

MEMORIAL DAY

OUR HEROES.



JERUD'S RHEUMATIZ.

“WICH-TA?” was the name that the brakeman screamed, as our train drew slowly to a halt, unappointed freight house at the terminus of the railroad. One of the passengers, three in number, to this wilderness station.

We took up our bags and walked out on the platform. There was no waiting-room, nor was there even a solitary backman to whom we might appeal for transportation. If backmen there had been, we could not have given him orders where to drive us.

The sun was setting. There was no shadow of a hill or tree. Slowly the prairie changed from green and brown to pale yellow, and there were no outlines of irregularity to mark its border circumference.

A few blanketed Indians stood about, watching their “supplies” with evident anxiety. An occasional oath, borrowed from the vocabulary of the white man about them, was all the English which they uttered or knew.

No other building was in sight, save a few red structures just across what is now, it is supposed, the main street in the city of Wichita, Kansas. In the doorway of this red structure, above which was a sign and placards, “Tavern,” a woman suddenly appeared.

She beckoned to us in the twilight, and accented her motions by a shrill cry of “Come over here.” We obeyed, and entered the tavern. The supper was soon prepared at a long board table, where we sat with the cowboys and the freight hands. We had our bread, white bread, canned vegetables and fresh fruit, and a fried. Black coffee was served in cracked cups without saucers.

We were government employees, on our way to Fort Sill. At Wichita, the railroad gave place to the stage line. Before daylight we were aroused for breakfast, which was served in a room of supper, made into a bed. We carried our blankets, which were wrapped our greenbacks in a piece of buckskin and deposited them in a long, narrow, knitted stocking which hung from her apron band.

The stage-coach was drawn up to the door by four horses, as a pair of mules and a stage-coach of the true western style, was large and strong, with three seats beside the driver. The canopy, sides and cushioned seats were of genuine brown leather.

We started off at high speed. The curly spring buffalo-foam seemed as soft as wool. The ground was unbroken save by the indentations of the straggled dogs, whose towns were a continuous city on each side of the trail for many miles. The saucy inhabitants were out early, probably in the interests of farming, and straight up and talking to one another, darning out of sight down their doorway, and peeping out again as suddenly.

The morning sun appeared, without shadow, as he had set the night before. There were now four high, square-planted with small peach-trees.

From the doors of doghouses, or tiny frame houses, half-dressed children peeped curiously forth. One came through creek and river, up slippery banks and over the plains.

“If this is wagon,” he said, “then good-by to steep cars for the prairie.” But our pleasant way, like many another, was subject to change. At the end of fifteen miles we halted at a relay, our horses were foaming, and we were replaced by fresh ones. We alighted at a stage-line station, and were told to “take out our luggage.”

In six minutes we were ready to start again. The stage-coach, which had dashed out of Wichita with its plume of comfort and rapidity, gave place to a dirty, canvas-covered, two-mule coach without cushions.

The seats were high, and without backrests, as the leather harnesses against the slender spacers, which held up the canopy.

Our new steeds were slow and stubborn. By nine o’clock we had a raw, hard instrument, whose like I have never seen, they were induced to plod along. They were thin in flesh, and lame.

Now and then we saw early wild crows and canterbury-bell, and the soft trailing sensitive plant, with its white blades spattered with golden dust. There were no more houses—only level, unbroken plain, with an occasional stubble-strewn stream, on whose margin grew a sparse fringe of cottonwood-trees.

Gray wolf trotted out of the timber and stared at us. Deer in the distance bounded away, while one solitary

signed when the boys came home, and pretty near a minor crisis.

“Jerud wasn’t given to work very much, on account of his rheumatism; I never said, that up against him. We come out here for the best of the company five year ago, and done pretty well. Elmathan and I done most of it.”

“It always seemed to weigh on Jerud that he hadn’t been a soldier. He would sit out on a bench at the door for hours, watching Elmathan at his diligent corn, and having that far-away look in his eyes you hear talked about. And one time he died. We’ve decorated his grave ever since, just as if he’d been a soldier.”

“Do you have many flowers around here?” we asked.

“Oh, no, there ain’t no flowers, so to speak. I don’t care much for them; it’s the wild things, and I ain’t never planted any poppy seeds and hollyhocks and geraniums and pinks. I’ve got something in that trunk over there that’s better than flowers to decorate graves with.”

We looked at the trunk. It was covered with calfskin, tanned with the hair on, and studded with brass nails. We wanted to know what was in it, which was “better than flowers to decorate graves with,” but we restrained our curiosity, for Jerud had said that it was better than flowers to decorate graves with.

That night we went to sleep to dream of grassy mounds and shining cream headlines.

We awoke in the morning when the relay mule was found; but the driver himself had then disappeared, and our clothing was piled up in the trunk. The breakfast dishes were washed the old woman dressed herself in her old-fashioned best clothes, put on a bonnet which had been “left for the war,” and sat down by the ancient trunk. We did not talk, for she seemed as if she had something to say.

She opened the receptacle which held something better than flowers to decorate graves with, and drew carefully forth a neatly-folded, press-worked quilt. Then she walked slowly out to the grave.

After standing for a few minutes talking with Elmathan, the two took the quilt by each of its four corners and spread it evenly above the grave.

It was late in the afternoon, the sun was setting, and the two men were sitting on a bench at the door of the house. The woman was standing by the grave, and she was looking at it with a sad expression.

“What you have done here?” we asked.

“I’ve done what I could,” she said. “I’ve done what I could.”

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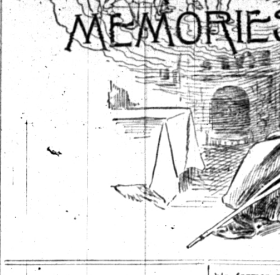
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MATT BARLOW'S

A STORY OF DEEDS.

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ACTORS IN PRIVATE LIFE.

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