A LEAP YEAR EPISODE.

"I would not marry John Marryatt-not for \$50,000!" said Avice Mere. She said it, too, exactly as if she meant

it, with reddened cheeks, eyes full of hazel fire, and two small, dimpled fists clenched tightly.

"My dear," said Penelope Paxton, one of those jovial old maids who are privileged to say anything, "you remind me of a famous historical character."

"I?" said Avice, momentarily off her guard.

"Yes," said Penelope. "Miss Betty Baxter, who refused Captain Jones before he axed her."

"Oh, it isn't that!" protested Avice, rosier than ever. "Of course Mr. Mar-ryatt has no idea of asking me; why should he have? And if he did, I shouldn't accept him. "

"Miss Betty Baxter," monotonously chanted Penelope, "who refused--" "Penny, do be quiet!" said Avice, stamping her foot in genuine annoyance.

"You know what I mean."

believe you know yourself." "He said it was leap year," pleaded in-

dignant Avice.

So it is, " said Penn. "Get the almanac and look for yourself. Four into eighteen hundred and eighty-four

goes-" "Penelope," cried Avice, "can you not talk common sense ?"

"To be sure I can, if you will set me the example!" gravely responded Miss Paxton.

"And he told Doctor Darien he wasn't coming to our party to-morrow night because he didu't want to be married against his will." Well, after all, there's something in

that," said Penelope, reflectively, "I never was a man myself, but I can imagine that, under such circumstances,

a cold shiver would go all through me." "Penny," said Avice, solemnly, "do you really, seriously think that one of us girls ever thought of marrying John Marrvatt?"

"That is a question I am not prepared to answer," said Miss Paxton.

Avice ran out of the room, and was surprised to find herself crying over the clove-scented blossoms of her favorite carnations in the bathroom window.

"I'm sure I don't know why," sobbed she, "I hate John Marryatt, and I think it was horrid of Doctor Darien to go and repeat what was said to him in confidence. And if John Marryatt really believed that-that-there, I won't think of it any more. Leap year, indeed! Why do people talk such a string of nonsense because the mouth of February happens to have 29 days in it instead of 28?"

In the meantime Mr. Marryatt had packed his valise and gone off to visit an old uncle who was at the point of death.

"It won't be a very cheerful visit," said he to himself, "but it will be better than a state of siege-for I have been told, on good authority, that every one of those girls mean to get engaged at the leap-year party, the saucy coquettes! It will be the old story of the Sabines over again, with the sexes reversed. And when I marry-if I marry-I intend to have at least the privilege of choice. So Fil just go up to Uncle Origen's."

Uncle Origen's farmhouse was on the top of a bleak hill, where a few dwarfed cherry trees shook and shuddered in the wintry blasts, and the cows huddled in the shelter of the hayricks to keep from being blown away.

"I think we are going to have a storm," caid Mr. Marryatt n quite certa

"Eight mile as the crow flies, "How the dickens do you suppose 1 nm to get eight miles from here when it is pitch dark already?" cried Marryatt, crossly.

"There's Jenkins' onc-hoss wagon," mildly suggested the old-man. goin' to his place d'rectly arter a box o' stove blacking, a paound o' taller dips and quarter o' a paound o' green tea for Isabella. I can tell Jenkins to come raound and cart ye to the station, of ye don't begrudge a crown.'

"By all means; and while you are gone Isabella can give me some supper." Marryatt sat down in the old, lowceiled room, where the rag carpet seemed neither brighter nor dimmer than it had been 20 years ago, and warmed his chilled feet before a blaze of snapping logs; while old Isabella, who might have appeared creditably at any tableau as the Witch of Endor, crept around an iron pot which swung from a prodigious crane and got supper after a slow, clumsy manner.

"Pretty gay in town this winter?" said the old woman, brandishing her spoon "No, I don't," said Penny, "and I don't over him as he ate rabbit stew.

"I suppose so. "I'm thinkin' o' goin' there myself," said she.

"To take a situation ?" asked the young man, inwardly thinking that he could not recommend her as cook.

"Bless your heart, no!" said Isabella. "I know a sea captain there as ain't married; and they tell me the gals is all pickin' and choosin' for themselves now that lesp year has come around. Any-how I'm tired o' this place, and I don't see why my chance ain't as good as anybody's.

Marryatt stared at her in mute amazement, as he secretly deplored the sad

case of the unsuspecting sea captain. "P'raps you wouldn't mind keepin' an eye on the fire," said the gentle Isabella, while I just go and see if Simon has locked the hen house-he's so forgetful.' And she hobbled away.

At the same time there came a loud knocking at the outer door, and a stout country girl, with cheeks of that peculiar red which shines as if it had been varnished, very black eyes and coarse hair, walked in, well wrapped up in a red and black plaid shawl, and a felt hat which looked like a damaged helmet.

Heals the Sores. "I've come for Mr. Marryatt," said she, without any ceremony of introduction. Instinctively our hero backed up cgainst the wall.

"What!" cried he. "You're Mr. Marryatt, ain't you ?" said

she. "That's my name," retreating still farther behind the stiff wooden-backed chair, where Uncle Origen used to sit and amoke his pipe.

"Well, I'm come for you. You ain't deaf, be you? I'm-come-for-you!" "Yes; but I-"

"There ain't no time to lose," bawled this daughter of solitudes, seizing him by thearm. "This here's your baggage?" grasping the valise in the other hand. This was leap year with a vengeance,

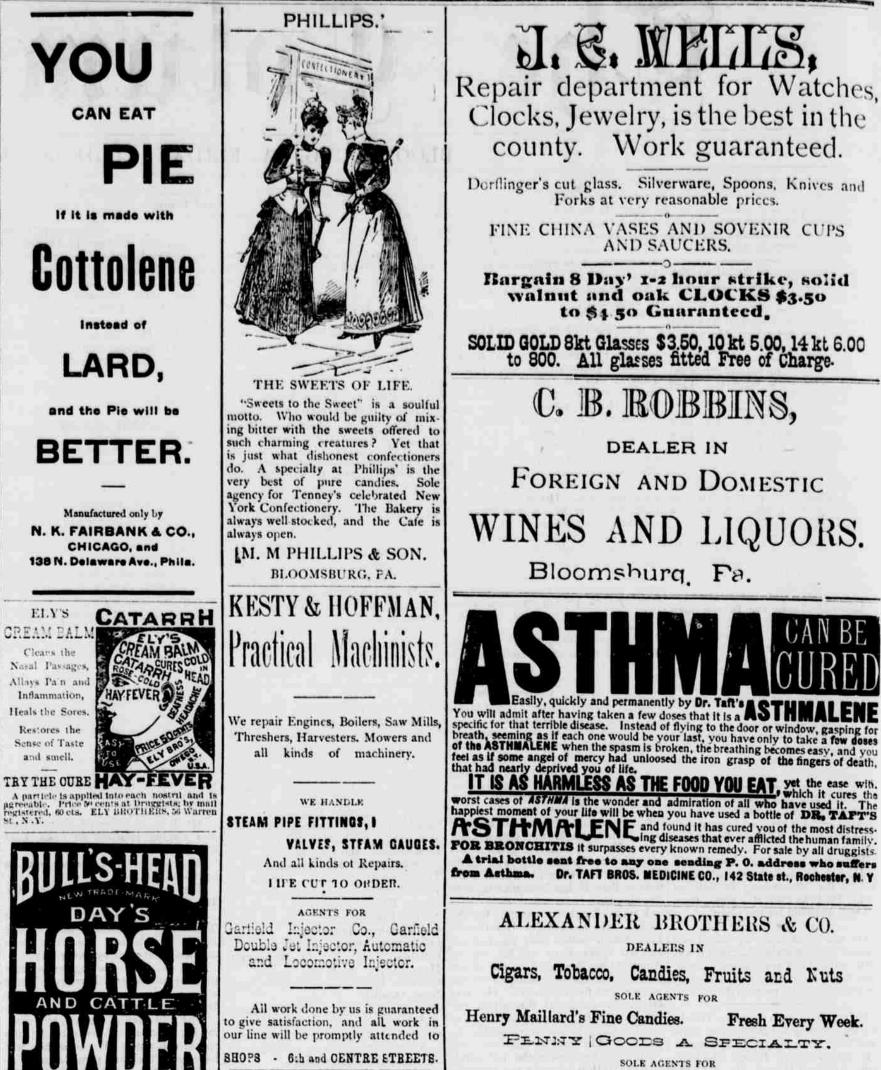
thought our hero. With one desperate struggle he freed himself from her grasp.

"I won't go !" he said. "Nothing can compel me to go against my will." "You won't?" said the red-checked

damsel. "No, I wou't, " replied John Marryatt.

"Then you will miss the train," said the red cheeked damsel. "And it won't be no fault of mine. Fatl or has had the rheumatics, and I promised him I would come for you."

"Oh, the train-I see," cried Mr. Marry-



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that I smell snow in the air. And there are more cheerful places during a northcast wind than Uncle Orgien's house."

In fact he was almost disposed to be sorry that he had come, when he stood there, knocking and thumping with the handle of his umbreila at the shrunken panels of the front door.

Pretty soon a crooked old man, with his garments fastened with tow strings instead of buttons, came shuffling to the door, and peeped suspiciously around it.

"Eh ?" said he, with one hand back of his poor old purple car. "'Pears to me I heard somebody knocking, didn't I?"

"Yes, it's me," said our hero, "John Marryatt, dou't you know ?"

"Married?" squeaked the old man. "To whom?"

"John-Mar-ry-att!" distinctly repeated the visitor. How is my Uncle Origen?"

The crooked old man sheltered his candle-flame with one hand and stared as if he were gradually being transformed into one huge eye.

"Land sakes alive!" said he. "Didn't you know? He was buried yesterday." Here was a cheerful welcome for a city visitor.

"But what can I do?" said Marryatt, with a helpless gaze down the darkening hillside. "I came to visit him. I had not heard-"

"Walk in, walk in," said the old man, holding the flaring candte high above his head, and flattening himself against the whitewashed wall. "It's pretty lone-some here; but there's the deceased's chamber you can sloep in, and I trapped a rabbit this morning in the pine wood that Isabella's just stewing up, and-"

"Isabella?" repeated John Marryatt.

"She's the old woman in charge-my sister," explained the ancient warder of the castle. "Ain't much to look at, but she's a proper good cook." "But," said Mr. Marryatt, "I don't

think I care about sleeping in the room where Uncle Orgen died.

The old man stared at him with dull, Classy eyes. "Eh?" said he. "Why not? You

1on't believe in speritocalism, do you?" "Nonsense!" cried Marryatt.

"Then why ain't one room as good as snother ?" asked the old man, stolidly.

"Nevertheless, I would much rather gs to the nearest hotel," impatiently utared John.

"Ain's none short o' seven mile," said he old man. "And that's only a sum-tesr machine. They don't run it arter the waterfalls are friz up. But there's a freight train with a passenger caboose hitched on that stops at Cutting Corners at midnight."

"Where is Cutting Corners ?"

att. "I didn't quite comprehend your meaning at first. Yes, I'll come immediately.

The red-cheeked damsel, who proved to be no despicable charioteer, rattled down the frozen mountain road with considerable skill and energy, reaching the solitary station just as the freight train came in sight around a curve.

So Mr. Marryatt arrived in town just in time to see the sunrise glow irradiate the red brick chimney tops behind the Delavan House.

"Not married yet, " he said to himself ; "but I will be as soon as possible, if she will have me. I'll run no more such risks as this!"

That very afternoon he called at Doctor Mere's house and proposed to Aviceand Avice accepted him. Yes, she actually accepted him!

"But did you really say that?" asked Avice, feeling that it was her duty to admonish her swain a little: "that-that you didn't want to be married against your will?"

"Of course I said it," answered Marryatt, "and I meant it. I don't intend to be married against my will; I intend to be married with it. And did you really say that you wouldn't marry John Marryatt for \$50,000?"

"And I wouldn't!" cried Avice, looking up with sparkling eyes. "Not for twice that money, but-just because I love him!"

So they both were happy and laughed heartily over the adventures at Uncle Origen's house.

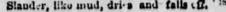
When Penelope Paxton next saw the bride-elect, she chuckled and said :

"So it isn't to be a case of 'Miss Betty Daxter,' after all ?"

Avice colored and said she "didn't know what Miss Penny could possibly mean.".

A Proper Request .- "Now, Willie," said mamma, "I want you to keep very quiet. I don't want you to say a word all through dinner." "Ve'y well, mamma," returned Willie. "Only I fink you ought to help by givin' my mouf plenty of fings to eat, so's to keep it busy.

He Kept Still .- Mother-How did your face get that strained, agonized look in your photographs? Did the light hurt your eyes? Small Son-No, ma'am. The man tole me to try to keep still, an' I did Street & Smith's Good News.





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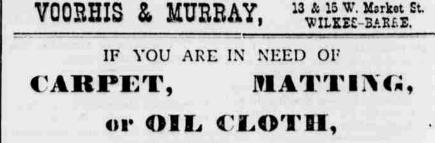
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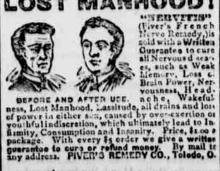
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