

DOLLIE AND THE TWO SMITHS

From Blackwood's (Edinburgh) Magazine. My father was an Irishman and a writer of articles for magazines. I have never written in a magazine or anything else myself. My mother I don't remember. She died shortly after my birth. One of my earliest arithmetical efforts consisted in the discovery that I had nine brothers and sisters, concerning whom, as they are all alive and are some of them Fenians, I desire to speak only in complimentary terms. I believe publishers did not pay so liberally on those days as I have reason to hope they do now, or possibly my father may have acquired dissolute habits through his contact with literary men; but from some cause or other I was so slenderly provided with food, clothing, and amusements, and my home was so inconveniently crowded and uncomfortable, that I left it at the age of fifteen with an outfit consisting of one extra shirt, one ditto pair of socks, a comb, and thirteen-and-sixpence that I borrowed, without alluding to it at the time, from my eldest sister, who was keeping house and acted as treasurer generally, and whose balance in hand consisted of that amount. I have since paid it her back, with interest at seven per cent. As, however, my present purpose in writing is not to dwell upon the varied and striking incidents in my own fortunes through life, so much as to portray certain scenes through which its destiny has led me, I will skip over the first twenty years after leaving home, and land myself in a neat white clapboarded house, with green venetians, and a verandah half round it, situated on a wooded hillside, and commanding a lovely view of a sea-enclosed lake about ten miles long and three wide, on the shores of which a few scattered clearings indicate that we are across the Atlantic, and in a part of this country not yet very thickly settled. Nevertheless we are in one of the Eastern States of America, at no very great distance from a city of fifty thousand inhabitants, and can hear the shriek of the engine as the cars stop at the little village at the head of the lake. As to whether that lovely creature with fair hair and blue eyes, and hands so small and white that it is a marvel how she can do so much household work and preserve them as she does, and a pleasure to look forward to eating the bread they are now kneading—I say, as to whether this young lady is my wife, or the "chattel," to take the legal English view of her, of that handsome broad-shouldered man unyoking a team at the door of the barn, is a matter in which we are alone concerned. It does not signify, either, who are the parents of the two little chubby children belonging to the point to which I wish to call my readers' attention to this. Here an I, an Irishman by descent, an Englishman by birth, a citizen of the United States by naturalization, and of the world by an extended knowledge of it. I confess to only one inveterate prejudice, acquired doubtless from a long residence among pure and simple Asiatics, and this is an intense abomination of, and contempt for, all society calling itself civilized, and especially for that mongrel race of money-grubbers, whether they are located on one side of the Atlantic or the other, who, in their Anglo-Saxon and which, to an inordinate conceit, adds an almost inspired faculty for "peddling." If, therefore, the extremely sensitive feelings of my American readers are hurt by the record of my experiences of village life in their country, I only request them to wait until I publish a few observations upon which I am engaged in regard to the commercial morality of London as compared with that of New York, when they will have an opportunity of judging for themselves of my extreme impartiality, and of venting their spleen against England, by republishing my very original and uncomplimentary criticisms on that country, and pocketing the entire proceeds of the labor of my brains. I give them fair notice that for every dollar of which I am thus robbed I shall stick a pin into them somewhere; and people with such thin skins had better make friends with me in time. I am to be bought. I have not purchased and paid for so many of my fellow-citizens without knowing to a cent what my own price is. My stock-in-trade consists of a certain faculty I have for washing the dirty "soiled" we call it on this side—"dirty" is considered coarse) lines of the Anglo-Saxon race in public. So much as regards myself. The name of my broad-shouldered companion and fellow-laborer is Orange Z. Smith. As there are two other Orange Smiths in the neighborhood, we have to be very particular about the Z, pronounced zee, not zed, in America, and so taught throughout the schools and colleges of the country. In the case of Orange, it does not stand for the first letter of any name, but is simply a distinctive middle initial; hence it follows that he is popularly known as Orange Zee. When our first little cherub was born, we called him Zuyder Zee, out of compliment to a Dutch ancestor on his mother's side. I may here remark that my name is also Smith. I dropped my Celtic patronymic and appropriated the English one upon the occasion of my taking thirteen-and-sixpence from my sister above mentioned. The name of Zuyder Zee's mother is Mary, but she is called "Dollie." All the pet diminutives of female names in the States end in ie, and not in y as in England, perhaps because there is a more refined flavor about ie than about y; and all Dollie's correspondents address their letters to her, not by the Christian name of her husband, or even by her own Christian name, besides that in the case of "Mrs. Dollie Van Snook Smith," thus as it was inviting the affectionate sympathy and interest of the clerks in the post office. So when I was so unfortunate the other day as to upset her out of the buggy and she broke her leg, the editor of the Van Snookville Democrat touchingly alluded to "the hand of Mrs. Dollie Smith, one of the most beautiful and highly respected residents of this township." Dollie's grandfather, Van Snook, had been the first settler here, and the town was called after him. When Zuyder Zee was born I asked Orange Zee whether the event ought not to be announced in the Van Snookville Democrat, but he said it would not be considered proper to make any public allusion to the incident; and I remembered afterwards that I never saw a column for births in any American newspaper. Long may it be before our Dollie figures in any other column; but whenever she does her affectionate relations will stick to the pet diminutive, and will announce the departure, not of "Mary, wife of — Smith," but of "Mrs. Dollie Van Snook Smith."

It is not necessary to say how Orange Zee and I first became acquaintances and then friends, and then decided "to go to farming" together, and were attracted to this pretty hillside, and to the immediate neighborhood of the farm where Dollie was living with her parents. I had to trust to Orange Zee's farming experience in writing my daily observations

was so great that he never ceased wondering where I had been "raised." I should like to know how many of my readers know how to drive a nail so as not to split the wood. I think the profound contempt with which Orange Zee regards all Englishmen, to whom he owes his origin, is principally based upon the information which I gave him that there were actually many people in England who did not know how to drive a nail. Nor does he yet understand—as of course everybody must be constantly wanting to drive nails in England as in America—"what on earth they do, if they don't know how."

After Orange Zee and I had seen Dollie, and found that the adjoining farm was for sale, we determined to buy it; and we accordingly went to Dollie's uncle, to whom it belonged, and told him that the fences were all out of repair, and the house was falling to ruin, and the meadows were all "run out," and that it was a miserable old place "any way," and not worth taking at a gift. Dollie's uncle saw at once from this that we were dying to get hold of the place, and, as he was equally anxious to sell, he said that he had now given up all idea of selling, and intended to "hang on" to it. Orange Zee told me afterwards that the great art of buying and selling was to appear as if you did not want to buy or sell, and always to seem to hang back. So we were boarding with Dollie's parents, and found "hanging back" quite a pleasant occupation. At last one day Dollie's uncle came and said that he had been offered \$75 an acre for his farm, and that if we wanted it we had better speak, as he was going to let it go at that. To my surprise Orange Zee said he had just offered \$50 an acre for a better farm on the other side of the lake, and expected to get a decided answer from the proprietor to-morrow. I felt quite angry with Orange Zee when I heard this; as I hated the looks of the other side of the lake; and when Dollie's uncle went away, I told him he might go there if he liked by himself, but that I should continue to "hang back." He laughed at my impudence, and assured me that what he had told Dollie's uncle was only a big lie as what Dollie's uncle had told him, and "how else could we expect ever to get hold of the farm?" So then, of course, I said that it was all right, and we went on "hanging back." Finally, we had a talk with Dollie's father on the subject; and he said that if we would give him a hundred dollars down, and a note of hand at six months for a hundred more in case he succeeded, he would get the farm from his brother at fifty dollars the acre; but in that case we must leave the place for the present and seem to have given up all idea of settling here. Orange Zee told me afterwards that the old man (we always call Dollie's father "the old man") had held a mortgage over his brother, and by threats of foreclosure forced him to sell. The old man was highly respected and looked up to for many miles round as being the best horse doctor and the "smartest" man at a trade generally to be found in that part of the country. He was also an elder of the Baptist Church, and exercised a most powerful gift on the occasion of "revivals" and "protracted meetings." When he died, how matters stood between Dollie, Orange Zee, and myself, he got nearly all our money out of us by secret promises of Dollie—first to one, and then to the other; and nothing but the accident of Dollie herself taking a decided stand of her own, prevented our being turned out of the house Dollieless and penniless. The whole details of this financially romantic transaction were afterwards reported in the "Van Snookville Democrat," and the old man received a sort of ovation for some time afterwards whenever he entered a store in the village, in compliment to his skill in having thus turned the charms of Dollie to such good pecuniary account. This did not prevent our having a wedding, which was the occasion of great rejoicing amongst all the members of the church to which Dollie belonged, and which bore grateful testimony to her popularity among the farmers' daughters in the neighborhood, who flocked to her marriage, in very elaborate Parisian toilets, in buggies and spring-wagons, and accompanied by "beaux" the honesty of whose intentions it was refreshing, to one accustomed to less primitive conditions, to contemplate. If I decline for reasons which may hereafter appear, to say whether Dollie was married to Orange Zee or myself on this auspicious occasion, it is not because either Dollie or her husband have ever since done anything to be ashamed of. Of the purity and simple innocence of our ménage there has been a question. Nor did the fact that one of us had failed to realize his aspirations in respect of this estimable young lady embitter our home relations. The sepietics in virtue on the other side of the Atlantic may sneer, but I am proud to say that no cloud of jealousy ever disturbed the serenity of our domestic horizon. Nor was the disappointed smile ever for an instant false to the pure and innocent sentiment of fraternal affection which bound him to the other two. Indeed I may say that we were (and I trust still are) all three very justly considered models of propriety by the highly moral community of the village.

The said village consists of a single street, with three churches and a school-house, all facing each other, in a little square in the middle, with pugnacious-looking steeples and a hostile cock to the gables, as though they were all longing to fly at each other. There are three dry-goods stores, and a hardware store, and a drug store, and a blacksmith's shop, and a billiard saloon, and two taverns, besides great mills, saw-mills, carpenters' shops, etc. The population is a genial, good-natured race enough. Everybody is familiarly known by his or her abbreviated Christian name; and the most minute details of the daily life of every family, and every obscure member of it, are accurately known and carefully discussed at post-time in the store that keeps the post office, and which serves as a club and resort for idlers generally throughout the day. For although the inhabitants of Van Snookville are a tolerably industrious and prosperous community, they manage to spend a large share of their time in gossip, and find in the ever-varying excitements of politics and religion abundant occasion for quarrels and intrigues. To one not familiar with their habits their severe language and the harsh judgments they entertain of each other might be supposed to lead to irreconcilable feuds. But this is rarely the case, for the simple reason that an irreconcilable feud is a very unprofitable investment of time and temper; and men seldom hate each other so much as to interfere with their prospects of being able to cheat one another. Of course the more rich and influential a man is the more he can afford himself the luxury of a temper. In America, as in England, civility is a marketable commodity; and I had frequent occasion to remark with admiration that my Van Snookville friends rarely permitted their

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