

One Old Maid

By LEE MITCHELL.

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During a certain period, lasting about three years, if any one had asked what was the chief feature of the village of Harpersville he would have been told it was gossip and scandal. It had come to such a point at last that hardly any two families were on speaking terms, and a number of people had sold out and moved away in disgust.

The social state of affairs could not have been much worse when the Rev. Henry Bates received a call to fill the pulpit of one of the two churches. He was a man of thirty and single, and he promised to be popular. It wasn't a month, however, before there were stories floating around to his detriment. He had come from the west, and it was said that his congregation had been pleased to get rid of old terms, and there were other sly statements and insinuations calculated to make his position uncomfortable.

There is more or less gossip in every village in the land, but as to who starts it is always one of those things that can't be found out. Mrs. White hears it from Mrs. Black, and Mrs. Black from Mrs. Green, and Mrs. Green from Mrs. Brown, and so it goes, and the fountainhead is seldom located.

When the Rev. Bates came to find out what a hobnob he had got into he cut short his sermons to do a little outside work. When he came to delve into the situation he was more than astonished. There was just one single woman left in Harpersville who hadn't been talked about to her detriment, and she was an old maid named Sarah Lee. She was not only an old maid,



SHE MADE IT PRETTY PLAIN THAT SHE WAS WILLING TO BE HIS.

but she was extremely homely, and the pastor hadn't been investigating long before he thought he had located the fountainhead. In another week he was sure of it.

The old maid was not a church member, but the pastor called on her just the same and threw out broad hints that the gossip and the scandalizer would have hard work to squeeze into the better land when the time came. Sarah agreed with him and two days later cooked up another canard.

She was in command of the situation up to a certain point. She was well to do, and she had wealthy relatives to stand by her. The minister saw that he must go slow and bide his time. There are clergymen who study the subject of religion alone. There are others who study human nature as well. The Rev. Bates was one of the latter.

"An old maid," he reasoned, "is a young woman who has been overlooked in the scramble or got left in the shuffle. This fact has soured her temper and made her envious and jealous. The only way she can get even is to use her tongue. She is down on all her sex and on the married men of the other. The tongue of one old maid can stir up more mischief than five ministers can smooth over."

When the pastor had reasoned that far he took a rest for a few minutes and then continued.

"What is the remedy for a tattling, gossiping, slandering old maid? Remove the cause and the disease is cured. In other words, if she can be married off the spirit of spite will be laid and she will have no reason to interfere with the peace of mind of others."

The line of reasoning was up to date, and the philosophy weighed full sixteen ounces to the pound. One may reason a thing to a logical conclusion, however, and yet find that only one difficulty has been removed. The Rev. Bates was pitted against Sarah Lee. It was Lee versus Bates. He realized that he would have to go to the end of a year or Sarah Lee would have to be provided with a husband. Not only was the instinct of self preservation appealed to, but if the question had been submitted to any lay mind the answer would have been that one minister was worth ten times as much to any community as an old maid. The Rev. Bates did not turn conspirator. It takes two to conspire, and he did not take any one into his counsel.

His very first move almost brought about his downfall. He made a second call on Miss Lee, and during that call he brought the conversation around to the subject of matrimony. It was the duty of men and women to marry. The world would be a savage desert without homes. Race suicide would end in a state of barbarism. For good reasons of her own, he supposed, she had neglected this great duty, but he hoped and trusted that those reasons would soon be removed. He himself was still single, but he was happy to state—

Before he could make his statement the old maid was in his arms, or would have been if he had not quickly in-

creased the distance between them. She made it pretty plain that she was willing to be his and would do her best to make life happy for him. When he closed the conversation by saying that he was engaged to a lady in the west he was almost turned out of doors, and Miss Lee started three or four new stories about him.

The pastor felt sure that he had struck the keynote, however, and a week or two later he was writing a letter to an acquaintance in his former parish. The man he wrote to was not a church member. He was an old bachelor who paid pew rent, contributed to the heathen, attended Sunday school picnics and let it go at that. The pastor had once talked with him on the subject of matrimony and had been given to understand that there had been no marriage because the right woman had not been found.

"Referring to a subject once discussed between us," wrote the Rev. Bates, "let me say that there is a young woman resident here who seems to have many of the qualifications to fit her for wifehood—that is, she has the best of health, is worth several thousand dollars, and she has assured me that she would do her best to make a husband happy. Were you to pay me a visit and meet her, I might prove to be the one you long have sought. Did you not know my radical ideas on the subject of race suicide? I should not have mentioned it this matter to you. While I mentioned that the lady had money, it was only incidental, and that fact will have no undue influence, I trust."

Ten days later James Perkins appeared in Harpersville as an old acquaintance and the guest of the clergyman. The Rev. Bates did not boast of being a hustler, but within twenty-four hours he had introduced his guest to Miss Lee. Mr. Perkins had no reputation as a hustler, but within forty-eight hours he was speaking words of flattery that made the old maid smile like a June day. She couldn't forego what she had come to believe was her privilege, however. She told Mrs. Jackson, and Mrs. Jackson told Mrs. Taylor, and Mrs. Taylor told Mrs. Beebe and the rest of the town that she believed Mr. Perkins had had two wives and killed them both by smothering them with a pillow. The story reached the parsonage and the ears of the guest within a day, and the guest was wroth, but the good pastor sat down with him and argued.

"James, the gossip of women is as the breeze that bloweth. Give it no heed. I incidentally learned today that the exact amount of wealth possessed by Miss Lee is about \$12,000, and all in bonds drawing fair interest. I am assured that she is a great worker in her own house, has no extravagant habits and that she would have no objection to a home in the great and boundless west. Perhaps I should not have mentioned the exact sum of money, but I know you will receive it as only incidental, James—only incidental. If there is a marriage I hope and trust it may be founded on love alone. I shall be busy with my sermon tonight, and should you desire to call on Miss Lee I shall not miss you for a couple of hours."

There was no hustling on the part of the Rev. Bates or James Perkins, but two weeks after his arrival in Harpersville Mr. Perkins entered the minister's study one evening with a bland smile and an extended hand and said:

"My dear old friend, congratulate me. I am the happiest man in the state."

"Has—has something happened?"

"Something has. Sarah has promised to be mine, and she has set the marriage day for only six weeks ahead. How can I ever thank you for bringing us together?"

Something like a smile appeared at the corners of the pastor's mouth; but, of course, he let it spread no further. When he found that the happy couple were to go west to live he tendered his hearty congratulations and likewise offered up his thanks mentally. The marriage came off, the old maid became a wife, and Harpersville knew her no more. Then the calm that settled down was indeed blessed—no more gossip, no slander, no lying; in place of them, peace, harmony and contentment. And if the conscience of the Rev. Bates ever prickled him he had but to say to himself:

"Isn't it better to marry off one old maid than to have a thousand people made unhappy?"

The Volley Over the Grave.

The firing of a volley by soldiers over the grave of a dead comrade is a survival of a very ancient custom. In days gone by, when superstition was practically universal, it was generally believed that making a noise kept away evil spirits, and the passing bell came into vogue for that reason. When dreams were invented the volley fire was substituted for the passing bell, the belief being that the sound of battle would be more efficacious in the case of a soldier.

Her Dear Friend.

Miss Knock-Ethel is to be married next month, and she says Walter wants to board, as he thinks she needs a rest. Miss Knock—She does need a rest, considering the way she ran after him, but I didn't know he knew it. Woman's Home Companion.

Modern Progress.

Grandma—In my day women didn't fly around out of doors as they do now. They would sit at home and spin. Gladys—But now they go out and spin much better if they have a good, fast auto.—Baltimore American.

The Proper Word.

"But she sings more than she plays. Why do you speak of her music as instrumental?"

"Well, it's instrumental in making the neighbors move out."—Catholic Standard and Times.

Beneficent Warning.

"But," protested the plain people "you are robbing us."

"Suppose I am," responded the trust sagely. "If you stop me it will bring on a panic, and then where will you be?"—Puck.

Had an Assortment.

Tourist (in Arizona store)—Got any neckties?

Clerk—Yes, sir. What kind would you like—silk, calico or hemo?

A Marriage Lottery

(Original.)

In Smolensk, Russia, marriage is really a lottery. Four times a year a prize is drawn there in the matrimonial market. Five thousand tickets are sold for a ruble a ticket. The winner of the 5,000 rubles is bound to marry a certain girl. Should the girl decline to marry him they may divide the money between them. In case the man is already married he may turn over the money and the matrimonial prize to any friend he may select.

One day a traveler stopped in the town and, because of the lottery, gave a servant 10 rubles and told him to buy ten tickets. The drawing was to take place that evening, and after supper the stranger strolled around to the building appointed for the purpose.

The wheel was turned and a paper drawn. He drew it and it held it up, face to face, at it and said:

"The winner is Dmitri Waronovich."

The stranger started. Every one looked at every one else. No one seemed to know who Dmitri Waronovich was.

"If Dmitri Waronovich is here, let him come forward."

The stranger advanced and after some questioning was credited with the money and conducted to the home of the girl he had drawn.

Mirza Dovenieff was of a station far beyond those who would usually put themselves up to be raffled for. A fancy for such a role had taken possession of her, though she had no idea of marrying the man who should draw the prize of which she was a part. Nevertheless there is a fascination in meeting one never before seen who is to be something more to us than a stranger and maybe of immense importance. Naturally Mirza had dreamed of many different kinds of men and that at their meeting he who had won her would be mad to wed her. These, of course, were merely dreams, for she knew the class that bought tickets in the lottery and had no doubt she would divide the money prize with the winner and remain a spinster—at least for him.

It was certainly an exhilarating moment for these two when the door separating them opened and they stood face to face, Mirza's heart beating like a trip hammer.

"You are a stranger here," she said.

"I am. I arrived this afternoon. I bought some tickets to the lottery and, singularly enough, won."

"I suppose you know the conditions."

"The only condition I know is that I have won a wife."

"You are mistaken. I have the privilege of dividing the money prize with you and remaining single."

"May I ask why one of your class entered for this lottery?"

"For a new sensation. And you—why did you buy tickets?"

"For a new sensation."

"Are you quite sure the hope of winning the money was no inducement?"

"I shall resign my share of the money to you."

"And I have resolved to give my share to the poor."

"Singular," said the man wonderingly, "that two people among 5,000 should have been captivated by a whim and the man in the case should have won."

"Remarkable, especially since you do not live here."

"I never was here till a few hours ago."

"You reside?"

"In Tula, when I am at home, but I am seldom at home."

During the dialogue the couple remained standing, but suddenly it occurred to the lady that she was treating the man who had won her very coldly, and she asked him to be seated. Then she rang for refreshments. It was late when the fortunate man left the house, and on reaching his inn he was besieged by a throng to know if there would be a wedding or a division. He announced that there would be neither. The 5,000 rubles were to be given to the poor. This was done the next morning.

The curious people of Smolensk had forgotten all about the singular outcome of the drawing when it was revived by the appearance of the winner in the prize in the town. He looked somewhat thinner than before and careworn. He came frequently after that, always looking more distraught than before. Finally at one of his visits he departed looking radiantly happy. The next day the townspeople were agog at the announcement that the couple who had won 5,000 rubles and given them to the poor were to be married after all.

The groom prospective told his fiancée that after their marriage they would live in his home in Tula; that he had held a government position, but his marriage, for some reason he did not explain, required him to resign it. She was about to marry him for love, but since he assured her he could support her, was respectable and she had some property of her own she did not inquire thoroughly into his social or monetary condition.

The wedding over, with its peculiar Russian customs, the couple were about to depart for Tula when a telegram addressed to Count Odendoff was handed to the groom to know if he knew any such person. He tore it open, read it and handed it to the bride. It was an order from the emperor to return to St. Petersburg at once and ended, "Your marriage will be recognized."

Then the recipient explained to his bride that he was of blood royal, but not of near kin, and in the service of the emperor, who had doubtless found he could not get on without his assistant.

NELLIE EDNA CURTIS.

Troublesome Growth.

"Does the child ever keep still a minute?" asked the woman as the youngster sprawled noisily over the couch in a dozen squirming positions at once. It seemed to her.

"No," answered his mother. "They are growing when they do that, they say."

"Will you please ask him to stop growing?" Implored the woman, "just for this week, while he is visiting me?"—New York Press.

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PAIN DOU

In Inter Swiss Alp the Jungl with snow ty. One d endeavori to canvas had little glimmer, sh an impos The gir her work ette. "Maden said a voi She turn a young t "I only am an An "Oh, an he repeat native to "I shall the girl d "Perhap work. W again in fresh?" "That's the thic "In tha ommend noon." "Why? "Well, ent light ally one early par "Are y "I pale temperar dabbles i of the ki Every sat befo stranger, —at the looked a about it friendly of enco "Don't When y to you, be bette have res said pro ing she been dis previous fore her couple i would s she hac Then th and ren when re see her j ence. " he said. In the a In th day ilk shadow ed mor white s noticed commor and fin deur wi But sh with it was so eyes, h ant vo charme She wa of love The i needed vied h it for and th there a posin In an been a on an the b "As I pron had a salon, equal Demo When saw a The taken was c check. Je "Wl with l friend "Tw "An orator "In than : On : brush girl t the pl of G. The one q anton show comp ing. The fore l her t the p "H my k "I noon, bring your "B than the s "T the t "I ed f sdre