

THE HOME CIRCLE

The Quarrel.

By Effie W. Merriman.



IF YOU were to look on the map of Minnesota for a place called Kingman, you would not find it, nevertheless, there is such a place, and ever so much more life may be found there than one would imagine who had never seen it except through a car window.

At one time, not so many years ago, it boasted a very active temperance society, which was made up of nearly every young person who lived within a radius of five miles, and that, of course, included Anna Wells. Anna's father was wealthy when compared with the other farmers in the neighborhood, and Anna had been given advantages which made her quite envied by most of her associates. She had gone to school in the city, and had taken lessons in music and elocution.

Among the rules of this temperance society was one to the effect that anyone failing to contribute to the entertainment, as requested by the committee, should pay a fine of 25 cents. When it is understood that young people of that neighborhood seldom had 25 cents to call their own, it will be seen that this law was well calculated to make them work. But, as a rule, the various committees were thoughtful, and tried to give each member a task that he was known to be able to perform.

Dick Wyman and Alice Wells had been very good friends ever since Anna's return from the city. This was somewhat surprising to the rest of us, for Anna was inclined to judge by appearances, and Dick was about as plain a boy as one could find, besides, his father was the poorest man in the neighborhood. But Dick was full of fun, and his merry laugh could be heard from the midst of any group of young people gathered together for a good time. He seemed to carry his good time with him, and he shared it so freely that no one cared because he was too large and too awkward for his age, or thought much about his great hands and feet, his freckled face and shock of curly red hair.

One day Dick and Anna quarreled. It began about the merest trifle, but Anna lost control of herself entirely and made a rude remark about Dick's parents, repeating a bit of neighborhood gossip that ought never to have been mentioned in the first place. For a moment we thought Dick would strike her, he looked so furious, but he got himself under control sufficiently to turn away without replying, and soon his merry laugh was heard ringing out from amidst another group of young people.

I am sure Anna regretted her rudeness, and hoped, with the rest of us, that Dick had not allowed it to cut very deep. That evening the temperance society met, as usual, in the schoolhouse. Anna was on the program for a song, and it chanced that she had selected one which was a favorite with her, although much too high for her voice. Her best friends were always sorry when she attempted it.

On this occasion, she simply made a failure of it. She could not reach the high notes, even by making an effort that was painful to witness, and I cannot imagine why she persisted in going on. But she did. And when she reached the difficult passages of the second verse, a voice—an odd, high falsetto—joined in, warbled through the high notes and finished with a fine yodel that brought down the house. Of course it was Dick. No one else could yodel like that.

Anna was white with rage, but we couldn't stop laughing, at once, even though we were sure Dick had been so rude. It really was not like him, although he sometimes seemed to forget himself, as most all young people do, occasionally.

Dick had three particular friends among the boys—Will Haynes, Bob Pierce and Harry Penny. They were all nice boys, but so full of mischief that they often quite disgraced themselves in the eyes of very proper people. On this occasion they chanced to sit in the

front row of seats with Dick, and they all began applauding vociferously. Then what did that dreadful boy do but stand up where we could all see him, and begin bowing and smirking like a prima donna. He said, afterward, that he did it that we might all know he was the guilty party, for he did not want anyone else accused of such rudeness. That was like Dick.

Anna had stood there confused, indignant, and undecided as to what she should do next, but when she saw Dick bowing, she turned scornfully away, and walked off the stage like an angry princess. It was the rudest thing I ever knew Dick Wyman to do, and it shows how far a boy will go in the wrong path when he seeks revenge. He was sorry, in a minute, and begged Anna's pardon before us all, but her reply was very cool, and we were all so uncomfortable that we were glad when the time allotted for intermission had expired, and we were called to our seats again.

It chanced that Anna was one of the committee appointed to arrange the program for the next meeting, and when it was read we were all surprised to learn that there was to be music by the "Kingman band," for such an organization was quite unknown among us. But we soon understood.

The Kingman band, according to Anna, was made up of four noted musicians—Will Haynes, Bob Pierce, Harry Penny and Dick Wyman. The last name was pronounced in a tone of withering scorn. We were thunderstruck. Not one of the boys owned a musical instrument, or had ever played on one. Indeed, neither of them knew one note from another.

It was very evident that Anna meant not only that they should pay the fine which they could ill afford, but that they should be humiliated by being obliged to confess that they were unequal to the task assigned them. Three of the boys looked as if the laugh were no longer on their side, but Dick did not act as if he had heard a word of that program. It was noticed, however, that he passed a slip of paper to Will, who read it, then passed it on to Bob and Harry, and from that moment there was not one among us who was skillful enough to get a word out of one of those boys as to what might be expected at our next meeting.

When the eventful evening arrived, our schoolhouse was packed, for the temperance societies from two neighboring villages had come to visit us. We knew, then, that Anna had sent out invitations without consulting the rest of us. The program proved an unusually interesting one, and we were rather proud of the hearty applause each number elicited. If only Anna would decide to pass over that number alling for the Kingman band, we felt that this would be our banner evening. We did not want any member of our society to be publicly disgraced, and several notes to that effect were sent to Anna before that part of the program was reached. They had no influence upon her, however, and our hearts stood quite still when she announced, in her most relentless tones:

"We will now listen to a selection by the Kingman band." For a moment there was silence so oppressive that the dropping of a pin would have startled us. It was very evident now, that our guests had been invited especially to hear this particular number on our program, and if we could have told Anna, at that moment, just what we thought of her, she would probably have handed in her resignation at once.

There was a large closet back of the stage, which we had fixed up for a dressing room, and close upon Anna's announcement, four ragged, negro boys emerged from the closet, and took their places on the stage. Such costumes as they wore! Such collars! Such white gloves, made from sheeting! Such dreadful, dreadful hats!

The audience looked and laughed, and the longer they looked the harder they laughed. The band fairly stumbled upon the stage, they were so exceedingly awkward. Oh, but they were comical! In spite of their rich color and ragged attire it was not difficult for the members of our club to recognize our darky performers. Dick carried a large comb wrapped in pink paper. Harry had a Jewaharp—the largest he could find. Will had a plow-clevis which he played upon with a cornet steel. Bob had a big sheet-iron ash-pail strapped about his waist for a drum. He played upon it with an iron

cooking spoon and a turkey's leg fastened to a piece of broomstick.

A funnier sight could not be seen than those four boys, standing as awkwardly as they could, in a crooked row on the platform. And when they bowed and smiled! Well, you ought to have heard the audience then! Dick blew a great blast on his comb, right in Harry's ear. He was giving the key-note, which Harry repeated on his Jewaharp for Will and Bob, who stood right in front of him with their hands behind their ears, so as to be sure not to miss a part of the sound. Then came "Go Tell Aunt Rhoda,"—we really recognized the tune, but I don't know how,—and all the while the boys played they beat time in the most pronounced style—one with his head, another with his knees, a third with his hips and Dick with his entire body.

The audience simply howled. The boys were called back again and again, and every time they either played some ridiculous tune, or bowed and smirked in a way that convulsed us. "Never had so much fun in my life," "Haven't laughed like this in years!" "What comical boys. I wish we had some like them in our society!" These were a few of the exclamations made by our guests at the close of the evening, and there was no doubt that Dick was still ahead in the game of revenge which he and Anna had started to play.

Anna had laughed at the performance of the "Kingman band." She couldn't very well help it; but we who knew her best were quite sure that she would not let the matter drop with this defeat, and for days we asked, when we met where these two were not present, "Have you heard any of Anna's plans?" or, "Have they spoken to each other yet?" and always the answer was in the negative.

One night the members of our party started out for a ride on a hayrack. We meant to go to Bird Island, a little village five miles distant, and return the visit made us by the temperance society at that place. "Prairie fire!" suddenly exclaimed one of the girls, pointing to a bright light to the east of us. "Not at this time of the year," replied her brother.

"What is it, then?" asked several voices, and then, as a lurid gleam shot into the air, there was an agonized cry from Anna. "Oh, our house! Our house is on fire!" Dick was driving and the rate at which his horses were made to travel the mile between us and that house has never yet been beaten in that part of the country.

Mrs. Wells was a very delicate woman, who fainted easily, and when we reached the burning house and she was not to be seen, our faces blanched with horror. The roof looked as if it might fall at any moment, and without doubt Mrs. Wells was in her own room on the second floor. Mr. Wells was away from home, and both the hired man and the kitchen girl had been so busy trying to save the furniture that they had not once thought of their mistress. Anna started to force her way into the house, but firm hands held her back. It simply meant a loss of 100 lives instead of one; but every eye was wet with the tears shed in sympathy with her grief, which was terrible to witness.

We were startled by the crash of breaking glass. Someone had kicked out one of parlor windows. A bright blaze filled the room at that instant, making a fearful background for a picture which none of us will ever forget. There stood Dick, trying to draw a blanket more closely over Mrs. Wells, with one hand, while he supported her fainting form with the other. The flames played about his head and licked hungrily at his clothing, but he appeared as cool as he had when playing on the paper-covered comb. He took Mrs. Wells into his strong, young arms again, and stepped through the window. The roof fell at that moment, and he was lost to our sight in the smoke and dust and flying cinders; but before we could summon presence of mind enough to rush to his assistance, he had placed Mrs. Wells, quite unharmed, on the grass at her daughter's feet.

Did we applaud him? No, we cried, and Will and Harry hugged him with all their might. They said it was to smother the last spark of fire from his garments, and perhaps it was, but when we girls hugged him we certainly did not have that excuse. How glad we were, now, that Dick was too big for his age! If he had not been large, how could he have carried Mrs. Wells? His crop of red curls was stung off close

to his head, and so were his funny red eyebrows, but that made him none the less beautiful in our eyes.

As for Anna—oh, no one dares to say anything against Dick to her, and her father has loaned him money to pay his expenses at a business college in the city. Dick would not accept it as a gift, but was glad to be able to borrow it. The two families have become very good friends, and Mr. Wells has helped Mr. Wyman to a good position, so he is no longer the poorest man in the neighborhood.

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