The Observer.

MORO, OREGON :

FRIDAY...........April 3, 1908

Personal Talk With You.

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The Mangolds' Valentine.

By ELLIS GRANT.

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"THERE'S nothing against the Mangolds as I know of," the jolly storekeeper at the Rock Prairie settlement remarked, "but it's plain they don't amount to much."

"That's so," spoke up one of the settlers who were warming themselves by the fire at the store on an early February evening. "They make the two little fellows do all the work. I've never seen the father anywhere."

"Neither have I," said the storekeeper. "They come here in September. The first we see of 'em was noticing the white topped camper's wagon standing on the section of government land near the cabin that the Blagg boys left when they found the land wasn't first class. The two boys have been here for a few things and always paid for what little they got, but they wouldn't talk much. I guess they're pretty hard up, and I've thought I'd go over and see 'em, but I never got to it."

The other men agreed with this history of the family and remarked that

AT LAST THE FAINT LIGHT IN THE CABIN SHONE ACROSS THE PLAIN.

they, too, had thought of going to see the family, but had never carried out their purpose.

One had passed the cabin about a month before. He had seen a woman through the window, but nothing more was known of them. They were evidently the one family of delinquents in a prosperous community of settlers.

"Nice, open winter," remarked Squire Gillett as they all rose to go.

"Yes," said the storekeeper. "Plows'll be going next week, though the nights are kind of chilly yet."

"If the Mangolds expect to hold government land, they must get some plowing done right off."

"Correct. Too bad the old man puts it all on those two boys."

Buttoning up their heavy coats, the settlers mounted their ponies and rode homeward together.

"There's the two boys now," remarked Squire Gillett when they had ridden two miles or more across the brown prairie. Looking off to the west, they saw two small boys mounted on large, rawboned work horses, their outlines distinct against the sunset sky.

The two boys were jogging along slowly and in silence. Their slender forms seemed oddly in contrast with the size of the horses they were riding. They shivered in the raw evening air. Heavy clouds were coming up in great black masses from the northeast.

"We must hurry, Joe," said one of the boys, "or we'll get wet."

"I suppose so, for our coats aren't quite waterproof," said the other.

"Say, Clive," Joe went on after a moment's silence, "don't you think it's been a pretty lonesome winter?"

Joe nodded three or four times rather ruefully.

"I shall be glad enough when spring comes," he continued, "for then papa can get out of doors and see all the folks."

"He's pretty sick, don't you think?"

"Yes, Joe, but mamma says he's feeling better, and if we're brave, strong boys he'll get well again."

"But the plowing! Can we do it all?"

"Do it? We've got to do it, and there are only a few days left before the time will be up, and if we don't have it done we shall lose the claim. It's too bad the harness broke this afternoon, but if the storekeeper has some straps we'll be all right."

The horses had started into a gallop, and the boys bobbed awkwardly in their seats. Over the swells, down the grassy slopes they went and then, with a still faster pace, whirled down another declivity and crashed through the dead sunflower stalks and tumbleweeds that covered the bottom of the slough.

They had gone but a few yards here when the horses suddenly stopped and sent the young riders sliding forward to the animals' shoulders and manes.

The object which had stopped them was a large and dilapidated "prairie schooner," which stood at the side of the trail. The horses which had been attached to it browsed upon the weeds.

A campfire had been started beside the wagon, and near it, his hands holding his head and his elbows on his knees, was a flannel shirted and unkempt man.

He did not look up until the boys called to him, and then he raised a worn, anxious, hopeless face.

"Anything the matter?" Joe asked.

"Yes, something's the matter. It's the little one." He motioned toward the wagon.

"Sick?" asked Joe.

"Yes, and maybe dying. I've come for days from the west, calculating to take the child home to the old folks in Missouri, but the little codger couldn't stand the journey."

The boys slipped to the ground and by the light of the fire approached the back part of the wagon. They drew aside the cover and let the firelight into the interior.

A child hardly more than a baby was moaning on the bed of straw within.

"Can't we help you?" asked Joe anxiously.

"I don't know. I've tried to find a doctor, but I don't seem to make out. Maybe the folks are afraid of me. Anyhow they don't seem to want me around, and now I've clean lost my way."

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said Joe. "We'll take you home. Papa can doctor people."

"But the harness, Joe?" said Clive.

"That's so. I forgot it. Well, I'll tell you—you drive home with the man, and I'll go to the store. I ain't afraid."

In a few minutes the emigrant was on the road toward the Mangold cabin with Clive, while Joe, his courage just a little weakened by the appearance of the still darkening sky, was riding rapidly in the other direction.

"My goodness, who's this!" exclaimed the storekeeper as he was putting up the blinds of the lonely prairie store for the night. He could hardly believe his eyes when the young rider presented himself.

"And you've come all this way alone?" he said when he had heard Joe's story. "Well, my boy, you must be a good one. Look here! I'm going home with you."

He put on his overcoat and wrapped a shawl about the slender boy's shoulders.

"Come," he said, picking up a bundle which Joe thought was certainly too large to contain nothing more than the piece of harness, "let's go."

Together they mounted the horse, and through the falling rain the two rode on mile after mile, the steady swish of the horse's feet through the dead grass being the only sound to break the stillness of the night.

At last the faint light in the cabin of the Mangolds shone across the plain, and a few moments afterward the storekeeper and the boy had entered the house.

"I tell you what," said the storekeeper the next evening when a group of settlers had gathered about his fire, "it wasn't a pleasant sight. There was the baby moaning and suffering, while the little woman was trying to comfort it. Over in the other corner was Mangold himself."

"The old man, eh?" said the squire.

"He's sick, boys—pretty sick. He's been a kind of doctor in the east, but was ordered out here for his health. He hasn't been able to go about any since he came, and his brave little wife and the two boys have looked after everything."

"That's it, eh?"

"Yes. And, besides that, out of all of us they were the ones to take care of the camper. The poor fellow was about discouraged, and it was a godsend to him that the boys came across him, for the baby 'd surely died right there in the ravine.

"More'n that, boys, I found out that the plowing that has to be done on the claim to hold it from the government ain't near finished. Those children have been trying to do it, and they've got only a few acres plowed. The time expires on the 15th of the month—that's day after tomorrow—and the claim's likely to be jumped by some outsider."

"I know two fellows who've got their eyes on it," said the squire. "They've been wanting it for some time and are going to make a break whenever they can. They're sharp, and I think they've got wind somehow that the railroad's going to strike through that quarter section."

"It'll be tough on the Mangolds to lose their claim," slowly droned out a lank herder who was occupying the top of a sugar barrel; "but, then, they don't amount to much in the settlement, and the Hay boys, being hustlers"—

He got no farther. The look that the storekeeper gave him quite upset him, and he relapsed into silence.

Then a very important conference was held between the storekeeper and the other settlers, and after it the party separated with smiling faces and a satisfied air.

The rain had cleared the atmosphere, and next morning the sky gleamed in such blue splendor as only prairie skies can know. The air was full of the softness and warmth of an early spring morning in southern Kansas.

At an early hour there were seen here and there wagons wending their way along the prairie. In each wagon

SQUIRE GILLETT MADE A VERY HANDSOME LITTLE SPEECH.

there was a plow or a harrow, and in some of them were heaps of corn and other provisions.

Clive and Joe looked out of the Mangold cabin and noticed that the horses' heads were all facing them.

"Let's hurry and hitch up," said Joe, "and get to plowing. All the folks are coming by here, and we ought to be at work."

They ran out and began harnessing the horses to the plow, the stranger emigrant looking on dolefully.

"Hold on there, boys! Unhitch those horses!"

It was the storekeeper, with a grin on his face.

"All you have to do today," he went on, "is to boss. We'll do the work. Now, say, where do you want your forty acres plowed?"

Joe, bewildered, looked around upon the gathering teams and pointed to a tract around which the boys had made several straggling furrows.

"All right. Now, fellows, hurry up!" shouted the storekeeper.

There was a great rattling of chains and much laughter as team after team went with its plow to the corner of the field, presently to send a long chocolate ribbon of sod rolling after as it took its way around the great square piece of prairie.

"Twenty-four of them," said Mrs. Mangold, counting with extended finger, her worn face lighting up with pleasure. The strange visitation and the pile of provisions that had been brought by the settlers had almost overwhelmed her.

Following the plows were harrows, and the land rapidly took on the appearance of a field long tilled. The sun was halfway across the sky when all stopped at a signal from the storekeeper.

"Boys," he said when the men had gathered round, "now let's eat dinner, and then we'll finish. But while we're finishing how would it do for some one to go to the village and bring out a certificate of entry on the claim? That'll make it all sure. By that time he will be able to prove that the required plowing is done, you see."

The proposition was received with a shout of approval.

"I'll go," said the lank herder, who had been completely converted to the Mangolds' side.

As he had the fastest pony in the neighborhood he was allowed to take the trip.

Just before the sun reached the horizon the square of prairie sod had been blotted out.

As the party gathered around the cabin in the twilight the herder rode up, his horse white with foam. He held a large official envelope in his hand.

"February the 14th," read the storekeeper aloud, beginning the certificate. "Boys," he said, with a laugh, looking up, "this is St. Valentine's day."

"That's so," said several of the settlers.

"Tell you what let's do," proposed Squire Gillett; "let's give the certificate to the woman for a valentine."

Gathering together, with the squire at their head, they knocked at the door of the cabin. Mrs. Mangold opened it, and the pale face of her husband was seen behind her shoulder.

Squire Gillett made a very handsome little speech and presented her with the certificate as a valentine, accompanying his formal words with some hearty praise of the brave boys.

"HOLD ON THERE, BOYS! UNHITCH THOSE HORSES!"

Translated.

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Dam. Corona 23356, by Sandow 21144, by Clampin 13999 [29892], by Phenix 8849 [6983], by Fenelon 2682 [38], by Brilliant 1271 [755], by Brilliant 1899 [756], by Coco II [714], by Vieux Chaslin [713], by Coco [712], by Mignon [715], by Jean Le Blanc [739].

2d Dam. Babe 21146, by Pluton 10113 [19321], by Vaillant [404], by Prosper [893], by Decide [892], by Vieux Pierre [894], by Coco [712[, by Mignon [715], by Jean Le Blanc [739].

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