

MATRIMONY ON POSSUM RIDGE

BY THOMAS P. MONTFORT.

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A young man on horseback was riding through that section of Missouri known as Possum Ridge. He was in very good spirits, and he was cantering along the road, which led across a stretch of native forest, he merrily whistled the tune of some gay old song.

After a while, however, he came to a point where the road "forked." He ceased his whistling and reined up his horse. He was perplexed, for he had no idea which of the two branches he should follow in order to reach his destination.

While he hesitated, undecided what to do, the silence was suddenly broken by a sharp, cracked voice which gave forth, with some semblance of singing, the following original lines:

"Mr. Man came cantering down the road,
All so peart and gay,
But first thing Mr. Man knowed
He'd up and lost his way."

The stranger turned and cast a glance in the direction from which the sound of the voice came, and over beyond a little field he saw a man sitting on top of a high rail fence. One look was enough to identify him as a native of the Ridge. He was a little, sawed off, sun-dried chap, past middle age, and wore a big hair and a little wisp of scraggy chin whiskers. He was barefooted and in his shirt sleeves, had on an old weather-beaten, sharp pointed straw hat that had lost its brim and a pair of overalls patched with all kinds and colors of goods from broadcloth to red flannel.

"Say!" the stranger called. "I want to go to Squire Beeson's. Can you tell me which of these two roads I must take?"

"Guess you mustn't take neither one of 'em," the man called back.

"Why? Doesn't one of them lead to Squire Beeson's?"

"Yes; one of 'em does."

"Then why mustn't I take that one?"

"Cause for several reasons."

"What are those reasons?"

"Well, first, the road ain't yourn, and you got no right to take what don't belong to you; second, you ain't got no place to put the road if you was to take it; third, you can't take it now, 'cause it's fast to the ground. Ha, ha!"

"You are very cute, aren't you?" the traveler said sarcastically.

"Widder Wheeler says I'm cute as a bug's ear, and she knows. Widder's powerful sweet on me too."

"Well, how shall I go to reach the squire's place?"

"I'd go horseback if I was you, seein' you got a boss."

"Blame it all, which of these roads shall I travel in order to get to my destination?"

"Thought you wanted to go to Squire Beeson's?"

"I do."

"Then what you asking about which road you'd travel to get to that other place for?"

"What other place?"

"Oh, pshaw, man, what's the matter with you? Squire Beeson's place is my destination."

"Guess you're off about that, mister. I know squire's place like a book and every dingy thing on it, and if there's any destination that I don't know anything of it."

"Well, then, which of these two roads shall I travel in order to reach Squire Beeson's place? Is that plain enough for you?"

"Yes; now you're talking sense. If you'd asked me that at first, I could have told you long ago."

"I hope you'll be so good as to tell me now."

The man climbed down off the fence and came slowly across to the road. He carried an old-fashioned long-bar-

"Something about law?"

"Yes; I have a case in the squire's court, and I'm going over to try it."

"Then you're one of them lawyers, air you?"

"Yes; I wish you would direct me."

"I will. I see you 'pear to be in a hurry, and I won't stop you. What did you say your name might be?"

"I didn't say it might be anything, but it is Conyers."

"Conyers, eh? Reckon you don't happen to be a son of old Bob Conyers, over on the Ridge here, who was sent to the penitentiary for stealing hosses?"

"No, sir, I do not."

"I loved you couldn't be. Maybe you're a son of old Dick Conyers, what was hung for killing his wife?"

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The man sitting on the log laughed. He was a long, loose jointed, bony specimen of Possum Ridge humanity, and his dress was scarcely an improvement on that of Rix.

"It's Wheeler," he said. "I told you how it 'ud be. Three times now Bob Rix has set the day and started over here to marry you, and every time he has gone off chasing after coons and rabbits and never got here. What's the use of fooling with him any more?"

"Min Cobb," the widow said slowly. "I reckon that ain't any."

"Then s'pose we hitch."

"Just as well, I guess. But while we're fooling around about it I might as well take a snake."

She took a cob pipe from her pocket, filled it with tobacco and then put a live coal on top of it with her fingers. She wiped the suds from her hands on her apron and said:

"I'm ready."

Cobb arose, slouched over and took hold of her hand. Squire Beeson stood before them and went through the ceremony which made them man and wife. When it was all over, Cobb went back and sat down on the log and resumed his whistling, while the bride, a homely woman of 40, returned to her washing.

Conyers informed the squire of his business, and the latter came out and mounted his horse to ride back home. They were just in the act of turning away when there was a rustling among some corn that grew by the yard fence, and the next moment Rix sprang out before them, holding his gun in one hand and a coon in the other.

"Sorry I kept you waiting, squire," he said, "but I had to have that coon, and I tell you he's a fine one. Just hunt him once, will you, and see how fat he is."

BE A GOOD BOY! GOODBY!

How oft in my dreams I go back to the day
When I stood at our old wooden gate
And started to school in full battle array,
Well armed with a primer and slugs,
And as the latch fell I thought myself free
And gloried, I fear, on the sly,
Till I heard a kind voice that whispered to me:
"Be a good boy! Goodbye!"

"Be a good boy! Goodbye!" It seems
They have followed me all these years;
They have given a form to my youthful dreams
And scattered my foolish fears;
They have staid my feet on many a brink,
Unseen by a blinded eye,
For just in time I would pause and think:
"Be a good boy! Goodbye!"

Oh, brother of mine, in the battle of life,
Just starting or tearing its close,
This motto alert, in the midst of the strife,
Will conquer wherever it goes;
Mistakes you will make, for each of us errs,
But, brother, just honestly try
To accomplish your best. In whatever occurs
"Be a good boy! Goodbye!"

—John L. Shroy in Saturday Evening Post.

A PARTIALLY OBEYED ORDER

The Reporter Returned, but the Mule Was a Total Loss.

Harmon W. Brown of Ohio, who held a responsible place on the staff of General Rawlins during the civil war, tells the following story of the general's treatment of an intrusive reporter:

"One day before Vicksburg the correspondent of a certain paper went to General Rawlins for news.

"The general pondered a moment and took me one side.

"Take this young man," he said, "up to the top of those trenches within a stone's throw of the enemy. Take him up there and lose him. I don't care what happens. Understand?"

"I said I did, and we started through the lines. Both of us were mounted. I pointed out a crest overlooking the enemy and told him he could get a good view from that point.

"Ain't you coming with me?" he asked.

SHE WAS A DIPLOMAT

AND UNDOUBTEDLY WOULD HAVE BEEN A GOOD STATESWOMAN.

As Was Proved by the Neat Way In Which She Induced the Man of Her Choice to Keep Away From Her Dreaded Rival.

"Dear me, I haven't seen you since you came back from the south," cried the girl with the appealing eyes. "I must say that I was surprised when I heard you had gone, but I suppose you know your own business best, so—"

"I rather fancy I do, dear, but it is awfully sweet of you to admit it. Most people"—said the girl with the distracting curls.

"Can manage the affairs of every one else better? I know it. Still, even you?"

"Settle the affairs of others sometimes? I do, dear. Indeed I fancy that I have just been doing so. No one is, however, aware of the fact, so—"

"It really doesn't matter, after all? I see. By the way, what has become of Tom? I haven't seen him for an age, though I have asked Grace about him several times. I thought—"

"You should have asked her elder sister, dear. She could have told you more. By the way, I had a lovely time in Florida. I could hardly make up my mind to come home when I did."

"Who was the man, dear? Was he rich or only good and handsome? Do—"

"I haven't seen an unmarried man over 18 and under 80 since I left home," smiled the girl with the distracting curls.

HE WAS EASY.

The Hovel to This Little Story Is "Don't Bet."

"Talk about your 'easy marks'!" said a Chicago turfman. "I heard of a case out at the track the other day that really beat the record. One of the professional tourists thought the ground got hold of a pretty verdant insurance man who lives here in town and talked him into putting up \$200 to bet on a 20 to 1 mug that he swore had a lead pipe cinch on the first race. The four went to the betting ring ostensibly to place the money, which, needless to say, he really put in his inside pocket and brought back a 'fohney' ticket.

"But that's only the starter. After delivering the fake ticket he sat down by the victim and remarked casually that he wished it would rain.

"You see, this horse is dead struck on mud," he said, "and if he swore had a double riveted certainty, I've sent over to the paddock to see whether it can't be fixed."

"What d'y' mean?" asked the insurance man in surprise.

"Sh-h!" whispered the tout. "Here's my man now."

"Just then a sporty looking individual rushed up with a great air of mystery. 'Well, it can be done for \$25,' he said.

"Give him \$25 quick, old man!" exclaimed the tout excitedly. "This is for getting the stretch wet."

"On the spur of the moment the insurance chap handed over the cash.

"Now just wait," said the tout, and sure enough in a few minutes a springing cart appeared and wet down the track, as is always customary before the first race.



HE WAS A LITTLE, SAWED OFF, SUN DRIED CHAP.

reled rifle on his shoulder, while from a belt about his waist hung three dead rabbits. Four or five lank, hungry looking dogs trotted along at his heels.

"Say," he said when he had come up to the horseman, "air you thinking of going to the squire's?"



CONYERS JOGGED ALONG AFTER.

"I ain't got time to tarry," I ain't late, and squire is waiting Widder and me for to marry."

The stranger looked at the little old man in astonishment as he sang these impromptu lines; then, in spite of his vexation, he smiled.

"So I understand," he said, "that you and the Widder Wheeler are to be married today?"

"I don't know anything about your understanding, stranger, but we're sure going to get married. I'm on my way down there now. You'd as well come along and see the fun, for it's on the road to the squire's."

The old man struck off down the road in a brisk walk, and Conyers jogged along after. They had gone a short distance in silence when suddenly the Possum Ridger burst into song again:

"I went down to the widder's house,
Told her my name was Rix,
Said I'd like to marry her,
I'd be in a dicker of a fix,
Old Jim Cobb he come along,
Asked her to marry him,
Widder she smiled up her nose,
And says, 'You're a little too late, Jim.'"



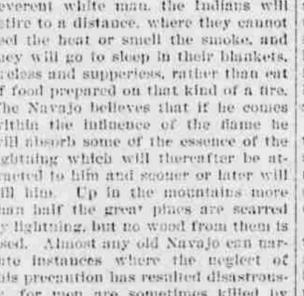
"I'M READY."

and pretty soon, as Conyers and the squire rode in the opposite direction, there came to their ears the following words, sung to no particular tune:

"Old Mr. Cobb, didn't see him,
Up a tree, say 'Squire is a holler,
Widder Wheeler she smiled up Jim Cobb,
Widderly had her done for a dollar."

Conyers burst out laughing.

"That certainly beats all the matrimonial affairs ever I saw or heard of," he said.



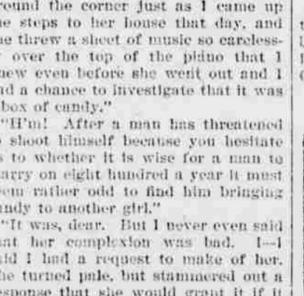
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The Sunday school teacher had been telling the class about Joseph, particularly with reference to his coat of many colors and how his father rewarded him for being a good boy, for Joseph, she said, told his father whenever he caught any of his brothers in the act of doing wrong.

"Can any little boy or girl tell me what Joseph was?" the teacher asked, hoping that some of them had caught the idea that he was Jacob's favorite.

"I know," said one of the little girls, holding up her hand.

"What was he?"



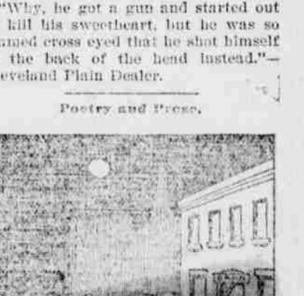
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