

A close-up photograph of a pink peony flower in bloom, positioned next to a spiral-bound notebook. The notebook is open, showing a blank, cream-colored page. The background is dark and out of focus.

***ELBERT
HUBBARD***

***THE MINTAGE:
BEING TEN
STORIES &
ONE MORE***

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The Mintage: Being Ten Stories & One More

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Five Babies

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Riding on the Grand Trunk Railway a few weeks ago, going from Suspension Bridge to Chicago, I saw a sight so trivial that it seems unworthy of mention. Yet for three weeks I have remembered it, and so now I'll relate it, in order to get rid of it.

And possibly these little incidents of life are the items that make or mar existence.

But here is what I saw on that railroad train: five children, the oldest a girl of ten, and the youngest a baby boy of three. They were traveling alone and had come from Germany, duly tagged, ticketed and certified.

They were going to their Grandmother at Waukegan, Illinois.

The old lady was to meet them in Chicago.

The children spoke not a word of English, but there is a universal language of the heart that speaks and is understood. So the trainmen and the children were on very chummy terms.

Now, at London, Ontario, our train waited an hour for the Toronto and Montreal connections.

Just before we reached London, I saw the Conductor take the three smallest little passengers to the washroom at the end of the car, roll up their sleeves, turn their collars in, and duly wash their hands and faces. Then he combed their hair. They accepted the situation as if they belonged to the Conductor's family, as of course they did for the time being.

It was a domestic scene that caused the whole car to smile, and made everybody know everybody else. A touch of nature makes a whole coach kin.

The children had a bushel-basket full of eatables, but at London that Conductor took the whole brood over to the dining-hall for supper, and I saw two fat men scrap as to who should have the privilege of paying for the kiddies' suppers. The children munched and smiled and said little things to each other in Teutonic whispers.

After our train left London and the Conductor had taken up his tickets, he came back, turned over two seats and placed the cushions lengthwise. One of the trainmen borrowed a couple of blankets from the sleeping-cars, and with the help of three volunteered overcoats, the babies were all put to bed, and duly tucked in.

I went back to my Pullman, and went to bed. And as I dozed off I kept wondering whether the Grandmother would be there in the morning to meet the little travelers. What sort of disaster had deprived them of parents, I did not know, nor did I care to ask. The children were alone, but among friends. They were strong and well, but they kept very close together and looked to the oldest girl as a mother.

But to be alone in Chicago would be terrible! Would she come!

And so I slept. In the morning there was another Conductor in charge, a man I had not before seen. I went into the day-coach, thinking that the man might not know about the babies, and that I might possibly help the little immigrants. But my services were not needed. The ten-year-

old “little other mother” had freshened up her family, and the Conductor was assuring them, in awfully bad German, that their Grandmother would be there—although, of course, he didn’t know anything at all about it.

When the train pulled into the long depot and stopped, the Conductor took the baby boy on one arm and a little girl on the other.

A porter carried the big lunch-basket, and the little other mother led a toddler on each side, dodging the hurrying passengers.

Evidently I was the only spectator of the play.

“Will she be there—will she be there?” I asked myself nervously.

She was there, all right, there at the gate. The Conductor was seemingly as gratified as I. He turned his charges over to the old woman, who was weeping for joy, and hugging the children between bursts of lavish, loving Deutsch.

I climbed into a Parmelee bus and said, “Auditorium Annex, please.”

And as I sat there in the bus, while they were packing the grips on top, the Conductor passed by, carrying a tin box in one hand and his train cap in the other.

I saw an Elk’s tooth on his watch-chain.

I called to him, “I saw you help the babies—good boy!”

He looked at me in doubt.

“Those German children,” I said; “I’m glad you were so kind to them!”

“Oh,” he answered, smiling; “yes, I had forgotten; why, of course, that is a railroad man’s business, you know—to help