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The Search for a Shilling

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THE SEARCH FOR A SHILLING.

A TRUE STORY OF TERRITORIAL DAYS IN IOWA.

BY ALLIE M. LETTS.

One bright November morning in 1844, a family group stood at the door of a little log cabin in southern Iowa, bidding good-bye to the eldest son and brother.

He was a big, strong fellow, larger than his father, but a glance at his face showed you that he was only a boy, not more than eighteen years of age, and his lips quivered a little as he tried to say "good-bye" bravely.

"My son," said the father, "you are young to go out alone in the world to earn your own living, even for a short time, and you know it is not what I had planned. In fact, all our plans have failed, or you would be starting to school now instead of going out in search of work."

The boy answered cheerfully, "I know, father, but it is all right, or will be as soon as I get work; as I have partly learned the carpenter's trade, I will get work with some carpenter, and as soon as I can earn enough to buy clothes and books, I will start to school, probably in Burlington. I will go every day I can till spring, and when you want to go back to our own farm I will go with you, if you need me."

"No doubt it is the best thing you can do," said the father, "but I am sorry. I wanted you to have a good education; it is the only thing you cannot possibly lose. It is not like riches, that sometimes take wings and fly away. You are starting empty handed, too, but many great and good men have done the same. Nothing can harm you if you do right. Be industrious; shun evil companions; be a good, honest, true man, and all will be well. Farewell," and the tenderness of his heart spoke forth in the Quaker "farewell" learned from his boyhood's companions.

The mother had said her parting words the night before and only added, "You will write soon, my son." She did not say

"every day or week," as mothers do now-a-days, for there was only a weekly mail, and the postage was a shilling on each letter, to be paid at the end of the route by the receiver. In that new country, in those hard times, letters were either luxuries or necessities, not every-day affairs, by any means.

"Yes, I will write, but you may be sure I am all right if you do not hear."

"But you will write if you are sick? Promise me, my son, you will let me know if anything goes wrong with you," anxiously urged the mother, never dreaming that her request would be the cause of anxious hours, and a sleepless night, but the boy gave the desired promise, kissed her, and the little children, and went on his way.

James Maine, the father, and his wife were natives of New York State, and removed to Pennsylvania with their parents while young, married, and remained there till they had a large family, mostly sons. The fabulous reports of the rich prairie lands of the Great West attracted Mr. Maine's attention, and he so longed for better opportunities for a start in life for his sons than had fallen to his own lot, that he made a prospecting tour through several western States. He entered land in Iowa and removed thither in 1842, taking with him lumber to build a frame house on his new farm.

Several other families, relatives and neighbors, went with, or followed them, and a little colony settled on the prairie, with high hopes and bright anticipations.

Hastily constructed log houses and board shanties did duty for shelter the first summer, while they were breaking the prairie sod and putting in their crops; but with the summer's heat came sickness. Ague and malarial fevers were prevalent, and often there was scarcely one well person in the little colony.

First settlers in the western States had to contend with a great deal of sickness from several causes: First, the change of climate was great from the hills and woods of the East to the sun-scorched, wind-swept prairies of the West. Secondly, they always settled in the edge of the timber and built their

houses near a spring or creek, probably in memory of the cool springs and pebbly brooks of their native states.

But the little streams and springs were near marshy ground, and the decaying vegetation there, as well as that caused by the turning of the prairie sod by the breaking plow, caused sickness, and often death. More than once that first season the prairie sod was broken for a grave! Mr. and Mrs. Maine laid their eldest child, a beautiful daughter of eighteen bright summers, beneath the prairie flowers, that first autumn.

The little colony was broken up. Some returned to their eastern homes, but Mr. Maine struggled along the second year amidst all sorts of discouragements, finished building his frame house, moved in, and raised a crop, but the long-continued sickness of the mother and the little ones forced them to leave their new home and go into an older-settled part of the State, rent a small farm, and await the further development of the country, while they were recovering their health.

So, here we find them, thirty-five miles from their own home, in a little log cabin not far from Mt. Pleasant, mother and children rosy with health again, the crops gathered, and the eldest son, Lafayette, leaving home in search of work, and an education.

One afternoon, a few weeks later, the mother and younger children were alone in the cabin, the father having returned to the farm on business. The boys were in school, and as the short afternoon began to wane the mother laid aside her work, and set about preparing the evening meal for her little flock.

Suddenly a clatter, and chattering outside, announced that the boys were home from school, and unusually excited about something. The mother met the noisy trio at the door with a smile. Judson, the eldest, a dark-eyed, manly boy of fourteen, said hurriedly:

"Mother, there is a letter in the postoffice for father." "And," piped in Franklin, "the postmaster wouldn't let us have it because we didn't have any shilling to give him. He called it a 'bit,'" added the little fellow, contemptuously.

"Give us the bit, mother," urged Emmett, the youngest of the three, proud of the new western word, "and let us go right

back for it," for even the children knew how the homesick parents longed to hear from the old home and old friends.

"Softly, boys," said the mother, still smiling; "don't all talk at once; I am afraid it is too late to go back to-night, and," after a moment's pause, "I don't know as there is a shilling in the house; I'll see," and she dusted the corn meal from her hands, and left the mush to boil, while she went in search of the shilling.

She looked carefully through an old leather wallet of the father, felt of an old-fashioned bead purse, searched carefully though the many compartments of the "India box," where precious things were kept, only finding a few tarnished pennies that had belonged to "the little boy that died"; sighed a little, put them back, and went on with the preparations for the simple supper, saying, "Your father has taken the little money he had with him; we must wait for the letter till he comes home."

A little later, Judson came in with his pail of new milk, and while he was straining it, said, "I asked the postmaster to give me the letter, and I would bring the money in the morning, but he said he couldn't do it, but he said, 'Tell your folks the letter is from Burlington.'"

Then indeed did the mother's face flush, and her eyes-look troubled, as she exclaimed: "Burlington! Why! Judson, it is from your brother, Lafayette. I did not expect a letter so soon again. I do wish that postmaster had sent it out. Perhaps your brother is sick," and her mother's heart grew more and more anxious.

Judson, wise beyond his years, said, "Don't worry, mother. It is some good news likely; and if he is sick you couldn't go to him till father comes; he has the team, you know."

"Why! Yes, I could, Judson. I could borrow a side saddle and ride Dolly. I used to ride on horseback a good deal when I was young." "But the children, mother?" and he looked at the little sister and rosy four-year-old baby brother, and his face took on a puzzled look. Then the mother laid her hand fondly on his shoulder and said, "I could trust you with the children. Judson! you took good care of them more than a year ago, while I was sick. You would be just as faithful now

if need be," and the two pairs of eyes, one so fond and proud, the other so trustworthy, looked into each other for a moment, and it was settled.

"It is too late to do anything to-night, but in the morning we must find some way to get that letter," but there was little sleep for the anxious mother that night.

The family was astir early the next morning. The younger boys were sent to school, and though Judson tried to hasten his morning's work, his faithful hands found so much to do in his father's absence that it was not very early when he set out in search of his shilling.

Mrs. Maine sent him to Mr. Ingersoll, the wealthiest man in the neighborhood, to borrow the money until the father's return.

Mrs. Ingersoll met him at the door, and gave him a warm welcome, for he was a favorite of hers. She asked cordially after the family, but when he made his errand known, her face took on almost as much of a troubled look as his mother's had.

"I am awful sorry, Judson, but I declare I haven't a 'bit' in the house. I wish to goodness I had; you should have it this minute. I know Mr. Ingersoll hasn't, either, so there is no use to hunt for him. I don't know where in the land of the living you'd find a cent around here, either." Good woman! no wonder she was puzzled; they were *the* rich folks of the neighborhood, owned several hundred acres of land, horses, cattle, and grain in plenty, but not a cent in money.

What could be done? They could not send potatoes, or butter, or eggs to the postoffice, as they did to the store, and she looked pityingly at the boy, who was just starting home with a disappointed look on his face.

A "Hello!" from the gate called Mrs. Ingersoll to the door, and a man on horseback said, "Good morning! Mrs. Ingersoll, can you give me an early dinner? I have been riding since daylight, and my horse is tired, and I want to travel a good many miles yet, before night."

"Yes," she answered; "come right in. Judson, won't you take the horse around to the barn and water and feed him, and then come in again before you go home?"

This was not the first time Judson had done little chores for this good neighbor and he did not think strange of her request, but as he came back to the kitchen door Mrs. Ingersoll rushed out, caught him by the arm, and whispered eagerly, "Wait till this man pays for his dinner and then I will have the money for you, don't you see? I'll charge him two 'bits' for his dinner and horse feed," and the pleasure in her face leaped like a flash of light to his, and she flew back to the kitchen, and he went in and waited as patiently as possible.

How long that hour seemed to the boy while he waited! knowing his mother was wondering at his delay; and although Mrs. Ingersoll was not slow in preparing the meal, the stranger took his own time in despatching it; how very deliberate he was, and how much he talked while eating.

He told his hostess that he was a member of the Legislature, going to Iowa City—then the capital—to take his seat at the assembling of that honorable body, a day or two later.

It was with no little interest that the boy looked at the man. He wore "store clothes," and no doubt had a full purse and a very wise head.

When the honorable member from —— county began preparations for his departure, Judson ran to the barn for the horse, brought him around to the gate, and as the stranger had not made his appearance, he tied him to the post and went to the door to say, "The horse is ready," just in time to hear him make the following explanation:

"Mrs. Ingersoll, I am sorry—perhaps I ought to have told you before—but I was sure it would not make any difference with you, but I cannot pay my bill this morning, but I will be along this way as I return and stop with you again and pay both bills at once. In the meantime I am under obligations to you for your kind entertainment. Good morning," and he walked briskly to his horse, mounted, bowed and rode away just as cheerily as if he had not left disappointment and dismay in his wake.

"Well! I declare! If that ain't too bad, Judson!" said Mrs. Ingersoll. "Why! I was just as sure of that money, as if I'd a had it in my hand! But I couldn't say a word, could I? If

he didn't have the money he couldn't pay me, you know. Oh dear!" and the good woman, who did not think of her own profits for a moment, was much cast down for the boy's sake.

Judson's heart was heavy, but he spoke as cheerfully as possible to his kind friend, and started hurriedly homeward. The forenoon was gone and yet he had not found the much needed shilling, and it was a sad face that looked up into his mother's as she met him at the door.

"We'll have to wait till father comes home," he said after he had told his story. "If Mr. Ingersoll hasn't any money, it isn't likely any of the other neighbors have," and he paused disconsolately.

"No," said the mother, musingly; "but really I can't wait days for that letter. Is there nothing we can sell for money?"

"We have some corn, but none to spare, and they don't buy corn at the postoffice, and the stores pay for everything people have to sell in trade."

"The postmaster keeps a drug store, I believe," said the mother, and a little light began to dawn in her face, and she rose and went to a neat medicine chest, carefully filled by their doctor before they left their old home.

As she looked meditatively over the case her eye fell on some bottles in one compartment, with the red sealing wax yet unbroken. As she lifted them from the case her quick eye read the labels, "Wintergreen Essence," and she gave a little, glad gasping cry and exclaimed, "O Judson! Look! Here are a number of bottles of wintergreen essence that your father took with that lot of mixed goods, on a bad debt. The postmaster will take these, I know. Get ready quick and go," and she hastily packed the bottles into a little basket, helped him brush his hair and coat, for no hurry ever made her forget to help her little man to be neat and clean.

How fast Judson flew over the ground, how the postmaster willingly took his bottles and gave him his letter, and how quickly he ran home and placed the letter in his mother's hands, is needless to tell.

That dear mother's fingers trembled a little as she broke the seal, and the eager children around her knee watched her face

in breathless interest as she read, and when she laughed a rippling little laugh, and then half sobbed, and her eyes ran over with tears as she laughed again, they could only look on in wonder. And this is the letter she read, written in a big, sprawling, boyish hand, interspersed with many capitals:

“BURLINGTON, Iowa,———1844.

Dear Father & Mother:

I take my pen in hand to let you know I am well and hope you are enjoying the same great Blessing, I sent you word that I got here all Right and will now tell you how I am getting along.

I could not get any Carpenter work, It was too late in the Season; I tried two days, then I bought an Ax, I gave one Dollar and Fifty cents for it, and it was all the money I had; Then I went to a woodpile and got a Hickory stick and made an Ax helve and was ready for work. I got a Job right away. Got a job of cutting 15 cords of 4 foot wood for a pair of Boots, good heavy ones. I am cutting for a suit of Clothes now. As soon as I get them and some Books I will start to school, I can pay for my Board chopping nights, and mornings, and Saturdays. Tell Jud and Doc to be good Boys and little Sister not to forget me, and when I come Home I will bring her and the little boys some Candy. Don't worry about me mother, I am doing First Rate.

Your Obedient Son,

LAFAYETTE E. MAINE.”

The mother read this letter to the children, then gave Judson a warm dinner and sent him back to school, re-read the letter and then went about her work with a glad smile on her lips the rest of the day.

Strange! that she should wear a smiling face here in this strange new land, almost a thousand miles from the old home and friends, driven from the new home by sickness, living in a log cabin with only one room and a loft, on rented land, her eldest son out in the world earning his own living by cutting fifteen cords of wood for a pair of coarse boots, not a shilling in her purse, and money so scarce that the richest man in the

neighborhood, and even the law-makers of the land, were no better off, and yet her heart sang for joy.

For right down in her warm mother's heart she knew that this discipline, these trials and hard struggles, were making a man of her boy; that poverty could not harm him, but would train him to habits of economy and industry; that few bad habits grow without money as a fertilizer; that he,

"By poverty kept to his daily task,
And by his daily task to virtue kept,"

would grow up an honorable, upright, useful man; and so with health and hope and faith in the dear Father over all, caring for His own, why should she not smile and be glad?

LIFE AND DEATH OF THEODORE GUELICH.

BY B. F. GUE.

THEODORE GUELICH, who died at Burlington, on the 27th of January, 1893, has been for more than thirty years one of the notable men of Iowa. He was born in Schleswig-Holstein, January 29th, 1829. He began the usual thorough course of education common to the ambitious German youth, and was preparing for entrance into one of the best Universities when the revolution of 1848 began. He espoused the cause of the revolutionists with all the ardor of a freedom-loving young student, entered the army and served with great gallantry for three years. He was several times wounded in the heroic struggles which his countrymen were making for freedom from their oppressors, and when defeat finally came, he with many others sought a new home in the American Republic, beneath the protection of the stars and stripes that Baron Steuben and other gallant German patriots had fought under in the dark days of the Revolution of 1776.

He settled at Davenport in 1851, and soon after established *Der Democrat*, a weekly journal which took high rank among the German papers of the West. While publishing his paper, Mr. Guelich found time to study the English language and law, and in 1856 he had made such progress that he was

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