

The Last Round

IN the prosperous little settlement of Scopoon there resided, in fact to be precise there still resides, a prosperous little farmer by the name of George Townsend. He is one of the pioneers of the settlement having migrated in early life from the inhospitable shores of Newfoundland to make a home for himself in the fertile smiling valleys of the Garden of the Gulf. In person he is not calculated to inspire sentiments of awe, being about four feet ten in height and of corresponding proportions otherwise. Of his features we must perforce refuse a discription, owing to the fact that within the memory of the oldest inhabitant they have been covered with such a mass of hirsute adornment that the only visible indication of the possession of such personal attributes is the gleam of a particularly bright blue eye which by its animation gives token of the restless spirit which dominates the corporeal substance. About his age we must also remain silent owing to sheer ignorance, for memory fails on this point. In point of activity however he still holds his own with the best; one of his favourite feats for the edification of the young (with whom he delights to associate) being to stand on his head on the saddle-board of the barn, in which position he much resembles some ancient goblin, guarding in an inverted posture the interests of the domicile.

During the major portion of his eventful career, George's joys and sorrows were shared by a partner in connubial bliss named Jane, who, as is often the case was, in respect to size at least, the antithesis of himself. Of a tall and commanding figure and a martial and forbidding aspect, one could hardly regard her without an involuntary glance of pity for the microscopic being who was doomed by a matrimonial Nemesis to love, honour and—it seemed inevitable—obey this Amazon through life. But your pity would have been quite wasted for this apparent mesalliance served but as another instance of the domination of spirit over matter. For this seeming lioness became the meekest

of lambs under her fiery lord's rule, and quailed under his fierce glance and his picturesquely vituperative language with genuine fear. In fact she was his abject slave, and would toil in the field or the barn while her lord and master lolled at his ease in the house, to receive as her reward a storm of abuse if the quantity and the quality of the work done was not entirely pleasing to her far from amiable spouse. His treatment of his better half was indeed the only blot on an otherwise stainless escutcheon. Whether it was the effect of aggravation resulting from a conscious sense of his physical inferiority or merely what he considered a just assertion of his rights as one of the lords of creation, he made life anything but an Elysium for his unfortunate partner. But, to use a time-worn phrase, even the worm will turn and at last Mrs. George refused to be trodden on any longer—and thereby hangs a tale.

On a certain day George deposited a basket full of potatoes before his better half with the statement that he wanted those Jenny Linds cut up for seed. His wife thereupon ventured to remark that in her modest opinion the tubers aforesaid, were not Jenny Linds but Early Roses. This statement aroused the ire of her husband who replied with a stream of vituperative eloquence, which made up in force of expression what it lacked in grace, at the same time conceiving a sudden and violent antipathy to the nasal protuberance which adorned his wife's countenance, he seized and violently tweaked it, apparently with the laudable ambition of forever effacing it from recognition. This assault on so tender a part of her anatomy had the temporary result of engulfing all his spouse's fears of him in the anger of the moment, and after a cyclonic five minutes the quondam hero found himself regarding the heavens from a horizontal position out of a pair of rapidly closing eyes, while the mistress of the field, partly from fear of the consequences and partly from a resolve to finally free herself from bondage hastily gathered together a few scattered belongings and departed.

When George recovered from the dazed condition which was the result of his wife's forceful declaration of independence he found himself deserted. His first

feeling, that he was so essential to the very existence of his better half that necessity would soon compel her to return, became gradually less confident as the days passed and brought no tidings of the absent one.

At last the conviction forced itself upon his unwilling mind, that the separation was likely to prove of longer duration than he had anticipated, and the realization was all the more bitter as he gradually discovered how many of the comforts of life which he had hitherto taken as a matter of course had depended on the wife of his bosom. That recalcitrant spirit however which had ever moved him in his actions would not permit him to humiliate himself as to so far admit his perversity as to seek a reconciliation. While inwardly lamenting his somewhat hasty conduct, and in his solitary moments indulging in melancholy recollections of sundry tasty dishes and provisions for material comfort by which his spouse had formerly demonstrated her affection, to the world at large he presented an outward aspect of indifference and even cheerfulness over his liberation from the irksome thralldom of matrimony.

Weeks passed and in the absence of the managing spirit George's household rapidly took on an appearance of neglect bordering on decay. The house became the scene of nightly revels, for the youth of the neighborhood who had formerly stood somewhat in awe of Mrs. George's lowering countenance, now that this rather substantial skeleton at the feast had been removed made the place their regular rendezvous. George seeking perhaps to dissipate remorse in conviviality dispensed his hospitality most lavishly, and the added charm of preparing their own banquets proved an irresistible attraction for the guests. Indeed at first George assumed the duties of cook as well as host, but after the first occasion when after having regaled themselves on the good fare provided the company was informed by their proud host that all the eatables even to the butter had been prepared by his own hands, and after a prolonged survey of those hands, silently proclaiming their total lack of acquaintance with soap and water, the whole assemblage unanimously proclaimed their opinion that he was really putting himself to too

much trouble on their account, and announced their intention of superintending the culinary operations in future.

But this round of revelry did not seem to have the desired effect, and day by day the loneliness of his position forced itself upon him, and life seemed more and more a hollow mockery, when it presented such difficulties as the darning of socks and the preparation of porridge in addition to the duties which appertain solely to the male sex. As the anniversary of the ties approached the feeling of solitude became more intense, but true to the perversity of his nature he ruthlessly crushed all feelings of regret, and with spartan fortitude resolved to celebrate the day, or rather the night, by a grand rally of the whole male population of Scopoon. Many willing helpers were found to assist in the preparations. The accumulations of a year were removed from the most conspicuous places; refreshments were provided on a Brobdignagian scale, and the great night found everything in readiness for the reception of the fortunate ones.

They began to arrive at an early hour, and ere long the echoes resounded to the music of an ancient fiddle which ground out its protests against the insults offered to its infirmities in accents the most heartrending. In another room callow youths mingled with hardened, grey-bearded gamblers paying their devotions to the fickle goddess of chance in nerve racking excitement of "forty five." On every available shelf and table were bestowed refreshments; not dainty knick-knacks to tempt the clogged appetites of over indulged palates, but solid substantial fare calculated to appease the most ravenous appetite. But to describe the scene the pen of an Irving would scarcely be adequate, therefore let it be my lot to describe events alone.

As the hours passed a certain inclination to boisterousness made itself apparent among those present, perhaps from a too frequent reference to the contents of certain black cylindrical vessels with the name of a prominent Scotchman attached thereto. Soon indications of hostility arose, for, freed from the restraining

influence of feminine society, and their sense of personal dignity magnified in proportion of liquid animation which they had imbibed, ancient feuds were quickly renewed by the slightest word. At last one of the participants in a heated argument which had been going on in one corner of the room, finding himself entirely vanquished by the loquacity of his opponent, bethought himself to settle the dispute by what he considered an irresistible argument, which consisted in bringing his right hand into such violent contact with the mouth of his antagonist that he effectually stopped the flow of language issuing therefrom. This method, however, did not appeal to some of the stricken one's friends as being entirely in accordance with the rules of courteous behavior and they speedily demonstrated their disapproval in a most emphatic manner upon the person of the violent disputant. He being in turn supported by several adherents, in an incredibly short space of time a truly Homeric contest was being waged which soon involved the whole company in one grand affray. The scene now presented was indeed an animated one. The combat gradually resolved itself into a number of separate duels, which were carried on with deadly intensity in every part of the room. In one corner could be seen a couple rolling on the floor locked in a most affectionate embrace, in another space would be seen two others exchanging wild blows which often as not merely created vacua in the atmosphere; again two or three of the more formidable contestants would be holding at bay a swarm of smaller or less courageous antagonists, while hovering on the outskirts of the conflict were a band of skirmishers, who, unwilling to endanger themselves by venturing into the heart of the fray, helped their party by sundry raids upon combatants who were engaged with others.

George at first was disposed to regard the affair leniently, looking upon it only as a fitting touch of excitement with which to wind up the celebration, but, on finding that his furniture was being totally demolished and that the combat seemed likely to be prolonged indefinitely, he raised his voice in protest, imploring them not to bring discredit upon the fair fame of the house

by their ungentlemanly proceedings. Finding this of no avail, he gradually drifted into personalities and informed his guests individually and collectively concerning his profound convictions as to their actions, their antecedents and themselves. Enraged at last at finding his eloquence totally disregarded, he seized the nearest available weapon, which happened to be the poker, and rushed into the fray dealing emphatic protests impartially to right and left in no gentle manner. Though the verbal scourging which he had inflicted had been tolerated by his guests, this new style of argument was far from pleasing to them, and in a few moments George found himself disarmed, and in spite of his struggles, secured by three or four lusty fellows who announced their intention of depositing him in the water-butt at the door, that his ardor might be cooled. His protests and threats were alike disregarded, and struggling he was being conveyed to the door when suddenly the portals burst open, and like an avenging spirit, bearing in lieu of a sword an ancient but nevertheless formidable fork handle, there burst upon the astonished revellers the colossal form of Mrs George. With one sweep of her weapon she disposed of her husband's assailants, and when both began to work in concert all fled the place ; all but one, a wretch by the name of McArthur who endeavored to brazen it out, pitting his puny strength against Jane's Herculean prowess. The following day this presumptuous one employed in extricating particles of glass from out his capital member, whilst George found it necessary to re-furnish a window with this same substance, a labor necessitated by the mode and means of McArthur's exit.

When matters were satisfactorily adjusted that night and explanations brought forward, it appeared that Jane, attracted by the lights, had in passing yielded to the impulse to investigate and had arrived at the door just in time to save her spouse from the degradation intended for him. Mutual protestations of affection and appeals for forgiveness followed, and today George and his wife are pointed out to all young couples as the ideal of a contented married life.

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