

THE GIRL AT THE HALF-WAY HOUSE

A STORY OF THE PLAINS
BY E. ROUGH, AUTHOR OF "THE STORY OF THE COWBOY"
Copyrighted, 1908, by D. Appleton & Company, New York

CHAPTER XVI.

The Halfway House.

"Miss Ma'y Ellen," cried Aunt Lucy, thrusting her head in at the door, "oh, Miss Ma'y Ellen, I wish't you'd come out yer right quick. They's two o' them pral' dogs out yer a-chasin' ouah hens agin—nasty, dirty things!"

"Very well, Lucy," called out a voice in answer. Mary Ellen arose from her seat near the window, whence she had been gazing out over the wide, flat prairie lands and at the blue, unwinking sky. Gathering each a bit of stick, she and Aunt Lucy drove away the two grinning daylight thieves, as they had done dozens of times before their kin, all-eager for a taste of this new feathered game that had come in upon the range. With plentiful words of admonition, the two corralled the excited but terror-stricken speckled hen, which had been the occasion of the trouble, driving her back within the gates of the inclosure they had found a necessity for the preservation of the fowls of their "hen ranch."

"It's that same Domineck, isn't it, Lucy?" said Mary Ellen, leaning over the fence and gazing at the fowls.

"Yess'm, that same ole hen, blame her fool soul! She's mo' bother'n she's wuf. We kin git two dollahs for her cooked, an' seems like long's she's erlive she bound' fer ter keep me chasin' 'roun' after her. I 'clare, she jest keep the whole lot o' ouah chickens wore down to a frazzle, she traipsin' 'roun' all the time, an' them a-follerin' her. An', of co'se," she added argumentatively, "we all got to keep up the reppytation o' ouah cookin'." I kaint ask these yer men a dollah a meal—not fer no lean ole hen wif no meat ontose her boues—no, ma'am."

Aunt Lucy spoke with professional pride and with a certain right to authority. The reputation of the Halfway House ran from the Double Forks

timber, and as yet unsupplied with brick or boards. In addition to the main dugout there was a rude barn built of sods, and towering high above the squat buildings rose the frame of the first windmill on the cattle trail, a landmark for many miles. Seeing these things growing up about him, at the suggestion and partly through the aid of his widely scattered but kind-hearted neighbors, Lajor Buford began to take on heart of grace. He foresaw for his people an independence, rude and far below their former plan of life, it was true; yet infinitely better than a proud despair.

It was perhaps the women who suffered most in the transition from older lands to this new, wild region. The barren and monotonous prospect, the high-keyed air and the perpetual winds, thinned and wore out the fragile form of Mrs. Buford. This impetuous, nerve-wearing air was much different from the soft, warm winds of the flower-laden South. At night as she lay down to sleep she did not hear the tinkle of music nor the voice of night-singing birds, which in the scenes of her girlhood had been familiar sounds. The moan of the wind in the short, hard grass was different from its whisper in the peach trees, and the shrilling of the coyotes made but rude substitute for the trill of the love-bursting mockingbird that sang its myriad song far back in old Virginia.

One day Aunt Lucy, missing Quarterly Meeting, and eke bethinking herself of some of those aches and pains of body and forebodings of mind with which the negro is never unprovided, became mournful in her melody, and went to bed sighing and disconsolate. Mary Ellen heard her voice uplifted long and urgently, and suspecting the cause, at length went to her door.

"What is it, Aunt Lucy?" she asked kindly.

"Nothin', mam; I jes rasslin' wif ther throas o' Grace er I'll bit. Wo

essence of vital stimulus. Tall and shapely, radiant, not yet twenty-three years of age, and mistress of earth's best blessing, perfect health—how could Mary Ellen be sad?

"Chick-chick-chick-chick!" she cried, bending over the fence of the chicken yard. "Chick, chick, chick!"

"I'll be thah' t'reckly wif ther feed, Miss Ma'y Ellen," called out Aunt Lucy from the kitchen. And presently she emerged and joined her mistress at the corral.

"Aunt Lucy," said Mary Ellen, "do you suppose we could ever raise a garden? I was thinking, if we had a few peas, or beans, or things like that, you know—"

"Uh-huh!"

"And do you suppose a rose bush would grow—a real rose bush, over by the side of the house?"

"Law, no, chille, what you talkin' 'bout? Nothin' haint goin' to grow yer, 'less'n hit's a little broom cohn, er some o' that alfafalfa, or that sohn er things. Few beans might, ef we worter'd 'em. My lan!" with a sudden interest, as she grasped the thought, "whut could I git fer right fresh beans, real string beans, I does wonder! Sakes, ef I c'd hev string beans an' apple pies, I sho'ly c'd make er fohtune, right quick. String beans—why, law, chille!"

"We'll have to think about this garden question some day," said Mary Ellen. She leaned against the corral post, looking out over the wide expanse of the prairie round about. "Are those our antelope out there, Lucy?" she asked, pointing out with care the few tiny objects, thin and fufelike, crowned with short black forking tips, which showed up against the sky line on a distant ridge. "I think they must be. I haven't noticed them for quite a while."

"Yass'm," said Aunt Lucy, after a judicial look. "Them blame I'll goals. Thass um. I wish't they all wuzn't so mighty peart an' knowin' all ther time, so't Majah Buford he c'd git one o' them now an' then fer ter eat. I 'member mighty well how Cap'n Franklina sent us down er quarter o' an'lope. Mighty fine meat, bit wuz."

"Er—Miss Ma'y Ellen," began Aunt Lucy presently, and apparently with a certain reservation.

"Yes?"

(To be continued.)

WHERE HE GOT THEM.

Little Boy's Explanation Embarrasses Generous Teacher.

At recess one morning little Nathan Garowski withdrew to a corner and wept, and the heart of his pretty teacher was moved with compassion.

"What's the matter, Nathan?" she inquired gently. "Why don't you play with the others?"

Nathan looked up with dimmed eyes. Dust and tears mingled on his brown cheeks. He pointed mutely to his skirt and then broke into a roar: "It was the dress of Rebecca. Me mudder no money has for buy me any-ting. I never have the trouser, and the children—the children—they stick out the finger on me, and make a laughs. They call me—call me—a g-girl."

"Don't mind them, dear," said Alice Harmon with sympathy. "They shall not laugh at you long. I will get you a coat and trousers, too."

Several days later Nathan appeared in the glory of a new suit and strutted about basking in the admiring glances of those who had despised him. His cup of pride was filled to overflowing when the superintendent came in with the principal for a visit of inspection. Nathan, well in the foreground, glanced at his garments and looked at the strangers for approbation.

"Why, little boy, what a fine pair of trousers!" said the superintendent affably. "Where did you get them?"

Nathan drew himself up to his full height, and outstretched his hand in the direction of his beloved teacher. "I got them off her," he announced. "I got them off Miss Harmon."

Then Alice Harmon, with the blush of confusion on her fair face, explained: "The—children—on the East Side always say 'off' when they mean 'from.'—I Appincott's."

GOT THERE AT LAST.

President's Messenger Long Delayed by Senatorial Courtesy.

One of the prerogatives of a United States senator is that when he steps aboard an elevator in the senate wing of the capitol he is carried immediately to his destination, no matter in which direction the elevator may be bound or who may be aboard. Three rings of the bell indicate that a senator wants to ride, and the conductor loses no time in responding to the call.

One day last week Mr. Barnes, the assistant secretary to the president, stepped aboard a senate elevator from the ground floor. In a portfolio under his arm he carried a message from the president of the United States to the Congress.

"Senate floor," said Mr. Barnes, as the conductor shut the door.

Just then there were three rings of the bell and the indicator showed that a senator wanted to be lifted out of the terrace. The elevator went down instead of up, and Mr. Barnes went along. The senator in the terrace only wanted to go to the ground floor. As he stepped off, however, there was another senatorial ring from the terrace. The senator wanted to go to the gallery floor, and the elevator went there without stopping. As the car started down there were three rings from the ground floor, and again the car failed to stop at the destination of the president's secretary. Fortunately for Mr. Barnes, this senator wanted to get off at the senate floor, and the congress, after long delay, received the message from the president.—Washington Post.

ILLINOIS NEWS

COUNTY CLERK IS ACQUITTED

Belleville Jury Returns Verdict in Favor of George K. Thomas.

A jury in Belleville, before whom was tried indictments against George K. Thomas, county clerk of St. Clair county, returned a verdict of not guilty. The last grand jury returned nine indictments against Thomas, charging him with having embezzled money supposed to belong to the county and ordered paid to various state institutions for the keeping of county charges. It appears that the state institutions have been accustomed to render bills to the county monthly. These bills, it is alleged, would be allowed by the board of supervisors and a warrant drawn for the amount. It was charged by the special committee that Thomas, instead of paying the money as ordered, indorsed the county warrants and cashed them and appropriated the money to his own use. At the end of three months the institutions which had not received their money would render a statement to the county, including the monthly bill and the balance due from back account in one sum, and this would be allowed by the county board and turned over to the institutions to which it was due. The defense claimed that Thomas cashed the county orders and in their stead mailed his personal check to the state institutions for the amounts due.

GIVES UP HIS SHARE OF ESTATE

Prefers to Be Witness to Will and Relinquish Right to \$2,000.

The will of Joseph Piel, who died a year ago, bequeathed \$3,000 to his favorite cousin, Anton P. Schulte, who was also one of the witnesses to the will. When the instrument was offered for probate in the Adams county court Schulte was notified that his act in witnessing the will barred him from any of its benefits. He was given his choice to withdraw his name as witness and contest for his share or to let the will stand and waive all claim as the beneficiary. He chose the latter position and the amount named as his bequest will go to relatives in Germany.

Reports on Drinking Water.

Dr. John H. Long, expert chemist of the state board of health, has completed his analysis of the drinking water of every city in the state with over 5,000 population. In Belleville the water was found to be of high standard. Of other cities in southern Illinois the report says: "Alton, filtering evidently poor; Cairo, safe condition by filtration; Carlinville, common river water, but not dangerous; East St. Louis, chemical results, like most river water; Edwardsville, not condemned; Madison, average water; Carrollton, seems to be good."

Improvements at Plaza Chautauqua.

The course of the creek at Plaza Chautauqua, passing through that summer resort, will be changed to make place for modern improvements. General Manager Gridley of the Bluff line, with officers of the Chautauqua, decided upon moving the outlet of the creek about 600 feet up the river by straightening the channel so as to throw it on the west side of the new hotel. The bed of the old creek will be turned into a bathing pool, to be covered with a pavilion, adjoining the hotel. Contracts for building the pool and pavilion have been let.

Murder is Charged.

Chester Stahlung was arrested at the Alton glass works by Deputy Sheriff Trullitt of Green county on a charge of murder. Stahlung had been working in Alton since a few days after he is alleged to have committed the crime. With his brother-in-law Stahlung is charged with the murder of his cousin.

Gets Blood Poison From Corpses.

William Ballhorn, an undertaker, died at Granite City from blood poisoning, having contracted the disease several days before while handling a dead body. Mr. Ballhorn was 28 years of age and formerly a member of the board of aldermen of Venice.

Costly Fire in Barn.

A large barn belonging to Robert W. Craig, a farmer living five miles north of Marshall, has been destroyed by fire. All the contents were burned, including six horses and five brood sows. The fire is thought to have been of incendiary origin.

Engineer is Scalded to Death.

John W. Stucke, a Chicago, Burlington & Quincy railway engineer, was killed in a wreck two miles out of Beardstown. Mr. Stucke was caught under the wreckage and the water from the burst boiler scalded him, life soon being extinct.

Sand for Glass.

H. J. Bowman of Alton is preparing to open what appears to be an inexhaustible supply of white sand for making glass on his place near Delhi. A switch will be built and work of taking out sand will be started shortly.

Prepares to Build Power House.

Engineer Smith has a force of workmen at Okavville surveying for the proposed power house of the Southern Two power houses are to be located in the county, Irvington on the east and boundary to have the other.

TRIES TO BURN NEW-BORN BABE

Sad Plight of Young Woman Who Tries to Conceal Her Shame.

Gustia Simek, 21 years of age, who came to Edwardsville from Bohemia four months ago and has been living with the family of Martin Mockler, was held by a coroner's jury on the charging of murdering her newly-born babe. She will be held for the grand jury. The woman was discovered poking the kitchen stove, and when others attempted to discover the cause she became violent. An officer was called, but before he arrived Mr. Mockler and a friend had succeeded in taking the body of a child from the stove burned to a crisp. To several Bohemian friends the woman stated that she was so frightened that she burned the remains to conceal the fact. She also stated that the father of the child lived in Bohemia and had sent her to this country, promising to follow her in a short time, and that she had learned that he has since joined the army. The verdict of the coroner's jury was that the "infant came to its death through the criminal intent of the mother to dispose of it, and her efforts to burn its body, and that the mother is Gustia Simek of Edwardsville."

CARRIES COAL TO NORTHWEST

Jacksonville Line Is an Important Feeder to the "Q." System.

Since the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad company has secured the control of the Jacksonville line into Centralia, the latter has developed into quite a freight line, especially in carrying southern Illinois coal to the northwest. A coal traffic arrangement has been made with the Illinois Central by which this road brings from the South sixty cars of coal daily, delivering them to the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy road at Centralia, and receives from the latter road every day a train load of empty flat cars to be loaded. The interchange of traffic has become so heavy that additional transfer tracks had to be put in.

Home Protective Association.

The East St. Louis Home Protective association has been organized. N. L. Clannahan was elected president, Charles McCasland vice president, J. B. Sisking secretary and Walter Beckwith treasurer. The object of the association is said to be to keep saloons out of the residence districts. A resolution was offered that the city council should not grant a saloon license unless the application be accompanied by a petition signed by two-thirds of the property owners in the block in which the saloon is to be located.

Babe Dies of Measles.

Violet Charlotte Lox, the 2-year-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. William Lox of Bethalto, is dead. The child was suffering from measles, and the mother says she sent for a physician, but was unable to pay the fee. About 3 o'clock in the morning the mother was aroused by the child asking for something to eat, and two hours later, when the mother again awoke she found her little daughter dead beside her in bed.

Non-Alcoholic Elections.

Woodriver township is being agitated by the advocates and the opponents of a proposition to abolish the practice of electioneering by giving away beer. The movement in favor of non-alcoholic campaigns started in Upper Alton. Since it was begun another movement has been started against candidates who agree to the proposition.

To Restock Dead Creek.

Andrew Morgan of Rush City, a suburb of East St. Louis, announces that he has secured a large consignment of game fish from the state hatcheries with which to restock Dead creek, which for many years has been one of the famous fishing grounds of the East Side.

C. E. Election.

The Presbyterian Christian Endeavor society of Cairo has elected the following officers for the ensuing year: President, Miss Jennie Dewey; vice president, Miss Eliza Halliday; secretary, Miss Carrie Rule; treasurer, Miss Frances Bennett.

Tricounty Institute.

The tricounty institute of the W. C. T. U. of Alexander, Pulaski and Massac counties will be held at Monks City on Thursday and Friday, March 31 and April 1. Mrs. Mary E. Hopper of Chicago will be the leader.

Two Sent to Asylum.

Ella Hoelscher, aged 18, and Michael Ranney, aged 30 years, of Quincy, have been adjudged insane and sent to the asylum at Jacksonville.

Adds to Its Population.

The territory southeast of Springfield, bounded by Ash and Tenth streets and East and South Grand avenues, has been annexed to the city. It includes about 200 houses and has a population of about 2,000.

Protects Home Labor.

The Alton city council has decided to insert in every improvement contract hereafter a clause requiring contractors to pay not less than \$1.25 per day, and in case Alton labor is preferred.

DOES NOT OPPOSE A MITCHELL

Secretary Ryan Declines to Be a Candidate for Governor.

Reports have been current that some of the larger cities that have United mine workers in Illinois, opposed the acceptance of the operations ultimatum for a reduction in wages was that he desired to support John Mitchell as national president. He was asked: "Mr. Ryan, have you anything to say in regard to the rumor sent out from Chicago that you are taking this stand against accepting the compromise deals offered by the operators in the hope that if it is rejected President Mitchell will resign and that you may be made the national president at the end of this term?" Mr. Ryan replied: "Emphatically, I am not. I never dreamt of such a thing. I have no aspiration for that position. I have always been an admirer and ardent supporter of John Mitchell. Results may show that President Mitchell is right. It may be that our judgment was mistaken in taking a different view. I hope that time will show this is the case. John Mitchell will never have a stancher supporter than I, and there is no man I hold in higher esteem."

VAIN ATTEMPT TO SMOUGLE DOGS

Illinois Farmer Tries to Evade the British Customs Officers.

James Chesnut, a Madison county farmer and noted animal trainer, has been going through an expensive experience as the result of his attempt to smuggle into England his pet dog, Tommy, when he went there for a visit to his birthplace. Tommy is a pretty little French poodle, which has been taught to perform almost incredible tricks. Chesnut tried to get the animal past the customs officers, but the dog was seized, although Chesnut settled up, and is being kept a period of six months in order that any latent germs of the rabies may be given opportunity to develop. Chesnut sent back word that he has been paying \$5 a week for his dog while it is in quarantine, and is waiting in England to get his pet back. Chesnut trains animals as a pastime on his farm east of Alton.

Runaway Boy Foils Police.

Willie Thomas, aged 16, who was picked up on the streets of Belleville by the police and who admitted being a runaway, but claimed that he had boarded a train at Benton, Ill., to sell papers, was furnished transportation by the Belleville police. The boy had no sooner left than John Thomas of East St. Louis, father of the boy, arrived in Belleville. Mr. Thomas told the police chief that he had been cleverly worked by the boy. He said, however, that the lad's grandmother lived at Benton and he had doubtless run away from home to visit her.

New College President.

Rev. A. L. Whitcomb, pastor of the Free Methodist church of Greenville, has been elected president of Greenville college by the board of trustees and has filed his conditional acceptance, which has not been finally passed upon by the executive committee, in whose hands it is. If the election stands Rev. Whitcomb will succeed Dr. W. T. Hogue, who recently resigned.

Select New Principal.

The board of trustees of Greenville college has elected Prof. Sherman Cooper of Evansville, Wis., to the principalship of the business department.

Naval Academy Alternate.

Homer Brents of Taylorville has been appointed first alternate for the naval academy at Annapolis by Congressman B. F. Caldwell.

To Build Big Reservoir.

The managers of the water works have planned to build an additional reservoir, which will hold over 200,000 gallons of water.

Educator is Ill.

E. A. Gastman, president of the state board of education and superintendent of the Decatur schools, is seriously ill at his home.

Shafting Kills Workman.

L. C. Barkus, an employe at the Prate & Co. cereal oil mills at Decatur, was caught in the shafting and instantly killed.

Scarlet Fever Epidemic.

Mayor Nicodemus of Taylorville ordered all of the schools in the city closed on account of the scarlet fever epidemic.

To Vote on License.

The Salem city council has decided to submit the question of granting saloon license to a direct vote of the people.

Clerks Discard Union Button.

The Alton Retail Clerks' union has unanimously decided to discard the union button. Some of the clerks declined to wear the badge on the ground that some persons refused to make purchases from them.

Engineer's Death is Claimed.

W. W. Burns of St. Louis, who was engineer on the Illinois Central passenger train, while making a run through the tunnel near the head station at Jacksonville, was killed.



Drove away the two grinning thieves.

of the Brazos north to Abilene, and much of the virtue of the table was dependent upon the resources of this "hen ranch," whose fame was spread abroad throughout the land. Saved by the surpassing grace of pie and "chicken fixings," the halting place chosen for so slight reason by Buford and his family had become a permanent abode, known gratefully to many travelers and productive of more than a living for those who had established it. It was, after all, the financial genius of Aunt Lucy, accustomed to her life to culinary problems, that had foreseen profit in eggs and chickens when she noted the exalted joy with which the hungry cow punchers fell upon a meal of this sort after a season of salt pork, tough beef and Dutch-oven bread.

At first Major Buford rebelled at the thought of inkeeping. His family had kept open house before the war, and he came from a land where the thoughts of hospitality and of price were not to be mentioned in the same day. Yet he was in a region where each man did many things, the first that thing which seemed nearest at hand to be done.

From the Halfway House south to the Red River there was nothing edible. And over this Red River there came now swarming uncounted thousands of broad-horned cattle, driven by many bodies of hardy, sunburned, well-armed, hungry men. At Ellisville, now rapidly becoming an important cattle market, the hotel accommodations were more pretentious than comfortable, and many a cowboy who had sat at the board of the Halfway House going up the trail, would mount his horse and ride back twenty-five miles for dinner. Such are the attractions of corn bread and chicken when prepared by the hands of a real genius gone astray on this such miscoguous world.

Thus the little Southern family quickly found itself possessed of a definite, profitable and growing business.

Buford was soon able to employ aid in making his improvements. He constructed a large dugout, after the fashion of the dwelling most common in the country at that time. This manner of dwelling, practically a roofed-over cellar, its side walls showing but a few feet above the level of the earth, had been discovered to be a very practical and comfortable form of living place by those settlers who found a region practically barren of

all po' weak sinners, Miss Ma'y Ellen."

"Yes, I know, Lucy."

"An' does you know, Miss Ma'y Ellen, I sorter gits skeered sometimes, out yer, fer fear mer supper-cashuns ain't goin' take holt o' heaven jesn right. White folks has one way er prayin', but er bigger kaint pray erlone—no, mam, jes kaint pray erlone."

"Now, Aunt Lucy," said Mary Ellen, sagely, "there isn't anything wrong with your soul at all. You're as good an old thing as ever breathed, I'm sure of that, and the Lord will reward you if he ever does any one, white or black."

"Does you think that, honey?"

"Indeed I do."

"Well, sometimes I think the Lord ain't goin' to forgive me fer all ther devtilment I done when I was 'I'll. You know, Miss Ma'y Ellen, hit take a life er prayer to wipe out ouah transgresshuns. Now, how kin I pray, not to say pray, out yer, in this yer lan? They ain't a church in a hundred mile o' yer, so fer's I kin tell, an' they sho'ly ain't no church fer culund folks. Seems to me like, ef I c'd jes know er single nigger, so'st we c'd meet onct in er while, an' so'st we c'd jes kneel down together an' pray comferible like, same's ef 'twus back in ole Vehnny—why, Miss Ma'y Ellen, I'd be the happiest ole 'oman ever you did see."

Mary Ellen rose and went to her room, returning with her guitar. "Listen, Aunt Lucy," she said; "I will play and you may sing. That will make you feel better, I think."

It was only from a perfect understanding of the negro character that this proposal could come, and only a perfect dignity could carry it out with grace; yet there, beneath the floor of the wide prairie sea, these strange exercises were carried on, the low throbbing of the strings according with the quavering minors of the old-time hymns, until Aunt Lucy wiped her eyes and smiled.

"Thank yer, Miss Ma'y Ellen," she said; "thank yer a thousand times. You sho'ly does know how to comfort folks mighty well, even a pore ole nigger."

On the morning following Aunt Lucy's devotional exercises that good soul seemed to be altogether happy and contented and without any doubts as to her future welfare. Mary Ellen was out in the open air, bonnetless and all-a-blow. It was a glorious, sunny day, the air charged with some