

An Old Maid's Defeat.

BY SOPA SPARKS.

At last we alight from the railway coach and wend our way towards the beautiful and picturesque village of Nanawobville, N. Y. A feeling of loneliness, mingled with anticipation, takes possession of us as we find ourselves strangers in a strange land, but our two mile walk to the village soon shakes off all languor and depression, and sends the warm life blood coursing through our veins at such a rate, that on arriving at our destination we partake freely of the steaming viands set before us by our kind hostess.

Naturally of a frank and open disposition I venture a remark on the flaky whiteness of her home-made bread, which she straightway attributes to my sharpened appetite, notwithstanding my protests to the contrary.

This village is a lively little place beautifully situated on either bank of Beaver Creek, and while standing on the iron bridge that spans the stream, the spectator has command of a most dreamy and beautiful view of the broad sweep of woodland, and a bit of celestial scenery more beautiful than all. American people are extremely social. I find no difficulty in becoming acquainted with all the elite of the village under the chaperonage of our kind hostess.

Among others I became acquainted with Harriet Rezek, a young lady of true refinement, whose graceful manners and witty sayings had made her a favorite with old and young; more particularly I might say to her future spouse, the village Doctor, who was a gentleman of rare genius and ability, and who also possessed a most fascinating address. However, the best of men have their faults, and Dr. Eppig was no exception to the rule. 'Tis sure he adored Harriet Rezek, and meant at some future date to wed her and settle down in life, but it is equally true that he was a desperate flirt, and that he could not possibly be induced to limit his attentions to Miss Harriet alone, who was altogether too sweet to resent such conduct. When censured on this point he invariably exclaimed:

"What! you would have me take a wife, to share my cares and sorrows? Faith! that would be a party shine—'T would double both, be jabsers!"

"Oh no, I'm a gay, young rollicking doctor. On courtin' girls my mind's not bent; And marry! no is my intent, But remain a rambling doctor."

Having ascertained these facts, and having our curiosity awakened by numberless queries about his lordship. In fact every caller on the first afternoon of our arrival inquired of me if I had seen the Doctor. What mortal could stand more? I began to wonder what this wonderful specimen of humanity was like, and to wish for a sight of him. However, my indignation was aroused, and I concluded, with the assistance of my companions, to punish him for his flippant behavior toward his betrothed. How much easier said than done, as I found to my cost ere I had done with it.

"But you don't mean to drown him?" exclaims Burk with horror depicted on every line of his countenance.

"Fshaw! no"; I reply. "Just give him a nice bath in the brook."

"How will he know for what purpose it was done?"

"I don't intend he shall know. I think he deserves some punishment, and then I'll rather enjoy the sport of it. What say you?"

"Capital!"

"Well, then the first thing to be done is to obtain an introduction me thinks I can manage that all right. Since we leave on Tuesday it will be necessary to arrange all things for Monday night; it is not likely we'll

care about stayin' much longer after that. At dusk conceal yourselves on the plank bridge. If I remember rightly there are bushes at the farther end."

"Yes, plenty of them."

"Of course you'll not expect me to do more than bring Dr. Eppig over the plank."

"No, we'll duck him."

"The curtain will rise about half past nine. Adieu."

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While strolling past Miss Rezek's residence one evening, where she and the Doctor were engaged in that game of all games, "Croquet," the former hails us with, "Have a game, Miss Sparks. Just time for another before dusk."

"Really, Miss Rezek, I know nothing whatever about playing—" I commence, when the Doctor steps up and is introduced.

"Happy to make your acquaintance Miss Sparks; come along, and have a game; you can learn easily I know. You and I against the three."

We all agree, and ere the last streak of daylight has faded into night it is ended, and the Doctor and I are champions, since we hold the victorious side; but of course no credit is due me, the Doctor was playing, I was thinking. After the last ricket is pulled, the last ball and mallet laid away, we adjourn to the drawing-room, where we are entertained alternately by the "per meow" of a cat held in the arms of Dr. Eppig, and the not too harmonious notes of a distant band.

The next day, being Saturday, my time is spent on the beach, and I find it hot, yea burning hot, so that I can scarcely write; a gentle dream of jocund summer. Sunday Harriet calls for me to accompany her to church. We listen to an eloquent discourse on "God is Love." After tea the Doctor calls. He is very lively and witty, and explains the difference between Canadian and American customs as regards a lady taking off a gentleman's hat. I find it a little embarrassing, but manage to pull through it, mentally vowing to leave all hats alone in the future.

Time sped on swiftly, and time of our stay was drawing to a close, for my time was of value to me, as I could not conscientiously leave books unopened and music untouched for weeks at a time. So far all has gone well, and I am in excellent spirits over the anticipated fun to night. To make it all complete Harriet has invited me there to-night, and she slyly whispered: "The Doctor said he would come too." It was easily seen that she was not afraid of plain Norah Sparks winning her lover.

Notwithstanding that Dr. Eppig fell in with my plans so nicely, you must not suppose that he was not keen-sighted enough to see that I put myself somewhat in the way of receiving attention. In the last case I need not have stayed until it was too late to return alone, which I did by proposing a second game of chess. As soon as the last game was finished I arose to go, and the Doctor, (what else could he do?) very gallantly said it was no trouble at all to escort me safely home.

I know by this time you must be wholly disgusted with my forward conduct, but I entreat you to look with a lenient eye on my peculiarities for possibly I may yet get the punishment; besides I am, and always have been a devout student, and this is my first encounter with a society gentleman.

We walked along almost in silence until we reached the bridge, (which by the way was no better than an old plank), when I stepped slightly to one side, at the same time requesting Dr. Eppig to precede me, which he did, when lo! my comrades, mistaking me

for the Doctor, tossed me lightly into the stream.

"Gracious! if it was not cool. Believe me if I'd been a man, I'd had to swear; under the circumstances, however, I considered it the better plan to swim to the opposite shore and escape, ere the doctor had time to recover from his astonishment."

My comrades, on perceiving their blunder, got away as quickly as possible, and to my dying day I don't suppose I'll ever know what the doctor thought of such a plot, but of course he knows very little about it unless perchance he reads this little tale.

I presume it is quite needless to tell you that ere the dawn of the following day we had left the scene of my catastrophe far behind us. And when again in Her Majesty's Dominions were prepared to make it all a joke.

"They is Hoop Snakes."

"Who says they ain't no such thing as hoop snakes?" shouted the Old Settler, at Milford, Pa., pushing his chip hat on the back of his head, and bringing down his cane with a thump that made the glasses behind the bar jingle. "Who says they ain't? People is gittin' too consarned smart now-a-days. They don't b'lieve in nothin'. 'Twan't only 'tother day that day that I heerd one o' these yer city boarders say that the story bout Gin'rl Washington's hackin' down the cherry tree, and then tellin' his pap that he done it with his little hatchet, was all got up by a newspaper man, and that they wan't no more truth in it than they is in a 'lectioneerin' yarn; an' another one said that he didn't believe that story 'bout Gin'rl Putnam ridin' bare-back down Stony P'int no more'n he did the one about the coon that come down out'n the tree when he seen it war Davy Crockett a drawin' a bead on him. Gosh! mightly! When folks git to flyin' right in the face o' double twisted facts like them, where's the keutry goin' to? They ain't no sech things as hoop snakes, hay? Who says they ain't?"

Some of the boys had been discussing the hoop snake question at the Crissman House. The Old settler was snoozing in his chair. One of the boys said he didn't believe there was such a thing as a hoop snake, and that had waked the Old Settler up.

"Well major," said the Sheriff, "if there are hoop snakes, why don't any any of us ever see 'em?"

"Why don't you see any of 'em?" said the Old Settler. "Why don't you see 'em? Don't you s'pose hoop snakes ain't got nothin' to do but to take their tails in their teeth an' hump themselves around this town like a circus procession? If you want to see hoop snakes, why don't you go where hoop snakes is? I'm bettin' the jig-water for the house that if the lan'lord here hadn't shut down on trustin' a couple o' months ago, you an' the hull passel o' you durm smart roosters would be a secin' hoop snakes, an' ev'ry other kind o' snakes by this time, consarn ye!"

"Major," said the Sheriff, "Frank's new barrel of apple is a little the best he's had for a long time. Ice in yours as usual?"

"Well boys," said the Old settler, as he joined the crowd, "I don't want to git mad about this thing, but when a feller tells me that hoop snakes aint amongst the curiosities of this mundane speer, he might jist as well call me a liar, an' my father an' my gran'-father afore me a liar. Didn't an old lifter of a hoop snake usty have his den on top o' Rocky Hill? An' didn't he an' his posterity make it warm for my gran'-father, an' my father, an' me off an' on, year in an' year out, fur more'n forty year? Well, mebbe they didn't but if you're bankerin' after facts that won't wash but n'r shrink,

I can tell you that he did. Frank," added the Old Settler, "that apple has 'he makin' of good liquor in it, but it's too young. They's too much tooth to it. 'n' the tooth is well set. It's first class electioneerin' apple, and it'd tend to business right up to the mark on circus day. If I had time I could set down an' figure up jist how many fights they 'had to the pint in it. It's a good apple, Frank, but if I was you I wouldn't see any more of it till this time next year. By that time I'll forget you've got it, an' then you can work off another on me, mebbe."

"Major," said the Sheriff, "is that hoop snake, or any of its offspring, hanging out at Rocky Hill yet?"

"Scarcely," replied the old Settler. "Not by no means, he a in't. But I've got the tail horn of the father of 'em all 'mongst my traps. You see hoop snakes live principally on deer, and—"

"On deer, Major?" interupted the Sheriff. "Now say, Major, c'n't you bring their feed down at least to a ground hog?"

"What!" said the Old Settler, "hoop snakes eat a groun' hog? Why groun' hogs is cold pizen to hoop snakes! The groun' hog don't know it, but hoop snakes has to pack right up and git if a groun' hog digs his cellar any-where nigh 'em. An' that's jist what's druv the hoop snakes out o' this keutry. The groun' hogs has got too thick for the sarptins, and they've picked up their tails and rolled off to 'ords the settin' sun, or some other part of the footstool. The way I found out this little fact of naturall history was this: Rocky Hill was once o' the boss ridges for deer, an' my gran'-father an' my father usty hunt there more'n any other place, though they knowed they had to take the chances with the hoopers, as we called the snakes. Greased lightnin' aint the millionth part of a second quicker than a hooper, an' a hooper'd sooner chase a man than eat. 'y gran'-father, an' my father, an' me arter 'em knowed how to manage 'em. Soon as we'd see one start down the hill for us we'd drop behind a tree, an' kersock, the hooper would slap his horn inter it. Mebbe you've noticed how many dead trees they is up along the south side o' Rocky. Them were all killed by hoopers sockin' their stingers inter 'em instead o' inter us. The pizen killed 'em in the jerk of a lamb's tail. But them hoopers was so durm suddin that we never could git a club on to one before he'd have his horn out o' the tree an' in his mouth again, an' be a rollin on down the hill like a runaway waggon wheel. My gran'-father nor my father never killed one o' the hoopers, an' they died b'lievin' that hoop snakes was charmed, an' couldn't be killed. Well one day I was huntin' up on the hill when a big buck got up jist in front o' me. He kinder along, and I was a drawin' a bead on him, when I see a hoop snake start down the ridge right at the deer.

"Ho! ho!" says I, "I'll wait and see the fun."

"Jest afore the snake reached the deer, a groun' hog came out of his hole, which was a new one, an' I hadn't noticed it, and stepped between the snake that was whizzin' along and the deer. The snake struck the groun' hog plumb in the side, an' the groun' hog didn't seem to know it. The deer went on; but I didn't see the snake. I put a ball through the groun' hog's head, an' he dropped. I went up to him. He was dead, an' layin' by him was the hooper, jist as dead as he was. That kinder staggered me. Pooty soon I got an idee. I picked up the groun' hog an' walked along the side o' the ridge, keepin' a sharp eye out for hoopers. Not more'n a minit afterwards I see an ol' whopper start from the top of the hill straight for me. I stopp'd an' braced myself. When the snake got to where one