

DAVE LARKINS' COAT.

This story is as true as stories ever are. It was told me by an old gentleman from York State, who is, incredible as it may seem, almost as truthful at sixty as George Washington was at six. And I—well, my memory is equal to my imagination any time, and I am going on my memory now.

It arose from a conversation on clothes, comparing the peculiarities, especially the absurd ones, of the present with those of the past. He had the advantage of me, for he had enjoyed a good deal more past than I had, and felt gleeful over it. I was not quite willing to give it up, for had I seen my grandmother's bonnets? But they were nothing to the things I had not seen; and I listened to an description after another of things ugly, inconvenient or ridiculous—perhaps all three—till I didn't want any more.

Swallow-tailed blue broadcloth came up at last, and I enjoyed a brief flash of triumph, for had I not seen my father's well-saved wedding suit? But the old gentleman soon annihilated me. He brought up the identical coat that Dave Larkins wore, I don't know how long before I was born. Of course I knew nothing at all about that particular coat, and couldn't help wanting to know. So I subsided, with my best expression of mute attention.

Now I must admit the never reads papers with any nonsense in them, and won't know it, that the old gentleman can tell a story better than I can. I will, however, give it to the best of my recollection, solemnly avowing that the cream at least is genuine.

Dave Larkins was one of those unfortunate fellows who, they say, used to exist in good many years ago, with great will and small ability to be successful ladies' men. There was not a girl in the neighborhood that had not miffed him; some had miffed him several times. If a new girl ventured there he presented her with attentions until she was half frantic. Nature had not done well by him, so he tried to do the best he could by himself, and dressed all he knew how, at least whenever he expected to meet girls.

He went to a paring bee one night arrayed in his very best. Now the rest all were only their second best at paring bees, or something not even so good, and were disgusted at Dave. The idea of all the young folks in the community being outside and humiliated by Dave Larkins' Sunday coat! They went from disgust to indignation, and their indignation was fed for that coat. Apple parings began to fly quite profusely, and then rotten apples; and by some force of circumstances they all hit fairly on some part of that coat. A pitiful looking coat it was—ruined in fact; but Dave had one consolation—he had never received so much attention before in his life. He had a new coat made and wore it to meeting hopefully. Blue cloth it was, with swallow tails and brass buttons so bright that you could see your face in every one of them.

Some of the big boys outside the meeting-house made grins at each other and snickered; but what did it care? Dorella Cunningham, called Wily for short, had ridden up just as he was tying his horse, and had actually permitted him to help her off and tie her. This unwonted grace had cheered his very soul. But this was not all. As she had turned her head to give him a parting glance, she smiled.

Now, he had always had a sort of inclination toward Wily Cunningham, and she had always turned him the cold shoulder very decidedly. An uncommonly smart, capable, good looking girl she was no wonder, if she had not been the greatest mischief in the neighborhood, and fanned far and wide for her fitless practical jokes. Young men who did not hold themselves cowardly were afraid of Wily.

But "fools rush in where angels fear to tread," as has been written and quoted a few hundred times before, I believe. Emboldened by that smile and that coat, Dave resolved to try his chances once more.

Wily kept horse for an old couple who were both as deaf as—no I won't say deaf as a post—find a comparison yourself, please, and let me go on. Dave Larkins came along that evening just as she was going out to milk. She greeted him so cordially that his courage rose still higher. He went with her to milk and helped her every in the paths. How chatty and sociable she was. It really seemed to him as if he might possibly have a chance of winning the smartest and thriftiest girl in the settlement after all—he, Dave Larkins. What a success that would be, and how some fellows would envy him.

He helped her down cellar with the milk, and stood watching while she strained it, she talking away gaily with him all the time. She took up the empty pails and hesitated a moment.

"Here, Dave," she said, suddenly, "you stay here a moment till I go up to the kitchen for a bowl."

She tripped lightly up the steps, and in a second the trap door on the porch, by which they had gone down, was shut, and he was in Egyptian darkness.

Wily slipped the bolt, and then, running into the kitchen, fastened the cellar door there.

"She will let me out pretty soon," he thought; "it is only a joke," and tried not to care; but by the time the minutes had lengthened into hours he did care a good deal. He called for help, of course, and at last, grown desperate, yelled with all his might, but she would not heed, and nobody else could hear. He paced back and forth, back and forth, between the two long benches that held the pans of milk, till he was tired, and then sat down on the cellar stairs and slept.

He swore solemnly to himself, the walls and the milk-pans, that he would never look at another girl as long as he lived. At last the trap-door was raised, and noisy steps beat a retreat. He walked up stiffly and looked around. Nobody was visible. He started home and the fresh air and sense of liberty gave him an idea.

"Nob'dy need know it," he thought; "they'll just suppose I went to see Wily and stayed this morning a little late. I don't believe she'll tell it. If she does, I'll say 'bout so, that I set up with her in the kitchen. I guess folks'll believe me if I stick to it."

About the time he arrived at this same conclusion, he saw Deacon Smiley and his family, including a gossipy wife and two grown daughters, driving toward him, on their way to town. He took off his hat, brushed down his hair, and walked on boldly.

"Good morning, Dave," said the deacon. "Dressed in your best, and on your way home this time Monday morning! What does this mean?"

Dave smiled, and looked as if he could tell, but wouldn't.

Miss Rutley spoke up, "S'ness he's been over to see Wily, and forgot to go home. Will saw him going that way last night."

Dave didn't deny "the soft impeachment."

"But, Dave, what on earth ails your coat?" exclaimed Miss Smiley.

Dave cast two rapid glances over his coat, one in front and the other behind. Those milk pans! They stood just high enough for the swallow-tails to skim and dip to advantage. The unlucky wretch! He grinned a ghastly grin, and then, Miss Smiley, looked as if he was wanting to cry. The deacon drove on.

The story leaked out, as a matter of course, and the circumstantial evidence being so strong, it was believed. Poor, desperate, discouraged Dave had to tell somebody to relieve his hearted feelings, so he gave my informant all these particulars, and added:

"I ain't going to give up so, though. I'm going to try Nancy Brown. They say she ain't more'n half-witted; but I don't care—she'll suit me all the better. I don't like these snarp girls."

It may be a comfort to you, as it certainly was to me, to know that he did marry Nancy Brown, and turned out quite a money-saving man and a good "provident."

Wily did not enjoy unalloyed satisfaction from her cruelty. She had a white churning of cream, and that, too, which butter was bringing an extra cent on the pound.

LOVES IN FLAMES—How Two Young Folks Got Too Warm Under the Stars.—We have already made it a matter of printed record that a house was set on fire by carrying heated bricks to bed, and that a young married couple were "evicted" by heated "seditions." It now becomes our duty, as a faithful chronicler of passing events, to record a freak of advice under peculiar circumstances, whereby an impressed funeral pyre on the bed and almost became a matter of dead final. Without holding the reader in his name any longer we proceed at once with the story. One week ago last Sunday (the news has been some time reaching me) Mr. Fogarty and Miss Kennedy, of 73rd Street, eight miles north of Independence, resolved like good Christians to go to church. The morning was bright and bitter cold, as every one will remember. No fair weather or warm weather Christians were this worthy couple, but as persevering as Bunyan's ideal; therefore they loaded a goodly stack of coal sticks in the stove, checked it into the bottom of the sleigh, jumped in themselves, wrapped their quilts and blankets around them and drove on. The miles soon began to be gathered up pretty rapidly under the nimble feet of the horses. The bells jingled, and everything began, notwithstanding the keen bitter air, to be "lively and divine," when suddenly, a seat of something burning began to fill the air. The horses started to sound, and immediately called the attention of her partner to the very palpable odor. A moment after a column of smoke was seen to issue from behind their seat. Fire! both exclaimed, and jumping from the sleigh, each discovered the other to be in a blaze. In jumping out, as was natural they should, Mr. Fogarty jumped out on his side and Miss Kennedy on hers. The danger was imminent. Mr. F. was on fire, Miss K. was on fire, and the sleigh was on fire. With a commendable presence of mind Mr. F. snowballed himself out, and then rushed to the rescue of Miss K., but by that time the fire had got under such headway that her garments were consumed to her underclothing; even the bone stays of her corset were crisped. Mr. F. rolled her in the snow, and soon had the satisfaction of knowing that, although she was reduced to a very primitive garment for a covering, her person had actually escaped from any serious harm. Our informant did not state how Mr. Fogarty got his dulcinea home. —Dubuque, Iowa, Times.

JOHN VISITS A FAIR.—I shall remember Rome, N.Y. Years ago the citizens got up a fair to try and raise money enough to buy a minister a night shift. I went to it. The clerk at the fair wore a fair female. I gave a gal a five dollar bill for a chicken's hind leg without any gravy on it, and she never gave any change back. I remarked that was dear. She offered to bet me the price of a pen wiper it wasn't. I took the bet and says I to a gal she had with her: "Don't you think that is dear?" "No, sir," said she, "I know it ain't dear, it's chicken."

I paid for the pen wiper, and I bought a little-crown flannel dog for a dollar. There was only three cents' worth of flannel and one cent's worth of snuff in that whole dog, and its tail couldn't possibly have cost a cent or two cents to support. It was made to stick pins into it and I could stick pins into it all day and it wouldn't stir. I think I paid too much for the dog, for since that I bought a dog for fifty cents and you can't stick one pin into him without his jumping a rod.

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