

CLOVERDALE COURIER.

VOL. 10.

CLOVERDALE, TILLAMOOK COUNTY, OREGON, SEPTEMBER 4, 1914

NO. 14

A Home In America

A Story For Labor Day

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Jean Stahren and Elsa Vogan lived on adjoining farms on the western coast of Norway. Neither had any brothers or sisters; consequently they were constant playmates, for there were no other children within a couple of miles. Since the country was rocky and not very productive their parents were very poor. But neither Jean nor Elsa had ever known luxuries, and what we do not know of we do not covet. Besides, there is an unconsciousness of deprivation in childhood, and so long as children have enough to eat, though of the plainest food, and enough clothing to keep them warm they are content.

But there came a time with Jean when he began to think of his future. This was when he was seventeen years old. One day, standing with Elsa on a high ridge overlooking the Atlantic ocean, he said to her:

"Elsa, it will not satisfy me to remain here with father and mother to work this little farm. There is barely enough for them to be made out of it, and I feel that I must go out into the world to make something for myself."

A frightened look came to Elsa's face. This was the first intimation she had that she and Jean would not live near each other always as they had lived.

"Where would you go, Jean?" she asked.

"If one sails westward from here in a few days he will reach some islands called Britain. They have a king there, as we have here, and nobles, but I understand that the people are active, and there are opportunities for poor men to make a good living. But if one continues on southwestward he will come to a great continent called America. The people there have no king, no nobles. All are on the same level so far as the law is concerned. To that land people of small means from all nations are flocking. There is plenty of land there which is very rich, and great factories where people work, and those who are skilled receive wages that are unheard of here in Norway. I am thinking of going to America to join in the battle for fortune."

"But, Jean," cried the girl, "you are not skilled at any work, and in no country are farms given away. Having no trade and no money to buy a farm, what will you do to earn a living? And where will you get money to pay your way?"

"I am now of a proper age to learn a trade, and as to the means for the journey I shall work my passage. I shall go on a ship to Hamburg, for which I have the money. There, I understand, there are great vessels sailing to America. They need many per-

sons to wait on the passengers, and it will not be difficult for me to secure one of these places."

"How did you learn all this?"

"Lars Olsen told me; he has been to Hamburg."

Elsa was looking out to the westward, and Jean saw tears gathering in her eyes. He put his arms about her and kissed her. The boundary between childhood and youth had been passed. From that moment they were lovers, though they were still unconscious of the change.

"Don't cry, Elsa," said Jean. "When I have become a skilled workman I will send for you to come over the sea and be with me."

"How could I go over there and be with you, Jean? That would not be right."

"But I will then be a man and you a woman; we can be married."

This ingenuous proposal did not seem to give comfort to Elsa. She said that it would be a long while before Jean could send for her, and even then she could not leave her father and mother, who were every day becoming more dependent upon her. This made Jean feel ashamed, for he knew that he, too, was needed at home. But Jean looked further into the future than Elsa and had more resolution to break the barriers between him and success. Besides, he looked forward to the day when, having become a skilled laborer, he could earn more than he needed for himself and could send money to his parents.

It was a sad day for all when Jean departed. His mother begged him to stay, but his father approved of his going.

"Goodby, my son," he said. "I have heard of that great country beyond the sea where the people are the government and where the workingman must be educated for what he does the same as the lawyer, the doctor and the priest. And they tell me that when he learns his trade he is protected by the trade unions against the competition of those who are unskilled. Go, and God grant that you may prosper."

Elsa went a part way on the road with Jean and when they parted surprised him by encouraging him instead of giving way to repining.

"It will not seem long, dear Jean, before you will be building houses or railroads or ships, and every day you will earn more than you need, so that you can send money to your father and mother to buy them comforts they sorely need in their old age."

"But I shall not be satisfied, sweetheart, till I have earned not only enough for that, but to send for you to come to me."

Nevertheless they had no sooner passed away from each other than Jean's eyes became moist, and Elsa broke down and sobbed as though her heart would break.

An ocean liner came sailing down the coast and, entering the lower bay of New York, made its way up toward Ellis Island, where emigrants must prove that they come within the laws governing their admission to the United States of America. Among those who were transferred from the vessel to the island was a young woman, who gave her name as Elsa Vo-

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