

and her protector from the hard work and the blows she had become so used to receive as her share. She "learned" him the names of many things they saw and after she ceased to be at all afraid, his funny pronunciation taught her the trick of laughing, which somehow she had never learned before. That day of the parade Wahl swore that Hans should not leave his work nor take the team, for any such foolishness. "I haf tell Maggie," was his answer, and the two walked the six miles to town for Maggie's first holiday. The truth was, Wahl was afraid of Hans, for he was such a terribly strong fellow, stronger even than Sam, who had given him that terrible blow a year back. Hans was good help and took low wages without any kicking. So Wahl only swore and let Hans do as he pleased.

When Maggie was taken sick Hans was much concerned. His first question in the morning was "Maggie?" and often during the day he came to the house only to ask again. When he found that they were paying small heed to her at night, he got them to let him watch beside her many nights. When the doctor came Hans waited to hear how the child was, while Wahl swore because of the bills to pay, and Mrs. Wahl, wiping her eyes with the corner of her greasy apron, complained of the bother Maggie was making.

One evening the doctor told Hans—not the father or mother,—that Maggie could hardly live through the night. Somehow Hans understood. That night he watched beside her, and when she awoke and spoke his name he took her wee little hand with a touch as gentle as a mother's. In the morning, when she lay all quiet and still after the restless fever, he went out to the field to work,—hard, hard,—to stop that tight feeling in his throat, and rest his eyes on the great prairies which he had come to love as they must always be loved, dumbly. How long he remembered that beautiful spring day!

When he came in at noon time, Wahl was just driving into the yard with the long black box, and Hans went to carry it in.

III

Three days later the crowd of loafers, larger than usual, gathered around the station to see the train go through. They were not pitching quoits or "rasslin'" but stood in a group talking quietly.

"The clerk said he wouldn't bury a dog in that there coffin," Pete Haskins was saying. "Wahl wouldn't even let him fix the broken glass."

"By gosh!" said Bill Crowins, "if I'd been in Hans' place I'd smashed the hull thing to pieces, too."

"I'd ruther seen him hammer Wahl that way," Bob Aker's asserted.

"They say he never got his senses,—if he ever had any." Pete again remarked. "I never wanted to see a man killed, but I declare I'd give my northeast eighty, jest to have seen old Wahl git his rich deserts."

So they talked on, of the particulars of "The Bloomfield Tragedy" as the city papers had said.

The sight of that dusty old coffin, with the broken glass and tarnished trimmings had been too much for Hans. He had taken it from the wagon and looked at it for a moment. Then he grasped it with one hand, hurled it against the side of the barn, and turned to meet Wahl, who was coming at him with a club. Hans had never fought before in his life, but now—

Then when it was over, and he had helped the boys carry their father into the house, he had gone soberly but as fast as the ponies could travel to get the doctor, and a good coffin for Maggie. Her funeral was the largest ever seen in Bloomfield. Her father lay in the next room, unconscious, and the next morning, he too, was dead. That was the story they talked over and over in Bloomfield.

"Make way there, boys, I've got my

man." And the burly sheriff came through the crowd, with his hand on Hans' arm.

But the boys only crowded nearer, trying to show Hans in some way that they were on his side. He only said "Good bye."

"I suppose," said Pete Haskins, after the train was out of sight, "I suppose we fellows ought to help him out of this somehow."

IV

"Fifteen years at hard labor,"—that was the sentence of the court. I wonder what Hans thinks of, as he sits in his cell after the day of "hard labor." Does he think of the great wide, free prairie, of the sunshine, gleaming so softly on the hills, of that beautiful spring day, and Maggie? I wonder if he thinks of anything else.

FLORA BULLOCK.

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