

Her father, however, decided that if he had to waste his time in looking after me, Kate had better accept the opportunity to be probated in the art also. Accordingly, though reluctant at first, she at length conceded. Kate was a bashful little girl with brown curls and two flashing eyes sufficient to make all the old bachelors within miles want to swear off. At the time I was somewhat shy myself, especially in the society of ladies. To Kate I had been particularly so on account of the sublime ignorance I had shown of rural matters and country customs.

Nevertheless an opportunity was shortly to present itself of my making her closer acquaintance,

On the first day of our combined ride we gave a dual exhibition. My horse stumbled just at the same moment her's did, and we performed a large double-act dismounting scene into each other's arms. There was no need of further introduction, we were fast friends from the start.

After the happening of this auspicious event my landlord thought it time to interfere, but I assured him I had found out what was wrong. "My stirrups are too high," said I. My landlord replied that he thought I must have felt the distance somewhat on the descent.

At another time I innocently remarked that I thought the holes in the road accounted for the frequency of my falls, and he replied ironically that he guessed I had better see the council about it.

However, during my two weeks' stay I had ample opportunities afforded me of studying the art of dismounting from every conceivable point of view. Indeed by the time my visit was up I had been thoroughly grounded in the business. A very deep-rooted antipathy, however, had sprung between the garden vegetables and myself; the carrots did not like my frequent turn-ups, nor did I relish the impressions gleaned from amid the horse-radish. I am persuaded to the belief also that no man was thrown out of more positions or placed in as many situations in a life-time as I was during that eventful fortnight.

Of other diversions there were many to interest me during my stay in addition to riding, driving and walking, but none of them concerned me to such an extent as these three.

Nevertheless, I went fishing with the youngest son of the family, making all sorts of idle blunders and mistakes, and getting myself inexplicably tangled up with fish-hooks and nets until I much resembled a porcupine with its quills stuck through a sieve. In this way I managed to escape being caught myself when attempting to steal a ride on the peddler's wagon. I was far too sharp for him. It was impossible to lay hands upon me.

Boating, I usually indulged in, in the evening, after the sun had gone down, and the kingdom of the silver had begun to enwrap the land—at a time when strangers might be deluded into the belief that any splashing that I made was caused by fish jumping in the water.

Shooting had no attractions for me whatever, I got all the noise and confusion I wanted from my landlady in the house without going out for it.

Many of these sports and diversions were entirely new to me. Some of them I had never indulged in before, and of others I had had only

a taste, for such things are comparatively rare in town. It was soon apparent, however, that an abundance of them was not wanting in the country.

I should have enjoyed my visit immensely had it not been for the lady of the house. Whatever unexpected exploits or misfortunes I had experienced in the way of riding, fishing and so forth, had been sources of amusement to me in spite of the many intricate misadventures I had got into. None of those things worried me to any appreciable degree; but the incessant chatter of my landlady proved a serious barrier to my full peace of mind, and the thorough enjoyment which I would otherwise have had. No matter to what degree these other happenings had been unlooked for, as has been said, the most fortuitous circumstances connected with my visit was the meeting with such a thing as gossiping in the country. I was so much averse to that sort of thing that had I foreseen the possibility of encountering it in such a positive form, it is doubtful if I would have made the trip at all. On numerous previous occasions had I made journeys to the country, 'tis true they were hurried, flying ones, but never before had I seen anything which indicated that such a vicious practice existed there. I looked for it everywhere in vain, but in the city, and had begun to think that that kind of thing was not done in the country. Here, alas! was evidence of a character indisputably strong, which told me that the city had no monopoly over the country in this respect. On this visit my efforts to escape this excessive talking were as futile as my endeavors had previously been to locate it there. Everywhere I went, the voice of my landlady went with me. It haunted me constantly with unspeakable certainty.

What pleased and puzzled me to an untold extent was that none of the other members seemed to inherit the disease. My landlord (whose name by the way was Jones) was a kindly old gentleman, fine-looking, well-preserved and bearing very certain signs of having continually enjoyed the best of health in spite of his affliction; above all, he was very quiet and very reticent. The sons I found most agreeable and hospitable; while the daughters, Fannie, Mary and Kate, like all other country maidens, were beautiful and charming. But of the mistress of the house it was manifest she was not of my style of liking. I liked all the rest of the family but her, and all the rest of the family appeared to favorably entertain me but she. I had, at the time, ample reasons for believing this—reasons which placed it beyond the shadow of a doubt.

In all my extensive wanderings I had never come across such a woman—in the country. 'Tis true in urban life I had encountered them, but they were usually of the exhaustible kind that used themselves up as well as you by their efforts. My friend, however, had no element of this kind in her entire make-up. She was as fresh as a cucumber and as lively as a cricket after the utmost efforts conversationally. Any little obstruction she met with only acted as an incentive to greater feats with her—she was without doubt the greatest talker I had ever met.

She had one of her peculiar attacks the second evening after my arrival. I diagnosed it early

in the day as St. Vitis' dance in the tongue. She felt it coming on all afternoon but restrained herself until the arrival of her docile spouse in the evening, when she started off at a sulky pace, and went to the quarter without a break.

"You're a lazy, idle loafer," she cried vehemently. My landlord looked dejected. I expected to see the old man rebel, but he evidently knew his business.

"You're a mean, close-fisted old wretch," she proceeded, "without sense enough to—"

"My good lady," I remonstrated.

"Sir!" came the monosyllabic reply. "I don't think, sir, that I addressed myself to you, sir!"

"No! I don't think you did, my good woman, but—" I timidly began, growing somewhat uneasy on my own account.

"Well, sir," she interrupted, "I shall be pleased, sir, if you will keep your remarks to yourself, sir, or there may be someone here who will make you, sir." At this point she clenched her fist and struck a threatening attitude. I drew instinctively back.

"I once knew a man, sir, who had his nose flattened, sir,—"

"Flattened?" I queried.

"Yes, flattened, sir; flattened by shoving it into other people's business, sir; and if you do not mind, sir, and keep your remarks to yourself, sir, and not thrust your impertinent self into other people's affairs, sir, you may find that very useful appendage to your anatomy, sir, also covering a greater area than it was originally intended that it should, sir!" Here she shook her fist in my face, stamped vehemently on the floor and then, wheeling about on her heel, walked off to the other end of the room in a tantrum.

It was plainly evident to me from her actions, from the dilated nostrils and the firm position into which her mouth was drawn, that she was generating motive power, I could readily see



"YOU'RE A LAZY, IDLE LOAFER!"