

A COUNTRY SINGING SCHOOL.

No person has seen all of life who has not been at least "one quarter" at a country singing-school.

It is held in the district school-house, a deep red-coloured building, with white trimmings, and board blinds of the same red hue. This palace of learning is usually located at a "corner," where there is either a huckleberry heath or a bog—for country school-houses are always built where the land is good for nothing else, and where the poorest crow in all the world would never think of looking for a worm or anything else to fill his hungry craw.

The school-house inside presents the unvarying display of a couple of dozen desks, with their accompanying chairs—the desks notched and carved in grotesque figures by juvenile jackknives, and ornamented with random spots of black and blue ink.

There is a red chair, with a bottom of "basket stuff," for the use of the teacher; a dingy water pail, a battered tin dipper, a broom worn one-sided by constant use; and in the background a grayish-white blackboard, and a yellow map of the Dominion by way of ornament.

The "Singing Master" is generally a little bald, with a very lank and long drawn-out appearance throughout. It is a well-accepted theory that people with long necks sing the best, because they have more extent of pipes, we suppose; and "singing masters" are mostly constructed with this principle in view. He has a habit of elevating his eyebrows at every difficult passage of music, and of wetting his lips with his tongue before he "performs" on the tuning fork.

All the girls will be arranged in orthodox modesty and propriety on one side of the school-house, and all the boys in the same way on the other side, and you would never dream that the innocent souls ever thought of getting any nearer each other upon any pretext whatever. But if you watch them closely you will see human nature cropping out in the way they sheepishly turn their eyes toward each other when they snuff the candles or pass their singing-book to their next neighbor. And all the time they have the pleasant, serene, self-satisfied air which seems to say as plainly as words, "Nobody mistrusts it."

"Cord!" says the teacher, and then he snaps the tuning fork between his teeth, and holds it up to his ear so that it sings in his scanty side-whiskers, and then he opens his ponderous mouth, and the well-known "do-mi-sol-do" issues therefrom, and his baton describes the magical evolutions of "down, left, right, sing," and the performance has begun.

What a battle there is among the singers for supremacy! The bass bellows away in the attempt to outsize the soprano and the alto and tenor go through with a spirited tilt for the victory. The bass gets red, and then purple of face, the treble screams till the very spit-curls on her forehead stand on end, and as for the tenor, the only wonder is that those buttons of his can stand the strain. We speak of each part as of a single individual, but there are generally a dozen on each part, and all united as one man to drown out the others.

After the tune is ended the singers whisper together, and the alto says that "it is strange some people don't know the difference between singing and screaming;" while the treble whispers to her neighbor that "any well-trained Thomas-cat could beat that alto all hollow!"

By and by there is a recess, and then you begin to see how it is. The boys single out their favourite girls, and sheepishly present them with apples, or walnuts, or maybe peppermints, and pull their curls slyly, and snap apple seeds at them, and snatch away their pencils, or pocket their gloves, or indulge in something else equally as ridiculous and delightful.

And the girls blush, and giggle, and exclaim: "Oh, dear!" and "Let me alone!" and "Ain't you ashamed?"

And the boys keep right on, for don't they know, from long experience, that the girls like it?

"Order!" says the master. And everybody hurries to his own seat, and seizes on his singing book, and braces himself to wrestle with such Goliaths in the way of tunes as "Zerah, Cazenovia, Zion, and Balerma."

The spectators sit on a wooden bench by the stove, which is generally red-hot, and interviewing a country singing-school is a warm operation.

After a while, about half-past nine, the school is out, and then comes the event of the evening. The boys with their singing books under their arms, stand ranged round

the door, waiting for their particular girls to get into their shawls, and rubias, and furs, and come forth ready to be escorted home.

A more forlorn-looking set you never saw than these waiting swains. They stand first on one foot and then on the other, and they put their hands in their pockets and pull them out again, and they trot their toes on the floor, and whistle, and try to appear as if they didn't care a cent about anything, and did not know that there was a girl anywhere within ten miles of them.

And here we pause to propose the conundrum.

Why is it that young men always appear so sheepish when they are seeking the favor of some young lady?

How long those girls are in getting their wraps on to their satisfaction! What an age they are in tying those provoking "clouds" under their rosy chins! Did ever it take such an eternity to hunt up muffs and crochet mittens?

Then the girls have such a multitude of secrets to whisper to each other; such volumes of confidences to exchange and nobody must hear; and then the boys get up a little heart and put their heads between to intercept those confidences, and get their ears boxed in consequence; and all of them feel as happy as possible by the time they get ready to start for home.

The girls fairly rush through the narrow entry, and this is the time which tries the souls of the boys.

"None but the brave deserve the fair," and the boldest secure the prettiest girls.

Many a young man has sealed his fate at a country-singing school, and lost the girl of his heart by the lack of courage to rush up at the proper moment and thrust his elbow into her face, with the significant query:

"May I see you home?"

Every girl likes pluck in a young man, and the youth who fails to prove himself equal to the occasion loses grace in the eyes of his beloved; and this is the propitious time when his rival steps in and carries off the prize.

From that old red school-house some hearts go away light as air, while others are heavy as lead; and matches are made and matches are broken, during the long, cold walks to solitary farm-houses, over the crisp, creaking snow, beneath the pallid winter moon.

And how long it takes for John to say good-night to Sally, and how the moonlight turns the icicles on the eaves to crystals, and how the stars glimmer and wink at the happy, "spooney" couple, as if they had a personal interest in the affair.

And when the good-nights are finally said, and John is started for home, whistling softly, and thinking how nice it was to feel Sally's little hand clinging to his coat-sleeve, that same little hand of Sally's is cautiously trying to get the big door of that farm-house to shut without creaking, and the problem which fully occupies her brain is, can she ever bolt it without rousing the old folks?

For doors, where there are girls, will always creak, and the parents of attractive damsels invariably sleep with one eye open.

The Iron Cross.

The "Iron Cross of Prussia" is one of the decorative badges worn by the sex which is supposed to like gold better than iron. Frederick William founded the order as long ago as 1813: it was revived in the Franco-Prussian war and remodeled by Emperor William I. The first woman who received it was Miss Florence S. Lees, who was superintendent of the ambulance of the Crown Princess, now Empress Frederick. Miss Lees was English, and she was with the Tenth Prussian Corps before Metz. She has written a handbook since for hospital nurses, but she seems to have faith in the future peace of Europe, or she finds one medal enough for her satisfaction, for she has married a country clergyman, and it is not unlikely that the infants of the Rev. Dacie Craven cut their teeth when they are particularly well behaved on the cross of the Prussian medal.

The French Cross of the Legion of Honor is worn by quite a number of women, but it was never meant to be. Napoleon established it as the Order of the Eagle, and he was not a man to bestow eagles, or any other birds bigger than canaries, on women. It became a "cross" in later days, and then an "Order of the Holy Ghost," and then under Napoleon III. a cross again.

The first woman who received it was Rosa Bonheur. The Empress Eugenie personally asked for the cross for the great animal painter and met a refusal. The Ministers said that "as it had never hitherto been granted to a woman they protested against creating a precedent."

TWO DREAMS CAUSE A MARRIAGE.

Two remarkable dreams led to the marriage of the parents of Charles James Mathews, the great comedian. The marriage was solemnized on the 28th of March, 1803, and both of the parties were often questioned in regard to the facts we are about to narrate.

In 1801 the first wife of Charles Mathews, who was himself an actor of eminence, exhibited signs of a decline. She was intimate with a Miss Jackson, a member of the dramatic profession. One evening toward the close of her brief life Mrs. Mathews sent a message to Miss Jackson by Mr. Mathews, requesting a visit from her on the following day. Miss Jackson came, and found Mrs. Mathews propped up in bed, and they maintained a lively conversation until Mr. Mathews came in. She told him that her present cheerfulness was the result of considerations which had induced her to arrange the interview.

"My dear husband," she said, "no human skill can prolong my life, but before I depart I wish to exact a promise from both yourself and Miss Jackson, which will make my death one of peace."

"A promise!" repeated both in a breath. "Listen," she continued, with much solemnity. "You, Miss Jackson, are my dearest friend, and I know your affectionate and loving character. You are unprotected, and I wish you and Mr. Mathews to marry."

Both Miss Jackson and Mr. Mathews gave an exclamation of surprise and horror at this extraordinary declaration. Instantly, however, the dying woman caught the hand of each of them, and pressing both to her feverish lips in a solemn manner exclaimed:

"I'm a dying woman, and can find no relief from my anxiety for both of you unless you pledge me to become man and wife after my death."

The scene was heart-rending in the extreme. Mr. Mathews and Miss Jackson's faces were as pale as that of the dying woman, and both were overwhelmed with anguish at the situation in which they were placed. Mr. Mathews could not refrain from reproving his wife, Miss Jackson threw herself upon her knees, and cried in despair:

"Oh, pardon me, my friend, but this cannot be. Mr. Mathews and myself are dear friends but you must not speak of marriage I must fly from you."

Overcome with her emotions Miss Jackson now rushed from the room, and Mrs. Mathews sank back in exhaustion, muttering:

"It is my dying command. Remember:—remember!"

In the May following, Mrs. Mathews's illness terminated in death. Mr. Mathews attributed the action of his wife at the memorable interview with Miss Jackson to delirium, but it, of course, made a most lasting impression upon both of them. He implored her not to harbor a suspicion that he had been aware of his wife's intention. For some time a natural reserve was observed between the widower and Miss Jackson. By degrees, however, this coldness wore off, and a feeling of regard gradually grew up between them. At this period both had a dream or vision at the same hour, which was not only very extraordinary in itself, but finally led to their marriage.

Mr. Mathews had gone to rest after a very late night performance at the theater, but still found it difficult to close his eyes. He had no light, nor the means of getting one, all the family being in bed. He endeavored to go to sleep, but his eyes refused to close. He remained in this state of restlessness for some time. At length sleep overcame him, but it was not more than the slightest slumber. Suddenly in a dream he heard a slight rustling, as if of a hasty approach of somebody. He turned his head the direction of the noise, and clearly beheld at the side of the bed the figure of his late wife, in her habit as she lived. She smiled sweetly upon him, and put forth her hand as if to take his, as she bent forward. Then these words were heard:

"Remember my dying command—remember!"

Springing from contact with the figure Mr. Mathews threw himself out of the bed upon the floor. The fall aroused the house, and he was found in a fit. On his recovery he related his wonderful dream, and the whole of the following day he remained extremely ill, and was unable to quit his room.

At the same hour Miss Jackson saw a like vision. Retiring to bed she could not sleep. At last, overcome by absolute weariness, she fell into a light sleep. Soon she heard a slight noise, and saw a well-known figure before her eyes. It was perfect in its representation of the late Mrs. Mathews as she

appeared in her life-time. She smiled, and stretched out her hand.

"I have come," she said, in gentle though solemn tones, "to remind you of my dying command. Dead I command you as I did while living. Remember!—remember!"

As the figure solemnly pronounced these words the hand was again stretched forth, as if to touch the sleeper.

At this moment Miss Jackson was awakened by her terror, and with a scream raised herself in the bed. She caught hold of the bell-rope in order to summon the people of the house, but the rope broke, and she fell with it in her hand upon the floor.

The parties with whom Mr. Mathews and Miss Jackson resided at the time were perfect strangers to each other, and living widely apart, and they recounted severally to those about them the extraordinary dreams. These persons repeated the story to many before they were requested to meet and compare accounts. There could consequently be no doubt of the facts, and the circumstances became a matter of much general interest.

It seemed as if some strange and mysterious Providence really designed that Mr. Mathews and Miss Jackson should become man and wife, according to the wish of the dying woman, and their friends looked forward with anxiety for this hoped-for result. The parties themselves were deeply and solemnly affected by all the events which had occurred, and at length became engaged. The marriage took place as we have stated, in March, 1803. Mr. Charles James Mathews, the popular comedian, who made three or four professional visits to this country, and died in 1878, was the fruit of this union, so strangely enjoined and wonderfully brought to pass.

Mrs. French-Sheldon's Feat.

Further details have been received of the exploit of Mrs. French-Sheldon, who, a few months ago, accomplished the remarkable feat of descending the almost perpendicular face of the rocks which wall in the crater Lake Chala at the eastern foot of Kilimanjaro—a feat which Mr. Joseph Thomson declared was impossible. Though Mr. Thomson said he could not see how any human being could reach the level of the lake, its discoverer, Mr. New, in 1871, did manage to reach the edge of the water, though he described the crater as exceedingly steep and difficult of descent. Mrs. Sheldon went to Africa at her own expense, with her own little private expedition, for the purpose of getting a taste of African travel in the savage equatorial regions. Her journey to the great snow-capped mountain was successful, and descent to Lake Chala was the crowning feature of her trip. She accomplished this feat in company with Mr. Keith Anstruther, and they not only got down to the water's edge with some of their porters but they also carried down a sort of raft, which they launched on the lake.

Mrs. Sheldon says that with the utmost difficulty she forced her way through the dense vegetation and the loose rocks on the way down the declivity. Multitudes of birds whirled about and troops of monkeys leaped from branch to branch. After a while she found herself upon "a ragged, rough triangle of tree trunks and rocks," with the water lapping her feet. She had led the way, Mr. Anstruther and the men following with the pieces of raft, which at the water level they locked together and set afloat. Mrs. Sheldon and her white comrade, with one of the porters got on board, and while the woman and porter paddled, Mr. Anstruther kept a sharp lookout for the numerous crocodiles. At places the almost perpendicular rocks from 200 to 800 feet high, which form the walls of this remarkable lake could be seen reaching far below the surface of the clear blue water. Above the water the walls were densely clad with trees, tangled with vines, and alive with birds and monkeys.

Mrs. Sheldon noticed a strange undercurrent in the water that now and then caused waves to rise up and move forward through the centre of the otherwise tranquil surface; yet the air was perfectly calm. She also speaks of the "resistance or suction" of the water, which was felt when the paddles were put two or three feet beneath the surface. This may perhaps be accounted for by the water coming into the lake from its bottom, for there is apparently no supply from the outside. The party could not reach the bottom of the lake with their sounding line. The water basin is two miles broad by two and a half to three miles in length, and the circumference is about six miles.

In Bulgaria only 75 per cent. of the population can read and write.