

The Straw-Ride at Frisker's.

By Fletcher Cowan.

The village of Racketville was at fever heat.

At fever heat in the middle of February.

What an absurd expression that is, by the way. At fever heat in the middle of February, when the general climate is so sternly suggestive of ulsters, arctic, chest protectors and Baltimore heaters. But we use it only in a figurative sense. Racketville was at a perfect fever heat, not according to the thermometer, but according to the pressure of excitement and expectation.

Why, the following notice, clipped from the "Local Items" column of the village paper:

"It is a well known fact that the annual straw-rides of our esteemed fellow townsman, Farmer Frisker, are the most prominent features of Racketville's winter entertainments. Tomorrow evening, at half-past seven, the best straw-ride of the season will start from Frisker's house, to travel all the way to Dan Kelly's hotel at Fairview, where quite a surprising sensation is promised to take place. The party will return home in plenty of time for the next day's dinner. Over fifty invitations have been issued."

Is it not likely that such an announcement should cause quite a furore, that everyone in the village who had the least claim to acquaintanceship with the Frisker family should be looking forward to receiving an invitation; and that everyone who had not, should determine on going down to the Frisker cottage to see the party off; for, in the opinion of everyone, the starting off of the annual Frisker straw-ride was a sight not to be missed, or eclipsed either, even by the great displays of Christmas and the Fourth of July.

Well, the eventful evening arrived in safety, and a more glorious one for a straw-ride could not have been wished for. The moon and stars were out and shining beautifully, the surrounding country presented the most lovely snow landscape the eye could feast upon, and the road over which the party were to travel was in splendid condition.

Half-past seven came, and the great straw-ride started from the Frisker cottage amid the cheers of half the village populace, who had assembled to see them off, and the crash of a brass band that Farmer Frisker had secured to accompany the party. "Music allers seemed to patch up such a sort of enchantment around the scene," he said.

There were four sleighs full of invited guests. They were all ranged in line, and, festooned with flags, branches of fir trees, bright Chinese lanterns and numerous other decorations, looked quite a pretty sight. The horses were trimmed up fantastically, too, like a lot of animals in the holiday assortment of a New York department store.

As the party moved away from the cottage the scene was lit up magnificently by the glare of brilliant fireworks, which had also been provided for the occasion.

Then away the sleighs sped in fine style over the fleecy road like arrows, and the crisp snow crackled beneath them with sharp, snapping sounds, the bells jingled with a merry unison, and the voices rang out upon the frosty air with a far merrier discordance.

The night was superb. The glistering jewels of the sky shed a soft, celestial glow over the snow-clad hills and meadows, and gave the country the appearance of an emerald paradise.

On a few sleighs, past houses, fences, trees and mill ponds, like locomotives, until the village was left many miles behind. On they dashed through the hills and valleys, and across the low, white-carpeted meadows, past scattered villages and silent, lonely homesteads, the party enjoying this pleasant diversification of scenery all along the route. Enjoying the scenery and enjoying plenty else.

Ah, how nice it was! How really nice it was! Young Simon Lee, for instance, sitting with his arm around the waist of Laura Dale, pointing out to her the places of interest upon the road, the old dead sycamore tree, with the spring in its trunk famed for such good water, the broken-down bridge where he used to fish, the haunted mill beside Brewster's, where he got her that pretty pair of pigeons some time ago, etc. All this while her father and mother, sitting quite near, were in danger of looking; when they were not looking, the conversation was carried on in the silent language of the eyes, and made doubly interesting by affectionate bouts in hugging and kissing.

All the other young people derived an immense amount of enjoyment in precisely the same manner.

There was one person there who enjoyed himself as thoroughly as all the others combined, and, however strange it may seem, all alone.

That person was Bachelor Spriggs, quite an eccentric individual, but the most intellectual man in Racketville.

No one, however, seemed to make much of him during the ride, or to care for listening to his queer but humorous conversation. The ladies of the party thought him "perfectly horrid, for he drinks, and the smell of whisky on him is terrible," they whispered to each other. The men pitied his weakness, pronounced him a very smart and funny man, but did not endeavor to draw him into conversation, for, when once started, he ran on like

a town clock; in fact, made himself quite a bore.

So the old bachelor, discarded by everybody, "went it alone," nestled in one corner of the sleigh under a cluster of fir branches, with no one but his little brown pocket flask to keep him company, but he had real enjoyment with it, and seemed to prefer its pleasing comfort to all the fun and frolic taking place around him.

His frequent potations soon began to tell upon him, as everyone feared would be the case, for he was known to never be without his flask, and oftentimes the people saw it flash in the moonlight as he raised it to his lips and took what he humorously termed his "astronomical observations."

Farmer Frisker began to get nervous. He had brought Spriggs out upon the ride for a particular purpose—to make a big speech at Dan Kelly's hotel as the opening feature of the "surprising sensation" he had promised in the notice of the village paper.

He began to fear that Spriggs would be unfit for the delivery of the speech. These fears were considerably heightened by the bachelor suddenly bursting out into a boisterous song, and as tipsy men's songs are always as long as your arm, he never finished until the sleighs entered Fairview and dashed up before Dan Kelly's door, where fully half the town were gathered to receive them.

"Spriggs!" cried Frisker, seizing the bachelor by the hair so viciously that he yelled like a wild beast. "I didn't think you'd serve me in this way. Tarnation take your distillery stomach! You're not fit to grace a mud-gutter, let alone a grand affair like this here. You're not fit to spout now."

"Oh, yes, I am, Frisker," said Spriggs, in a quavering voice. "Trust me—trust Spriggs. He's not gone back on you. He'll make a grand speech."

Frisker said nothing, but turning to one of his sons who was assisting some of the girls from the sleighs, whispered:

"Zach, for mercy's sake, keep Spriggs down in the bar-room, or he'll turn the whole affair into a circus. Don't let him upstairs, or I'll go mad!"

"But, father, I can't hang onto his coat-tails all the time. I must be present upstairs."

"Then tell Dan Kelly to get some one to do the job. If Spriggs gets upstairs a cock fight will be nothing to the row he'll raise."

Frisker, Jr., promised he would, but the girl of his heart was waiting to be handed from the sleigh, and as he sprang to do his duty Spriggs fled from his memory.

As the party left the sleighs and filed upstairs into the snug parlor of the hotel, everyone, excepting the members of the Frisker family, and the Darrell family, and a few others, was burning with anticipation as to what the "surprising sensation" was going to be.

When all were assembled in the lighted parlor, quite some surprise was manifested at a few certain things.

Farmer Frisker's daughter had thrown off her cloak, and was discovered in a handsome silk dress—a rather too beautiful and costly costume for a straw-ride.

Stephen Darrell was dressed in handsome black, which is not generally worn upon a straw-ride, either.

Two or three other ladies and gentlemen were dressed in a style not to be expected for a straw-ride, and the families of Frisker and Darrell were dressed in their very best.

All this caused curiosity and remark.

Suddenly the presence of Parson Brooder, sitting at an adjoining table with a Bible before him, was noted, and this and that put together generated a great deal of suspicion.

In the midst of the mysterious whisperings Farmer Frisker arose, and, with a stately smile, that showed how he enjoyed the deception he had practiced upon his friends, disclosed the nature of the "surprising sensation."

"My friends," he said, "I wanted to provide you with real enjoyment upon this ride. We have had great fun on the road but I have reserved the cream of the amusement to the last. This cream we would have churned at my house, but there wasn't enough room there, so we'll churn it here under the roof of good Dan Kelly. The great sensation announced to take place here is the marriage of my daughter to young Stephen Darrell, on which I pray you to shower your blessings."

What Frisker had done in his few words he had intended Spriggs to make the subject of a splendid speech. But, alas! Spriggs had failed him in his hour of need, and he was forced thus to be his own speechmaker, but it is our belief that the great Spriggs had been in fit condition, with all his polish and ready command of language, could not have delivered a speech with better effect than had the farmer in his few blunt words.

Then all became silent, and the parson, rising, entered upon his happy duty of joining together two loving hearts.

"Keep Spriggs out! Don't let him in!" said Frisker, to one of his friends before the marriage service began, for he had looked around the company and found, to his great relief, that Spriggs was missing, for the tipsy bachelor was at that moment in the bar-room of the hotel below, replenishing his little brown flask.

The bride and bridegroom, with their

attendants, took their places, the parson rose, and the ceremony began. But when nearly through, and just arrived at that highly critical part of the ceremony when the couple are questioned as to whether they accept each other as husband and wife, suddenly out went the gas, and the room was left in total darkness.

This created some consternation. "Blame the luck!" cried Frisker, and he followed for a match.

"I'll go downstairs for one," cried the man on guard at the door, and he opened the door to go; but at the same moment the bridegroom, Stephen Darrell, called out that he had a match in his pocket.

There was no use then of the guard going for one, so he shut the door again; but before he did so a dark figure passed into the room unnoticed in the gloom.

Stephen Darrell was intensely flurried by the interruption, and rushed to light the gas himself. But, when he got to the jet he found that he had no match as he had supposed, and that it was only a toothpick he had felt in his pocket. Then, desperate with rage, and—simple fellow!—quite frightened, it must be admitted, at the sudden extinguishment of the light, which he superstitiously took to be a bad omen for his wedding, he rushed out of the room and downstairs to get a light himself.

No one knew who it was that went out, but thought it some one of the young men gone on the errand.

"Confound the thing!" cried Frisker. "There ain't much more jobbing to do, is there, parson? Well, then, let the wedding go on in the dark. Darn it! I've heard that it's bad luck to stop in the middle of a marriage; and if that's the case, the dark ain't going to stop my daughters."

"Yes, let it go on in the dark!" cried Farmer Darrell. "I've heard that it's bad luck to stop, (go.)"

The parson attempted to expostulate; but both the farmers ordered the marriage to go on in the dark. So the bride took her place beside a figure which she supposed to be that of her husband, and the service went on.

"Do you accept this woman as your wedded wife?"

No answer was heard. Everyone supposed that the bridegroom had spoken it, but that, owing to nervousness which sometimes does affect bridegrooms to a great degree, he had spoken inaudibly.

"Do you accept this man for your wedded husband?"

"I do," replied the bride, in a firm voice. "Gracious, Stephen, how are you trembling!" she was then heard to whisper.

"Then I declare you man and wife!" said the parson, "and the blessing of God, and of everyone, be upon this union."

As he said these words the figure of the husband bent toward the bride. She thought he wished to kiss her, and presented her lips for the purpose of being so treated.

Her lips met something, but it was not the lips of her husband. It was something very cold, and a strange, shivering sensation passed over her as she felt its touch.

"His—what some—hic?" asked a quavering voice, and the next instant the young bride felt a cold stream of some liquid poured over her face. Some of it went down her throat and nearly choked her, and by its taste and smell she knew it to be whisky.

She uttered a piercing shriek and fell back into the arms of her father, who was standing beside her, just as Stephen Darrell entered the room in the greatest haste, bearing a lamp.

Light being thrown upon the scene, a strange tableau was revealed.

Stephen's bride lay in a half-faint in her father's arms, and Spriggs, the dark figure who had stood beside her during the latter part of the ceremony, stood in the glare of the light, with one hand grasping his brown flask, and the other clutching the table for support—Spriggs, the bachelor, stood half married to Miss Sarah Frisker.

The excitement that prevailed after this thrilling tableau it would be hard to portray.

"Blame that Spriggs!" roared Farmer Frisker. "Throw him out of the window!"

"Let me at him till I break his neck!" cried Stephen, and indeed the angry parson would have broken the poor bachelor's neck had friends not interfered and calmed them down, and bore Spriggs out of sight.

Then, when the full ridiculousness of the scene was realized, there was great amusement. The cause of the light going out so suddenly was that somebody downstairs had turned off the gas, but whether designedly or accidentally could not be ascertained. The mirth and excitement over the affair did not subside for fully fifteen minutes.

By that time the bride had recovered from her faint, and the father and bridegroom from their desperation.

Then the ceremony was re-enacted, and the right man was married.

After the ceremony there was a splendid supper, and after that, spirited dancing, which was kept up until an early hour of the morning.

Then the straw-ride party left Dan Kelly's and reached Racketville not only in time for dinner, but in plenty of time for breakfast.

"We have had a first-rate time. Haven't we, Frisker?" said one of the farmer's friends.

"Yes, a spankin' time," said Frisker. "Straw-rides are very well in their way, but the next straw-ride I get up will be a straw-ride and nothing else. Never while I have brains enough left to raise carrots, will I cart one of my daughters to another man's house to be hustled into wedlock. Then I'll know she'll not be married in the dark."—New York Weekly.

Independence for Ireland

It Would Lead to an Irish Alliance With England and Strengthen the Empire

By Thomas J. Regan.

Ireland was given her freedom, the first thing she would do would be to form an alliance with England. Her first formation of a foreign policy would be an official declaration of the obvious fact that the prosperity of Ireland, when a nation, must depend upon the prosperity of England, her safety upon England's safety, her welfare upon the maintenance of the British Empire.

If Ireland were a nation she would need England's navy to defend her and protect any shipping she could create. She would be too poor to waste any money or energy on the maintenance of military and naval armaments to be used against England or any other nation. An alliance with England would leave her free to give all her attention to domestic concerns. It would mean that Ireland could never be attacked by any Continental nation. Such an alliance would be Ireland's only foreign policy, and it would be maintained as stoutly as we maintain the Monroe doctrine.

Ireland's welfare and prosperity would be at stake whenever England was attacked. England's prosperity would be the source of Ireland's riches, because England would be the consumer of the surplus products of Irish farms. Ireland when developed would seek an English market for her surplus foodstuffs, for her fowls, eggs, and dairy products. She would supply England with high priced grades of meat, which cannot be obtained from the muscular cattle of our western ranches and which England cannot provide for herself.

This English market for Irish products would be a community of interests between the two. Ireland would be the warmest friend that England could have, because her friendship would have the warmth of self-interest, which is the warmest thing on this side of the grave.

England's alliance with Ireland would do more than anything else could to strengthen her union with her colonial possessions. She has seen the necessity of a closer union with her colonies. During the South African war she called for their help. The gratitude of the Irish race would bring her more help from her colonies than she can see any other way of gaining. If the green flag were waving beside the flag of England there would not be a true Celt in Canada or Australia whose heart would not leap with enthusiasm for an Anglo-Celtic cause. If there was an alliance between England and Ireland the British Empire would renew its youth.

The Incomparable Value of Business Tact

By E. E. Perkins.

ANY man who has to meet the public and whose success depends on the public's attitude toward him needs to study himself constantly that he may become tactful. How easy to say the wrong word, to make an unfortunate impression, to canvass a prospect at an inappropriate time, or not to realize when to stop talking.

There are two eminent examples of what tact will do. James G. Blaine was a most adroit man. He was a friend maker, a moulder of men. A wonderful memory for names and faces aided him. He used to know and call by name people whom he had seen but once many years before. That was one of the secrets of his great popularity. He approached people right. So did Mr. McKinley, who was remarkably considerate of the opinions of others. He was so tactful that political enemies often were transformed by him into friends at a sitting.

Qualities like these are necessary to the successful, high-grade insurance solicitor. They should be cultivated at every turn. You are in "public life" and daily have to meet people. It is absolutely necessary that you employ diplomacy as did these two eminent tacticians. You know how you warm up to the man who treats you as you like to be treated—in a business-like way—because he has properly sized you up. You know how susceptible to such influences you are. If he went at you properly he could get your signature, or your last dollar, as the saying goes. Turn it around; get yourself into the same relative attitude toward the other fellow, from whom you want first an interview, then an application. 'Twill enhance your success. In other words, constantly study the art of being tactful in order that you may excel in it.

There is Nothing : : That Will Endure

By President Eliot, of Harvard.

HAVE often wondered if our civilization will leave anything to the archaeologist of 2000 years hence to study. You have studied materials that have endured under the earth for 3000 years. I have found it difficult to find any such durable things in our buildings, arts and great manufactures. Do we make any vases that record, as the Greek vases, our costumes, arts, religion, etc.? None. It may be that ours are not worth recording. Instead we attempt to put the records of 2000 years ago on our vases, much to the confusion of the archaeologists 2000 years hence.

Across the river there is a structure of concrete durable in spite of the frost of winter and the heat of summer. Will it stand? What will be the ruins of the Stadium 2000 years hence, or will the structure of steel and concrete stand?

All the products of our trade and commerce are the temporary. Our stone walls are mere veneers of three or four inches thick backed up by bricks. If you examine the producers of our great industries, they are perishable in a high degree and all are becoming more so.

The old books of Germany will last, but ours will not, for the paper will rot or dry in a short period hence. Where, then, shall we find material for the archaeologist 2000 years hence?

There is only one thing that will last—our subways. There are our chances. The Brooklyn Bridge, which is the foremost of our engineering structures, needs constant care.

I trust that out of your labors as they penetrate the minds of our people will come worthier arts and buildings to record our civilization to the future.

Paying Too Much for Success

By Orison Swett Marden.

IF a vigorous young business man, anxious to push his business and make money, were offered a million dollars to shorten his life ten years, would he accept the money on such terms? For what stocks and bonds would he exchange the peace and tranquility of his mind for the rest of his life? What price would tempt a man to trade his steady nerves for shaky ones scarcely enabling him to sign his name, or substitute for buoyant spirits and a vivacious manner jaded ennui and dull apathy? What would he ask for his bright, youthful countenance, if it was to be immediately replaced by a wrinkled, careworn visage, stamped with anxiety? How much would he take for his athletic figure, his quick, elastic step, if offered in exchange a bent form and a shuffling gait? How much real estate would he consider a fair compensation for the companionship of his wife, the joy and comfort of his home, and the sweet love of little children?

Suppose that a bright, hopeful college graduate were asked to sell, off-hand, the result of his four years' work, to give up his grasp of human nature, and to close forever all the doors of intellectual progress that his studies have opened to him,—how much money would close the bargain?

Ask some man, what he would take in exchange for the friendships that have made his life rich with hallowed experiences and perpetual inspiration, and which promise him pleasure and profit in future years.

Ask some respected citizen, influential for good in his community, whose advice is sought, who is held up as an example to growing youth, to sell his good name, his influence, his community's respect, what sum would he name?

Co-operative Socialism in Belgium. Socialism in Belgium has developed largely in the direction of co-operative enterprises. In that particular it has taken a firmer hold in that country than elsewhere. Co-operative evolution is already too far advanced for any opposition by the State to be effective. There are many huge co-operative organizations, and their energies are directed toward almost every phase of economic life. In the main they may be said to be successful; certainly they are far more successful than any attempts at co-operation which we have seen in America. Without doubt, their influence is beneficial. Most of the great co-operative associations have their own libraries, devoted particularly to economic and social science. In the Vooruit, at Ghent, I have seen a collection of many thousands of volumes devoted to these two subjects.

New Erie Locomotive. The Erie Railroad has ordered 137 very heavy freight locomotives and 5000 freight cars. The company is also having built three of the new and fast type of passenger engines known as "balanced compounds." These locomotives will pull more passenger cars at a higher rate of speed than any other kind. The company is also having built three heavy Pacific type of passenger engines.

Honduras Lottery Raided. Collector of Customs William E. Tibbitts, of the Mobile, (Ala.) district, seized 1,000,000 tickets of the Honduras National Lottery company, and at the same time notified W. C. Cable, W. Baltimet and James Ray, alleged officials of the company, to appear at his office. The seizure is result of correspondence that has been going on for some time with Washington. The tickets were on board the steamer Hiram just arrived from Honduras and the same vessel brought the alleged officers of the company.

FACE LIKE RAW BEEF

Burning Up With a Terrible Itching Eczema—Speedily Cured by Cuticura. "Cuticura cured me of a terrible eczema from which I had suffered agony and pain for eight years, being unable to obtain any help from the best doctors. My scalp was covered with scabs and my face was like a piece of raw beef, my eyebrows and lashes were falling out, and I felt as if burning up from the terrible itching and pain. Cuticura gave me relief the very first day, and made a complete cure in a short time. My head and face are now clear and well. (Signed) Miss Mary M. Fay, 75 West Main St., Westboro, Mass."

Always Says State of Maine. A really curious question has been raised by the Boston Herald. Why, it asks, does a Maine man always speak of his part of the country as "the State of Maine," instead of calling it simply "Maine," as a New Yorker would say "New York" or a Nebraskan "Nebraska?" As an adequate answer to the inquiry it says: "Maine was not one of the original States, but up to 1820 was a part of Massachusetts. It was then known as the District of Maine. In 1820, Maine achieved her independence and became a separate State of the Union and became a separate State of the Union."

Finnish Bride's Dress. In rural Finland a bride wears to church a curious combination of wedding veil and wedding bonnet. It is a great cap with ribbon streamers behind and in front a fall of lace which shadows the face. Over her dark cashmere dress she ties a handsomely embroidered white apron.

To Cure a Cold in One Day. Take Laxative Broom Quinine Tablets. All druggists refund money if no cure. E. W. Grove's signature is on box. 25c.

A bee that works only at night is found in India.

Assassination in Russia. Takings-off are so managed in Russia that the very chief of the third section has again and again proved unable to protect himself. Col. Sudeikin, who held office in the late Czars' time, transacted a good deal of his business on an upper floor in an out-of-the-way street, under a name as common as the English "Smith," and always with the door locked. A visitor had to knock in a certain manner, and give a password that was changed every day. Yet one day some one knocked, gave the password, got inside and opened fire. The colonel was badly hurt, but he killed his man and reached the landing—only to be finished off with an iron bar there by somebody else. No where does the unexpected happen oftener than in St. Petersburg.—N. Y. World.

Knew What He Was Talking About. A reader asks where the characterization of Washington as "first in war, first in peace and first in the hearts of his countrymen" comes from. It appears in the oration delivered by Major Henry Lee at the request of Congress in 1799.—Springfield Republican.

\$100 Reward, \$1000. The readers of this paper will be pleased to learn that there is at least one dreadful disease that science has been able to cure in all instances, and that is Catarth. Hall's Catarth Cure is the only positive cure now known to the medical fraternity. Catarth being a constitutional disease, requires a constitutional treatment. Hall's Catarth Cure is taken internally, acting directly upon the blood and mucous surfaces of the system, thereby destroying the foundation of the disease, and giving the patient strength by building up the constitution and assisting nature in her own work. The proprietors have much faith in its curative powers that they offer One Hundred Dollars for any case that it fails to cure. Send for list of testimonials. Address F. J. CHEREY & Co., Toledo, O. Sold by Druggists, 75c. Take Hall's Family Pills for constipation.

China's Coal Fields. China's resources of coal and iron are among the largest and most favorably situated in the world. The extent of the great coal fields has been put at 400,000 square miles—more than seventy times the aggregate extent of all the coal fields of Britain.