

## THE WELL.

A story of the Gold Findings in Nebraska.

KATHARINE MELICK.

For The Courier

Eliza sat looking through the triangle of clean glass in her window-pane, at the holly-hock stems. Peter had just mended the window-jane, and she, herself, had rubbed the pane of glass clean. When her wrists were stronger, she would wash the whole window. It was very dingy. But her mother would not have time. It would be all that she could do to drag her rheumatic limbs from the kitchen to the bed-room with Eliza's bowl of broth or milk.

So Eliza sat thinking how nice it was to have a clean corner to look through. Out-doors was so much pleasanter than the green and red quilt, the colorless rag-carpet, and the rusty little stove, whose pipe was always threatening to fall over on the bed.

To be sure, outside there were only the dead holly-hock stalks, falling down, and the gate, with its string of stones for a weight to hold it shut, and a glimpse of country road, fringed with stunted box-elders. But the gate was something to look at. Peter had spent half a day tying the stones, with curious knots and hitches into the rope. And the gate swung quite to, now. It had been an eye-sore to Eliza all winter, hanging crookedly open. She could hear it slam shut in the wind, on stormy nights.

But now she watched it complacently, and finally closed her eyes. She opened them suddenly, on hearing the stones rattle and slam against the gate-post. It was Peter—she knew the muffled thump of his bare toes—as someone gave the door a quick kick, to see if it were open, and then turned the knob, violently.

"Lizy!" he shouted, "Sam Buffum's found gold in his well, an' there's a comp'ny started to git it out, an' they're all goin' to git rich! Now, what'd I tell you?"

"Shut the door, Peter, an' clean the mud off'n your feet, an' don't yell so, in my ears. What good'll Sam Buffum's gold do us? Fix my fire, can't you. It's clean out."

"Ain't got time. It'd do us a pile o' good, 'f I had five dollars to join the comp'ny. I told you there'd be some, somewheres. Dave says the ground's full of it in streaks all over."

"Why don't you dig out our old well, then?" suggested Eliza scornfully.

Peter carefully carved a brown triangle from his "Star plug," and walked slowly down the steps. Eliza watched him march deliberately to the clump of sunflower stalks, where a pile of stones marked the place of the old well. He sat down on one of the largest, and began to throw the others off, shying them carelessly at the sunflower stalks.

She hitched her chair along to the stove, and poked her fire with stiff fingers. Then she sat and watched him.

What if—to be sure it was nonsense. They never could have such luck. She had used to fancy such things, long ago, when she scoured the old kitchen floor on her hands and knees. She shut her eyes and felt the thick, wet cloth in her hands, and the ache in her back. She tossed her head to throw back the locks of hair from her eyes. And then she was standing over the tub, with the steamy vapor in her face, and her small fingers wrinkly and red—not white and misshapen—and the ache in her back was harder. If she could feel it now! Anything but this horrible numbness, that froze her knees, and stiffened her wrists.

She opened her eyes and watched Peter stooping to tear up the boards

that made a crazy platform over the well. Then he went off for a rope which he fastened to the planking, he had left on one side. How carelessly he swung down, like the picture of a great strong orang-outang she had seen. If Peter would only care for work! She shut her eyes again, when he was out of sight. She did not want to see the corners of the room, heaped with tattered garments, and shoes, and old newspapers. But she knew they were there, and in the kitchen there were greasy islands around the old brown stove, and the window panes by the table. If she could only work again! If she had wrists like Peter's!

She lay back and let herself think how it would be if Peter should really find something in the old well. What bright specks there used to be in the clay, when she played there, all day in the sun! How long it seemed! Ten—twelve years. She tossed her hair back nervously, and held her twisted hands in the sunshine, that made the little patch of glass glitter.

It was better for Peter to be there, where she could see him, than lounging around with Black Dave. She watched his old felt hat rise out of the black hole among the sun-flower stalks. Locks of hair stuck through the crown, and clay and bits of leaves clung to them. She wondered how he would look in a new store suit of clothes.

"It'd make a man of him," she muttered. "He'd git some pride inter him, an' try to fix things up, an' git in the corn fore everybody else 'd begun to cultivate."

When Peter came into the kitchen at night, she pushed her door ajar, and listened.

"'T looks jis' like the dirt in Buffum's well," he was saying, between vast bites of joanny-cake. "All kinder clay, with yeller streaks in it. I believe mebbly it's gold. I'm go'n'ter take some over there in the morning 'n, sec."

"They say there's lots of it in the ground, all over, only you can't hardly see it, it's so thin. Now, if it'd a-ben put all in a lump somewheres—"

Peter's mother stopped helplessly.

"I wish it'd a-ben put in a lump in our well," said Peter.

"We don't know what's in store for us," Eliza heard her mother talk painfully over the floor—she heard the oven door open, and there was the sliding sound of a pan, lifted out. She could smell the "johnny cake," hot and steamy, with a strong odor of soda.

"Jonas allays said he was sure we'd see better days."

"'F've found gold in that ere well—" something—hot "johnny cake" presumably—here muffled Peter's words for a moment—"W'y, we'd build a new barn, an' put up a win' mill, an' I'd buy a wite shirt an' go to meetin'."

"But you wouldn't get proud, Peter, an' look down on them as wasn't so fortunate."

Peter shoved back his chair, noisily. "Did you water old Darb?" called Eliza from her room.

"I don't believe he did," she said to her mother, who was coming in with the yellow bowl of milk. "Won't you tell him to?"

Eliza's mother put up one thin hand to catch the loose coil of black hair that was falling down her back.

"I don't like to be allays lecturin' of the boy—never givin' him a minute's peace."

There was a splash in the bowl that Eliza was taking, with painful slowness, into her hands. She pushed it back, quickly, and began to cry.

"Well, now, Lizy, that ain't nothin'. I kin git it out in a minute. It's on'y one o' them little bone hair-pins. I'll

git you some more, 'f yer so perticler."

Eliza shook back her hair, and drew one misshapen wrist over her eyes.

"I don't want none."

Eliza lay back on the green and red quilt, but it was dark. She could not see the ugly squares. Her mother was talking, in the kitchen, and some of the words came through the closed door.

"I don't know why I should a-ben so afflicted," she was saying in fretful tones. "One o' my children with no ambition, an' the other with so much she's as good as killed herself. You'd orto look after things, an' kind o' take an interest. Lizy's allays worryin'."

"'F she'd let a feller alone"—there was an emphatic "spat" in the empty wood-box—"but she's naggin', the minute a feller comes in sight."

There was a sympathetic silence, and presently some words that sounded indistinctly.

"Darb's all she's got now," came in the mother's dragging voice—"Darb an' the cart."

"He'll fall down, some day, 'n break the cart, 'n then she'll wish I'd a turned 'im out on the road, 'stead o' waterin' 'im, wen he can't drink more'n a cupful."

There was a longer silence. "Guess I'll have to git some sleep," said Peter's voice, presently. "'F that there gold pans out, I'll git some celleroid rings to put on Darb's harness."

Eliza's fingers loosened their clutch of the frayed quilt. She remembered now strong Peter's arms were, when he lifted her into the shaky cart.

"He ain't had no chance," she said to herself. "I wish he would find something in the well. Buffum's did."

She woke, late in the night, and listened. It was a horrible sound, so like a human shriek, and yet not human—the terrible death-voice that breaks from dumb creatures. Eliza sat up in her bed, as she had not lifted herself for a year. She waited, with the sweat starting from her hands and forehead. There was not another sound. But surely she had heard it. It came—she strained her eyes through the dark toward the window, and the old well.

Old Darb! Poor old Darby! Peter had not watered him. He had broken down the crazy stall again. He was in the well.

She cried with all her strength, "Peter!" and "Peter!" again and again.

Her mother answered, from her tiny room on the other side of the kitchen. "You can't make him hear. It's no use, Lizy. What'd you want?"

"Darb's in the well!"

Eliza's mother groaned. "I knowed it! I heard him—but we can't make Peter hear. If that ain't waked 'im, nothin' can."

Eliza wrung her hands, in the dark. "He sleeps like a barn-door. Nothin' 'll wake 'im. An' I can't climb them stairs, Lizy."

Eliza lay back on her pillow. There would be no rides, now, in the shaky cart. Peter would not have to lift her in, anymore. She would never see Darb arch his poor old neck, and trot stiffly down the slope between the box-elders, jolting the cart with stiff little jerks. There would be nothing, now, but the green and red quilt, and the rag carpet, and the corners piled with rubbish that lay from one day to another. Only out in the pasture, in the rosin-weeds at the foot of the hill, there would be—poor old Darby!

How he had held up his head, the day the new cart was brought home. And how proud Peter had been to take the lines from her for a little while. He was only seven, then. And now he was sleeping up there, and Darby was

[First Pub. Dec. 15--4]

## Notice to Creditors.—E 1496.

In the county court of Lancaster county, Nebraska, in re estate of Hobart Van Andel, deceased.

To the creditors of said estate: Take notice that the time limited for the presentation of claims against said estate is July 15, 1901 and for the payment of debts is January 15, 1902. That I will sit at the county court room in said county on April 15, 1901, and on July 15, 1901, to receive, examine, allow and adjust all claims duly filed; notice whereof is ordered published four successive weeks in The Courier of Lincoln, Nebraska.

Witness my hand and seal of said court this 11th day of December, 1900.

(SEAL.) FRANK R. WATERS,  
County Judge.

By WALTER A. LEESE, Clerk County Court.

First Pub. Dec. 15--3

## Notice of Petition for Letters.

In the county court of Lancaster county, Nebraska E 1507.

In re estate of Gena Leonard, deceased. The State of Nebraska, to the children, heirs at law and next of kin of said deceased and to any other persons interested in said matter.

Take notice that a petition signed by H. D. Leonard praying said court to grant letters of administration of said estate to H. D. Leonard has been filed in said court; that the same is set for hearing on the 7th day of January, 1901, at ten o'clock A. M., and that if you do not then appear and contest, said court may grant administration of the said estate to H. D. Leonard.

Notice of this proceeding has been ordered published three weeks successively in The Courier of Lincoln, Nebraska, prior to said hearing.

Witness my hand and the seal of said court this 11th day of December, A. D. 1900.

(SEAL.) FRANK R. WATERS,  
County Judge.

By WALTER A. LEESE,  
Clerk County Court.

First Pub. Dec. 8--4.

## Notice to Creditors.—E 1502.

County court of Lancaster county, Nebraska, in the Estate of Christian Heidecker, deceased.

The creditors of said estate will take notice that the time limited for presentation of claims against said estate is July 1, 1901, and for the payment of debts is January 1, 1902; That I will sit at the county court room in said county, on April 1, 1901, and on July 1, 1901, to receive, examine, adjust and allow all claims duly filed.

Notice whereof is ordered published four consecutive weeks in The Courier of Lincoln, Nebraska.

Witness my hand and seal of said court this 5th day of December, 1900.

(SEAL.) FRANK R. WATERS,  
County Judge.

By WALTER A. LEESE, Clerk County Court.



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