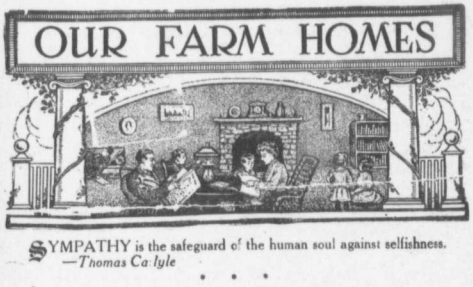
OUR FARM HOMES



SYMPATHY is the safeguard of the human soul against selfishness.
—*Thomas Carlyle*

Winning the Wilderness

(Continued from last week.)

"THAT sounds surprising, but life is full of surprises," the doctor thought as he took up his medicine case and followed Rosie's lead.

The way took them to the alley behind the Wyker House, through a rear gate to the back door of the kitchen, from which it was a short step to the little "blind tiger" beyond the dining room. Sounds of boisterous talking and laughter and a general shuffling of dishes told that the evening meal was beginning. For her size and clumsiness, Rosie whisked the doctor deftly out of sight and joined the ranks of the waiters in the dining room.

The only light inside the little room came from the upper half of the one window looking toward the alley. As it was already twilight the doctor did not get his bearings until a huge form on the floor near the table made an effort to rise.

"What's the trouble here?" Carey asked in the sympathetic professional voice by which he controlled sick rooms.

"Lord, Doc, is that you?" Darley Champers followed the words with a groan.

"You are in a fix," Carey replied as he lifted Champers to his feet.

Blood was on his face and clothes and the floor, and Champers himself was almost too weak to stand.

"Get me out of here as quick as you can, Doc," he said in a thick voice.

At the same moment Rosie Gimpke appeared from the kitchen.

"Slip him out queek now. I hold the dining room door tight," she urged, rushing back to the kitchen.

Carey moved quickly and had Darley Champers safely out and into his own office before Rosie had need to relax her grip on the dining room door-knob.

"I guess you've saved me," Champers said faintly as the doctor examined his wounds.

"Not as bad as that," Dr. Carey replied cheerfully. "An ugly scalp wound and loss of blood, but you'll come back all right."

"And a kick in the abdomen," Champers groaned. "But it was from what was comin' you saved me. I've never been sick a day in my life and I've had little sympathy for you and your line, and then to be knocked down so quick by a little whiffet like Smith and roll over like a log at the first blow!"

"You're in luck. Most men in your line ought to have been knocked down a good many times before now," the doctor declared. "How did this happen?"

"I settled with Smith and made him sign everything up to a hog-tight contract. Then he started in to abuse me till I got tired and told him I'd just got back from Ohio and a thing or two I saw there. Then he suddenly belted me and, against all rules of the game, kicked me when I was down and left me, threatening to come back and finish me. That's what you saved me from."

"Champers, my old buggy is like a rocking chair. Let me take you home with me for a few days while you are wearing patches on your head," Horace Carey suggested.

Darley Champers stared at his helper in surprise. Then he said slowly:

"Say, Doc, I've hated you a good many years for doin' just such tricks for folks. It was my cussedness made me do it, I reckon. I'd like to get out of town a little while. That joint of Wyker's has seen more'n one fellow laid out, and some of 'em went down Big Wolf later, and some of 'em fell into Little Wolf and never came out. It's a hole, I tell you. And Smith is a devil to-night."

On the homeward way Dr. Carey said quietly:

"By the way, Champers, I saw you at Cloverdale, Ohio, last week."

Champers did not start nor seem surprised as he replied:

"Yes, I seen you, but I didn't want to speak to nobody right then."

"No?" Dr. Carey questioned.

"No. I've got hold enough of Smith now to make him afraid of me if I'd turn loose. I'd a made money by doin' it, too. Good clean money. That's why he's gettin' good and drunk to beat me up again to-night, maybe."

"Well, why don't you tighten up on him? Why let a scoundrel like that run free?" Carey inquired.

"Because it might drag Leigh Shirley's name into the muss. And I'm no devourer of widders and orphans; I'm a humane man, and I'll let Smith run till his tether snaps and he falls over the precipice and breaks his neck for hisself. Besides I'm not sure now whether he's a agent representin' some principal, or the principal representin' hisself. And in that case I'd have to deal the cards different for him, and them he'd do harm to."

"You are a humane man, Champers," Carey declared. "I think I've hated you, too, a good many years. These gray hairs of ours ought to make us better behaved now. But, even if you do let Smith run, that 'blind tiger' of Wyker's must go out of business. I'll start John Jacobs after that hole one of these days. He holds the balance of power on public sentiment out here. He'll clear it out. His hatred of saloons is like Smith's hatred of Shirley, only it's a righteous indignation. I've heard John's father was a drunkard and his mother followed her husband into a saloon in Cincinnati to persuade him out and was killed by a drunken tough. Anyhow, John will break up the game of Wyker's one of these times. See if he doesn't."

Darley Champers slowly shifted his huge frame into an easier posture as he replied:

"Yes, he can do it all right. But mark me, now, the day he runs Hans Wyker out of that doggery business it will be goodby to John Jacobs. You see if it isn't. I wouldn't start him after it too quick."

Darley Champers spent two weeks with his physician, and the many friends of Dr. Carey smiled and agreed with Todd Stewart, who declared:

"Carey would win Satan to be his fast friend if the Old Scratch would only let Carey doctor him once."

But nobody understood how the awakening of the latent manhood in Darley Champers and his determination to protect an orphan girl were winning the doctor to him as well.

Leigh Turned to see Thaine Aydelot Looking Down at her as he Leaned Over the High Back of the Rustic Seat.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Purple Notches.

Two things greater than all things are,
One is Love, and the other War.
And since we know not how War may prove,
Heart of my heart, let us talk of Love.
—The Ballad of the King's Jest

THE summer ran its hot length of days, but it was a gay season for the second generation in the Grass River Valley. Nor drouth nor heat can much annoy when the heart beats young. September would see the first scattering of the happy company for the winter. The last grand rally for the crowd came late in August. Two hayrack loads of young folks, with some few in carriages, were to spend the day at "The Cottonwoods," a faraway picnic ground toward the three headlands of the southwest. Few of the company had ever visited the place. Distances are deceiving on the prairies and better picnic grounds lay nearer to Grass River.

On the afternoon before the picnic Leigh Shirley took her work to the lawn behind the house.

What most ranches gave over to weed patches, or hog lots, or dumping grounds along the stream, at Cloverdale had become a shady, clover-sodded lawn sloping down to the river's edge. The biggest cottonwoods and elms in the whole valley grew on this lawn. A hedge of lilac and other shrubbery bordered by sunflowers and hollyhocks bounded it from the fields and trellises of white honeysuckle screened it from the road.

In a rustic seat overlooking the river and the prairies beyond, Leigh Shirley bent lovingly above a square of heavy white paper on which she was sketching a group of sunflowers glowing in the afternoon sunlight. Leigh's talent was only an undeveloped inheritance, but if it lacked training it's fresh originality was unspoiled.

"The top of the afternoon to you."

Leigh turned to see Thaine Aydelot looking down at her as he leaned over the high back of the rustic seat. He was in his working clothes with his straw hat set back, showing his brown face. His luminous dark eyes were shining and a half-teasing, half-sympathetic smile was on his lips. But whatever the clothes, there was always something of the Southern gentleman about every man of the Thaine blood. Something of the soldierly bearing of his father had been his heritage likewise.

"May I see your stuff, or is it not for the profane eyes of a thresher of alfalfa to look upon?"

Leigh drew back and held up her drawing-board.

"It's just like you, Leigh. You always were an artist, but when did you learn all the technique? Is that what you call it? How do you do it?"

"I don't know," Leigh answered frankly. "It seems to do itself."

"And why do you do it? Or why

(Continued on page 16.)