she congratulated them on the happy event and expressed the hope that Jack's experience had taught him to confide in his father in the future.

Jack assured her that there would be no danger of a recurrence, as it would take him the rest of his life in his effort at strict obedience to atone for what he had done.

Mrs. Gully, with Miss Anderson's assistance, had prepared a splendid dinner, which they told Jack was a reunion dinner, gotten up especially for him and his father, and they were to be the guests of honor. His father, they told him, was to be seated at the head of the table and was to preside, and Jack was instructed that when dinner was announced he was to escort his father to the place assigned to him.

When dinner time arrived, Jack did as he was bidden and after they were all seated, he told his friends of how his father had played the typical bachelor homesteader while his guest the night before, and they suggested that they induce him to erect a shack on his land and become one of them.

[Pg 229]

They laughed heartily at Jack's description of his father as a cook, and agreed with him that it would be nice if he would stay.

Mr. Norton thanked them for their invitation, and said that nothing would suit him better, as he was fascinated with their country, and was sure that it had a great future; so much so, he added, that he had determined to improve his holding, and would probably acquire more.

"But," he continued, "I am an old man, and have interests in other parts of the world that require my attention, so I cannot remain with you. But while I am here I want to thank you, Mr. Gully, and your estimable wife for the interest you have taken in, and the kindnesses you have shown, my son, for I have been assured by him that it has been very largely due to your action and assistance that he has been able to make his achievements so great.

"He has also told me, as you know, of the honor your daughter has bestowed upon him by promising to become his wife. This knowledge is very gratifying to me, for as he has chosen to become a farmer, he has done wisely in selecting for his help mate one who is familiar with the life of a farmer, and at the same time one who possesses the grace and beauty that few are endowed with. I am proud of Jack's choice, and gladly welcome her as my daughter."

"I feel," he continued, "that under the guiding care of such worthy people as you and Miss Anderson, who Jack tells me has watched with patient care the shaping of their destinies, these young people have nothing to fear for the future.

[Pg 230]

"In a few days I shall return to my life, and I would like to change the plans of these young people and take them home with me for a while. It is but a few weeks until the date set for their marriage, and will cause but little inconvenience, and I want them with me. What do you say, Jack?" he asked.

Jack thought for a moment before replying, and then arising, he thanked his father for what he had said and told him that his proposition had come so unexpectedly they would have to ask time to talk it over, but as far as he was concerned, he thought it might be arranged.

"Very well," said his father, "let me know as soon as you have made up your minds, and I will tell you my plans."

After finishing their dinner, Mr. Norton remarked that he supposed he ought to send word to Mr. Palmer and the other members of the party that he would be delayed for several days, and give them an opportunity to come out and inspect the country and return to Spokane with the cars, if they so desired, and he called to the driver of the car he had been using to tell him of his wishes and have him drive to the village with his message.

As the driver came in response to his call, Jack asked his father if he would let him deliver his message.

Mr. Norton, knowing that Jack was an expert driver, gave his consent and dismissed the driver, telling him that young Mr. Norton would use the car during the afternoon, and turning to his son, gave him the message to deliver.

[Pg 231]

Jack listened attentively to his father's instructions, and when he had finished, went hurriedly into the house calling to Ida and the children to get their wraps and prepare for a ride to the

village in the auto. The children eagerly sought their mother's permission to accompany Jack, and when this was given seized their wraps and joined Jack at the car, where he and the driver were discussing the merits of the machine.

Mr. Norton and Travis Gully had gone to the barn and were inspecting some of Gully's fine colts and discussing their points, a subject on which Jack's father was an enthusiast. Ida was accompanied out to the car by her mother and Miss Anderson. Jack expressed his regrets that there was not sufficient room in the car for them to go also, but he had unthoughtedly mentioned the trip to the children first, and now he could not disappoint them.

Mrs. Gully laughingly replied that she had waited until the present time without ever having ridden in an automobile, and she did not suppose that she would suffer by waiting a little while longer, but she added:

"I do propose to have you give me a ride before the car is taken back to Spokane."

Jack promised her a ride the following day, and after assisting Ida and the children in, jumped into the driver's seat, and just as he was starting Miss Anderson approached, and addressing he and Ida, who was seated by his side, said:

[Pg 232]

"Make up your minds about your father's proposition to accompany him home. I think it would be just simply delightful for you to do as he has suggested."

"What do you think, mother?" Jack asked, addressing Mrs. Gully.

"Just as you and Ida say," she replied.

"You mean just as Ida says," Jack corrected, and laughingly added: "I'm in with Dad on the proposition."

And with shouts of goodbye and with much waving of caps and hands they started for the village.

Mrs. Gully and Miss Anderson watched them for a few moments, and turning to go back into the house, Minnie Gully asked Miss Anderson her opinion of the early marriage of Jack and Ida.

"I do not see that having it occur a few weeks ahead of the appointed time would make any difference, and as Mr. Norton seems so anxious to have them accompany him home, I would be glad to see them agree to his proposition, but I believe I would leave the matter to them to decide."

Mrs. Gully agreed with her and added: "As we have made no provisions for their marriage I think should they decide to do as he asks, it would be best to allow them to accompany Mr. Norton to Spokane and have the ceremony performed there, and Ida be given an opportunity to prepare herself for the trip home with him."

"An excellent idea," answered Miss Anderson, "and it would be splendid if you would accompany them as far as Spokane, be present at the marriage, and assist Ida in her preparations."

[Pg 233]

Minnie Gully thought for a few moments before she replied to Miss Anderson's suggestion about her going and finally said:

"How about Travis and the children? Who would care for them while I am away?"

"Don't worry about them; the other girls are plenty old enough to manage things for the few days that you would be away; and besides, I will be home, and I can come and assist them."

"Are you not going?" exclaimed Mrs. Gully, in dismay.

"I had not thought of going," answered Miss Anderson.

"Well, if I go you must accompany me," declared Mrs. Gully in a decisive tone.

"We will not discuss our plans until we have heard from Jack and Ida," Miss Anderson replied.

In the meantime Burns Norton and Travis Gully had walked down into the alfalfa field and had stopped and were earnestly discussing the future of the two young people. Not the plans for their approaching marriage, but of the bright prospects of this beautiful country in which they had chosen to make their start in life, and the splendid opportunities it afforded as compared with those that had been given to them when they were their ages.

Jack and his party reached the village in a very short time—as Joe expressed it, "by the time papa could have had the horses hitched to the wagon"—and upon their arrival Jack left them and sought Mr. Palmer, to whom he delivered his father's message. Mr. Dugan, who was on the street at the time and had seen their arrival, was at the car talking to Ida when Jack returned, and after greeting him Jack told him that the party would probably be out to Mr. Gully's the day following, and he was particularly anxious to have him come out, as he had a matter of importance to discuss with him. Dugan was much surprised at this request but promised to come.

[Pg 234]

Jack purchased a supply of candy and oranges for the noisy youngsters, and they returned home after making a detour of many miles.

It was almost dark when the auto party arrived home, and the children tumbled out of the car and ran into the house, all clamoring to tell of the delightful time they had enjoyed. Ida was

assisted from the car by Jack, who was then preparing to drive over to his own home and care for his stock, when he was told by the driver that Mr. Gully and Mr. Norton had driven over in the buggy a short time before to look after things, and were expected to return at any time. Upon hearing this Jack joined the ladies in the house, and as he came in, he started in with the children telling of their wonderful ride, but seeing the inquisitive look on the faces of Mrs. Gully and Miss Anderson he asked them if Ida had not told them, of their decision?

They replied that they had not had time to talk with her since her return.

"Well, we're going with Dad," Jack announced.

"We are so glad," declared both ladies. "It will be such a delightful trip for you both."

[Pg 235]

They did not get to inquire further into their plans, as Mr. Norton and Gully came in from their trip to Jack's, and after supper was eaten Jack and Ida made known their decision, and agreed to abide by any arrangements their parents might make for their marriage and the trip.

CHAPTER XXII.

[Pg 236]

The following day Mr. Norton's companions came out from the village and the entire day, although it was Sunday, was devoted to a trip over the adjoining country, where the party was given an excellent opportunity to judge for themselves what the country was like.

They expressed themselves as being favorably impressed and predicted that at some time in the not very far distant future it would develop into a great agricultural and stock center.

Mr. Norton and Jack, together with Travis Gully, who had accompanied them on their tour of inspection, were brought back to the Gully place and left, while the rest of the party continued their trip toward Spokane, where they expected to take the train for their homes.

Burns Norton, after telling his friends of his intention of having Jack and Ida hurry their marriage and accompany him home, explained that this would probably delay his return for a week or ten days, but he hoped to rejoin them at the end of this period in their homes in the south. He bade them goodbye, as did Jack and the Gullys, and the party continued their trip, leaving him behind.

As for Jack, he had so far figured out the details of his plans for the wedding that he had persuaded Dugan to lay over in Spokane upon his arrival there until he and Ida joined him, at which time he would have Miss Anderson accompany them, and he wanted her and Dugan to attend them at the marriage. Dugan agreed to this, and he now knew what the important matter was of which Jack wished to speak. Jack, however, had said nothing of this arrangement, not even to Miss Anderson.

[Pg 237]

For the next few days Mrs. Gully and Miss Anderson's time was taken up in making preparations for Ida's departure. Old Mr. Norton entered a protest against any preparations whatever, it having been decided that Mrs. Gully's plan of having the marriage take place in Spokane being the most feasible, be adopted, and she and Miss Anderson were to accompany Ida. Mr. Norton insisted that all the necessary arrangements could be made after their arrival in the city.

The days before their departure were not only busy days for the ladies—the men too had all they could attend to.

Mr. Norton, after seeing the effect produced by the application of water on this land, and realizing how simple a matter it was to secure the necessary supply from the inexhaustible subterranean reservoir that underlay the territory that constituted the desert area, did not hesitate to invest a few thousand dollars in bringing about the reclamation of his land. He arranged before he left to have a well and pumping plant installed on each forty acres of his holdings.

[Pg 238]

Two of these wells were to be drilled during the winter that the work of developing the first two units of his project might start early the following spring. And he was farsighted enough to appreciate the fact that when these two units were brought into a state of productiveness they could be sold in fractions of ten acres each, which was sufficient land to keep one man occupied with intensive farming, for an increased value, sufficient to pay for the reclamation of the rest of his land.

This work he arranged for Gully to attend to until Jack's return, when they would both be busy looking after the project.

At last the day came for the departure of the party for the city, and all were ready and Ida and her mother had kissed each of the girls and Joe goodbye, and Jack had faithfully promised Joe that they would have an automobile when he returned, the party, consisting of Ida, her mother, Miss Anderson, Jack and his father, were driven to the station by Travis Gully, who saw them off on their trip and returned home to his lonesome children, who had never been left by their mother before.

Upon the arrival of the wedding party in Spokane they were met at the station by the thoughtful Dugan, who Jack had advised by telegram the time of their departure and the number in the

party, and then upon seeing Dugan at the station, had evidenced as much surprise as the rest.

They immediately went to the hotel, where Dugan had engaged apartments for them, and that night Ida and her mother attended the theater for the first time in their lives. Miss Anderson, being escorted by Dugan, made the party complete.

[Pg 239]

Two days later Jack and Ida were quietly married in the parlor of the hotel where they had been stopping and Mr. Dugan and Miss Anderson were their attendants, just as Jack had planned. A few hours afterward they were on their way to Galveston under the care of Mr. Norton and Dugan, who occupied the smoking compartment, while the young couple were left alone to assume as much as was possible an air of indifference to the actions of their fellow passengers, who had in some mysterious way discovered the fact that a wedding had just occurred, and were enjoying themselves at the young couple's expense.

Mrs. Gully and Miss Anderson returned to their homes the following day, tired but happy and loaded down with trinkets, both useful and ornamental, which Mr. Norton, Jack and Ida had entrusted to their care for distribution among the family as a token of their best wishes.

Short messages and post cards mailed along the route were received from Jack and Ida in almost every mail, but it was nearly two weeks before the first real letter reached the home folks. They had been in Galveston for several days, but father Norton had kept them on the go so constantly they had not had time to write, and the letter, when it did come, was filled with accounts of their many trips and delightful time they were having. "Oh! mamma," wrote Ida. "Just think! I have been on board the 'Magnolia,' the very yacht on account of which Jack left home. There was some paint missing from the wheel, and Jack told me it was where he had worn it off in his effort to keep her off the point, but of course I know he was joking. He has promised me a trip in this very boat, if we get time, but I have made him agree to call the regular crew, and I mean to see that he does it too." Then after a bit she wrote: "I am just dying for one breath of burning sagebrush; everything here smells like fish or tar."

[Pg 240]

These letters from Jack and Ida always contained messages of love to Miss Anderson, who received them in quiet happiness, as if her life's work was completed when these young people were wedded.

Just a while after the Holidays Ida wrote: "By the time you receive this letter we will have started on our return trip. We leave here for New Orleans and from there we go to Chicago, and Jack has promised me one whole week or longer, if I want it, with grandpa and grandma, and Jack says he is going to bring them back with us."

When Minnie Gully received this letter she could hardly content herself, and immediately wrote to her parents notifying them of the coming of Jack and Ida, and renewed her plea for them to come.

Travis Gully was progressing nicely with the work Mr. Norton had arranged for him to have done, and the first well was almost complete when he came home from the Norton land one night and had just finished his supper, when hearing a call at the gate, he went out and was handed a package of mail by a neighbor who was returning late from the village. Going into the house, he looked over the several letters, found one for his wife from Ida, and handed it to her, saying: "See how the youngsters are."

[Pg 241]

Minnie Gully took the letter, and looking at the address, the date of mailing, and then carefully seeing if the stamp had been properly cancelled, just as most women do upon receiving a letter, opened it and read from Ida:

"We are well and happy; happy because we leave here tomorrow on the final stage of our journey home. And listen to what I am going to tell you, mother—grandpa and grandma are coming with us. This is no joke, for their baggage is at the depot and we are to stay at the hotel tonight. Jack said to please ask papa to meet us next Wednesday."

There was joy in that desert home that night. The final link in their chain of happiness was being forged, and would be welded the following Wednesday.

Travis Gully looked up and remarked: "Well, this is Monday night; day after tomorrow; it won't be long. It will soon come."

And it did. Gully, with his own family, met them at the station and those of the passengers who witnessed the meeting from the smoky car windows knew that happiness reigned in that little desert village for a time at least.

The following fall Mr. Norton and Dugan came back to attend Gully's making of final proof on his claim, at which time he proposed to celebrate. Why Dugan came was a question that was to be answered later, but it was a well known fact that Miss Anderson had been receiving numerous letters that bore a Texas postmark.

[Pg 242]

Burns Norton's project to irrigate one entire section of this desert land was well under way, and the success of the venture was so well assured that he had received many flattering offers from his capitalist friends who had accompanied him on his former trip, to purchase an interest in his holdings. These he promptly refused.

But the credit for the practical demonstrations that had grounded his faith in the future of the

country he gave to Travis and Minnie Gully, the homesteaders.

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE LAND OF LURE: A STORY OF THE COLUMBIA RIVER BASIN ***

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