

The Mystery of Metropolisville

THE MYSTERY OF METROPOLISVILLE

Edward Eggleston

WORDS BEFOREHAND. Metropolisville is nothing but a memory now. If Jonahs gourd had not been a little too much used already, it would serve an excellent turn just here in the way of an apt figure of speech illustrating the growth, the wilting, and the withering of Metropolisville. The last time I saw the place the grass grew green where once stood the City Hall, the corn-stalks waved their banners on the very site of the old store--I ask pardon, the Emporium--of Jackson, Jones & Co., and what had been the square, staring white court-house--not a Temple but a Barn of Justice--had long since fallen to base uses. The walls which had echoed with forensic grandiloquence were now forced to hear only the bleating of silly sheep. The church, the school-house, and the City Hotel had been moved away bodily. The village grew, as hundreds of other frontier villages had grown, in the flush times; it died, as so many others died, of the financial crash which was the inevitable sequel and retribution of speculative madness. Its history resembles the history of other Western towns of the sort so strongly, that I should not take the trouble to write about it, nor ask you to take the trouble to read about it, if the history of the town did not involve also the history of certain human lives--of a tragedy that touched deeply more than one soul. And what is history worth but for its human interest? The history of Athens is not of value on account of its temples and statues, but on account of its men and women. And though the Main street of Metropolisville is now a country road where the dog-fennel blooms almost undisturbed by comers and goers, though the plowshare remorselessly turns over the earth in places where corner lots were once sold for a hundred dollars the front foot, and though the lot once sacredly set apart (on the map) as Depot Ground is now nothing but a potato-patch, yet there are hearts on which the brief

history of Metropolisville has left traces ineffaceable by sunshine or storm, in time or eternity.

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