

THE LAST AFFAIR AT PEPPER'S GROVE. BY C.B. ROBERTS.

THE Barraville fair had been over for a couple of months, and everything had passed off without any particularly untoward circumstances. Even the unfriendliness between Major Josiah Pipkin and Col. Wesley Bloodworth, which had its inception during the gala days, had not developed any uneasy aspect—that is, it had not up to the juncture when the things presently to be here set down took place. The trouble grew out of the award to Major Pipkin of the prize for the fattest hog, both gentlemen having entered at the fair samples of the animal and vegetable products of their respective farms, which were conducted on the subject of a vicariously and as side affairs, for while their fathers before them had followed rural pursuits they themselves had not elected to lead the life of out-and-out farmers, but in the keeping of a store in Barraville for the sale of "all kinds of hardware," and Bloodworth was chiefly occupied with his duties as superintendent of the one small line of railways.

It was necessarily a close decision, for the layman in porcine matters could have detected no difference in point of corpulence between the two animals, and Colonel Bloodworth, in commenting on the subject, made some remarks that, reaching Pipkin, did not exactly please that gentleman. The result was that they ceased to speak.

The two had been close friends ever since they were boys; they had served together in each other's "Joshiah" and "Wes," and everybody said it was a pity that so puerile a thing should have been suffered to interrupt the tranquil continuity of Pipkin's family—Wesley Bloodworth was a quiet, unassuming, and was quietly disposed ordinarily, but proud and in some matters selfish. Bloodworth, who was a widower of long standing, and childless, possessed a somewhat choleric temper, and was easily provoked. The physical courage of both was above impeachment, and there was visible evidence of the quality of Bloodworth's spirit in his cork leg substitute for the natural one after a battlefield in the civil war. So, while nothing of the kind was apprehended, it would not have been greatly surprising to their fellow citizens to hear of some clash between them; but a suggestion of the possibility of anything like a prearranged encounter with firearms—in other words, a duel—would have been considered as extravagant as were the knight-errantry notions of Don Quixote, both because the provocation was too slight and because dueling, in the strictest sense, belonged to a generation past and gone. While nothing had befallen during the course of the fair to distinguish it from any of its predecessors for some years previous, nevertheless, two months afterward—following a little mere chance episode that served to recrudescence the dormant antagonism—came the unexpected.

It was late in the afternoon of a day that had been one of true winter weather. Major Pipkin for the moment was standing in front of his store with two or three townsmen idly bandying drivers, local topics, and the Central hotel's lumbering bus from the train with its four passengers—three commercial travelers and a visiting country attorney came to town to look after some cases—had just come by, creaking from the want of axle grease, when around the corner, about a block off, abruptly appeared, walking leisurely down the street, the squat, slightly limping figure of Bloodworth.

Simultaneously with their discovery of him he described them, and he would have passed on quite oblivious, to all outward semblance, of their existence, except for one of these circumstances, trifling in themselves, which all along in the history of the world have been fruitful of far-reaching consequences, and in the lives of individuals have had an influence analogous. When he had approached to within ten feet of the group he suddenly stopped upon the frozen snow, and, very much against his inclination and in spite of exertions in opposition, came down upon the hard formation with a jolt which seemed to him wholly innocuous and meaning that only those immediately about him should hear:

Alas!—for, whatever the intention, the colonel heard, He would have ignored the laughter, much as it aggravated his discomfiture; but the odium of the croaker's insult, as he deemed it to be, was positively unbearable and enraged him to that supreme point where he forgot to do what he always did when anything went amiss—aware consciously for a space averaging a number of a minute. From the congested appearance of his countenance no one would have been surprised to see him expire the very next instant from apoplexy. But he didn't. Instead, picking up the cane which he invariably carried and breathing hard and seething with indignation too turbulent to describe, he arose—with exceeding care, lest he should again descend.

"You ha a cow'd, suh!" he vociferated, paying no attention to the other man, but bristling up to Pipkin, who was tall and of a spare physique, and brandishing the stick like a sage of battle in the vicinity of his former intimate's nose. Having an idiosyncrasy of immediately repeating some of his utterances, he at once reiterated—if possible, with augmented vehemence and before the major could return a word:

"I say you ha a cow'd, suh!"

Just why he should have chosen that particular word-vehicle, rather than some other member of the vocabulary of invective which might have been more appropriate under the circumstances to carry Pipkin's knowledge of his displeasure, it is not possible to asseverate, but it is probable that he could not on the spur of the moment think of any other epithet which he fancied would be as hateful to the one to whom he addressed.

Pipkin, as we have given to understand, was of a pacific temperament—up to a certain point—averse to fighting when it could be avoided without sacrifice of honor, and he always did his best to avoid it. He could not refuse to take notice of this imputation, he would meet it, he decided, with a response which would prevent trouble and at the same time maintain the integrity of his reputation unimpaired. He did not move as he replied, very calmly:

"Major Josiah Pipkin, Sir: Referring to our conversation this evening, beg to advise that it will be convenient for me to meet you at 7 o'clock tomorrow morning at Pepper's grove, if that place will be agreeable to you. Colonel Bloodworth is authorized to make all arrangements on my behalf. Respectfully,
"WESLEY BLOODWORTH."

Whatever friends of either party were permitted to see that missive—far from being amusing regarded solely in respect of its tenor—must have been humorously moved by the sharp contrast between its severe formality and the previous familiar intercourse subsisting between the two men.

In suggesting Pepper's grove—an isolated clump of woods a mile and a half out of the Pepper family estate and which throughout several changing ownerships had retained its old name among the people—Bloodworth was following precedent. While nowadays "Pepper's grove" was the name of a halcyon picnic ground, persons still living remembered when its seclusion and opposite surroundings caused it to be the scene of more than one sanguinary engagement between gentlemen having grievances of one

kind or another which they thought could be brought to no other arbitration than that of arms.

Pipkin had not attached a great deal of importance to the occurrence of the afternoon and was on the point of closing up his store for the night and going home when Bloodworth arrived and made known the object of his embassy. He was astounded—dumfounded—and could not help telling Bloodworth that "Wes is a bigger fool than I thought he was." But if he refused, he argued to himself, after thinking it over, there might be some who would seriously call in question his courage, and he therefore felt that, now that it had assumed this phase, he would have to see the affair through in some fashion.

Being the challenged party, he had the selection of the class of weapon to use, and he chose the rifle. It was an almost unheard of preference in those parts, the pistol having always, as a rule, been favored in the duelling times gone by, and as it was unlikely that any one could be struck in a mortal spot by a rifle-charge and survive to tell how it felt, and as furthermore, Pipkin was "a good shot," Colonel Bloodworth was of the opinion that he was taking his full advantage, since Bloodworth was no shot at all. He was astonished, too, because the major was considered an exemplar of fairness and was not in the least of a vindictive mould. In this case,

though, it seemed that he was determined to kill his man.

Even Pipkin's own second, Gus Johnson, afterward expressed his surprise. "Y, mahuh, you'll teah yo'selves up sh!" he objected.

"Well a pistol won't do the job just exactly the way I want to do it," was the drawing reply. "If far's his hittin' he's consued, he'll nevah come any-who's neah it, no mattah how had he tries, and what I'm goin' to do is to simply shoot!"

The concluding words tickled Johnson for a broad grin appeared on his face.

"But, say, mahuh, ain't you riskin' a right sma'?" he urged. "You ain't goin' to let him stand up an'—"

Pipkin, though, who seemed to consider "Wes'" marksmanship as altogether neglected factor, interrupted him.

"I tell you he'll nevah touch me!" he again declared.

When Colonel Bloodworth was apprised of the kind of weapons selected he was convinced that long before 11 hours should have elapsed he would have ceased to be.

"Josiah's 'tuned out to be a ragalah secondah!" he exclaimed furiously. "I reckon he'll suit'ly kill me, but—and he swore a choice oath—"I'll see if I can't do a little shootin' myself!"

It was bitter cold the next morning, the temperature having, in the night gone way down, and an incisive wind ac-

centuated the discomfort. The few persons stirring shortly after daybreak, seeing, in close order, three buggies and two men on horseback faring out the Woodford pike, and identifying the nag hitched to one of the vehicles as Dr. Dudley's sorry mare, wondered what could be the occasion, so early and in such arctic weather.

In the first conveyance that crunched and bumped over the hard-frozen snow were Bloodworth and Bullwinkle, his second. It appeared considerably lopsided, but that was owing to the springs having given up the ghost under the former's bulky frame. A few minutes behind them rode the two horsemen, who, while officially disinterested, had been asked to be present as close friends to both combatants. Shortly following these was a buggy containing Pipkin—who had told his wife he was going shooting and thereby had not faltered—and Gus Johnson; and hard upon them came another, drawn by a sorry mare, in which sat the doctor and his young associate.

Besides the medical cases and the surgical kits in this last turnout, there were disposed in the bottom, wrapped about very carefully that there might be the minimum hazard of breaking, two large square-shaped bottles of some kind of fluid; and each of the other buggies, and the luggage pockets of the overcoats of the two men on horse, carried something similar, only in the last instance the safety of the contents was insured by confinement within a receptacle of metal. This liquid was of such a color and of such engaging and emollient parts, judging from the complacency of the travelers after they had frequently discussed its virtues, as to make reasonably certain of correctness the conjecture that it was a well-known distillation made in that section from grain, said to be very palatable and most exhilarating.

A little by-lane led off from the main road and into this the several parties reined in turn, and after proceeding a short distance through the old-fashioned gate held in place by a wooden bar and into a field in the middle of which stood the grove. The expanse was a virgin surface of snow save for little imprints left here and there by some lone rabbit in quest of sustenance, and on this bleak morning their branches were embellished with hoar-frost, which sparkled in the beams of the early sun and made them look like they had been decked with the glittering lines of the Christmas tree. Here Bloodworth and Bullwinkle were waiting when the others arrived.

The major and the colonel did not notice one another. The other gentlemen, as they mixed together for a few minutes, passed the customary morning civilities and a casual word or two about the transaction in hand. After some little conference the space was measured off, the arms were inspected and loaded, and the men took their places. It was decided by the toss of a coin that Colonel Bloodworth should be the one to count three as the signal for fire, and the seconds then took a station as close to their respective principals as was consistent with security to themselves. The others stood together a little removed. Evarishing was in readiness.

"Aim!" directed Bullwinkle. Hearing his name had commenced to fly across Bloodworth's mind with electric instantaneousness from the time that Bullwinkle had first spoken. It had uttered them that is what he would have said: "I'm on the brink of the grave—the present minute'll see my death—nothin' on 'uth can prevent it but the wust sta-

A Little Talk About Married Lovers

By ELLA WHEELER WILCOX.

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IN ALL probability Eve was the only attractive young woman who never attracted the too marked admiration of some man and man doing her life time. It falls to the lot of every young woman, or widow usually to lead herself the recipient of ardent glances from eyes which ought to look elsewhere, and to hear tender caresses in a voice which becomes dull or irritable when it makes utterance in the domestic circle.

Therefore, Miss or Madame, if you are conscious of being the divinity of some married adorer, do not imagine your case a solitary one. Do not invest it with a wonderful halo of romance either, and convince yourself that no beautiful a sentiment never before knocked at the portal of human heart, nor allow it to dominate your life under false pretences.

There is but one course for any self-respecting and sane-minded woman to pursue under such circumstances. She must cease to see or hear from the man she has no right to call lover.

It may be difficult to arrange. But when anything on earth must be done, there is always a way to do it. Perhaps the man is your employer, perhaps he is your physician, perhaps he is the husband of some near friend or relative who could not understand your absence from her home. All these complications are difficult to untangle, but there are situations far more difficult ahead of you unless you take the path of retreat at once before the way of escape is cut off.

It is useless to say that you can go on and conduct yourself in such a discreet manner that no harm will befall any one. If you do not care for the man, if the love and passion are all on his side, then indeed you may be able to control the situation by staying near.

There is nothing better than cold water for the extinguishing of a fire. If the fire has not become a conflagration.

But if you are hiding in your heart any affection for the man which you would not like to have him or his wife or the world know of, do not undertake to continue the association.

No matter how self-controlled you are, no matter how unselfish and high your ideals, the suppressed emotion will make itself felt as suppressed steam makes itself known.

A man and a woman who entertain an intense love for each other cannot hide the fact from others, no matter how they may try. When they believe themselves most successful they are frequently making the story legible reading for even defective eyes.

I have seen a young woman who talked loud and loudly of her high ideals, and who really by temperament and education was incapable of indulging in an amour, attempt to live down a force married man to live down a mad infatuation. She devoted herself to the wife and never permitted the man to see her save in the presence of his amiable and phlegmatic spouse. Yet the sensitive plate when held up to the sunlight does not so truly display the image imprinted thereon as the faces, voices and manner of these two people displayed their infatuation to even the casual observer. When they believed themselves immune from even a suspicion their enemies and the coarser minds of earth were attributing to them an ignoble love, while their friends and the finer minds were pitying them for the ineffectual effort to conceal a hopeless love.

Had the young woman possessed good common sense with her ideals she would have managed to avoid the man for sufficient long periods of time, until the infatuation died of starvation.

Of course, you and the man will say that such a love as yours can never die. That may be. There are great passions which stand the test of time and absence and silence, and yet have power to stir the hearts which hold them while life lasts. But the sorrow and pain which made the parting of the ways necessary dies with the passing of time, and only the sweet and dear memories of the love remain.

However painful may be the effort on your part now to place distance and silence between you and the man you have no right to love, remember that this pain will lessen with the drifting away of the months and years, and that new experiences, events, joys and sorrows will compel it to occupy a less important place in your memory and life.

I should not have said the man you have no right to love.

We have a right to love whoever calls forth love. But we have no right to interfere in the life of a third person and to make sorrow or misery for that one in order to drink our fill from love's chalice. And if you know that you are receiving far more of a man's thoughts than he is bestowing upon the woman he introduces as his wife, then indeed, it is time you absented yourself from his presence, and taught him to forget you in such measure as he may.

One fact is proven by a little observation: Nine cases of infatuation of every 10 are forever obliterated from the human heart by prolonged absence and silence. One alone bears the test of time.

This being the case, busy yourself with the method of an almost certain cure of your malady.

However impossible it may seem at first, if you set your mind to work you will find a way to extricate yourself from the position which makes it necessary to your association with this man.

Fate never shuts an immortal soul in a den of lions, and gives it no chance of escape and no weapons of defense. Look, and you will find a sliding panel, an open window or a secret stairway.

In finding the path out of our difficulties we also find character. There is no glory in fighting a fire with your hands, only to be burned and scorched for life. Better save yourself and send the fire engines to put out the flames.

Quote a Different Thing.
From the Cleveland Leader.

McBosh—well, m'good, 'f you feel 'n' had about it, 'I'll solemnly promise ne' touch noth' drug.

Mrs. McBosh—That's what you said on New Year's eve.

McBosh—But, m'dear woman, I's drunk when I s'aid it that time, wasn't it?

Not True Love.
From Fack.

Mag—Wot is "platonic affection" Lis? Is it love?

Lis—Well, no; it ain't true love. Dere ain't no quarrelin' in it, ne' no fightin', ne' worryin', ne' hookin', ne' drinkin', ne' gettin' arrested for non-support, ne' suthin' wot's really passionale.