The Acton Free Press

THURSDAY, JULY 16, 1920

SURMOUNTING DIFFICULTIES

There's a heap of satisfaction
In a trouble if you grin,
If you keep your nerve in action
And you wear a lifted chin.
There's joy in doing something
That you've never done before;
So don't be a deaf or dumb thing,
Chance is knocking at your door.

Down and out, there's fun in rising;
Fun in facing heavy odds,
Doing deeds that are surprising
And the happy fellow plods.
Plods along and hums a ditty
As he journeys down the street
Of the busy gold-mad city,
Till he's back upon his feet.

It's in overcoming trouble
That a fellow gets his fun;
It's in shattering the bubble
Whose name is "can't be done."
It's in striving night and daytime
When the problem hopeless seems
Man appreciates his playtime
When he realizes his dreams.

There's a heap of satisfaction
In a trouble if you grin
Difficulties have attraction
If you keep a lifted chin.
And the harder that your fight is
The greater is your fun.
And the finer your delight is
As you view the things you've done.

THE MATING OF MOLLY

By Elizabeth Ogden Starr

IT was a lazy, peaceful Sabbath Day. The sun shone warmly over the little village of Baldwin River, and wrapped it round about with heat—palpitating heat that rose quivering from the white dust of the road. The little church in the valley stood pointing an ever-inspired finger toward the sky, in which floated not one white cloud to relieve the sense of oppression.

Then the church bell pealed its welcome, and, with the precision of a toy village moved by machinery, the people came out of their small homes, locked their doors, and walked churchward with dignified step and pious manner.

Among the first to wipe their dusty feet on the mat, were the Sparks' family, a lively lot of little Sparks bounded on the north by Ma, on the south by Pa, on the east by Molly, and on the west by Sally. The lengthy pew which accommodated the family, well up towards the front, was presently filled with such a number of little Sparks that one might well have feared a conflagration. Perhaps that is what Ma Sparks feared, for there was much arranging and rearranging before all were seated to her satisfaction and she at last sat back with a sigh to see what her neighbors had on.

Molly, at the end of the pew, over by the window, sat with head bent demurely and small hands clasped. All about her, fans rustled or were shaken out, and heavenly waves of cool air came now and again.

Ma Sparks entered into the singing and responses with whole-souled vigor, elbowing Sally now and again to "speak up," and when the Scriptural reading seemed to strike any member of her family in a vulnerable spot, she would lean forward and nod meaningly at the blushing culprit. Even Pa Sparks was not exempt.

Altogether, Sunday was not a day of unmitigated joy and gladness to the Sparks' household.

The minister, a tall, good-looking young man with tired grey eyes, had long ago lost the divine inspiration which had marked the beginning of his work in the small parish. It only returned now and again as he regarded the bent head of Molly.

"Love thy neighbor as thyself," admonished the minister, looking at Molly, and Molly, lifting shy eyes, caught the glance and blushed, she scarcely knew why.

His tones continued on and on. Small Peter was sleeping openly, his head on Ma's lap. Pa was taking furtive naps behind his hand, and Sally had long since ceased to listen at all and was looking openly bored.

"It's too hot to walk so far," complained Molly, as Ma marshalled her forces through the doorway and over the dusty road.

"Well," answered her mother, regarding Molly's flushed face, "I don't know as you have any reason to hurry if you don't want to. I've got to get along and set the things on the stove."

So Molly lingered behind and sat down on the stone wall, loosening the strings of her bonnet. A little brook went gurgling over the stones on the other side of the fence in the meadows, so Molly climbed over the wall, stooped, and dampened her handkerchief and bathed her hot face and hands. She had just climbed back to her seat when the minister came hurrying along the road. He did not see Molly at first, sitting so demurely on the stone wall, her color coming and going with every beat of her heart, and when he did, he stopped and smiled, and hat in hand crossed the grass and sat down beside her.

With downcast eyes sat Molly. Not a word of greeting came into her mind, not a sound from her lips.

"Haven't you anything to say to me, Molly?" the minister said.

And Molly, finding voice at last, answered, "What do you want me to say?"

The minister laughed. "Will you agree to say anything I want you to, Molly?"

Molly considered. "I suppose a minister wouldn't ask me to say anything wrong, would he?" Again the blue eyes were raised questioningly.

"Oh, Molly," he replied a little sadly, she thought, as he looked into her uplifted blue eyes. Then much to Molly's dismay he reached up and removed her bonnet.

Her soft light hair was drawn back from her forehead and coiled in a hard, tight knot at the back of her neck. The style would have made anyone less beautiful than Molly, hideous.

"Do you always wear your hair like this?" questioned the minister.

Molly nodded. "Ma says it's the only way to be neat," she answered, wondering eyes turned toward him.

For a moment he hesitated, then with fingers that trembled a little, reached up and began gently to coax the fair hair from its hard knot. Released, the little tendrils curled softly upward like baby fingers and clung to his fingers. Suddenly he drew his hands away, and thrusting them hard into his pockets, regarded Molly gravely. Her cheeks were like wild roses, her eyes a heavenly blue, and her hair had caught the sunshine.

"Come, Molly," said the minister shortly, "we'd better be going."

Molly obediently put on her bonnet, but her fingers were trembling as she tied the strings under a soft, round chin that quivered the least bit. What could she have done or said to offend him? She could think of nothing, and yet surely she must have said something. He had never spoken like that in all the many times he had called to see her "for the good of her soul."

At the gate, Molly in desperation stammered faintly, "Are you—you are not offended with me?" There was sweet appeal in the blue eyes, and the minister looking away answered gravely, "No, Molly, that would not be possible." Then covering the small hand on the gate post with his own, he said, "I'm coming again this afternoon, dear."

"What a wicked soul I must have," thought Molly sadly as she went up the front path.

"Molly Sparks, what have you done with your hair?" asked her mother as Molly removed her bonnet. "If you knew how unbecoming it looks you wouldn't want anybody to see it that way. It is positively frowzy."

Molly made no reply but touched softly the little blowing curls. That afternoon, taking a book, she went off to read down by the purple lilac bush. She had only turned the first page when the front gate clicked and the minister came up the path. Seeing Molly, he crossed the lawn and sat down beside her in the shade of the bush. He held out his hand and Molly growing red, handed him the volume.

"I suppose I should have been reading something more religious, like Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress,' or something," she faltered. "But there are some religious poems in there—I mean they make you feel religious."

"What were you reading just now?" asked the minister curiously.

"The Lady of Shalott," answered Molly. "I love it. Do you think it is wicked to read such things on Sunday?" earnestly.

"No," answered the minister, "quite natural. Do you read Tennyson very often?"

"I haven't had time," and Molly shook her head with a bobbing of loosened curls. "Ma says it's all nonsense. She couldn't understand a thing. She says why didn't he state clearly what he had to say instead of making it so fancy. But it wouldn't have been so pretty, would it? I love it fancy."

"How did you come by the book, Molly?"

"Oh, the schoolmaster gave it to me down at Rocky Creek when I left there. Here's his name on the front page."

"Rocky Creek?"

Molly nodded. "I lived down there with my aunt until last summer, when Ma sent for me. She needed me to help at home. The schoolmaster was very good to me."

The minister nodded. "I should think he might have been."

"What did you say?" asked Molly.

"Nothing," he answered untruthfully. "Go on."

"There isn't any more to tell," and Molly shook her head.

"So you liked the schoolmaster then, did you?"

"Oh, yes," answered Molly, opening her eyes wide. "You remind me of him," he added naively.

The minister's face flushed slightly, and the hand he placed under Molly's soft, round chin trembled a little.

"That is nice of you, Molly. Now let me see if you are telling the truth," and tipping back her head, he looked long into the blue eyes. But what he sought was not there. Had it been he would have found heaven itself reflected.

Molly's eyes were clear and blue, a little troubled perhaps, a little shy but that was all. He dropped his hand and sighed. He had almost begun to despair. Had he known that Molly's heart had quickened its beating, and that Molly herself was perplexed at the strangeness of this new feeling, he would have glimpsed the nearness of her awakening and been content.

A warm flush mounted Molly's cheek. Just then Pa and Ma Sparks came out on the porch. Pa, in his shirt sleeves, sat down and tilted his chair back against the house. Ma sat down in a rocker with her Bible.

"I'll read about the flood," she announced, putting on her spectacles. "It's the most cooliu' chapter in the Bible, and has been a great comfort this dry spell. I've read it regularly," and Ma Sparks turned over the leaves of her Bible.

"I guess there weren't as many kinds of animals when Noah took to the Ark as there are now," she went on musingly. "It doesn't stand to reason. That's a nice little touch about peaceful, and human. More so than all the cattle after their kind. Don't you think so, Pa?"

"Aren't you a little mixed there?" he drawled lazily. But Ma was looking over in the direction of the lilac bush.

"I declare, if that isn't the minister talking to our Molly again," she exclaimed. "He certainly does seem to take a tremendous interest in Molly's soul," she added grimly. "I reckon he doesn't know Sally's got one. If I thought he meant anything by his fool ways, I wouldn't have anything to say. As it is, he's just leading Molly on. I don't care if he is a minister and does hear me." This in reply to Pa's voice of warning. "They aren't any better than other folks, in my opinion. The minister hasn't got any spirit in him at all."

At this point in her remarks, Sally came out on the porch.

"Sally," said Ma Sparks firmly, "you've got to have your soul uplifted."

"Oh, Ma," wailed Sally, "I don't want my soul uplifted."

"Well, you must," answered Ma grimly. "Molly," she raised her voice, "come here."

Molly rose bodiently, and the minister sauntered along at her side.

"See here," remarked Ma Sparks to the minister, "I want you to take Sally down by the woodshed and uplift her soul for a while. It's in terrible need. You can't do it here. There's too much noise. And don't forget to say 'Yes, sir,' Sally. Now Molly, you go upstairs and take a nap, you look peaked."

The unhappy minister and the reluctant Sally walked slowly down to the woodshed and seated themselves on a pile of wood. There was an embarrassing silence, then the minister pulled himself together.

"Do you like to go to church, Sally?" he asked hopefully.

"No, sir," answered Sally promptly.

"Sunday School, then?"

"No, sir," again answered Sally.

"Don't you like the Bible and the beautiful hymns?" he asked unhappily.

"No, sir," promptly answered Sally again. "Is this what you say to Molly?" she inquired shrewdly.

The minister started, then turned and looked at Sally who returned his gaze with defiance.

"I don't care," she said sullenly. The minister looked helplessly about, and Sally dug her bare brown toes into the brown earth.

"Aren't you old enough to wear shoes and stockings?" he asked irrelevantly.

"Yes, sir," answered Sally, "but Ma doesn't think so, except for church. I don't like 'em much myself. They make you feel so stuffy."

Again the minister looked at Sally and returned to the attack.

"I'm afraid I can't find out much about the state of your soul, Sally," he said sadly.

"Maybe I haven't got any," suggested Sally hopefully.

"Oh, you're bound to have one somewhere, Sally, but only the good Lord knows anything about it. Tell me something about yourself, maybe that will help some."

"There ain't nothing to tell," answered the little girl. "I'm the worst lookin' one in the family, Ma says. She says I don't take after her side. Molly does, though. Ma says I look like an Indian bein' so black. But 'twasn't my fault. I'd a good deal rather had yellow hair like Molly's, and it wouldn't have taken no more trouble to have made it either. Eve always sort of held it up against the Lord."

The minister looked aghast. "Sally!" he exclaimed.

"I don't care," said Sally. "It makes you good to be beautiful. The reason I'm so wicked is because I'm so homely."

The clergyman was at a loss. "You're not homely, Sally," he ventured at length, "and if you make yourself beautiful inside, you're bound to be beautiful outside."

"Oh, I've tried that," sighed Sally, shaking her head, "but it didn't work, not a bit. I just got poisoned and looked worse than ever. I don't think I was born a Christian in the first place, and it comes might hard if you wasn't. I don't know but I'd rather not be one anyway."

With this ultimatum, Sally rose and prepared to go up to the house. Suddenly she leaned forward on tiptoe, her mouth close to his ear.

"Don't you want to marry Molly?" she asked. "Ma, she says you don't mean nothing or you would have asked her long before now. She says Molly can't marry younger. Molly's eighteen and Ma was only fifteen. Pa he says 'Let 'em alone,' but Ma she says she's not goin' to wait for you any longer. She's goin' to send her back to Aunt's, down to Rocky Creek, to-morrow, and see what she can do down there. The schoolmaster hangs to Aunt's, Molly can't cook much to speak of, on account of Aunt's always havin' kept a hired girl. But she can sew as good as a machine."

Sally delivered this long speech, dark eyes on the minister's face. Eyes that narrowed shrewdly now and then as they watched his changing expression. "Pa he's goin' to drive her over to the crossroads to-morrow mornin' to meet the stage," she volunteered.

"Sally, you're a brick," exclaimed the minister, shaking her hand warmly. "I've changed my mind entirely about your soul."

"All right," answered Sally rather absently, as she turned away.

He went back slowly toward the house to take leave of Mrs. Sparks.

"Good-by," he said, holding out his hand. "Sally tells me Molly is going away."

"Trust her," answered Ma Sparks, "she'd tell all she knows and a little more if convenient, any time. It's no secret, though, Molly's the only one who doesn't know and she will to-night. I shouldn't be at all surprised if she had done some studying, the schoolmaster being in the house. He thinks a right smart lot of Molly's learning. He's boarding with my half-sister on my husband's side. She was a Reynolds before she was married. Some from up Big Dam Head. They always set themselves up as bein' above some folks."

"I'm afraid I must be going, Mrs. Sparks," interrupted the minister rather hastily, "May I say good-by to Molly?"

"I'm afraid not," she answered tartly, incensed at being interrupted while on her favorite theme, "she's lying down, but I'll say you said it which will do just as well."

The minister's tall form disappeared down the road and Ma, in the doorway, noticed the droop of the tall figure. "It does beat all," she exclaimed impatiently.

The next morning, a tearful Molly said good-by to the assembled family, climbed into the old lumber-box wagon and rattled away down the country road.

"I wonder," said her mother, shading her eyes with her hand.

All along the familiar way things looked very unfamiliar to Molly because of the tears that blinded her eyes. The little church among the trees appeared very wobbly, and the finger it pointed toward the sky seemed to tremble. But the minister's house seemed less clear than all the rest because of the tears that welled afresh in the blue eyes of Molly.

At the crossroads Molly's father helped her down from the wagon and then drove home to use the horses for ploughing.

Poor Molly felt very lonely and forlorn standing in the white, dusty road, her bundle beside her, as she waited for the stage. All about her the birds were calling and everywhere was the freshness of new-made hay. But to Molly the world was desolate, and then she heard a voice calling beside her and her cheeks flushed scarlet only to grow white and scarlet by turns. Once more the voice called, but Molly refused to turn. And the minister, leaping the low stone wall, came and stood close beside her. Still Molly hung her head. Then he tried to look under the blue bonnet to see the blue eyes, but he couldn't, so untying the strings he gently pushed it back from her face. Her pale yellow hair was drawn back loosely from her forehead and coiled into a soft knot on the top of her head, and soft little rings of gold clung to her moist brow.

"Molly!" exclaimed the minister. Then tilted back the drooping head and sought the blue eyes. And now they did not falter, but looked bravely back into his own, and in them he saw heaven itself reflected.

A man plowing in a nearby field paused to look kindly at the two young figures, and smiled a little sadly as he thought of his own springtime long since passed.

Molly's small brown hands were clasped in the minister's big ones and Molly's blue eyes looked into the minister's gray ones, and there was no longer any earth, but heaven itself.

Presently, just above them a branch swayed, and a bird's song broke the stillness. The man looked up with a start, then drew Molly to him.

"Look, dear," he said softly, "it's a bluebird for happiness, our happiness! Do you understand, our happiness, Molly!"

"Is that what it means?" whispered Molly awesomely. "I'm so glad. Isn't it wonderful?"

"Molly," asked the minister after a while, "how did you find out dear? I know that you cared, but I wanted you to know, and you didn't. I have waited such a long time, but when Sally told me you were going back to Rocky Creek and the schoolmaster I couldn't wait any longer. Tell me, Molly, how did you find out?"

Then Molly smiled demurely and looked up at the minister from under her lashes. "I think it was the schoolmaster's book. Mr. Tennyson, you know, he seemed to understand all about—all about such things," and she blushed and smiled a little reminiscent smile.

"I read it yesterday when Ma sent me upstairs, and somehow I couldn't stop, and then all at once, as if I had stumbled a secret spring, I knew! Oh, it was wonderful," said Molly. "—I can't tell you about it."

"You needn't, dear," answered the minister softly. "I think I understand—a little."

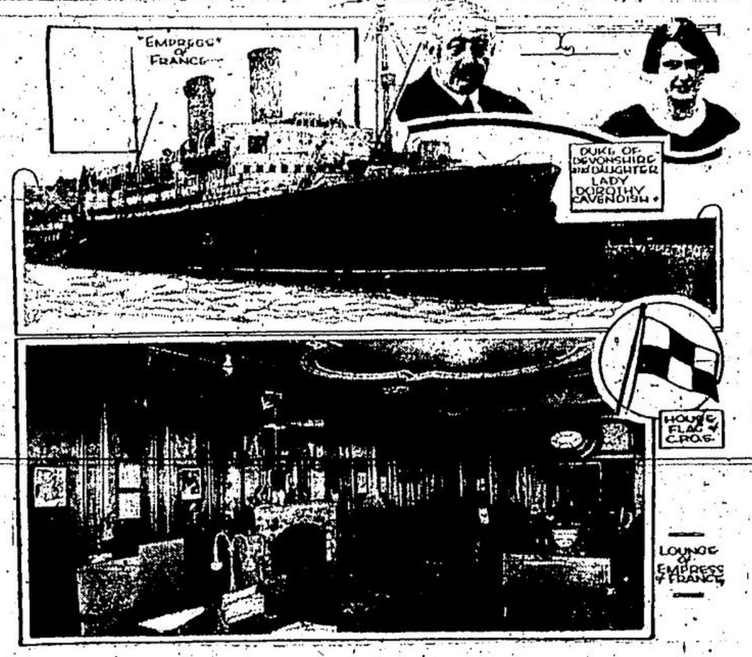
And thus it happened that the old stage coach rattling down the road in a cloud of dust took up two passengers instead of one.

Late that afternoon as Ma Sparks was brushing down the steps of the front porch, Seth Bassat the village gossip, rattled along in his lumber-wagon, Seeing Mrs. Sparks, he drew rein.

"Say, Mrs. Sparks," he began, "I have just been down to Rocky Creek and I saw your Molly and the minister go into the Methodist parsonage with Miss Reynolds. Looked to me as if there was something going on over there," and Seth winked his eye and nodded knowingly.

"I want to know," remarked Ma, leaning on her broom. "Really," she added reflectively. "And I thought the minister looked uplift."

DUKE OF DEVONSHIRE KEEPS HIS DATE



Canada is crowing over the exploits of a new Canadian Pacific Ocean Service liner, the Empress of France.

The Duke of Devonshire, acquisand Sir Auckland Geddes, by cable, that he would preside at a dinner given to the new British Ambassador at Washington by the Canadian Club at the Prince's Restaurant, Picadilly, London, England. The specific purpose of the Duke's visit, however, was to attend the wedding of his daughter, Lady Dorothy Cavendish, to Captain Harold MacMillan.

He was to sail on the Empress of France. Things looked bad at the start when the boat's schedule read "Sailing from St. John, N. B, March 13th." The 13 was a hoodoo right enough because a terrible gale met in with such fury that it was deemed advisable to delay the sailing twenty-four hours.

Capt. Cook, the commander, consulted by the Duke, gave a solemn promise, "Your Excellency will be in Liverpool at the appointed time on the stroke of the clock—if the ship's engines can manage it." Steam engines were never so popular, Stokers were heroes. A spirit of adventure lightened the nerves of all on board. The Duke kept his date.

Just as an after-thought, the Hoodoo of the 13 tried to break the Duke's promise by hanging a dense fob over the Mersey, but by cautious navigation Capt. Cook brought his vessel to anchor opposite the Prince's Landing Stage at Liverpool at six o'clock on the morning of March 22nd, the date and hour scheduled for its arrival.

"HIMUEL"

In some reminiscences published in Scribner's Magazine Sir Sidney Colvin tells a new and pleasing anecdote of the poet Browning. Sir Sidney, then a professor at Cambridge, had invited the poet to Trinity College to meet a party of undergraduates.

"He charmed them by his genuinity and rich talk," the host of the day declares, "some of it as serious and high-pitched as the most earnest of his admirers could desire."

By and by the subject of Christian names and their abbreviations came up, and Browning told of three brothers who came to be matriculated at an American university. The registrar asked the first brother his name.

"Sam," answered the lad.

"That is no name," declared the registrar. "Give me your full name properly."

"Samuel, sir," came the reply.

To a like question the next brother answered, "My name is Lem, sir."

"Nonsense!" cried the registrar, this time angrily. "Say your real name in full."

"Lemuel, sir" faltered the culprit.

The third brother, being roughly asked the same question, lost his head and twittered, "Jhmuel, sir."

The official thereupon broke into fury, declared the answers had been a plot to insult him and insisted on knowing which of the brothers had set the others on; whereat they gasped in chorus, each pointing at the other, "Himuel, sir!"

Sir Sidney intimates that the story may not be new, and he is correct. More than seventy years ago—and it may not have been new even then—Harriet Beecher Stowe, writing to a daughter of the founder of The Companion, Nathaniel Willis, related the same anecdote, apropos of the name of her friend's husband, James Parton, in whose household "Jhmuel" was long a household word. The tale as she told it was not of young men at college but of small boys in Sunday School; and there was no "Himuel." "Himuel" is pure browning—an aptly invented British posterpit to a thoroughly American story.

TWO OF A KIND

Elderly lady entering taxicab—"Driver, please go slowly, for I am very nervous. I am just in from Hoboken and this is the first time I have ever been in a taxi."

Driver—"Lady, you have nothing on me for being nervous. This is the first time I have ever driven a taxi-cab."

GEM SHOWER IN LONDON

Extraordinary scenes were witnessed at Albert Hall, where the Bishop of Zululand presided over the Anglo-Catholic Congress. At his suggestion 72 hours' effort is being made to raise $350,000 for foreign missions, and the responses was almost embarrassing in its enthusiasm.

Men and women crowded round the stewards and took rings from their fingers, watches from their pockets and bracelets from their wrists and dropped them into the haversacks that were used as collection bags. Many went up to the platform with large parcels which, when unpacked, were found to contain leather cases in which were turquoise brooches and necklaces, diamond and pearl pendents, silver salvers and personal jewelry of every description.

The mass of watches, chains, pencil cases and other articles that had been given filled two big tables on the platform at the afternoon session, and by the time the great Albert mass meeting opened in the evening, the heap had grown and flowed over to a third table.

A JOKE 3,000 YEARS OLD

Planned by the ancient Egyptians over 3,000 years ago a joke has just come to fruition, writes Prof. Flinders Petrie, the noted archaeologist. "While we were trying to find a way into a queen's pyramid," he says, "we discovered on a rock face a door which was so beautifully and exactly fitted that it was difficult to see the joints. We immediately set to work on this, thinking that we had found at last an entrance to the inner chamber. After a considerable amount of work we removed the door and found—solid rock! It was a carefully arranged blind to baffle anyone who wanted to find the entrance into the real tombs, and had been made about 3,000 B. C. by some one with a sense of humor."

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