



BY HENRY C. MITCHELL.



HE was coming! Great Scott! What news! She had actually started, and was expected to arrive within a few days.

It was enough to upset the equanimity of all the "Boys" in the settlement—and it did.

It was in one of the settlements of the North West, the exact locality of which it is unnecessary to specify—it occurred in a year needless to chronicle, and concerned a number of young gentlemen, whose names it might perhaps be unwise to mention!

Having thus briefly described the location, time and *dramatis personæ*, let us proceed with our "Pitiful Story."

There were a good number of us "Boys" in the settlement in those days, independent householders (house by courtesy), and according to the assessment roll we were "Farmers." I feel safer in quoting so reliable an authority as that, than in making a serious statement on my own responsibility, for I have heard this assertion doubted, by persons who plumed themselves on their ability to detect the genuine article! Let it suffice to say, however, that we were quite satisfied on that point ourselves, however skeptical others might be as to our right to so honourable a designation.

The average age of the brotherhood was at that time about twenty-one, and, strange as it may sound, although having reached such an age we were still unmarried! This was a state of affairs that caused us much unhappiness, although as a matter of fact, none of us felt we were to blame in the matter! We were quite willing, nay anxious, to serve in the ranks of the Benedicts; the fact of there being no eligible young ladies in the district may account in some measure for the unfortunate condition we were placed in, at any rate I have always thought it had something to do with it! Being then in this frame of mind, it will be easily understood what a state of excitement we were all in when it was announced on good authority that a young lady, pretty, amiable, and eligible in every way, was expected to arrive almost immediately, on a visit to one of the very few married ladies of our settlement. Our joy was not quite unalloyed, however, for although this was an event often discussed and hoped for in the "Shanties," the abruptness of the announcement brought consternation in our midst. We were not ready! Our houses were not in order, our washing was not home. To those young gentlemen who dwell in cities, and who are wont to adorn the sidewalks of a summer evening, habited in the most fashionable and striking apparel, such a predicament would cause slight embarrassment. "Washing not home,—that's nothing; all you have to do is to telephone to the steam laundry," they would say; "or if it isn't starched, buy another." (It is unnecessary to go into particulars).

The difficulty, however, with us was simply that there wasn't a steam laundry nor was there a telephone, neither could we have bought another had we wished to; our store didn't keep them in those days. Then again our laundry was managed on different lines to those city institutions. All the steam there was about it arose from the boiler that stood on the cooking stove, and which supplied the establishment with the necessary hot water, and was replenished from time to time from a wooden pail that stood near.

Then there was a beautiful uncertainty about when your things would be ready, there being no competition in our settlement; the lady who presided at the tub was a perfect autocrat; hers was a despotic sway; if the Duchess of the wash tub was indisposed, you had to wait; if Her Grace had decided that now was the time for gathering berries, and had placed your modest bundle of clothes outside the Castle wall, under the eaves where the rain could drain off

the sod roof on to it, very good, it is her pleasure! Don't argue! It is better not to; let 'em go, or Her Grace may point her noble finger to the door, "Begone, vile caitiff, avant, base minion! Down with the portcullis. Up with the drawbridge. Hie thee to the Buttery. Git!" And then where are you? So you see in this case, as it is often in others, prospective pleasure was tinged with present difficulties. However, each man felt he must make every effort to forward his cause, and realized the fact that in the approaching campaign he would have to rely solely on himself, and that this business was totally unlike any other. Usually when any difficulty arose we could count on the support and sympathy of all the fellows, but in an affair of this kind every one, to descend to the vernacular, ran his own show.

The competition would be very keen. On the evening of the eventful day when the great tidings were spread around, I drew up my chair in front of the fire to indulge in a thorough review of the whole situation and weigh carefully every chance for or against me in the coming contest.

The beautiful stranger was expected to arrive very shortly, although no one knew exactly the day, so I thought I ought to have the plan of campaign cut and dried beforehand. First, when ought I to call? Then what should I wear? These two were questions I felt should be settled before going any further, and I pulled away at my pipe. "The thing is, you know," I argued to myself, "the thing is whether I should score more by trying to get an introduction before anyone else, or whether I should wait for a few days until all the other fellows have called, and then sail down and knock 'em all out?" The latter course commended itself to me as the most advisable. Then what shall I wear? This was a knotty point. "You see, my boy," I argued, "it depends a good deal how the girl has been brought up; if she has been allowed to stuff her silly head with novels about wild Indians, hardy trappers of the West, etc., I might make more impression if I went in top boots, duck trousers, blue shirt with red handkerchief, wide brimmed hat, cartridge belt, spurs and Peter's duck gun. But if, on the other hand, she was sent to school early and kept there she may be intellectual and favour the professor style more, and then I could go in my carpet shoes, rubber coat, felt hat and spectacles.

These were difficult questions, and I smoked harder, in hope of soon getting at the inspiring part of the pipe. Finally I decided that it was very difficult to determine how this young lady had been brought up, and what her tastes were, that I would just go as an ordinary individual, as decently clothed as time and the Duchess would allow, for unfortunately at that time Her Grace had no washing of mine, and I should have to take it there at once. Then came the question,—after being introduced what subject should I choose for conversation? This was a very nice point; you city fellows mayn't think so, but when there is only one girl to about forty men ordinary small talk is nowhere. Any fool can talk about that! What you want is something striking, something that would remain in her mind, you know, to distinguish you from the rest of the crowd.

If she was a society young lady, I feared I should have rather a hard job to interest her. I could not tell her very much about the last party, what the girls wore and what a fright I thought the other girl looked, you know, for there hadn't been a party. However, one thing is certain, I should have to squeeze in some quotation in French or Latin or something of that kind, for one of our fellows was a great classic, "old H. H.," and he would be sure to let off some

Greek or something, and I must keep level at all costs. French, I thought I could remember most of, and briefly outlined a conversation in which I could wriggle in a few words. She might say, you know, "How very delighted I am to make your acquaintance," and then I could reply, "It affords me much pleasure to hear you say so. Sans peur et sans reproche." Or it might be she would say (if she was a judge of character), "I thought Mr. H. H. rather a foolish young man, don't you?" and I would reply, "Oh, yes, I agree with you. Honi soit qui mal y pense. Old H. H. hasn't much 'aplomb' about him."

After letting these gems off I could turn the conversation for fear of vain repetition. On arising next morning, clearly the first thing to be done was to journey up to the Duchess without loss of time with my bundle. So after doing the necessary "chores" I hitched up the oxen to the cart, and started away in the hope of getting my apparel attended to before any of the other fellows arrived.

The castle of the Duchess was some three miles distant from my shanty, and when I had gone about two-and-a-half miles I was near enough to see that there were no rigs at the door, which was encouraging, as I hoped I was going to be first; but presently as I was trudging along by the side of the oxen with my modest bundle tied in a large red handkerchief, slung on a stick across my shoulder, I saw what appeared to be a team and rig in the distance; but instead of heading for the castle, to my surprise it seemed to be coming my way. As it drew nearer I thought I could distinguish an umbrella shading the driver; this struck me as rather unusual; none of the boys owned such a thing, it must be a lady; and as the rig was now rapidly approaching the horse appeared very familiar. "That is Mrs. Dash's horse, I am sure," I said to myself, "but who has she got with her?" for now they were near enough for me to see that there was another lady in the trap, who also had a parasol, a large red one. "By jove, this is going to be interesting. Who the Dickens can it be?" Then I remembered Mrs. Dash was the lady the beautiful stranger was to stay with. A cold shudder ran through me. "Impossible! it can't be her." But something made me feel that it *must* be. "Oh where can I get to? What on earth shall I do?" They were very close now, coming right down on me. I tried to pull my old hat farther down, turn up my ragged old collar and sneak along by the oxen on the side farthest away. If it was her, it couldn't be worse. I wasn't ready. I felt I didn't look like a wild hunter, I didn't look like a professor, didn't look—look very clean! I couldn't remember what I meant to talk about, all the French was jumbled up. They were within a few yards. I got nervous, excited, I didn't dare to look up. They were opposite! They were passing, thank Heav— "Good morning, Mr. Henry; what a beautiful day it is."

It was Mrs. Dash's voice, and I had to look up, and there on the far side I could see the edge of that beautiful sunshade with lace around the edge, and just then it canted over and I saw the face of the stranger! I felt so overcome I was speechless. Mrs. Dash coughed; I felt I ought to reply to her remark on the weather, and so I dashed in regardless of consequences.

"Oh yes, indeed, very lovely, and so unexpected!—that is, I mean the weather is lovely, you know, quite warm enough for a red para—Ehem! Ah yes, beautiful weather." Mrs. Dash looked at me steadily, and then turning to the visitor by her side, said "Allow me to introduce my friend, Mr. Henry, to you, Marie." The visitor smiled bewitchingly as she bowed, and as Mrs. Dash went through the mystic words of introduction I had just sense enough to lift the ancient curio that did duty for a hat, but the