

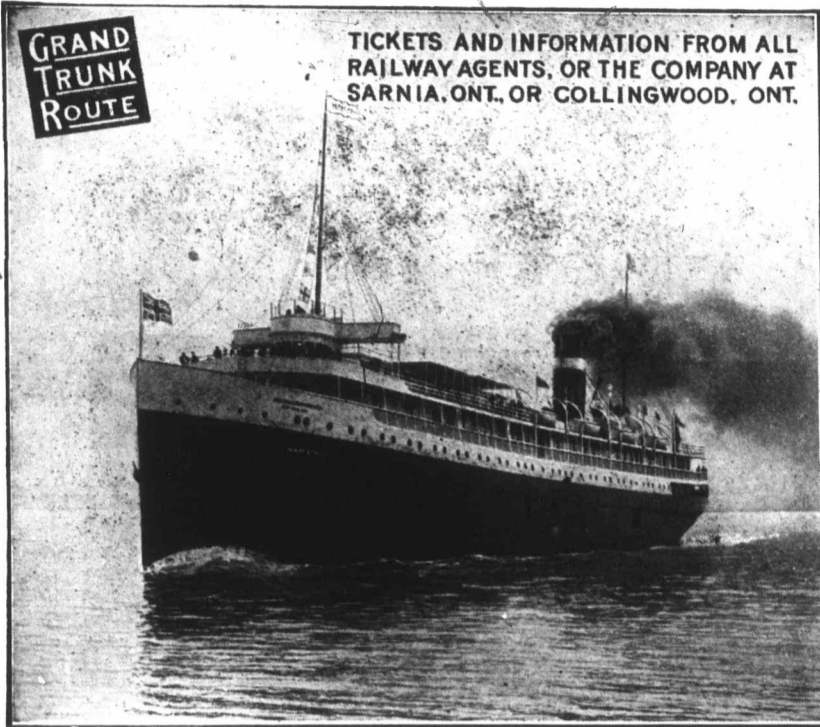
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"There, now, that's square. Perhaps you would like to rest a little and look about you."

Melicent ran her needle securely in and out of her work and sat up straight to get the ache out of her shoulders.

All this time Melicent's eyes were growing more and more surprised, for the walls of the room where they were sitting were hung with caps and long embroidered robes and dolls' dresses and strips of embroidery and shoes.

"Yes," whispered the sewing-bird, who had perched himself upon her shoulder. "Everybody who ever sewed has something here. This is the Stitch-keeper's House, and no matter how the stitches are put in, everyone's sewing is put up on the walls and kept. The very best piece of course."

"Oh," cried Melicent, for she had caught sight of her own name. She got down and went across the room to look at it. But it wasn't hers after all, for the stitches were so tiny that you

could hardly see them. "Your great-grandmother in Riverby did it," said the sewing-bird, swelling with pride. "I helped." And see, right beside it hung the fire-screen that great-grandmother's great-Aunt Lydia had made. Melicent had seen it before. There was a picture of each of the flowers in the Riverby garden embroidered upon it.

"Does my sewing really have to go up there?" inquired Melicent in an anxious whisper.

"Yes," said the sewing-bird, mischievously. "Unless you should happen to try hard enough to make the next piece better."

"But look up here," he cried, fluttering up into a corner and hovering before some long tattered streamers of white silk with bits of blue sewn on with golden thread, that hung beside some strips of red and white and some white stars sewn on blue. The names underneath them were Jeanne D'Arc and Betsy Ross.

"They were battle-flags," chirped the sewing-bird excitedly. "And see, this

was made by a princess." He darted to where, on the next wall, hung a bedspread with peacocks and humming-birds and orange trees and rabbits and daisies and lizards and a brook with curly waves, worked all over it.

All of the sewing was not so pleasant to look at. Miranda Isabella Brown had put in a patch with the wrong color thread and had finished it out with a hairpin. Little Star-in-the-pine-tops had mended the tear in her leather skirt with big, uneven stitches.

"But that wasn't her fault," explained the sewing-bird. "Because all the needle she had was a thorn pulled from the end of a leaf. She never had to bother about threading it, though," he chuckled, "for the thread was fast to her thorn-needle. All she had to do was to pull it off the plant."

And there were yards and yards of plain hemming and patchwork quilts with tiny squares sewn over and over. There were fine frilled linen shirts, but, as I've already told you, there were too many kinds to say the names of.

"Do you suppose that everybody knew that their work was to be put up here?" Melicent whispered to the sewing-bird. They had stopped before a hem that had not even been properly basted.

"Oh, dear no," chuckled the bird. "The little girl who did that thought that it was only a stupid task that was of no use anyhow."

Melicent grew red. She began to feel the she would not care to look at anything else. She turned her back on the sewing-bird and went over to the table where her red lacquer workbox stood.

The old man looked up from the pen he was mending.

"It's interesting, isn't it?" and he beamed at her over the top of his spectacles.

"Yes," said Melicent. "But mayn't I go home to my mother now? She'll think it queer if I stay away so long. Thank you for showing me so much."

"Not at all," said the old man; "I should like very much to have you come

again; but I trust that it will be under slightly different circumstances."

"Yes," said Melicent, firmly, "I'll try and put my stitches in so that they will never need to be taken out." Then she made her best dancing-school courtesy and said "Thank you" again. But when she opened the red lacquer box, the sewing-bird refused to go in. "What were wings made for?" he remarked, as he made a dash at the piece of white muslin and flew out of the door with it. This time he waited for Melicent. He did his best to keep pace with her feet, but at last his patience failed, and he gave a dart and a glide, the muslin flapped in the breeze and he vanished.

When Melicent came in at the door she found him sitting on the table edge. He never moved a feather when she sat down and picked up the muslin, for there was still a whole inch of hem between the last stitch she had put in and the blue-headed pin which marked the end of her task. His eyes twinkled mischievously, that was all. Melicent put in each stitch very carefully, for she meant sometime to do a piece of needlework that she would be proud to see upon the walls of the Stitchkeeper's House. When she had finished, she put in the needle and pinched the sewing-bird's tail, so that he said, "Ow!" and dropped the other end of her sewing. Then when she had folded it and put it away in the red lacquer box with her thimble and her thread and her stork scissors and her little scarlet emery that was made of an acorn cup; when she had done all this and had pushed her box back on the table, she looked at the sewing-bird and remarked as severely as she could, because of the twinkle in his eye:

"You said that I should never sew again."

"You'll never hate it again, will you?" answered the sewing-bird, cocking his head sidewise at her.

"No," said Melicent, as she began unscrewing his perch from the table. "Liking it makes prettier stitches."

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our Meat d Wheat

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