

ANDY CARSON

Written for The Western Home Monthly.

They had finished the last of the barley that day and had "quit" early, so that seven o'clock found them in their shack with chores done and tea over. Tea, it certainly was, being the only edible that had held its own against the seeding time, and consequently had to make up for the waning pork, baker's bread, store butter and dried apples. To speak truthfully, the tea did not at all resemble the ladies' five o'clock affairs which are so delightful to the eye, but to a hungry boy an aggravation; nor yet was it like the teas the dear old aunts and grandmas have where one is helped again and again regardless of etiquette and which one never forgets.

It were worth knowing the thoughts of Andy's granny, had she seen his tea table that night. But she never knew and her kind old bosom was saved a sigh.

Four poplar poles in thin native elegance, and cut to a reasonably even length, served as legs for the table, the top of which was formed of boards, planed on one side and which at some previous time had done duty as a door. But the burden that this unique piece of furniture supported! We have heard of tables that groaned beneath their load, which in this case it might be justified in doing. No needless dishes found a place there, but those used were of the sturdiest type, and bore marks of many a fray. 'Twas never known how the owners contrived when a visitor appeared, tho' many a hungry wayfarer had been refreshed at the same little shack; for gratitude kept him silent, and of the domestic arrangement the outside world knew nothing. The centre of the table was occupied, not by a flower pot, but a granite pot in which the afore-mentioned dried apples had been cooked and though it was now empty, from the specimen still left clinging to the side of the vessel, one would not be favorably impressed with dried apples. Scarcely any of the pork remained, but a pile of rinds on the corner of the table, and a long strip of fat with a hair-like thread of lean through it, which hung from the ceiling and glistened with salt. One would have imagined the butter to have been manufactured where dandelions or sunflowers were abundant, though Andy's thought was that it came from where the elephants grew, being, as he expressed it, "strong enough to draw a scrub plow." The bread was the only article a dyspeptic would venture upon, its freshness having passed away long since. Only the heel of a loaf remained on the table now, but an Indian could have found the place whence it came by the crumbs leading to a certain grain bag in the corner of the room. It should, however, have required an Indian to trace the way, for though the crumbs were plentiful enough, dust, kindlings, ashes and straw had found their way in as well. The broom was lost and they had been too busy to look for it; besides, visitors are scarce in seeding time. How could they live in such dirt? you say. Well, of their conscious hours, very little did they live in it. A hasty meal in the grey morning when everything is quiet save the birds; a midday meal snatched in the same way (for there was no dessert to linger over), and the evening repast somewhere in the neighborhood of nine o'clock, and then sweet sleep until notified that time was passing, by that malicious invention—the alarm clock. To men like these the country owes much, who, defying circumstances, force the Great West to yield them her golden treasure and do their part in making Canada the granary of the world.

These two young men were trying their luck at farming. Andy Carson was beginning his second year and Bill Smiklaw his first. They were partners, Bill having, as he expressed it, funds to invest, at which Andy smiled, for

he, by constantly hearing it, was beginning to drop the civilized term of "funds" or "money" and used instead "stuff" or "dough." But Bill would learn. On this particular evening Bill was engaged in the delightful occupation of making "whittles," and Andy in the not so pleasant but infinitely more necessary work of mending his socks. Something possessed Bill's thoughts that from time to time caused his broad shoulders to expand to their utmost and his erect form to straighten until it certainly would reach the six foot mark, which he professed to be. A fine manly figure he presented, and handsome, too, though maybe somewhat of the swagger (for not every man is 72 inches in his boots), which caused the other young men to delight in taking him down a peg, though they with one voice voted that "after all Bill was all right."

His companion was of much humbler proportions, rather undersized, with cheek and neck bronzed by western wind and weather, but some way his fair hair and mild blue eyes with long curling lashes made one think of a gentle mother. It were well, however, to be somewhat wary of those same eyes at times, for if there be mischief brewing, the long lashes may cover the eyes to hide divers wicked spirits, planning undreamed of confusion, and the mouth may droop to hide an evil laugh at the dismay of his victim. His sisters called this his "Sunday school look" and vowed they despised him for his teasing ways, but that was not true; for though few ever got square with Andy, yet everybody loved him.

The mending, which consisted in sewing up the holes with small wrapping cord, had gone on with snaillike briskness. One sock had reached the stage beyond mending and consequently had to be "jumped." That is, turning the sock until the heel, rather its place, rests on the instep, thus the yet entire instep covers the heel.

The conversation flowed on, Bill having the floor.

"She certainly is a fine looking girl; as fine a looking girl as I ever saw, and I have seen some in the east." The east referred to was not the far east, from which the wise men came, but Ontario, and especially a particular part near Toronto. "That she is clever," he continued, "may be seen from the fact that at eighteen she is teaching this school," and in the pause that followed his companion mildly drawled, "Yes, this school is notorious," for it was well known that the school had, in the past at least, been fated to a number of miserable time serving creatures. "Oh, yes! you'll say that anyone can teach and get a school, but they all say that Miss Barton is bringing on the children exceedingly well."

"Yes, she'll soon be here three months," was Andy's gentle reply in a tone that suggested that a new broom sweeps clean, and at which Bill was thoroughly piqued.

Poor Bill! He was hopelessly involved ever since he had driven the school ma'am from the station upon her arrival, and as the boys said, "had it so bad" that he could not see that his provoking companion was but teasing him and having more fun than he deserved.

Had Bill been wise the conversation had dropped here, but feeling that so far he had lost a throw or two and wishing to make good his loss, he continued, "Well, of course, every one has a right to his own opinion, but I think Miss Barton is getting on well with the school and is a favorite with every one."

"With some, no doubt," quietly from his tormentor. A scorching red, notwithstanding the tan, spread over the cheek of the luckless Bill, but he ignored the remark and went on, stiffly, "Yes, I think she is a very fine girl and very agreeable. To be sure, not one

of your spider-waisted, airy fairy creatures." As her avoirdupois was somewhere near the hundred and fifty mark, the worthy Andy replied that he quite agreed with him, which remark proved the last straw to Bill. Getting very red and striking a dignified attitude, in doing which the teapot was upset into the ash-pail, where it stayed until needed the following morning, he exclaimed angrily, "See here, old man, what is the matter with you? I'm not going to stand it. If you have anything to say against Miss Barton, say it now, I want to hear it." But here he was met by a look of such blank amazement that Bill stopped short, and when Andy followed in an injured tone, "Did I say anything disrespectful about Miss Barton?" Bill could not see his way out of the tangle but felt bound to speak.

"Well, you said—she was fat—and you hinted—that—well—See here, old man, I believe you are jealous. You want to go there yourself, but I am going to take her home from the dance Tuesday night, in spite of fate. Say, Andy, I'll bet you \$5 that I'll see Miss Barton home from the dance."

Andy bent over his sock, but in his half closed eyes evil spirits danced, but he moodily muttered something about it being all right for Bill, and he, conscious that Andy had come off best in the last encounter thirsted for revenge.

"Come, Andy, your chance is as good as mine (which in his heart he hoped was a lie). You know her as well as

the railway came, had secured his farm, later had patiently built himself a comfortable house of concrete, and the dance was given in honor of his only daughter Jean who had that day nineteen years before opened her baby eyes on this world. To see her to-night it was no wonder they were all proud of "our Jean." She was receiving her guests in all the glory of a new muslin frock, her mother's gift; a gold watch and chain, a father's foolishness for his "baby;" an ostrich fan, big brother Tom's present; while likewise numerous pins, combs, bows, handkerchiefs adorned her person, for she wished to please all by wearing their presents. A worthy motive, but sometimes inconvenient. And the other girls. Bright, pleasant, generally low-voiced, healthy and happy. Some in the important rustle of new muslin or print, some in heavier dresses, and a few with an attempt at elegance. Some wore their hair in all the tortured magnificence of curls and frizzes, which ere morning presented a wondrous sight. Some drew their tresses into tight rolls securely fastened by numberless pins, sometimes a net, from which should one rebellious hair free itself, it was immediately captured and put back, and with the tight rolls usually went a few scared curls or frizzes over the fair brow. Others again with a true artistic touch wore their hair softly curled or waved and as best became their face coiled on the crown or caught to the back of the head, not so loose as to show signs of collapse



Feeding the Calves.

I do; come, put up your dough," but that naughty boy, seeing that a seeming reluctance but added fuel to the fire, demurred with "money did not grow on trees." "Well here's a chance to make money. What is a western man if not a speculator? Come, take your medicine." "Well," in a sickly manner, "you'll fight fair?"

"All is fair in love and war," was the confident answer, as Bill produced his \$5, which Andy with very apparent distaste covered with one from his trunk. The bills were both put in an old sugar bowl and pushed to the rear part of the cupboard for safety. In truth it was a place of security, for no one, unless hardened by personal experience, will dare probe the mysteries of a bachelor's cupboard.

It was the evening of the dance, springlike, warm, delightful as the first of June usually is in the west. The first shy flowers, the anemone, the violet and the cowslip had come, and gave without stint of their sweetness, while the birds with the meadow lark as choirmaster, flooded the air with perfect melody seeming to marvel how man could be silent. Though the evening was well advanced, the great sun, swung well round to the north, was still above the horizon, and with his long golden needles sought to draw all attention to his glory. 'Twas a lovely twilight hour, and for a little time hushed the merry chatter of the young people as they trooped along in carts and buckboard and covered buggy to the dance. It was at Old McLearn's. The good man, a pioneer of the place, had settled long before

before the first dance was over, not so tight as to suggest pain.

The gentlemen were all, or nearly all, very clean, very brown, and very pleasant. Some few were entirely at their ease, a greater number wished to appear so, and a large number, especially of the younger fry, looked decidedly uncomfortable. Their stiff collars dug into their necks, their clothes hitched, their boots squeaked and from a non-acquaintance with comb and hair brush on all working days, these youths, upon whom the future of the country depends, did not appear to advantage. This was before the dance began. When the fiddler had twang-twanged a few times, the organ groaned a long A, the door between the two largest rooms was thrown open, in which the "caller-off" stood and shouted that so many couples were wanted. When the dance was thus begun, all became at their ease. Stiff collars, squeaky boots, hitching clothes were forgotten in the music and motion of the dance.

And what about Bill and his chum? They arrived somewhat late, their wardrobe needing some attention, with no long suffering mother or sister to bring order out of confusion; but a good shave, a good wash, a suit of good clothes transformed the two hayseeds into two swell young gentlemen.

When they arrived the dancing was in full swing, and each made a quiet survey of the room. Andy noted that the girl he wanted was not there, the prim little prairie maid who demurely went her own way, and to all appearances paid no attention to his Sunday-school looks and pathetic sighs. But