

A CHEROKEE CLAIMANT.

By Fannie E. Newberry.

THE sun was setting, as for weeks past, in a hot, merciless glare, which made its disappearance a distinct relief. It cast no long afternoon shadows, for between Lucy's eyes and the far horizon stretched only a rolling sea of prairie grass, browned to a stubble. The prospect to the east was as monotonous, and northward no less so, though the thought that Arkansas City lay in that direction gave it a certain interest in Lucy's eyes. Behind her, to the south, Snake Creek crawled its sluggish way through her father's grain fields, now parched to stiffness under the brassy sky.

Lucy sighed, and turned back into the cabin. Crossing its floor of baked earth, she lifted the lid from a rusty kettle simmering on a rustier stove, and gave a look at the uneasy potatoes within.

"D'ye see anythin' of pap?" asked a querulous voice from the squeaky wooden rocker near the back door.

"No, he isn't in sight yet, ma. Shall I put over the coffee?"

"Might's well. Hope he won't forgit th' dried apricots, and th' med'cine."

"And the mail," added Lucy beneath her breath, jerking a table of home manufacture a few feet from the wall. "Mayn't we have a table cloth tonight, ma?"

"What's th' sense? Jest makes extry washin'. Kain't ye wipe th' table off, if 'tain't clean?"

"Oh, I can." Lucy's pretty lips curled scornfully, straightening her dimples into hard, unlovely lines, as she caught the coarse dishes from their rude shelf, and shoved them into place with a vehemence which brought a sarcastic "Save the pieces, Luce!" from her mother.

She did not answer, but turned again to the north entrance, called by courtesy the front door.

"He's coming," she answered, half sullenly, after a moment's outlook; then in a brisker, brighter tone, "How easily Bonnie Belle makes it! You'd think she was on her first mile, and I'll wager my new hat pa's kept that pace the whole six. Bless the pretty creature!"

Her mother gave a cackling laugh, pleased at the girl's more cheerful tone. She resented fretfulness in another. That was her prerogative, born of years of "ailing," and youth and Lucy had no business with such a thing.

"She's a fine mare, Luce. There ain't many in Kansas slicker, 'less it's Charlie Maynard's roan"—with a covert glance. "I 'low his may be faster, but not much. Well, ef you'll dish th' murphies I'll git th' butter an' sass, hey?"

"All right. Hello, father! Back again? How's Bonnie Belle?"

"Chipper's ever, Luce. See her reach fer ye, darter. I vow, she's got more sense'n some humans! Supper ready? How's ma?"

"Better, and supper's dished. I'll unsaddle Belle—you go in. Aren't you tired?"

"Oh, some. It's derned hot an' dusty. Here, I'll tote in thet bag o' truck; it's heavy. I got yer shoes, Luce. Paid fer 'em, too! Thet ole Swanscot guv me a V on thet debt. They're nice, Luce!"

"Thank you, father; they're beauties! And the mail?"

"Wall now, they wan't ary letters, Luce," the farmer said, carefully abstaining from even a glance at the girl's averted face. "Leastways I didn't find none—them mails is so dern keerless, ye know. Mought hev a dozen lyin' round loose fer all we kin tell. But here's the paper. My Jerushy, but it's lively times down to Arkansas City! Boomers till you kain't rest, an' you don't hear nothin' but th' chinnin' 'bout th' Cherokee strip, an' th' ride fer it, nex' Sat'day. They's settlers pilin' in by every train, an' cowboys, an' thimble riggers—an' it's my 'pinion they ain't much chance fer th' honest chaps. Yes, ma, I'm comin'."

He entered to the impatient invalid, and Lucy led her blooded mare to the shed stable in the rear.

Stolidly she removed the Mexican saddle and holsters, substituting a rope halter for the clumsy bridle. Then, while the hungry mare began upon the few kernels of corn

left in her rude manger, the girl suddenly broke into a dry sob, and leaned against the pretty creature's sleek side.

Bonnie Belle turned beautiful eyes of sympathy upon her mistress, who pressed closer, and broke out:

"Oh, why don't I hear? Where is he? It can't be that little thing at the dance. I *hate* Jim Curtis!"—passionately—"I only went with him because—because I didn't care to show I preferred Charlie, when they came up at the same minute. It would have been so marked! Why couldn't he understand? Men *are* such idiots!"

Half laughing, half sobbing, she gave her pet a gentle rub down, adding food, drink, and a last caress. Then she turned towards the house, stopping an instant to note the fast darkening line of smoke fringing the southwestern horizon—that line of dread and danger of which the prairie settler seldom wholly loses sight during the long months of drought and heat.

"We need rain awfully!" she sighed—"as much as we need money. Oh, what a life! Work, work, work, and for what? If it isn't grasshoppers it's fires, and if it isn't those it is sand storms and cyclones. There's no use trying to get ahead in this God forsaken country!"

With a desperate, disgusted gesture she entered the cabin from its rear, stopping again to drive a couple of too familiar chickens from the doorstep.

"Go to your own roost, you silly things! It seems as if even the fowls couldn't be like themselves in these parts. That speckled hen would stay up all night if I'd let her."

"What you mutterin' over, Luce?" called her father's big voice from the table, where he was at work upon his fourth plateful of bacon and potatoes. "Come in an' hear th' news, kain't ye? An' ye mought read them papers to ma, ef ye will. I've been a tellin' her, but they's lots I forgit, an' th' papers is full of it."

"Of what?" said Lucy obliviously.

"Why, wasn't I a tellin' ye? Of th' boom, an' th' guv'ment's givin' out th' Cherokee lan's, an' all. I swan, ef I was a younger man, an' not so stiff in th' j'int's, I'd make a race fer it myself. I know Bonnie Belle could do it. She come from th' city t'night in forty minutes, an' never sweat a hair. She could do it, an' I know it!"

"Of course she could, father, but it's nearly twenty miles to where the good lands are, isn't it?"

"Yes, but she could do it!" he repeated,

pounding his knife handle emphatically upon the bare table. "Don't ye want no supper, Luce?"

"No, father, I'm not hungry."

He studied her shapely young head, now bent over the paper till her face was hidden, and his honest countenance, burned to a coppery hue by the ceaseless winds of Kansas, took on a worried look.

"Ye oughter be," he murmured, gulping down a tremendous mouthful, and shook his head slightly, as if he had no remedy for the situation.

Lucy, meanwhile, having easily found the leaded headlines she sought, soon began to read of that vast irruption of the stranger and "tenderfoot," which was transforming the small prairie town above them into a noisy, blustering, open all night, fakir ridden city, nearing its sixty thousand inhabitants; the better portion intent upon claiming a home at the opening of the government lands, while the remainder were as intent upon plunder, lawlessness, and deviltry. Lucy read listlessly for a time, then with growing excitement.

"It'll be a wonderful sight, pa, that ride! How I wish you were younger! How I wish we could get a town lot at Perry, and make a home there! I could teach, then, for I had a good schooling up at the city, and you could perhaps start a mill again, father, and we'd give up fighting the storms and bugs on this old ranch. If you only could!"

"Yas, darter, but I couldn't. 'T'ould be a blessed change, I 'low, but thar 'tis! How's a man to make sech a run when he kain't move his bridle arm 'thout a pain ketchin' him? 'Twouldn't do, Lucy, my pretty, 'twouldn't do! Pap's too old an' clumsy, ye see. An' now, le's git to bed soon's I've took a look off fer fires."

He disappeared outside, while Lucy and her slow stepping mother let down the bunks and stowed themselves away within their narrow confines, to sleep. At least, the mother slept. Lucy, snug behind her calico curtains, heard her father reënter, mutter something about "no need to worrit ef th' wind don't change," and lazily pull his boots off.

Soon his heavy snores shook the cabin, but the girl lay with wide open eyes far into the night, thinking, planning, resolving.

It was nothing unusual for Lucy to ride over to Arkansas City for a visit. She had schoolmates there who were always glad to see her, and possibly other interests drew her in that direction. It was the town

Charlie Maynard called home, and in which he spent his brief vacations, sandwiched between long business trips, as thin and unsatisfactory as the bits of fat ham between the thick slices of dry bread with which he was too familiar at railway restaurants. Here Lucy had met him often, during the past two years of her happy school life, and here she had, seemingly, irrevocably offended him by one of those sudden, girlish freaks so inexplicable to the male lover.

It was at a parlor dance, not a month before. He had arrived late, but his bright blue eyes quickly sought her brown ones, and he was hastily making his way across the desert of red and green ingrain carpeting that separated the group of expectant girls from the bashful line of boys, when dapper Jim Curtis, of Tape & Twist's dry goods "emporium," advanced at exactly the same instant from the opposite end of the row.

"May I have the pleasure, Miss Reade?" and "Will you give me this dance, Lucy?" were whispered simultaneously into the two pink ears of the bewildered girl.

She hesitatingly rose, and, woman-like, took the arm of the man she hated, leaving the man she loved to glower after her in a stupor of indignation. That was their last meeting, for Charlie left the house almost immediately, and she had neither seen nor heard from him since. Her father, who dearly loved her, noted the cessation of certain frequent letters, and the sadness in his darling's eyes, and longed with all his great, blundering heart to comfort her. When she asked, the next morning after his return on Bonnie Belle, if she might spend the rest of the week with Jennie Miller in Arkansas City, he was glad to answer:

"Why, sartin, Lucy, sartin! I ain't needin' th' mare now that things is at sech a standstill, an' yer ma seems quite chipper over th' new medicine. Only look out a little fer bummers and roughs—th' kentry's full of 'em."

"Yes, father, I'll be there before noon, and you know I'll be safe with the Millers. Wouldn't you like to live in a town, pa?"

"Wall, I ain't sayin' I shouldn't like it—but what's th' use in chinnin'? Here we've squatted, an' we couldn't scrape up th' dust to git, ef we wanted to. Shell I cinch up th' mare?"

"No, father, I can. You fix it up with ma, please. That'll be the toughest job!"

He smiled broadly in answer to her roguish look, and disappeared, to coax and wheedle the peevish, half sick, wholly dis-

couraged mother into a reluctant consent to her daughter's absence.

Lucy found that her father had not exaggerated the state of things at Arkansas City. She was obliged to check Bonnie Belle to a walk as she steered her way through the teeming streets to the small frame house of her friends, the Millers. But she gave little time to wonder or questionings. Mr. Miller was an attorney, and after a brief response to his daughter's glad welcome, Lucy said briskly,

"Jennie, dear, I came on business. I want to see your father—where is he?"

"He's home now. It's dinner time. I'll have brother Joe unsaddle Belle—come right into the dining room; we're all there."

After the noon meal, which consumed little time, the good natured Miller led his guest into the gloomy parlor, sacred to silence and obscurity, except on Sunday nights. Here, after a struggle with a refractory window that he might admit some much needed air, he turned with a twinkle in his shrewd eyes.

"Well now, to biz! What can I do for you, Miss Lucy? Anything about registration of claims, or——"

"Yes, sir, that's just it."

"Hey?" Mr. Miller was evidently not a little astonished.

"Yes, sir. I'm going to ride for a claim at Perry, and I want you to tell me just what to do to make everything safe and legal."

"Whew-w!" the attorney replied, drawing his chair closer to gaze intently into her brave young face, pallid with resolve. "It's a ride that will tax the strongest man, let alone a girl like you. You'll simply be run down and stamped to death in the rush. You're crazy to——"

"I'm a good rider, Mr. Miller, and Belle is sure footed. I'm going to take up a town site claim at Perry. Father's too old and too—too easy. You know all about him. I'm not afraid. I don't hold my life so very dear, anyhow. What have I to live for on that dreadful, burnt up prairie? Don't try to dissuade me, but let me know exactly what to do. I tell you I will make a go of it!"

"By gravy! I believe you will," he said, after a long, intent look. "Well, listen;" and he proceeded carefully to set forth the legal forms and requirements necessary, without interposing a single word of further remonstrance.

The next two days would have tested the resolution of most men, and did sap the strength of many, as they stood in packed lines under that blazing Kansas sun, blis-

tered with heat, parched with thirst, gritty and blind with the penetrating dust, waiting for their slow turns at the registration booths. But Lucy was a determined girl, and used to hardships. She had ridden, many a day, from dawn to gloaming, perched upon the wheat drill or corn dropper, and trudged hours picking up the "murphies" her father hoed out of the red black earth. She had galloped miles over the sun swept prairies, once hotly pursued by two drunken Indians; she had slept more than once with no roof above her and no couch beneath, and she knew what endurance meant.

Today she was dressed in a loose blouse and skirt of thin, cool flannel, with a man's sombrero crowning her close braided blonde hair, whose short locks curled naturally about her forehead. A sharp *machete* was thrust into her leather belt, and within the blanket, rolled into a tight bundle and strapped to her saddle bow, was hidden a bottle of cold tea, some lemons, and a paste-board box filled with food. She had come to stay.

If I tell you she also hid in her pocket several sticks of gum, do not be disgusted. She knew that chewing often relieves thirst by exciting the salivary glands to greater activity, and she only intended to resort to the Vassar remedy when cold tea and lemons failed.

All day she stood in line. At night she ate and drank, then wrapped her blanket about her, and gazed up at the stars. Something in her quiet, self contained manner prevented approach or insult, and several decent looking men, with more than one woman, were in her immediate vicinity, so she felt no fear. In fact, all physical feeling seemed in abeyance.

She had started on this mad scheme in a mood of strained excitement. Her lover's continued silence, her hateful, monotonously barren existence, her festering discontent with all her surroundings, only intensified by her school years away from home—all this had wrought her feelings to a pitch where almost any act was possible. Physical limitations seemed overcome by sheer brain force and nervous tension. She hardly thought of food or drink, and she bore the heat and crowding of the weary wait, only half comprehending their full measure of suffering, so deeply was her mind disturbed by thoughts of her estranged lover, and of the dreary life stretching before her, year upon year, as the prairie stretched before her door, wave upon wave, to the furthest limits of earth and sky.

If she gave a suppressed groan, now and then, it was because of mental suffering only; and if her face, beneath its grime of dust and sweat, was drawn and pallid, it was because the brain above never ceased from tensest thought. Nor did the strain loosen till her registration was accomplished, and she knew that she was enrolled as a land claimant. Then for a time tired nature succumbed, and she dropped into a sleep which knit up the raveled tissues once more, and made Saturday's awful ride a possibility.

Our beloved Uncle Sam's method of distributing his largess is certainly open to criticism, though it may not be easy to suggest a better way. It only affords another proof of the fact that a law which cannot be backed by main strength only hampers the honest citizen, while giving every opportunity to the knave. The decrees enforcing registration before founding a claim, and forbidding the claimant from setting foot upon the government lands before the signal at noon of the 16th of September, were intended only to keep out "sooners" and blacklegs; but they occasioned great delay and suffering to the honest settler, without accomplishing this intent, and caused a shameful, bloody struggle, which could only end in defeat for the better element. To make the distribution fair, there should have been a cordon of soldiery surrounding the Cherokee strip for a week's interval, at least; but that was deemed impossible. So the "sooners" hid in every clump and hollow, screened by dead leaves and branches, to spring into the best places after the signal, and seize their dishonest claims long before the law abiding settler upon his swiftest horse could enter the boundaries of his promised land.

That brave race for homes, with its endurance and agonies, ending too often in frightful tragedy, as nature's fiery mood and man's fiercer passions conspired to torture and kill, has passed into history. If older nations shake their heads and smile over the "generosities" of our great government, can we wonder?

It was five minutes to twelve on that brassy, sand swept Saturday, and Lucy Reade, mounted on her brave chestnut, stood with many thousand others in that mighty line of battle, ready for the charge. It was a charge where speed and pluck were the weapons, chicanery and greed the enemy, and where victory meant a home!

Lucy's teeth were set, and her breath came in gasps. Was her courage to fail her

now? In the midst of these rough, profane men, informed by the dominating sentiment of greed, was she to "flunk" and fail? No! She bit her white under lip to redness, she drew herself up to her full height, and grasped the reins more firmly in her gauntleted hand.

Hark—a gun! The flag at the military barracks yonder drops to the ground. It is the signal!

Instantly, as if moved by one wild spirit of freedom and defiance (for the carrying of firearms has been strictly prohibited) there is an answering volley from hundreds of revolvers discharged into the air. Then amid the roar, the smoke, and the yells from thousands of thirst dried throats, the line of battle starts forward—not at a walk, not at a quickstep, but at a run!

Lucy is nearly paralyzed for an instant, but Bonnie Belle is not. She is off like the bolt from a catapult, pounding through the dust and straining at her bridle.

For a few moments it is all a daze, a delirium, to the girl. Then her senses come back, her nerves steady themselves. The dust filled whirl about her resolves itself into hazy forms of horse and rider at highest tension, of ungainly prairie schooners lurching wildly by after their galloping horses, of a figure or two thrown, with bitter cries, into the very midst of the *mêlée*.

She sickens, and fixes her gaze between the mare's ears, resolved not to look, though every now and then a howl, an oath, or a hoarse laugh will break in upon the steady roar of the numberless hoof beats. Bonnie Belle, slim, quick, and graceful as a woman, and with the female genius for persistence, seizes every opening.

After a time, during which Lucy has been simply swept along, as easily and with as little conscious volition as are the planets through space, she finds herself among a still rougher element in this strange race. She has outstripped the honest householder, and reached the reckless cowboy, leading the train. As she perceives this, and notes the motley crew pressing her closely on every side, for the first time a womanly tremor thrills her breast. She knows their lawlessness well, and gives a quick, anxious glance about her at their swarthy, careless faces. At the same instant they greet her presence among them with rough cries of gallantry, which make her heart beat thick and fast. If she had only stayed in the safer crowd behind! But Bonnie Belle is quite beyond her control now. She has settled to her gait, and has no thought of anything but first place in this heat. She has

known cowboys before, carried them, too, and she proposes to keep her position with them now!

Lucy is half ashamed of her tremors, but they are acutely real, nevertheless. It is a horribly lonesome thing for a girl to be riding, unattended, over the open prairie amid such a crowd of irresponsible men. If there were but one friendly face in sight!

She turns her head uneasily for a glance back over her shoulder, catches one swift, hazy glimpse of a face that is familiar in spite of its dusty disguise, and before she has time to wonder hears the sudden exclamation—"Lucy!"

The next instant the other rider's horse is at her side, his hand is touching hers, and for one blissful minute she cannot see for tears, as she murmurs,

"Oh, Charlie, I'm so glad!"

It is the only explanation necessary. The glance, the tone of perfect trust, are enough for the most exacting heart, and from that moment the hard ride is for both but a swift rush for Eden.

At first Bonnie Belle resents the big roan pressing her flanks, but as a wet sponge is passed swiftly between her frothing jaws, bringing relief and refreshment, she ceases to fret, and the two pound along side by side, a well matched pair. Side by side, with now and then a low word, brief but full of meaning, the two riders leave the seventeen miles behind them, and their good steeds, reeking with foam but still sound in wind, bring them to the government quarters which mark the center of Perry just sixty minutes after the signal gun.

Lucy drops to the ground in a little heap, nearly spent, while Charlie, flinging her both bridles, has quickly staked out two desirable claims which will soon be worth their thousands. Meanwhile the helpful girl has pulled herself together, and is caring for the noble beasts as best she can, when Charlie stations her beside him to hold their own against the rush.

It was a wild, tumultuous moment, but they are close together, and his hand clasps hers, while he bends closer.

"Lucy, dearest, you can give your claim to the old folks—mine is for you! There'll be a minister along pretty soon, and my tent is coming by the first train. Why should we wait? Let us be married, and begin right here—together. Will you, darling?"

And clear amid the yells, the shooting, the mad rush of incoming settlers, half crazed with thirst, fatigue, and excitement, he plainly hears her honest answer, "Yes!"

THE CHILDREN OF THE STAGE.

The clever little actors and actresses who have appeared in "Fauntleroy" and similar plays—Their precocious talents, their successes, their ambitions, and the safeguards thrown about them by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

By Arthur Hornblow.

IN no country has the child of tender years been permitted to hold so important a place on the stage as in the United States; and this in spite of laws, in force in every State except Kansas, which forbid children under the age of sixteen years from appearing in a theatrical exhibition, and in spite of the strongest and most persevering opposition, in this State, from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

The stage child has been an institution since the earliest days of our theatrical history, and many of our favorite players began their careers as such. Joseph Jefferson was a child of the stage. So were Lotta, Maggie Mitchell, Minnie Maddern, Helen Dauvray, and many others. But while juvenile prodigies were always plentiful, they never appeared in any extraordinary numbers until after the production of Mrs. Frances Hodgson Burnett's "Little Lord Fauntleroy," which at once passed among the children's classics, and made every infant that could lisp a dozen consecutive words sigh for the center of the stage.

From that time on, the child actor and actress became a public craze. *Little Lord Fauntleroy*s sprang up on every side, and every new play produced had its child interest. Some of the old plays were revised, and juvenile parts were written in. The result was that clever children were in brisk demand, and commanded large salaries. But the reaction soon came. The fickle public tired of its fad, and dozens of children who were being rapidly coached for stage honors found it impossible to secure engagements. This change in

the taste of theater goers explains why there are fewer stage children before the public today than a year or two ago.

The youthful stars, however, and their parents, tell a different story. They deny that public interest in the stage child has waned, and say that their enforced inactivity is due solely to the merciless warfare waged against them by Elbridge T. Gerry and his society. They affirm that the theatrical managers, through fear of Mr. Gerry's interference, discourage the dramatists from writing parts for children, and that, in consequence, nearly four hundred of them are thus deprived of the means of earning a livelihood.

As this is one of the most interesting phases of the stage children question, and as the constitutionality of the present law is about to be questioned at Albany, it may be of interest to the reader to know exactly what the statute says, and also what position the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children takes in the matter.

The New York Penal Code, which may be taken as a type of the statutes in force, says (section 292):

"A person who employs or causes to be employed, or who exhibits, uses, or has in custody or trains for the purpose of exhibition, use, or employment, any child apparently or actually under the age of sixteen years—

"Or who neglects or refuses to restrain such a child from such training or from engaging or acting either in peddling, singing, or playing upon a musical instrument or in a theatrical exhibition—

"Is guilty of a misdemeanor."

Quite recently it was the privilege of