BEBEE;

or,

TWO LITTLE WOODEN SHOES.

By "OUIDA."

CHAPTER I.

Bebee sprang out of bed at daybreak. She was 16.

It seemed to be a very wonderful thing to be so much as that—16—a woman quite.

A cock was crowing under her lattice. He said how old you are!—how old you are!—every time he sounded his clarion.

She opened the lattice and wished him good day, with a laugh. It was so pleasant to be woke by him and to think that no one in all the world could ever call one a child any more.

There was a kid bleating in the shed. There was a thrush singing in the dusk of the sycamore leaves. There was a calf lowing to its mother away there beyond the fence. There were dreamy muffled bells ringing in the distance from many steeples and belfries where the city was; they all said one thing: "How good it is to be so old as that—how good, how very good!"

Bebee was very pretty.

No one in all Brabant ever denied that. To look at her it seemed as if she had so lived among the flowers that she had grown like them, and only looked a bigger blossom—that was all.

She wore two little wooden shoes and a little cotton cap, and a gray kirtle—linen in summer, serge in winter; but the little feet in the shoes were like rose leaves, and the cap was as white as a lily, and the gray kirtle was like the bark of the bough that the apple blossom parts, and peeps out of, to blush in the sun.

The flowers had been the only godmothers she had ever had, and fairy godmothers, too.

The cowslips and the sunflowers had given her [illegible] fragrance.

The winds had blown, and the suns had [illegible] but they had only given to her body and her soul a [illegible] freshness like that of a field cowslip.

She had never been called anything but Bebee.

One summer day Antoine Maes—a French subject, but a Belgian by adoption and habit, an old man who got his meager living by tilling the garden plot about his hut and selling flowers in the city squares—Antoine, going into Brussels for his day's trade, had seen a gray bundle floating among the water lilies in the fill of water near his hut and had hooked it out to land, and found a year old child in it, left to drown, no doubt, but saved by the lilies, and laughing gleefully at fate.

Some lace worker, blind with the pain of toil, or some peasant woman harder of heart than the oxen in her yoke, had left it there to drift away to death, not reckoning for the inward ripple of the current or toughness of the lily leaves and stems.

Old Antoine took it to his wife, and the wife, a childless and aged soul, begged leave to keep it; and the two poor lonely, simple folks grew to care for the homeless, motherless thing, and they and the people about all called it Bebee—only Bebee.

The church got at it and added to it a saint's name; but for all its little world it remained Bebee—Bebee when it trotted no higher than the red carnation heads—Bebee when its yellow curls touched as high as the lavender bush—Bebee on this proud day when the thrush's song and the cock's crow found her 16 years old.

Old Antoine's hut stood in a little patch of garden ground with a briar hedge all round it, in that byway which lies between Laeken and Brussels, in the heart of flat, green Brabant, where there are beautiful meadows and tall, flowering hedges, and forest trees and fern filled ditches, and a little piece of water, deep and cool, where the swans sail all day long, and the silvery willows dip and sway with the wind.

Turn aside from the highway, and there it lies today, and all the place brims over with grass, and bright and blossoms, and flowering limes, and wild dog roses; and there are a few cottages and cabins there near the pretty water, and farther there is an old church, sacred to St. Guido; and beyond go the green level country and the endless wheat fields, and the old mills with their red sails against the sun; and beyond all these the pale blue, sea like horizon of the plains of Flanders.

It was a pretty little hut, pink all over like a sea shell, in the fashion that the Netherlanders love, and its two little square lattices were dark with creeping plants and big rose bushes, and its roof, so low that you could touch it, was golden and green with all the lichens and mosses that are known on earth.

Here Bebee grew from year to year; and soon learned to be big enough and hardy enough to tie up bunches of stocks and pinks for the market, and then to carry a basket for herself, trotting by Antoine's side along the green roadway and into the white, wide streets, and in the market the buyers—most often of all when they were young mothers—would cry out the little golden head and the beautiful frank blue eyes and buy Bebee's lilies and carnations whether they wanted them or not. So that old Maes used to cross himself and say that, thanks to Our Lady, trade was thrice as stirring since the little one had stretched out her rosy fingers with the flowers.

All the same, however stirring trade might be in summer, when the long winters came and the Montagne de la Cour was a sharp slope of ice, and the pinnacles of St. Gudule were all frosted white with snow, and the hot house flowers alone could fill the market, and the country gardens were bitter black wind swept desolations where the chilly roots huddled themselves together under ground, like houseless children in a cellar, then the money gained in the time of leaf and blossom was all needed to buy a black loaf and fagot of wood; and many a day in the little pink hut Bebee rolled herself up in her bed like a dormouse, to forget in sleep that she was supperless and as cold as a frozen robin.

So that when Antoine Maes grew sick and died, more from age and weakness than any real disease, there was only a few silver crowns in the brown jug hidden in the thatch, and the hut itself, with its patch of ground, was all that he could leave to Bebee.

"Live in it, little one, and take nobody in it to worry you, and be good to the bird and the goat, and be sure to keep the flowers blowing," said the old man with his last breath; and sobbing her heart out by his bedside, Bebee vowed to do his bidding.

She was not quite fourteen then, and when she had laid her old friend to rest in the rough green graveyard about St. Guido she was very sorrowful and lonely—poor little bright Bebee, who had never hardly known a worse woe than to run the thorns of the roses into her fingers, or to cry because a thrush was found starved to death in the snow.

Bebee went home and sat down in a corner and thought.

The hut was her own, and her own the little green triangle just then crowded with its May day blossom in all the colors of the rainbow. She was to live in it, and never let the flowers die—so he had said; good, rough old ugly Antoine Maes, who had been to her as father, mother, country, king and law.

The sun was shining through the little square of the lattice she could see the great tulips opening in the grass and a bough of the apple tree swaying in the wind. A chaffinch clung to the bough and swung to and fro singing. The door stood open, with the broad, bright day beaming through; and Bebee's little world came streaming in with it—the world which dwelt in the half dozen cottages that fringed this green lane of hers like beavers' nests pushed out under the leaves on to the water's edge.

They came, some six or eight of them, all women; trim, clean, plain Brabant peasants, hard working, kindly of nature and shrewd in their own simple matters; people who labored in the fields all the day long, or worked themselves blind over the lace pillows in the city.

"You are too young to live alone, Bebee," said the first of them. "My old mother shall come and keep house for you."

"Nay—better come and live with me, Bebee," said the second. "I will give you bit and drop, and clothing, too, for the right to your plot of ground."

"That is to cheat her," said the third. "Hark here, Bebee; my sister, who is a lone woman, as you know well, shall come and bide with you, and ask you nothing—nothing at all—only you shall just give her a crust, perhaps, and a few flowers to sell sometimes."

"No, no," said the fourth; "that will not do. You let me have the garden and the hut, Bebee, and my sons shall till the place for you; and I will live with you myself, and leave the boys the cabin—so you will have all the gain; do you not see, dear little one?"

"Pooh!" said the fifth, stouter and better clothed than the rest. "You are all eager for your own good, not for hers. Now I—Father Francis says we should all do as we would be done by—I will take Bebee to live with me, all for nothing; and we will root the flowers up and plant it with good cabbages and potatoes and salad plants. And I will stable my cows in the hut to sweeten it after a dead man, and I will take my chance of making money out of it, and no one can speak more fair than that when one sees what weather is, and thinks what insects do; and all the year round, winter and summer, Bebee here will want for nothing, and have to take no care for herself whatever."

She who spoke, Mere Krebs, was the best to do woman in the little lane, having two cows of her own and earrings of solid silver, and a green cart, and a big dog that took the milk into Brussels. She was heard, therefore, with respect, and a short silence followed her words.

But it was very short; and a hubbub of voices crossed each other after it as the speakers grew hotter against one another and more eager to convince each other of the disinterestedness and delicacy of their offers of aid.

Through it all Bebee sat quite quiet on the edge of the little truckle bed, with her eyes fixed on the apple bough and the singing chaffinch.

She heard them all patiently.

They were all her good friends, friends old and true. This one had given her cherries a score of summers. The other had brought her a little waxen Jesus at the Kermesse. The old woman in the blue linen skirt had taken her to her first communion. She who wanted her sister to have the crust and the flowers, had brought her a beautiful painted book of hours that had cost a whole franc. Another had given her the solitary wonder, travel and foreign feast of her whole life—a day fifteen miles away at the fair at Mechlin. The last speaker of all had danced her on her knee a hundred times in babyhood, and told her legends, and let her ride in the green cart behind big, curly coated Tambour.

Bebee did not doubt that these trusty old friends meant well by her, and yet a certain heavy sense fell on her that in all these counsels there was not the same whole hearted and frank goodness that had prompted the gift to her of the waxen Jesus and the Kermesse of Mechlin.

Bebee did not reason, because she was too little a thing and too trustful; but she felt in a vague, sorrowful fashion that they were all of them trying to make some benefit [illegible] of her poor little heritage with small regard for herself at the root of their speculations.

Bebee was a child, wholly a child; body and soul were both as fresh in her as a golden crocus just born out of the snows. But she was not a little fool, though people sometimes called her so because she would sit [illegible] the moments of her leisure with her blue eyes on the far away clouds like a thing in a dream.

She heard them patiently till the cackle of shrill voices had exhausted itself, and the [illegible] women stood on the sunny mud floor of the [illegible] but eyeing each other with venomous glances; for though they were good neighbors at all times, each, in this matter, was hungry for the advantages to be got out of old Antoine's plot of ground. They were very poor; they toiled in the scorched or frozen fields all weathers, or spent from dawn to nightfall poring over their cobweb lace; and to save a sou or gain a cabbage was of moment to them only second to the keeping of their souls secure of heaven by Lenten mass and Easter psalm.

Bebee listened to them all, and the tears dried on her cheeks, and her pretty rosebud lips curled close to one another.

"You are very good, no doubt, all of you," she said at last. "But I cannot tell you that I am thankful, for my heart is like a stone, and I think it is not so very much for me as it is for the hut that you are speaking. Perhaps it is wrong for me to say so—yes, I am wrong, I am sure—you are all kind, and I am only Bebee. But you see he told me to live here and take care of the flowers, and I must do it, that is certain. I will ask Father Francis, if you wish; but if he tells me that I am wrong, as you do, I shall stay here all the same."

And in answer to their expostulations and condemnation, she only said the same thing over again always, in different words, but to the same steadfast purpose. The women clamored about her for an hour in reproach and rebuke; she was a baby indeed, she was a little fool, she was a naughty, obstinate child, she was an ungrateful, willful little creature, who ought to be beaten till she was blue, if only there was anybody that had the right to do it.

"But there is nobody that has the right," said Bebee, getting angry and standing upright on the floor, with Antoine's old gray cat in her round arms. "He told me to stay here, and he would not have said so if it had been wrong; and I am old enough to do for myself, and I am not afraid, and who is there that would hurt me? Oh, yes, go and tell Father Francis, if you like. I do not believe he will blame me, but if he do, I must bear it. Even if he shut the church door on me, I will obey Antoine, and the flowers will know I am right, and they will let no evil spirits touch me, for the flowers are strong for that, they talk to the angels in the night."

What use was it to argue with a little idiot like this? Indeed, peasants never do argue, they use abuse.

It is their only form of logic.

They used it to Bebee, rating her soundly, as became people who were old enough to be her grandmothers, and who knew that she had been raked out of their own pond, and had no more real place in creation than a water rat, as one might say.

The women were kindly, and had never thrown this truth against her before, and in fact, to be a foundling was no sort of disgrace to their sight, but anger is like wine, and makes the depths of the mind shine clear, and all the mud that is in the depths stink in the light; and in their wrath at not sharing Antoine's legacy, the good souls said bitter things that in calm moments they would no more have uttered than they would have taken up a knife to slit her throat.

They talked themselves hoarse with impatience and chagrin, and went backwards over the threshold, their wooden shoes and their shrill voices keeping a clattering chorus. By this time it was evening; the sun had gone off the floor, and the bird had done singing.

Bebee stood in the same place, hardening her little heart, while big and bitter tears swelled into her eyes and fell on the soft fur of the sleeping cat.

She only very vaguely understood why it was in any sense shameful to have been raked out of the water lilies like a drowning field mouse, as they had said it was.

She and Antoine had often talked of that summer morning when he had found her there among the leaves, and Bebee and he had laughed over it gayly, and she had been quite proud in her innocent fashion that she had had a fairy and the flowers for her mother and godmothers, which Antoine always told her was the case beyond any manner of doubt. Even Father Francis, hearing the pretty, harmless fiction, had never deemed it his duty to disturb her pleasure in it, being a good, cheerful old man, who thought that [illegible] now young summers and to sever young curs without his interference.

Bebee had always thought it quite a fine thing to have been born of water lilies, with the sun for her father, and when people in Brussels had asked her of her parentage, seeing her stand in the market with a certain look on her that was not like other children, had always gravely answered in the purest good faith:

"My mother was a flower."

"You are a flower, at any rate," they would say in return; and Bebee had been always quite content.

But now she was doubtful; she was rather perplexed than sorrowful.

These good friends of hers seemed to see some new sin about her. Perhaps, after all, thought Bebee, it might have been better to have had a human mother who would have taken care of her now that old Antoine was dead, instead of those beautiful, gleaming, cold water lilies which went to sleep on their green velvet beds, and did not certainly care when the thorns ran into her fingers, or the pebbles got into her wooden shoes.

In some vague way, disgrace and envy—the twin discords of the world—touched her innocent cheek with their hot breath, and as the evening fell, Bebee felt very lonely and a little wistful.

She had been always used to run out in the pleasant twilight time among the flowers and water them, Antoine filling the can from the well; and the neighbors would come and lean against the little low wall, knitting and gossiping, and the big dogs, released from harness, would poke their heads through the wicket for a crust; and the children would dance and play Colin Maillard on the green by the water, and she, when the flowers were no longer thirsted, would join them, and romp and dance and sing the gayest of them all.

But now the buckets hung at the bottom of the well, and flowers hungered in vain, and the neighbors held aloof, and she shut to the hut door and listened to the rain which began to fall, and cried herself to sleep in her tiny kingdom.

When the dawn came the sun rose red and warm; the grass and boughs sparkled; a lark sang; Bebee awoke sad in heart, indeed, for her lost old friend, but brighter and braver.

"Each of them wants to get something out of me," thought the child. "Well, I will live alone then, and do my duty just as he said. The flowers will never let any real harm come, though they do look so indifferent and smiling sometimes, and though not one of them hung their heads when his coffin was carried through them yesterday."

That want of sympathy in the flowers troubled her.

The old man had loved them so well; and they had all looked as glad as ever, and had laughed saucily in the sun, and not even a rose bud turned the paler as the poor still stiffened limbs went by in the wooden shell.

"I suppose God cares—but I wish they did," said Bebee, to whom the garden was more intelligible than Providence.

"Why do you not care?" she asked the pinks, shaking the rain drops off their curled rosy petals.

The pinks leaned lazily against their sticks, and seemed to say, "Why should we care for anything, unless a slug be eating us!—that is real woe, if you like."

Bebee, without her sabots on, wandered thoughtfully among the sweet, wet sunlightened labyrinths of blossom, her pretty bare feet treading the narrow grassy paths with pleasure in their coolness.

"He was so good to you," she said reproachfully to the great gaudy gillyflowers and the painted sweet peas. "He never let you know heat or cold—he never let the worm gnaw or the snail harm you—he would get up in the dark to see after your wants—and when the ice froze over you, he was there to loosen your chains. Why do you not care, any one of you?"

"How silly you are!" said the flowers. "You must be a butterfly or a poet, Bebee, to be as foolish as that. Some one will do all he did. We are of market value, you know [illegible] the garden, set into the wall; a niche with a bit of glass and of the Virgin, so battered that no one could trace any feature of it.

It had been there for centuries, and was held in great veneration, and old Antoine had always cut the choicest buds of his roses and set them in a delf pot in front of it every other morning all the summer long. Bebee, whose religion was the sweetest, vaguest mingling of pagan and Christian myths, and whose faith in fairies and in saints was exactly equal in strength and in ignorance—Bebee filled the delf pot anew carefully, then knelt down on the turf in that little green corner and prayed in devout, hopeful childish good faith to the awful unknown Powers who were to her only as gentle guides and kindly playmates.

Was she too familiar with the Holy Mother? She was almost fearful that she was; but the Holy Mother loved flowers so well, Bebee would not feel aloof from her nor be afraid.

"When one cuts the best blossoms for her, and tries to be good and never tells a lie," thought Bebee, "I am quite sure, as she loves the lilies, that she will never altogether forget me."

So she said to the Mother of Christ, fearlessly, and nothing doubting, and then rose for her daily work of cutting the flowers for the market in Brussels.

By the time her baskets were full, her fowls fed, her goat foddered, her starling's cage cleaned, her hut door locked and her wooden shoes clattering on the sunny road into the city, Bebee was almost content again, though ever and again, as she trod the familiar ways, the tears dimmed her eyes as she remembered that old Antoine would never again hobble over the stones beside her.

"You are a little willful one, and too young to live alone," said Father Francis, meeting her in the lane.

But he did not scold her seriously, and she kept to her resolve; and the women, who were good at heart, took her back into favor again; and so Bebee had her own way, and the fairies, or the saints, or both together, took care of her; and so it came to pass that all alone she heard the cock crow while it was dark, and woke to the grand and amazing truth that this warm, fragrant, dusky June morning found her full 16 years old.

CHAPTER II.

The two years had not been all playtime, any more than they had been all summer.

When one has not father, or mother, or brother, and all one's friends have barely bread enough for themselves, life cannot be very easy, nor its crusts very many at any time.

Bebee had a cherub's mouth, and a dreamer's eyes, and a poet's thoughts sometimes in her own untaught and unconscious fashion.

But all the same she was a little hard working Brabant peasant girl; up while the birds twittered in the dark; to bed when the red sun sank beyond the far blue line of the [illegible] when she sat under the awning, fronting the Maison du Roi; but all the time the child throve on it, and was happy, and dreamed of many graceful and gracious things while she was weeding among her lilies, or tracing the threads to and fro on her lace pillow.

Now—when she woke to the full sense of her wonderful 16 years—Bebee, standing barefoot on the mud floor, was as pretty a sight as was to be seen betwixt Scheldt and Rhine.

(To be continued.)

"Virtue is a modest flower which often blushes unseen in its hidden nook, while many and many a grander one falsely sails under its name in the world to be admired of men."

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FIRE CRACKERS.

Scientific American.

The stock of fire crackers in this country at the present time is said to be from twenty-five to thirty per cent. less than is usual at this season. This shortage is due in part to labor strikes in China, where all the small crackers and most of the large or cannon crackers are made, and also to the imposition by the Chinese government of the lekin, or tax, both of which have acted as a check upon manufacturers. Strikes are of frequent occurrence in China, and laborers are thoroughly organized, having what are here called unions and guilds. Strikes are sometimes attended with loss of property as well as of life.

The annual receipts of fire crackers in this country are from eight hundred thousand to one million boxes, and orders for these goods have to be sent forward one year in advance. The Chinese manufacturing year begins June 1, and this is about the date when American merchants send forward their orders for next year's supply. The usual voyage from New York to Hong Kong is 120 days, so that there are only left, after a passage to China and return, 125 days of the year. The ship Wandering Jew arrived in New York on April 29 with 135,000 boxes of fire crackers on board.

Crackers are made principally in Canton and in the country surrounding that city. A cannon cracker factory in the suburbs of Canton is described by an eye witness as follows:

The building is of sun-dried brick, with a tiled roof twelve feet from the ground, and this space is divided into an upper and lower apartment, each with the ceiling about six feet high. The interior of the building when visited was strewn with pieces of paper, while vessels containing powder were standing round, the contents of which seemed to be in imminent danger of being exploded, and men, women and children were actively engaged in the manufacture of the goods.

The paper needed for the cracker is cut to the required length and then weighed to see that the quantity for each cracker is exactly the same. The instrument used in weighing is of the rudest description, being a stick about two and one-half feet long, suspended from the ceiling by a string, which is attached to the centre of the stick, and a stone is placed as a weight on one end and the articles to be weighed on the other. The paper is rolled into cylindrical form by means of a flat piece of wood held in the hands, and then one end is creased with a pair of pinchers and a string tied into the crease as a temporary means of preventing the powder from running out when the cylinders are placed in a perpendicular position to be loaded. The last named process is as follows:

The cylinders are bunched together like cigars turned on end, and then pierced with an awl, and into the aperture thus made the powder is poured from a tin can. Then the stem of the cracker is inserted, which consists of a piece of thin, tough paper, with just sufficient powder twisted up in it to make it burn quickly. A piece of paper is temporarily pasted over the end containing the stem for the purpose of preventing the powder from running out, as the crackers are now placed on that end.

The string placed temporarily around the pierced end is now removed and clay tamping is hammered into the aperture and then the paper is removed from the stem end and the clay tamping is applied there, which prevents any powder sifting out.

The cracker is now ready for the thin piece of red paper which goes around the outside and completes it. The stems are then very neatly braided together, which forms the crackers into packs, and these are each wrapped in thin paper and ornamented with a red label with pictures of dragons upon it. Red is the festive color of China, and as fire crackers are used principally on festal occasions, that color is rigidly adhered to in the manufacture of these goods. The packs are placed in boxes and in proportion of forty packs to the box. There is a regular division of labor in the cracker factory, each person having his or her special work to do, and in this they become very expert.

The above is a description of cannon cracker manufacture, but the same will apply to the small crackers. The latter, however, are generally made in the rural districts, and are brought down the river to Canton in junks.

There is a large home consumption of fire crackers, and the Chinese think that their explosion will ward off evil spirits. They are fired off on numerous occasions, but particularly on the Chinese new year, which is a variable date regulated by the changes in the moon. Foreigners residing in Canton have what they call the Canton salute, which consists in the firing off at one time of six boxes of small crackers and two or three boxes of cannon crackers, and this is given on the departure of one of their number for home.

Of the million boxes of crackers sent each year to this country, a number are reshipped to South America, where they are used on social occasions as well as at public fetes. They are used at the South at Christmas time, and also in Canada on May 24, which is Queen Victoria's birthday. Cannon crackers are made in this country, but the small ones cannot be produced here at anything like the price they can be furnished by the Chinese. Their product is carried half way round the world, pays duty, and is then sold for 85 cents a box. In the McKinley tariff bill now before Congress, the duty on fire crackers is placed at 8 cents a pound, which will make the tax 63 cents as against 28 cents a box, which is the rate paid now. If this provision of the new tariff bill is adopted, it will probably have the effect of stimulating the manufacture of cannon crackers in this country.

Fire crackers are of very ancient origin. Dr. Williams in his exhaustive work on China, entitled "The Middle Kingdom," says: "No evidence exists of the use of gunpowder as an agent of warfare until the middle of the twelfth century, nor did a knowledge of its propulsive effects come to the Chinese until the reign of Yunglop in the fifteenth century—a thousand years after its first employment in fire crackers."

Exercise and Health.

Exercise, with both men and women is a question of intelligence—a consideration of kind and quality, rather than of degree. The subject has for women peculiar embarrassments and limitations, particularly in the close house-bound life of the city. In the country there are the natural morning duties, with open windows and flooding sunlight; the walk to the depot or for the mail, quite and calming; the long piazzas. In the city, nine women out of the ten are victims to morning gowns and slippers. A man's hat, coat, and gloves hang in the hallway, always in readiness. What would he say if boots, trousers, and coat were to be changed, after an hour, before he could get out for a breath of air? While many women still follow the traditions of delicacy and helplessness that have for so many years enshrined and enfeebled their sex, yet they have come, all the same, to understand, through the efforts of many of their sisters who must perforce be strong, that a poor physique puts a woman at odds, and at the mercy of others when the stress of life comes. In the new creed to which women are giving allegiance it will come to be an article in time that weakness, unless inherited, is sin. The young women of the future will fulfil the the poet's ideal: "She gave him her hand; it was not a helpless one."—EMMA MOFFETT TYNG, in Harpers' Bazaar.

In the Post Office appropriation bill lately passed by the Senate is a provision by which mails are to be sorted on on board steamers, so that deliveries will be hastened on the arrival of vessels. The arrangement is to be in conjunction with the governments, the United States paying its portion of the cost.

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9:06 A. M.	Lv	Oregon City	Lv	2:44 P. M.
6:00 P. M.	Ar	Roseburg	Lv	6:00 A. M.

ALBANY LOCAL (Daily, except Sunday.)

5:00 P. M.	Lv	Portland	Ar	9:00 A. M.
6:00 P. M.	Lv	Oregon City	Lv	7:54 A. M.
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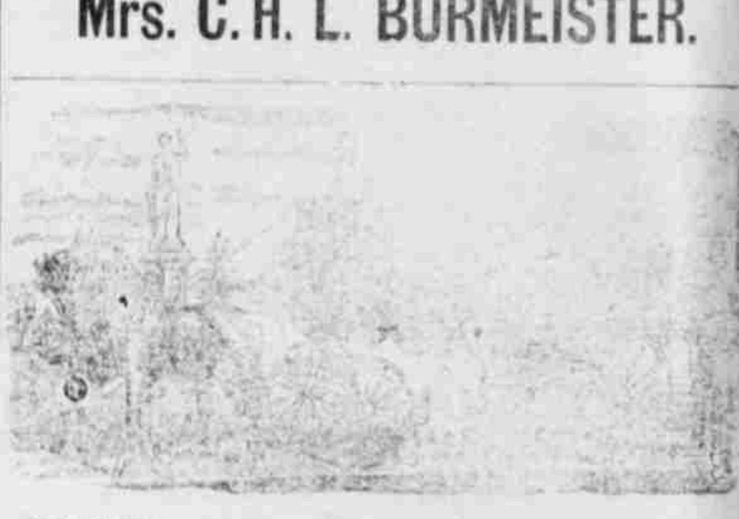

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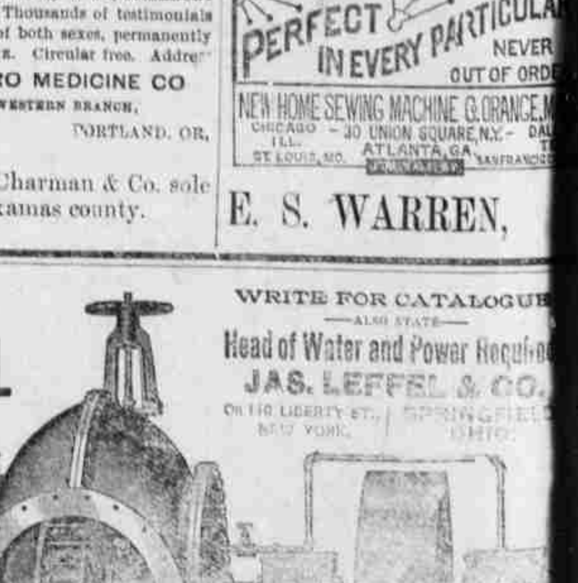
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