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Some people are trying to discover a redeeming trait in that little jabbering idiot, the English sparrow. He is fairly running over with traits, but all on the wrong side, declares the Epitome.

The evidence that we have plenty of material with which to recruit our standing army in times of national danger, is, in the opinion of the Atlanta Journal, shown in the fact that four hundred able-bodied men have applied for position as umpires in the national baseball leagues.

Excepting the strike in the coal regions, the year 1897 was remarkably free from general disturbances among wage-earners, and wages showed a slight upward tendency (officially estimated at five to twenty per cent.)

In spite of the Rand and the new mines in Australia, the United States is still the greatest gold-producer of all countries, notes the New York Tribune. It is likely to remain so, too, after the Klondike and other Yukon regions are exploited and "worked for all they are worth."

The United States of Australia will in all likelihood come into existence before the present century expires. This prediction is made regardless of the fact that Queensland and New Zealand still hold aloof from entering the proposed federation.

If the well-known British statistician, Michael G. Mulhall, is correct in his figures, the German Empire has progressed more rapidly than any other European power during the past twenty years. In the North American Review the statistician undertakes to establish the truth of this statement.

The travelers had now reached a point a little south of the center of Kansas, and were pressing on toward Uncle Ethau's ranch as fast as the jaded mules could draw them. Faith was anxious to reach their destination, as the school near her uncle's home was waiting for her.

IN THE FIRELIGHT. The mother rocks in the firelight, The little ones on her knees. And her song and the glow of the embers Steal through the shadows to me.

THE CLAIM-JUMPERS.

By AD. H. GIBSON.

HE wagon was old and creaked dully, as the lank, rough-coated gray mules dragged it along over the frozen prairie.

On the front seat of the wagon sat a girl, with the lines in her hands. She looked to be about nineteen. A mass of dark-gold curls surrounded her lean shapely head; her eyes were bright hazel in color, and the breath of the chill wind that crept up under the old wagon cover gave a vivid tinting to her pretty cheeks.

"Faith, how much farther is it to Uncle Ethau's?" asked a slender boy of ten, who occupied a low bench by the small stove, that stood almost in the center of the wagon-bed.

"A long ways yet, dear," answered the fair driver. "More than a hundred miles, I should say."

"I'm gettin' most awful tired," murmured Bessie, a curly-headed mite, little more than five years old, as she nestled in the folds of a huge buffalo robe near her brother.

"We are all getting tired out, Bessie," said Faith Haskins, a shadow crossing her brow. "But cheer up, dear, we'll reach Uncle Ethau's some time this week, I hope. And let us be thankful that we have even this poor shelter from the cold."

At the rear end of the wagon was a pile of bed clothes, while near the center stood the little stove, in which a cheerful fire was burning. On the ridge-pole at the top of the bows, hung several cooking utensils, and under the front seat was a large provision box, a sack of corn-meal, a side of bacon and other necessary articles.

Almost a year ago Faith Haskins' father had died, leaving her alone on a bleak Nebraska claim, with her little brother and sister, Clint and Bessie. Their mother had died only eight months before the father. The sorrow of the lonely orphan was very great, and, being very poor, there seemed nothing hopeful for them to which they could look forward in the future.

It was a lonely and desolate sight that met the girl's eyes as they moved slowly along over the brown, cheerless prairie. For miles no sign of human habitation broke the wild monotony, save at long intervals, when a lonely sod shanty or a dug-out could be seen nestling in the rank dead grass.

gannet and dust-blacked, was closing up for the night. "Hold on, Berger!" called Jim, springing from his pony and beginning to push the wheel into the shop.

"Yes, an' do a good job—none o' yer blottin'!" put in Ike. "We'll pay yer when yer finish."

Then they started toward Miley's store. Pausing before one of the windows, they peered within. Miley was trying up a package for a short, fat man with a ragged red woolen scarf around his neck, while a solitary figure was warming at the stove in the back part of the store.

Suddenly an exclamation burst from Jim, and he pointed toward the man by the stove. "Look, if that ain't Rob Wood I'll swear that wheel!"

"Yer right, by ginger!" ejaculated Ike, as he peered in above the rim of frost on the pane at a well-built, handsome young man, about thirty, who, divested of hat and overcoat, was giving himself a thorough warming at Pete Miley's rust-begrimed stove.

Entering the store, they spoke to Miley, then strode back to the stove to greet their fellow claim-holder. "Jest get back, Rob?" they asked, as they shook his hand warmly.

"Yes, just got in on the four o'clock train, and walked over from the station. What's the news?" he asked.

"News?" repeated Jim, assuming a long and reflective visage. "Wal, nothin' much, 'ceptin' ole Kiler's sold out an' left. An' lemme see; yes, that's Sukehouse, he got throwed by his broncho an' broke his collar bone. Us galloos have been doin' our work to patch him up. An' then, that's some new settlers comin' in lately—an' wantin' timber claims, an' jumpin' 'em, too, when they get a chance. But how did yer find the folks back yonder in Illinois?"

"All well and happy," replied Rob Wood. "But what's this you say about claim-jumpers?"

"Oh, yes! I reckon yer heard 'bout yer claim, an' that's hurried yer back," remarked Ike.

"My claim! What do you mean?" and Rob Wood's blue eyes dilated widely.

Then he glanced hastily around the room. There was his table bearing the remnants of a supper, while in an opposite corner a few boxes and some bedding were stacked away.

"Well," he said, dryly, "it's very plain they have come to stay."

Besides, remembering how Faith always treated her company, closed the door, and brought a chair up to the fire-place.

"Won't you have a seat an' warm?" she asked, looking into the young man's handsome face.

"No, little one," he answered quickly, but the severe expression on his face changed to one of tenderness as he gazed down into the pretty, innocent eyes of the tiny hostess. He liked children, and, banishing for the time being the thought that some of her folks were doing him great unkindness in thus appropriating his claim, he gave her a paper of mixed candies, which he had bought at Miley's.

"Come, Faith," said Rob, taking her hand with a touch that thrilled her, "sit down by the fire there and tell me all about your life since you left Illinois."

A few minutes later, when Clint came in, he found Bessie sitting cozily on the knee of a fine-looking stranger by the fire-place, while Faith, in a chair opposite him, was telling how they came to be there.

It was about two hours later when Ike and Jim returned with the mended wheel. They were somewhat surprised to find Rob at the covered wagon whistling away to himself, as if he was the happiest man on those prairies.

"Hello, Rob!" they called. "Wot of them claim-jumpers?"

"They've got possession and are going to keep it," he returned.

Then Ike and Jim laughed and Rob joined in heartily.

THE MERRY SIDE OF LIFE.

STORIES THAT ARE TOLD BY THE FUNNY MEN OF THE PRESS.

Two Passions—Two Hard Cases—Two's Company—An Illustration—Wasting Good Money—A Wise Child—A Modern Education—Practical Finance.

A woman looks into a glass. "Until she's fascinated." A man looks in another kind. "Till he's intoxicated." Philadelphia Bulletin.

Two Hard Cases. "You have a hard case," said the lawyer. "So did the safe," said the burglar, "but I cracked it."—The Ledger.

An Illustration. Husband—"That little Jones boy seems to be remarkably fond of cake." Wife—"Extremely! Why, he even eats his mother's home-made cake!"—Puck.

Two's Company. Mr. Wilberforce—"What do you think of the third party, Miss Dimpling?" Miss Dimpling—"Oh, I always detested a chaperon."—Louisville Courier-Journal.

Wasting Good Money. Charles Bragg—"Yes, Miss Brightly, it costs me ten thousand a year to live." Miss Brightly—"Oh, Mr. Bragg, do you think it's worth it?"—Boston Traveller.

A Wise Child. Mamma—"Ethel, what do you mean by shouting in that disgraceful fashion? See how quiet Willie is." Ethel—"Of course he's quiet. That's our game. He's papa coming home late and I'm young."

Practical Finance. Jones—"They say our circulation is twenty-two dollars per capita. Now, you haven't twenty-two dollars, have you?" Smith—"Yes, I have." Jones—"Have you? Lend me five, will you?"—Puck.

A Modern Education. Proud Mother—"At last, my dear, your education is finished, and you have diplomas from the highest seats of learning in the world." Cultured Daughter (wearily)—"Yes, and now I'm too old to marry."—New York Weekly.

Work of the Spring Band. Tourist—"What is that crowd over the way?" Native—"That's our string band." Tourist—"Preparing to give an entertainment, I suppose?" Native—"Yes; going over the river to lynch a horse thief."—Chicago News.

GOOD-BYE, SWEETHEART.

"Good-bye, Sweetheart!" Long after we had parted, love, The tender words rang in my ears; They seemed to echo from the spheres That smiled upon me from above.

"Good-bye, Sweetheart!" My soul forgot the world's cares; Crossing the tide of time and chance; I was the queen of love's romance, And breath'd but love's ambrosial airs.

"Good-bye, Sweetheart!" Let fortune frown and fate alarm, Let me be check'd by joy with pain; This precious phrase shall still remain An anthem to cheer and charm.

"Why, Teddy, dear, what is the matter? Don't you like asparagus?" "Yes, Mrs. Birehurn, but the handles are so hot!"—Trained Motherhood.

"Hattie—'Maude doesn't show her age at all, does she?' Ella—'No, but you can see where she scratched it out of the family Bible.'—Chicago News.

"Did you read about that mince pie ten feet in diameter, Mrs. Jones?" "Yes; but I presume my husband's mother has made bigger ones."—Chicago Record.

Frances (aged six, who loves her kitty)—"Are you happy, mamma?" Mamma—"Yes, dear. Why?" Frances (listening)—"I don't hear you purr!"—Harper's Bazar.

Edith—"She sings like a canary." Bertha—"Oh, no; a canary begins to sing when people commence to talk; people commence to talk when she begins to sing."—Boston Transcript.

"So old Blackstone, the lawyer, objected to your calling on his daughter last night, didn't he?" "Yes; but I fixed it all right. Asked for a stay, and it was granted."—Cincinnati Commercial.

She—"The Bicycle Gazette offers a prize for the best article on any subject connected with the wheel." He—"Why not send in an essay on 'How to Mend a Wheel with a Hairpin'?"—Puck.

"I have had to quit playing chess with Tompkins." "Why?" "Well, he gets mad if I get interested and beat him; and he gets mad if I get sleepy and let him beat me."—Chicago Record.

Attached by a Gray Eagle. While Peter Egelston was cutting railroad ties near Cascade, N. Y., he found the deserted nest of a gray eagle. While examining the nest and its contents he heard a loud noise, and suddenly the old eagle had struck him in the face with bill and claws, and, taking a circuit through the air, alighted on a tree about 200 yards distant, but in plain view of the nest.