The Promised Land

The vessel entered the St. Lawrence River where all passengers were placed in quarantine on a small island for a week. All clothing and bedding were sterilized in large vats hung over camp fires. Meals which were prepared by fires in the open were a most welcome change. But imagine the bread that had been baked three and a half months before! Lucky for them that they had been raised on hard bread (*knäckebröd*) and not on hot biscuits!

After the week of quarantine, they sailed up the river into Lake Ontario, landing at Hamilton, Ontario. From there Gustaf, Ingrid and Ulricka went by rail to Chicago by way of Detroit. They reached their destination 15 weeks after leaving home. As they were nearing Chicago they learned the most discouraging news, that a siege of cholera was raging there.

When they had checked through with the officers at the station, they went in search of a place in which to live. Chicago in the year 1854 was a place of 40,000 people. It was a low, marshy place with many hollows of green mire. The business streets were paved with heavy planks. As our newcomers walked along the street, a heavy vehicle came rolling along over the planks and the mire from beneath splashed up on the sidewalk before them. "What a stench," said Ingrid, as they sidestepped to avoid the unpleasant odor. They walked for many blocks and at one place it became necessary for them to stop at a crossing while a procession passed. As Ingrid looked down the street she called out, "Look, Gustaf, that wagon has several coffins on it. What can it be?" Gustaf shook his head slowly and answered, "I guess they contain the dead from the plague. At the station I overheard some Swedes saying that people were dying by the thousands. Gruesome stories are told of the dead being rushed off to burial before they are dead, and of some coming to life while being buried; but that those in charge have no mercy as they are filled on whisky to get them to do the work."

"This is a most tragic situation," said Ingrid. "We are not safe here; let's go elsewhere." Then in a meditative voice she reluctantly continued, "But perhaps we had better make some money first."

"Yes I think we had better try it a while as we don't know much about the place yet; and you know, Ingrid, that rumors are not always dependable."

They located living quarters on Kinsey street, two blocks from the Clark street bridge. They sent a drayman for the trunks and when these arrived Ingrid and Ulricka unpacked

the clothes and hung them about the room to air out the odor from the ocean voyage. As Ingrid smoothed out the creases in the garments with a loving touch she meditated, "These things now are happy reminders of home. I wonder how mother is. I am sure that she thinks of us often. She was always sweet and thoughful and she worked so hard to help us get ready. I wish that I could be as sweet as she is."

Ulricka answered thoughtfully, "Mother has had many trials. You and I have our lives before us and it remains to be seen what trials we will meet and how we meet them."

When the things were all unpacked, Ingrid looked them over and said, "These things from home seem to possess life and feeling or something that draws me to them; a comforting feeling in all this uncertain newness about us. I sometimes wonder why we came to America."

At this stage Gustaf came in and announced, "I have already secured work and am to report for duty the day after tomorrow."

"What kind of work, pray tell, when you could pick it up so soon?"

"I am to work with a street gang not far from here."

"On these sloppy nasty streets? You will need rubber boots." Then she added, "We had better go out and get some food before it gets dark, as we need to rest tonight."

When Gustaf returned home after his first day of work, he said, "That was hard after having been idle so long; I could hardly hold out the day. I am so tired."

The next morning he still was tired and it was an effort for him to go back to work but necessity urged him on now that he had room rent and living expense for which to provide. But along in the day he was brought home in a very sick condition. When the doctor arrived he pronounced it cholera and sent for an interpreter through whom he could give instructions to Ingrid as to the care of the patient.

The interpreter was a man from the street who had seen the sick man taken in, and he misinterpreted the doctor's orders and Ingrid did as she was told. The doctor ordered that no water be given the patient but Gustaf had a raging fever and called for water constantly and Ingrid gave it to him as she had been told to do. As the stomach could not retain the water it came right up again and this process continued all night, and mopping became Ingrid's major work.

Gustaf had a hard night and three men came in to help Ingrid. Cramp gripped him into a knot of excruciating pain and it took the strength of the three men to straighten him out again. In order to prevent such cruelty to the sick man, they watched for the attacks and as they saw them coming the three

men sat down on the limbs and in this way prevented their knotting so hard.

When the doctor came the next morning he became alarmed over the night's experience but Gustaf lived on and soon showed signs of improving. When he had improved sufficiently that Ingrid could talk to him freely she told him how very sick he had been and continued by saying:

"Do you know, Gustaf, I firmly believe that all that water which we gave you the first night saved you, as it washed the disease right out of your stomach. So many have died during the time that you have been sick but you are getting well now. I am glad that the interpreter was dumb and told me to give you water."

When Gustaf had recovered from the illness, he met a man who was looking for someone to join him in the tailor business. He urged Gustaf to go in with him; and while Gustaf did not claim to be a tailor he knew that he could look after the business end of it, and it did appeal more than street work at that time. From this impromptu beginning a shop was opened at the intersection of Lake and Canal streets and they eagerly looked for business. Gustaf and Ingrid lived in the rear of the building. Perhaps this business was a hasty venture; perhaps there was not sufficient business to be had; the one thing of which there was no doubt was the outcome and that was not so good.

A cousin of Ingrid's came to see them one day and when he learned of their misfortunes he suggested that they leave the city and go to his state. He said, "Wisconsin has a more invigorating climate; it is more like Sweden in that we have pine forests and birches. You will like it there."

Any change from their present disappointments looked good to Ingrid and Gustaf just then and Gustaf went to Wisconsin, leaving Ingrid in Chicago until he had investigated to find whether there was work to be had.

In the Timberland of Wisconsin

Gustaf went to Grand Rapids, which now is Wisconsin Rapids, where he secured work in a nearby lumber camp, making shingles. A group of men working there took him in to live with them in a small shack, which he thought was rather dilapidated. However, he did appreciate the kindness of the men and thought that it would do until Ingrid came when they could find something else. But when Gustaf began to look for a house he met with difficulties as there were no houses to be had. One evening he laid his trouble before the men and one of them said, "Bring your wife here; you and she can have the lower room and we will sleep in the upper one."

"That is very kind of you but I don't see how I can do that. My wife is a very neat girl and she came from a nice home in Sweden. I just can't ask her to live here."

Gustaf experienced much worry in trying to fit Ingrid into the settlement. She was coming and that shack was the only place which he could get. One evening he quietly surveyed the room to see if he could find some redeeming quality which he could hold out to Ingrid when she came, but not one could he find that was worthy of praise. The furniture comprised a table, a bench, a barrel, and a bed built to the wall. The barrel had puzzled Gustaf until he learned that it outmeasured the door, which meant that the shack had been built about the barrel and even a barrel could not be destroyed if it in any way could serve some usefulness.

The upper floor was spread with hay which served the men as mattresses; and, as the boards were fitted loosely together, wisps of hay protruded into the room below, causing it to look more like a haymow than living quarters. It had been easy for Gustaf to figure out why the men so readily offered to take Ingrid in; the chef was a 13 year old boy. This also accounted for much of the disorder of the place.

The day of Ingrid's arrival came; and, as Gustaf took her in the direction of the shack, he tried to prepare her for the shock which he knew would come to her. With a feeling of bewilderment, he ushered her into the room. Ingrid gasped and when she regained her speech she looked up at Gustaf saying, *"Inte kan vi leva här?"* (Surely we can't live here?) But when Gustaf explained to her that there was no other place, she consented, saying, "Perhaps when I get it cleaned up some we can stand it for a while. The pine forest is beautiful and that will help."

The young chef had dinner ready and there was salt pork, potatoes, and black coffee served in tin cups. Judging from the

young chef's apron, Ingrid knew that he enjoyed intimate relations with his pots and pans. Her appetite failed her and she thought that she would be glad to exchange place with the cook if she was to remain in the house.

Gustaf and Ingrid both worked hard and observed the strictest economy; but as Gustaf's wages were small, the savings also were small. They had been ambitious to get into something for themselves and when Gustaf had worked several months he said to Ingrid, "I think we can get that piece of land now as we have enough for the first payment. Then we can build a cabin before winter comes. I know you will be glad to get away from here."

"Surely I shall; it has often been unpleasant to live with these men who have no regard for temperance."

The deal was made and before long the cabin was completed. The bed was built to the wall, as was customary, and Ingrid made a mattress from heavy cloth filled with hay. The rest of the furniture Gustaf made after they moved into the cabin. Everything was new and clean and they were happy over their little home, which measured 16′ x 24′ in size. But there was one thing which pleased Ingrid more than all else and that was the door. All the cabins and shacks of the settlement had doors made of planks but their cabin had a real door. This pleasure was not instigated by pride or rivalry, because she always wished others everything that was good. But, for some reason, that door awakened within her a faith in better things to come.

The anxiety during Gustaf's illness in Chicago, as well as the worry over the expense and no income, had robbed Ingrid of optimism and left her dejected; but that door dispelled discouragement much as sunshine disperses dark clouds. Again joy came to her and she faced her duties with more courage. She gave evidence to this when one day she said to Gustaf, "I am glad that you are going into the shingle business for yourself; you have business ability and you will make a success of it. What part can I do to become a partner in the business?"

"Perhaps you had better not fell trees. But all shingles must be steamed before they are tied into bundles of 500 each; this steam bath would be more akin to woman's work and you can help with that."

Making shingles by hand was tedious work. The tree was felled and sawed into proper lengths; these were split into sections by means of wedges, and each section was again split into smaller parts by long heavy knives. With a draw knife they were finished into shingles. Then came the steam bath. The bundles were piled away, and as each new bundle was

added to the pile it anchored the hopes of our two pioneers more firmly to the possibility of paying for the wood lot and the oxen and wagon, which had been bought on credit as part of their business equipment.

Throughout the whole winter, in cold and in deep snow, they worked at their task. When the weather had permitted it Ingrid had done the steaming out-of-doors over a large iron kettle hung over a camp fire; but when it became cold she must do it over the stove, and this made it crowded and untidy in the little home.

When spring approached Gustaf built the raft and the tow boat; and as the ice floe passed off down the river, the men loaded the shingles ready for shipping. As the men would live on the raft during the trip, some of the bundles were piled to form a shelter which would also serve as cooking shack enroute.

This first trip held the thrill of a new adventure for Gustaf. To find a market for his cargo he would go down the Wisconsin River to where it emptied into the Mississippi, and along this latter river he expected to find the best markets. This trip also would offer an opportunity to see more of the country and it would give him a chance to acquaint himself with American business methods. The previous fall Gustaf had taken out naturalization papers which had made him eligible to vote for the 15th president of this country, however, his candidate, John C. Fremont, lost to James Buchanan; never-the-less he now was an American and he wanted to learn all that he could about his new country.

Ulricka came to stay with Ingrid during Gustaf's absence and when the day of his going came, the sisters went down to the river to see him off. The raft was loosened from the mooring and guided out to the center of the stream by the tow boat, where the swift flow of the river embraced it and moved it down stream.

Gustaf waved a last farewell to the girls as the raft rounded the bend of the river and was lost to view.

"Of what does that remind you, Ulricka?" questioned Ingrid.

"Of the same incident of which you are thinking, I am sure. That was the way we sailed down the fjord and out to sea. That seems a long time ago, doesn't it?"

Ingrid figured out the time to herself and then said, "It is nearly three years ago. Oh, how I should like to see mother right now! The longing nearly overwhelms me at times. Soon I shall be a mother, but my child will be an American; in fact, we all are Americans now that we have our naturalization papers."

After an absence of three weeks, Gustaf returned. He said that all had gone well on the trip and he had sold the raft and boat and made the return trip by rail. He told Ingrid, "I consider the income from the cargo a fair amount. Now we will make another payment on the land and pay for the oxen and wagon. That will not leave us much to live on and it must take care of all our expenses until we make another shipment; that means a year."

The primitive conditions of the settlement were hard on Ingrid at that time. Especially was this true of the food, and one day she called Gustaf's attention to this when she said, "I get very tired of salt pork for a constant diet, but I miss the milk most of all. I remember the lovely milk we had in Sweden; I wish we had a cow."

"I know that you should have milk, Ingrid; but we can't keep a cow here, and I would not know where to get one, anyway. It seems that we must live as do the other woodsmen."

"I know that I should not complain. I remember how the very poor in Europe had to subsist on bread made from the bark of trees. We fare better than they do; but I am tired of pork."

When half of May had passed Ulricka again was with Ingrid. With only a few finishing touches to the dresses, the layette would be ready. It was a simple layette but the articles were well made as Ingrid had learned to do expert sewing when she worked in the dressmaking shop in Jönköping. She laid the little things on the bed for Ulricka to see and as they looked them over Ingrid remarked; "The lace on the thin dress is that which I made with a needle, and it looks like tatting. That is the only nice dress we could afford. Isn't it cunning with the tiny short sleeves?"

"You are a fine seamstress, Ingrid; all that you need is money. I wonder where all that wealth is, which we heard so much about before we came to this country."

"This is a large country," responded Ingrid. "Fate will smile on us some day and then we shall find that fictitious wealth which eludes us now."

The little things were put away and from then on they waited for the baby, hoping that all would be well. There were no doctors in the settlement and all that could be done was to let nature take its course. Ingrid and Ulricka were young and inexperienced in the ways of receiving babies into the world, but they were resourceful and the approaching event was awaited with the usual calm of early frontier days.

In the latter part of May the baby came and a neighborly woman came in to act as mid-wife. The baby was a boy, which pleased the parents. When the first feeding time came the infant refused the mother's breast, regardless of much coaxing. The neighbor woman, who had a baby of her own, offered him her breast, which was more developed; this he accepted eagerly. The woman thought it a kind act but it was the undoing of little William and a hardship to Ingrid. It became necessary to feed William cow's milk and this must be hauled for several miles. When warm weather came, this was a hardship in many ways. In order to keep the milk at a pleasing temperature for night feeding, Ingrid placed the feeding bottle under the pillow. Several mornings she found that it had soured.

It was not long until she noticed that William did not gain in weight as he should and he had become fretful. She then made a gruel from milk and flour and tried him on that diet. The gruel stimulated the baby at first but before long he again began to loose in weight very noticeably. Ingrid did all that she could but she was helpless in fighting for her baby's life and one day as she watched over him he fell asleep, never to open his big blue eyes again.

Ingrid grieved bitterly, placing the blame with herself as she could not feed her baby as she should have done. Gustaf made a little coffin from pine boards and Ulricka lined it in some of the white material left from the layette. They dressed William in the thin dress with the tiny sleeves and placed him in his last bed.

The minister, who came to the settlement at times, conducted the funeral and some of the neighbors came in to comfort the parents. A familiar song was sung by the group and then the lid to the coffin was brought in and the cruel nails were driven in and that was all. The coffin was placed in the wagon and Gustaf, Ingrid, and Ulricka climbed into the seat and Gustaf called to the oxen to go, while the minister and some of the friends followed in another wagon. They drove to the burial place, where Gustaf had dug a grave. A short service was read and then the tiny coffin was lowered into the grave by means of ropes and the earth was shoveled in, resounding against the pine boards.

In the days that followed, Ingrid went about her work as before but her thoughts were with her baby. One day she gathered some bright-colored autumn leaves and took them to the grave, where she spread them out over the barren mound. This gave her the satisfaction that she had done something for William and she thought that he would know that she still loved him.

Before long winter was there and as the snow began to fall about the cabin one day, Ingrid watched it from the window. All at once, a chill shook her frame and a fear like unto despair came over her. Out in that cold was her baby, clad in that

thin dress with tiny sleeves. Tears blurred her vision while a whisper escaped her lips, "If only I could get to my baby and wrap a warm shawl about him! I could stand the grief, but it seems so cruel to leave him there without any protection."

The inevitable change of seasons brought spring which relieved Ingrid of that anxiety. As the years passed on other babes came to the home, giving the lonely mother new duties and new interest. A daughter, whom they called Amelia, was two years old when Carl came.

Changes of a wider scope came when the Civil War broke out. Money, property and everything depreciated in value and business was almost at a standstill. Times were very hard and banks were uncertain. Most of the money in circulation was state or private bank currency. Banks were being closed daily and most of the outstanding currency was unredeemable. Each bank's currency had its own value and seldom passed at par. For the purpose of informing the public of the worth of various bank currencies, a publication was issued each month which showed the market value of each bank's currency. Gold was very scarce.

Everybody fared badly during those times. When Gustaf took cargoes to market he exacted as much gold as possible in the sale; and on the return trip he bartered currency for gold, paying a heavy premium. To do this he would go by the way of Chicago, Milwaukee and Madison. On one of these trips his cargo sold for $1,300.00. However, when he reached home, the amount had dwindled to $600.00; yet all of that was gold.

Through these hard years Gustaf made shingles, though the sales brought less each year. In the spring of 1862 he had a shipment ready and he wondered what it would bring; he was greatly in need of money.

When all was ready, the raft was started down stream. The men noticed that the flow was swifter than usual, but not until they neared the rapids did they fear danger. Then the roar of the turbulent waters warned them and they jumped to the boat and rowed to shore, where they saw the tragedy—the raft capsized in the swirling waters and the entire cargo was lost. Gustaf seemed stunned and the men took him by the arm and lead him to the boat. They rowed to the dock, where they tied up the boat and Gustaf walked slowly toward home, a bankrupt and heartbroken man.

Ingrid saw him coming and went to meet him, Amelia running before her while she carried Carl.

"What is it Gustaf?" she called; but as she came to him she realized that something serious had happened and that he was not ready to talk. She took his arm and quietly walked with him to the cabin. He dropped into a chair and then tears

came to his relief; she watched him calmly until he gained control of his emotions, when he told her what had happened and then he said, "What can we do now? All that we have is the oxen and there is no work to be had."

"Let us not dispair, Gustaf; some change will come."

They went about the home duties as before, quietly waiting. Some days thereafter when Gustaf came into the house, Ingrid saw that he was troubled and then he said, "One of the oxen died during the night." No comment was made by either. Unawares, they had cultivated a stoic calm and it stood them in hand as trials came.

Once again Ingrid's cousin lent them advice in that he suggested that they go into Minnesota, as that part of the country was being opened up to homesteading. As there was no chance for work they decided to sell the woodlot and go westward. In later years Grand Rapids grew to include the woodlot and paved streets covered the place that was little William's grave.