

THE LOWER RANCH.

BY HATTIE HORNER LOUTHAN.

JASON GRANT sat in his light spring wagon, waiting to go with his wife and her friends to the Lower Ranch. She was really going, although she had vowed that she never would. But they were not ready yet, and he bowed his head on his hands and allowed his mind to wander over the almost twenty years of their married life.

No one would ever accuse Jason Grant of sentimentality; yet in this retrospection his thoughts dwelt with singular persistence upon a certain morning in a buying season long ago, when pretty Mary Moore had come to help his mother cook for the hay hands. He recalled the jealous pang with which he saw the young minister drive Mary to the door—for Jason Grant, hard-working, close-handed, grasping, was never given to sentiment. But twenty years made a difference, and he had been at that time what most of the other farmers boys were—except that every one thought him wrapped up in land-getting and money-making.

How well he remembered that day! He had made numerous trips, necessary and unnecessary, from hay field to house, just for a word with Mary Moore, or for a glimpse of her plump form and blooming face. The picture that rose oftenest before him was that of Mary, framed by the doorway, smiling upon him as he turned away with the hammer for which he had made one of those unnecessary trips. That smile had made his heart beat like a hammer of another sort—foolish folly!

Al, yow! he could see it all in detail—the yellow farmhouse with green shutters, the "eleant" for tools, the bench, the grindstone, the scythe, the garden rake, the wood-pile with the axe in the old stump, the well-sweep, beyond the stretch of orchard fence, the barn, swallow-eared, and the fast-multiplying stacks of emerald hay.

Jason, the only son, had inherited the Grant homestead; and Mary Moore had been wise, from the worldly point of view, in accepting his hand, grasping though it was, rather than that of the young minister, which had been offered her on that very morning's drive.

It was more the spirit of innate coquetry that prompted her to inform the reticent young farmer of the honor proffered her by the minister; though Jason Grant, during the sober second thought following the arduous insistence of his own proposal, came to the conclusion that the information had been vouchsafed him in order to bring him to the point.

His father had for some time had his business eye upon a rich bottom-land ranch, an entire section, six hundred and forty mostly arable, wooded, watered and gently sloping, and lying in the inevitable path of the much-staked-of branch road from east to west of the adjoining counties. When old Rauchman Grant came to his last illness, shortly before his son's wedding, he bequeathed to the respective bridegroom that the coveted ranch could be had upon a small payment, and that they would have to defer their intended wedding tour to the State capital. Instead, the night accompany him to the county-seat where he must go to sign up the transfer of the mortgage.

So Mrs. Jason Grant—how proud she was of the name—informing her friends and the minister—who had the grace to hide his disappointment and officiate at the wedding—and that for the present "my husband and me" would journey to the county-seat and stop at the best hotel till "my husband's" business was settled, that of buying six hundred and forty acres of the richest bottomland in the country; that later they would build a fine house on their new ranch, and move there; and that they would go on their wedding trip in the fall.

Needless to say, that wedding tour was never taken. So this was the first of a long series of credits to Mary Grant in her account with the Lower Ranch. That fall her health was not the best; by spring, baby Ruben came, and the multiplication of household cares tied her to the home ranch. But Mary was young and strong, and like many other young women, content her heart in her husband, home and baby, sang about her work, and laughed down any mention of a wedding tour. There were so many other things she wanted more; a baby carriage, some new clothes, and an Ingram carpet for the best room. But her mother-in-law said she had raised one son and six daughters without a baby carriage; that the wedding clothes could be made over, and that rag-carpet ought to be good enough for farmers' wives.

When Mary appealed to her husband, he said gravely that he feared she'd have to wait awhile, as the semi-annual payment on the Lower Ranch was about due, and he hardly knew how he was to meet it without sacrificing some hogs on the then low market. Then Mary, in a burst of generosity, said he must do nothing of the sort. He should have her butter and egg income, which was no little. So she continued to carry her heavy baby, and spent the evenings tearing and sewing carpet-rags.

That fall the old mother died, and the funeral expenses consumed much of the money saved toward the winter payment on the Lower Ranch. New winter clothes were not to be thought of; the butter and egg income consumed to flow into the Lower Ranch fund, and by spring Mary was asking a quarter at a time for bread and other necessities. Still she was proud of her husband as a land owner, and kept saying that she would go with him some day to see the Lower Ranch. But it was ten miles distant, a long ride for her and baby in the heavy wagon, and she was always so busy.

That season the crops were almost a failure through drought, and the hogs had to go, market or no market. In the spring another baby added to Mary's cares and she made Ruben's infant clothes do for the tiny girl. How could she ask for new things when barns must be repaired, hired hands paid, and that semi-annual payment always staring them in the face?

A hired girl had been the dream of her honeymoon days, and the necessity for house help grew as the passing years increased the work, and slipped babe after babe into her reluctant arms. But she was told, impatiently, "Fear, that she could see that three hired men couldn't put in and cultivate and gather all the crops of the homestead and Lower Ranch and the rented land; he must have more help. When once the Lower Ranch was paid for, she could have a hired girl and welcome."

It was the fifth year when the mortgage was due that a diplomatic trip had to be made to the county-seat. The last payment was overdue, with only part of the interest paid. But the agent was wise. He had learned upon inquiry that Jason Grant was honest, hard-working and ambitious; that he always paid, as he demanded to be paid—to the last penny. So there was no trouble about the extension of the mortgage; and the ranchman returned home radiant. His wife was not as sympathetic as he had expected. Every year of the extension of that mortgage meant another year without help in the house.

The second five years proved harder than the first five. Mary's superb health yielded more and more to the strain. The rosy face and arms grew brown and leathery from exposure at the wash-tub, in the garden and in the barnyard. She took less pride in herself and children now, went less frequently to church, though the minister still unmarried, called to protest. She grew more and more silent, unfriendly and self-contained, as she "trod her eternal circle" of cooking, dish-washing, sweeping and mending, washing, milking cows and reeking babies. During these years of meagre payments, she seldom expressed a want of a need—shoes or school books for the children, a bottle of medicine, or small donations for the parsonage—but she was confronted by the Lower Ranch and its next payment.

At length the mortgage was lifted, the last payment met; but the sign of pardonable relief was quenched by the news that the "fine house" could now be built for renting purposes. The projected Branch Road from county seat to county seat was enjoying its biennial boom, the Lower Ranch was on its surveyed route, and as all the adjoining ranches were making improvements, it was just pure business to keep up with the neighbors and be ready for what might happen.

The "fine house" was begun and finished, and Rauchman Grant urged his wife to go with him and see it. Mary smiled one of her grim little smiles, and said she was too busy and too tired; the children might go—Ruben, Mandy and Jason. She really never had been to the Lower Ranch, near as it was. The longing of earlier years to visit had changed, first into indifference, and by-and-by into a positive aversion, quite unaccountable to her husband.

The years that followed were full of prosperity for Jason Grant. He "bought more land to raise more corn to feed more hogs"—his eternal circle. His possessions increased—fields, barns, stock, family. He would have hired a girl for his wife, he told her one day about here; but country help was high-priced, and besides, Mandy and Mag were quite old enough to take responsibilities. To this Mary did not respond. She was growing to be almost as silent as he.

More years, more prosperity, more improvements on all the ranches and now of the state of affairs at the old ranch house, just a glimpse. Rauchman Grant sits inside the fly-screen of the west kitchen door. Mrs. Grant has "done" the supper dishes and strained the milk and set the yeast and picked the chickens and put the baby to sleep and heard Mag's and Willie's Sunday-school lessons, and now she draws her mending basket near the lamp, and approaches her husband on the matter of their share of the minister's salary. The Joneses give ten dollars besides most keeping the minister and his sister in meat. The Turners give ten dollars and never go to town without taking a bushel of turnips to the parsonage. And didn't he mind, they had set down four dollars and one-half last revival time, and only fifty cents of it was paid, besides the half bushel of potatoes and what butter she had spared?

Embodied by his silence, she goes on to remind him that Ruben needs a new pair of boots, since he and the team have been promised a week in Turner's timber. And Mandy ought to have a new calico dress if she takes the little ones to Sunday-school. And she, herself, would like to get another bottle of that iron tonic just to carry her over haying season; the other bottle had sort o' braced her up. She hated to go to Dr. Dean again, when he wasn't paid yet for tending on Willie and the baby.

Jason Grant is astonished. Doesn't he let her have half the butter and egg money, and oughtn't a woman to keep herself in little things with all that? Don't all the stores where she trades carry calico? And Ruben's boots will last another two months at least; he noticed them only last Sunday. As to the parson, doesn't he, Jason Grant, give each of the children

a penny every Sunday for the collection? She doesn't stop to calculate how much that amounts to in a year; women are nothing at figures anyhow. Well, he'll see the parson some of these days and see about that four dollars. Maybe he'll take some more potatoes. He settles back to his paper without a mention of the medicine. But his wife persists, though half frightened at her own temerity. Can she have just enough to get the tonic? She can't sell butter and eggs at the drug store. If she can only be carried over till cool weather. She isn't feeling right smart, and baby pulls her down and—

Her husband breaks in impatiently. How much does a bottle cost? Thirty-five cents. He counts out the exact change to her extended hand, muttering that he doesn't see how he is ever to improve the Lower Ranch if she keeps on. Nearly a whole dollar for a bottle of patent medicine that won't do any good either. Women are always sick or think they are. If they'd only take care of themselves! He is never sick. Always money! Does she think his breeches pockets are chock full all the time? A man can struggle along all his days and work like a slave and never get ahead. And to see his money, good straight silver, cash, mind you, worse than thrown away on such fool things as patent bitters! It is downright outrageous! Two new sickles broken and a new sulky rick to buy, and a stock-well to dig on the Lower Ranch, and won't that ranch be here when he is dead?

After several such interviews, Mary Grant's aversion to the Lower Ranch grew into a sort of mania. One day she refused to see it, but she began to tell her neighbors in a boastful way that she had never seen the big piece of land, bought when she was a bride, now more than eighteen years ago, and what was more, she never would go near it. It was the one subject upon which she was talkative. The habit grew upon her. She would tell the same story to every one, even to chance acquaintances. She went so far as to repeat her vow to the minister in the presence of her husband—a vow which the minister never forgot and which the husband never forgave.

But one day, after a week's absence at the county-seat, Jason Grant returned home too jubilant to remember petty wrongs. The Branch Road was to be built, in fact, was being built. The survey was completed, construction begun, and oh! what a fortune, a station was located right in the south-west corner of his section. A town, rejoicing in the name of Grantville, was to be laid out, and he would be the Town Company, with the price of lots to be fixed at his discretion. Now she must go to see their town on their ranch.

She heard him through with her little mirthless smile, but shook her head. She could not go; she was always too tired. And she clung to her resolution. The road was completed, the town laid out, lots sold and houses erected by the magic of all Western booms. Grantville flourished that summer and fall. There were the smell of new lumber and fresh paint and the sound of saw and hammer. A quarry was opened within two miles of the town. The new cemetery, with its two fresh graves, was laid out in the northeast corner of Jason Grant's ranch, and even there was a boom in lots.

But the Town Company's wife never saw the town. She kept her vow with the dogged persistence of her class, though the town was their nearest market. She remained at home altogether on Sundays after the services were transferred from the country schoolhouse to the new church in town. And the neighbors whispered that Mary Grant wasn't the housekeeper she used to be. She hadn't entered butter nor preserves nor patchwork quilts at the county fair for three years. Her marigolds and hollyhocks died from want of attention, and Mandy took the entire care of the last baby. Even the minister's sister had to acknowledge that Mrs. Grant "didn't seem to take any interest."

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Presently the minister came out of the house, and spoke a word to his sister who had charge of the children. Then he came to the side of the spring wagon and touched the arm of the dreaming man. If the minister had been a woman, he might have said something bitter, since he had never forgotten Mary's vow. As it was, he climbed to the wagon-seat in silence, took the reins from Jason Grant's hand and gave the sign for the procession to start.—Waverley Magazine.

An Authority on Napoleon. Frederick Masson, who has just been elected a member of the French Academy, is famed as one of the greatest living authorities on Napoleon. He represents in its most acute phase the French Napoleonic cult. His collection of Napoleonic relics is second to none except that of Prince Roland Bonaparte. He has spent a lifetime in combing the minutest details of Napoleon's public and particularly private life. But M. Masson is more than a mere antiquarian and commentator upon unpublished documents. He has a magic touch which gives life to the personages whom he discusses, and it is said that his election to the Academy represents a most important literary acquisition to that august body.

Underground Station in Paris. An extraordinary piece of engineering is begun by the municipality of Paris, which will keep the Place de l'Opera closed for nearly a year, and when it is reopened it will have beneath it an underground metropolitan railway station of three floors, where the several lines will intersect on the different levels. Metallic flooring will separate the three lines, and will support the roadway. The lowest line is twenty-one meters deep, but as water is reached at a depth of ten meters a large part of the work will be done by means of compressed air compartments, measuring eight by twenty-five meters.—Springfield Republican.

FOR WOMAN'S BENEFIT

EXERCISING FOR BEAUTY.

Some Hints For Women Who Desire Muscular Development.

The following exercise is recommended for filling out the chest and throat; Take the usual erect position with chest out high and fine, heels together, and hips back. Bring the arms directly forward with the hands lightly clenched and palms upmost; then draw the arms back as if you were pulling at reins, keeping the arms directly at the sides and sending them back as far as ever you can. All this time the chest must be kept forward. Never allow it to relax. With every pull at the make-believe reins take a deep inhalation, exhaling when the elbows are far back, and take a rest of four or five seconds. This exercise means muscular development. It should be started slowly, and increased gradually. First day repeat only five times; in a week increase to ten. As you get stronger, you can make it fifteen.

Hollows at the base of the neck is an affliction with which many women suffer. A tiny little scoop is considered pretty, much prettier indeed than a neck that is layers upon layers of fat. However, for an actual hollow in the neck this exercise will be found beneficial.

Heels together, hips back, chest out. Close the teeth tight together, turn the head so you will look straight over the right shoulder, then, with the fingers anointed with skin food, gently massage the left side of the neck, and what was more, she never would go near it. It was the one subject upon which she was talkative. The habit grew upon her. She would tell the same story to every one, even to chance acquaintances. She went so far as to repeat her vow to the minister in the presence of her husband—a vow which the minister never forgot and which the husband never forgave.

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THE COMMONPLACE GIRL

"The commonplace girl—I mean the girl who has nothing noticeably brilliant in her—is so apt to underestimate her worth. You know that from time to time she has come to you for comfort because she declared she was a social failure and so ordinary and commonplace.

"Why, it is just these dear, bright, little commonplace girls that make up the greater part of the world; it is the commonplace men and women who attend to the small but necessary matters that go to make up the great sum total of our lives.

"The geniuses are too busy to pay attention to these small affairs; and, besides, they are very rare. Men are always struck by the sweet simplicity and absence of vanity in the commonplace girl, and, as a general rule, she is the girl who captivates their hearts."—Brooklyn Eagle.

Appropriate Dress. One of the great drawbacks to a woman's feeling comfortable in general society is found in her dress. For a man the path is straight. His evening dress is practically the same for all occasions. It is only when he wanders from the conventional and indulges in such enormities as a four-in-hand with a dress suit that he makes fatal blunders.

With a woman the case is different. She does not always know how she ought to dress. If she goes to a dinner and wears the only high-necked gown in the room she is as uncomfortable as she would be if she went to an evening party in a low-necked frock and found every other woman there dressed to the chin. Because of this, it is safer for her to find out from some one who knows the ways of the house what will be the probable dress at a place where she herself is a stranger. Customs vary greatly in this regard. I know of homes where low-cut gowns are a regular feature, even at the family dinner table, and there are other houses where such dressing as this is never thought of except for the most important of evening parties or balls.—New York American.

The Healthy Baby. A healthy baby is a plump baby. A baby does not "take after" anybody in being thin. A normal baby is always plump.

Watch the temperature of the nursery. Begin with 72 or even 74 degrees and slowly drop to 70 degrees. Do not enervate a child by keeping it in a perspiration. This alone will produce cold.

Dash cold water over its chest after its bath, from the day it is born. This will strengthen the chest and close the pores in the skin, thereby preventing cold.

It is impossible to make a little Spartan of a baby that is not well fed. Any neglect in this respect will produce a puny, sickly child that will have to be watched constantly.

Guard the little stomach with great care and do not experiment with his diet, by changing his food or by letting him eat indigestible things.

Toughen the outside—but never try to harden the inside.—American Queen

Fad in Hair Ornaments. The latest decree in coiffure decoration is that the ornament shall not touch the hair. The owner of silvery, golden hair enhances the fluffy aureole effect of her coiffure with soft, lightly fashioned clouds of palest yellow tulle. Another often noted in social annals this time the possessor of "real red hair," tries bronze red tulle, with an occasional large black chenille dot, with fine effect. Yet a third, a woman whose hair has grown prematurely gray, wears a delightful "ornament" of twisted chiffon in three shades of gray, and a very dark head, the real black, that is "as glossy as a patent leather boot," finds black gauze ribbon, with a narrow black velvet edging, most successful when tied in a wide Alsatian bow across the head.

FRILLS FASHION

English pongee coats for driving and traveling are piped with a color and have removable capes.

The newest long chains have the stones run through instead of encased in the metal of the chain.

The flecked woolen goods to be worn for demi-season street suits will be trimmed with plain-colored cloth.

Coral is growing rare and costly; the pale pink beads are choice and are shown combined with diamonds.

Sash curtains of serim have a hemstitched hem and a border of scrolls done in cross-stitch with lustra thread.

NEW IDEAS IN TOILETTES

New York City.—Long coats make a feature of advance styles and will be much worn during the coming season. This one, designed by May Manton, is Trimmed With Blue Thistles.

Purple thistles beloved by donkeys are most familiar to wayfarers, but the requisitions of a fashionable milliner take a different view of natural history and botany. A blue straw hat is trimmed with bunches of blue thistles arranged on both sides of the middle and front. A scarf of white tulle is twisted loosely about the crown, and forms a sort of bed for the blue thistles to spring from. A green straw hat with a medium brim has an Algerian scarf as over-brim trimming. This is of changeable silk gauze, two shades of green, bluish and yellow green, one of white and one of blue. A bunch of white thistles is set at the left of front.

The New Pendant. The heart of cut jet is the latest addition to the ladies' chain. Pendants are never long in coming where ornamental chains are worn, so it is not thought out of the way to wear a jet heart at least two inches long swinging from your two-yard neck chain, whether it be of beads, black bogwood, which imitated the expensive teakwood bend chains, or in the twisted bead chains of cable effect. The heart is no prettier a finish than the tassel, but then it has the appearance of smartness, because of its comparative novelty. You see heart shaped pendants of dull-finished jet, but they are not nearly so handsome as the sparkling Whitby jet.

The Day of the Flounce. Flounces are growing in fussiness and importance day by day, especially where evening exigencies are concerned. A charming creation suitable to a late debutant, was arranged in delicate pink chiffon, its trained skirt decked with three froth flounces each one whereof was stitched with narrow ribbon and lace. The bebe bodice was finished by a pointed pelerine of the chiffon, dotted with diamante and hemmed lace, and bore elbow sleeves with handkerchief wing frills at their base.

well adapted to suiting material and cloth of lighter weight as well as to the silks and pongees of warmer weather, and to both the old wrap and the costume. As shown, however, it is made of black taffeta stitched with corticell silk, and is trimmed with handsome buttons and held by loops of silk cord. The long lines of the pleats are singularly becoming and the generous sleeves mean comfort as well as protection for those of the bodice.

The coat is made with blouse and skirt portions that are joined beneath the belt. Both portions are tucked to give a box pleated effect, and the blouse is fitted by means of shoulder and under-arm seams. The sleeves are tucked to be snug above the elbows, but form full puffs below and are finished with flaring cuffs at the wrists. At the neck is a flat collar.

The quantity of material required for the medium size is six and a half yards

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well adapted to suiting material and cloth of lighter weight as well as to the silks and pongees of warmer weather, and to both the old wrap and the costume. As shown, however, it is made of black taffeta stitched with corticell silk, and is trimmed with handsome buttons and held by loops of silk cord. The long lines of the pleats are singularly becoming and the generous sleeves mean comfort as well as protection for those of the bodice.

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