LOVE AND HUMAN NATURE.

Tale of a Short Courtship on the Mississippi River.

BY JOHN HABBERTON.

CHAPTER I.—Continued.

When the old man went away Jack retired to his little cabin and pretended to go to sleep, but he spent a most uncomfortable night. Why, even his boat cabin, not ten feet square, was a palace compared with the house at which he had taken supper. The idea of a man and woman bringing up such a daughter in such a place! What could they be thinking of, or, could it be they did not think at all? He thought his own quarters cramped and his river life almost as quiet as a hermit's, yet if that girl lived on a bee-boat she would see a great deal more of the world and its inhabitants than she ever could while she inhabited that bare cabin. But why should he think of her being on a bee-boat at all? There was no way for her to reach such luck unless she were some day to marry a man in the honey business; instead of that she would be sure to throw herself away on that stupid, unmannerly, lounging, hulking fellow with a gun. He wished his mother and sisters could have the making of that girl, and then send her back to her own country to teach her old acquaintances what was what. Wouldn't she make a stir if she could be put in that quiet old New Hampshire village—even if she made her first appearance in that very faded calico dress? As he imagined her walking into the village church, the white walls of that barn-like edifice suddenly grew rosy, to his closed eyes, and the scent of orange flowers banished the well-remembered and pervasive odor of caraway seed.

Nothing of that sort could happen, though, if she already was gone on that infernal fellow with a gun, as, of course, she was; if not, why did she rush out so wildly to stop him as he went along and bring him into the house? Beauty did not imply brains—he had learned this long ago in his home studies of heredity; neither did it save its possessor from rude tastes. Well, Jack was sure the whole affair was none of his business, and, if he could not get it out of his head, where it seemed determined to stay, he would have himself towed up the river ahead of time, and get away from such a nightmare of stupidity. If he could afford to rush the season a little he guessed the bees could stand it, too.

CHAPTER II.

As he emerged from his cabin in the morning, with a light and aching head, and began to make his toilet, he was startled by an apparition of the young man with a gun. Jack rubbed his eyes and saw that it was no apparition at all, but the man in his real person, with a very real gun. Jack had a gun of his own and knew how to use it, so he hurried into the cabin, slipped a cartridge into his rifle, and then peered cautiously through one of his little windows. The man was still there, but he did not seem in haste to proceed to bloody work, for he had leaned his gun against a tree and seated himself on a stump. Jack placed his own gun within the door yet where he could reach it quickly if necessary; then he ventured outside again. The man with the gun raised his head, saw Jack and shouted:

"Hello!"

"Hello yourself," Jack replied; then he thought it safe to say: "Won't you come aboard?"

"Don't care if I do."

Jack pushed out a plank, and the visitor, leaving his gun behind, sauntered aboard with his hands in his pockets and looked carelessly about him. He seemed to approve of what he saw, for he soon remarked:

"Mighty pooty bizness, this of yourn. Old man Mazzitt was tellin me 'bout it after he came back last night, an' I 'llowed I'd take a look at it if you didn't mind."

Evidently, then, the man with the gun was so close a friend of the family that he had spent the night with them. The idea of so uncouth a fellow being even under the same roof with that girl and treated as her equal! Jack wanted to toss him overboard and drive him to the bottom with a push-pole, but he restrained himself and explained the bee-boat business to him. If the fellow was to marry Lizzie perhaps the girl's life would be more endurable if her husband was to go into some business which would enable his wife to see what little of the world there is along the banks of the big river. It wasn't an impossible scheme. The business did not require much capital to start it, and, to tell the truth, there was not much more work about it than in carrying a gun and skulking about in the woods. So Jack enlarged a little upon what he had already said about bee-boating, and the fellow seemed to understand it, for he asked an intelligent question or two. Then he leaned against the sunny side of the cabin, looked Jack full in the eye, and startled the owner of the boat by remarking:

"You 'pear to be a pooty decent kind of a feller."

"Thank you," said Jack, "though I don't see how you've made up your mind on so slight acquaintance."

"Oh, well," said the hunter, "we have to learn in this country to take a man's measure pooty quick. There's a heap o' come along, some by land and some by water, an' there's no time to look up somebody that knows 'em and ask questions about 'em. If I didn't think more'n use all well of you, I wouldn't have come down here this morning to say somethin' to you—somethin' strictly 'tween man an' man."

"What the—something—is the fellow up to?" Jack asked himself.

"It's about her," said the native, nodding his head in the direction of Lizzie's residence.

"Don't worry about me," said Jack promptly and quite loftily. "I never attempted to take a girl away from another fellow."

"There's lots that she'll be taken away from, by why never gets her," was the reply. "I'll w'you ain't married? Well, her heads full of you."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Jack, with a frown which he could scarcely keep from becoming a smile. "She never saw me until last night."

"That don't make no difference," said the visitor. "I know the signs in gals. She couldn't talk about nothin' else all last night while me an' the old man was smokin'."

"You must have got two men mixed, my friend," said Jack. "I don't think I exchanged twenty words with her."

"I ain't have eyes as well as ears, my friend," was the reply. "I ain't a-goin' to go over again what she said, 'cause I don't b'lieve in tattlin', but what I've told you is dead sure, an' as you're a pooty decent kind of feller, as I said before, I made bold to come down an' ask you 'tween men, an' not to go any further, an' that you don't go to makin' yourself extry pleasant an' sociable-like onless you mean bizness."

Jack eyed the fellow sharply. Was this talk what it seemed on the surface, or was it a sly way of discovering whether he had any intentions regarding another man's sweetheart? Of course this man Bill was himself in love with the girl—he couldn't help it—no one could, Jack was sure, who saw her often. He had heard that some simple-looking Southerners were desperately crafty, and it was plain to Jack's practiced eye that this fellow, in spite of his rustic dress, was no fool; had he not discovered, through his own unaided intelligence, that Jack himself was "a pooty decent kind of a feller?" What could he be up to? Well, the most straightforward course was the best, particularly with a man who always carried a gun, and was astir so early in the morning.

"My friend," said Jack, "I give you my word as an honest man that all I'm thinking about down here is the bee business. I like the people I've met along the river, and the young woman you have been talking about is a very charming girl, but I've a mother and sisters of my own, and I've too much respect for other women to trifle with their feelings."

"I didn't 'llow that you'd do anythin' mean—leastwise—not a bit of it," was the reply. "It aint you I'm afraid of doin' anythin', it's her, bless her big, warm, natural, innocent, heart. You're somethin' new an' strange, not that she ain't seen other men that wasn't trought up in these parts, but I reckon you ain't like the rest of 'em; she thinks so, anyhow."

Jack had been studying the man closely while he talked. Unless all rules of human nature were false, this man was no sly dog; there were traces of the gentleman in the expression of his countenance. It was natural that he should not have said bluntly that he himself was in love with the girl; he had displayed admirable tact in the way he put the case. Jack's heart warmed toward him, and Jack's hand went forward as its owner said:

"Your manner does you great credit, old man, and I wish you joy of her. I promise solemnly that I will not go near her house again. When I find myself feeling lonesome I'll tramp in the opposite direction and find somebody to talk to. We Yankees are great talkers; everybody has his weakness, you know. But as for that girl, I again give you my word that I won't see her again."

The visitor dropped Jack's hand and his face grew long as he sighed:

"That'll be awful hard on her."

Jack stared in astonishment; then he began to lose his temper and he exclaimed—almost shouted:

"See here, old man, you talk like a fool. No man can be near that girl without admiring her a great deal; you have told me certain things about her; you don't want her to get more interested in me, nor me in her, yet——"

"Yes, I do," came with great energy from the visitor, while Jack in his surprise stepped backward and nearly tumbled into the river. "I only want you to keep away if you don't mean nothin' serious. Nothin' would suit me better than for her to git a man like you for her husband."

"What? And you give her up?"

Then it was the visitor's turn to be surprised. He began to straighten himself to a standing posture, and he continued until he seemed a giant when he said:

"What have I got to do with it? I aint her beau. I'm goin' to marry a friend of hers as soon as my cabin's done."

"Oh," said Jack, with a whole gamut of inflections as the change of conditions became clear to him. Then he found his brain in a whirl. It was utterly ridiculous, the discomfort he had suffered in abandoning that girl, which he had first seen only twelve hours before, to the man whom he supposed was her lover. Now that he learned she was free he wanted to shout with joy, which of course was equally ridiculous. Again, the fellow was probably mistaken; any man in love imagines everybody else in the same condition. He would question his informant farther, not that it would be possible for him to fall in love in earnest with a woman of whose family he knew nothing, but it would be delightful to be sure that so glorious a creature had really become interested in him.

"It's born in her," said the visitor, after a short chat about the indications which had aroused his interest. "Her father and mother went the same way. I've heard 'em, an' 'eg in how her mother, who was the most run-after gal in these parts, never took a shine to any feller till one day Sam came along. There'd been some land flooded down here by a break in the levee, an' Sam come down with some more fellers from up-river to go for deer that got bunched on a little rise of ground that the water didn't cover. He stopped at her old man's house to light his pipe; he didn't git no deer with his gun, but he got a 'dear' with his tongue before mornin'."

Then the visitor indulged in a long and gentle laugh over this time-honored joke of the vicinity. As for Jack, he murmured beneath his mustache:

"Heredity! heredity!"

"Sam could have done a good deal better for himself, in the money way," said the visitor, "if he hadn't been so fond of his wife. He's got a good head for business, an' more'n one big plantation owner back of the river has offered to go shares with him if Sam would manage the place an' let the owner go off North or somewheres else an' fool away his money, but Sam won't live anywheres but in the cabin where he first met his gal. Well, I don't blame him. If a feller has got that sort of stuff in him good and solid, he gits more good out of the world than money could buy him—don't you think so, stranger? The old gal's just as sweet an' pooty in his eyes as the first day he saw her, an' she can't see no change in him. Ain't that enough?"

"It certainly ought to be," sa'd Jack, with a great deal of feeling. The visitor, who had been studying Jack's half averted face, offered his own hand, which had a grasp like a vise, as he said:

"I thought you'd say so; I saw it in your eye. Well, I must be goin'. I'm after a buck that I saw in the woods down here a few days ago. He was too quick for me that time, but I marked his runway, an' I'm goin' to lay for him."

"Here!" shouted Jack, as the visitor was going ashore. "Won't you have something to keep the chills off?" Jack wondered, as he dashed into his cabin and emerged with a flask of brandy which he had brought down only for medicinal purposes, what any inhabitant of his native village would have thought had they seen him offer any one a drink that was stronger than water.

"Much obliged, but I don't ever take nothin'," was the reply. Then, after standing silent on the plank a moment, the visitor remarked:

"You didn't look to me like a drinkin' man."

"I'm not," said Jack. "I never touch liquor except when I am sick."

"Oh, that's all right," was the reply. "Twould have gone agin me to have found you was a drinkin' man."

"Say," shouted Jack, as the man again started away, "are you sure you have plenty of cartridges? Is your gun dead sure? You're welcome to take mine, it's the best that money can buy."

The visitor returned. Was there ever a hunter in so much of a hurry that he could not stop to look at another hunter's gun? Jack's breech-loader was looked over critically and admiringly, but returned with the remark:

"It's as pooty as a young magnolia in

THE BREECH-LOADER WAS LOOKED OVER.

its fust bloom, but I haven't got the hang of it. I can fire this old gal with my eyes shut an' hit the mark two times in three."

Jack had manners enough to remain on deck until the departing visitor was out of sight; then he entered his little cabin, threw himself on the bed, and did the hardest and most disconnected thinking of which he ever had been guilty. If Lizzie Mazzitt had been before his eyes he could not have seen her more plainly than he did lying there with his eyes shut. The whole thing was utterly ridiculous, but it was also very real. A handsome young woman—a clear case of heredity singling out of a single man—a young man impressed as he never had been before, and all in an atmosphere that seemed redolent of love and all manner of sweetness. What would people at home say? Hang the people at home! His mother and sisters had never known him to be mistaken in his estimates of human nature; they would trust him now; and as to others, it was none of their business. He would have no time for love-making; all such affairs in New Hampshire took a full year, unless they began in the summer and a fellow had to marry before planting season, so as to get to work. He might try to hasten things a little, so as not to delay his move up the river at the proper time—try to make the girl better acquainted with him, so that she would be willing to wait for him until the next season; but how awful it would be to be separated from her for a year—to be separated from this girl whom he had seen for about half an hour—no more! What nonsense!

Remembering that he had not breakfasted, he made some coffee and ate a biscuit; at dinner time his appetite was equally doubtful. He paced the shore beside the boat, arguing with himself, and finally informed himself that he never before had heard of such a fool. He would go right up to the cabin and see whether this girl was really what his fancy had painted her; girls beat Satan for appearing in different guises, as he had learned to his sorrow.

He reached the cabin in the middle of the afternoon, and the girl stood in the doorway. It was the same girl; a trifle less brilliancy of complexion, perhaps, than on the previous evening, but with more earnestness in her face. She seemed to be looking for some one.

"Pop ain't home," said she with a blush that seemed to Jack like a sun-

"POP AIN'T HOME," SAID SHE.

rise in paradise. "I thought he might be coming."

Jack looked at her intently, and the blush became the glory of the celestial day.

"Isn't he careless to go away and leave such a jewel unguarded?" the young man asked. He thought afterward it was a very stupid and stilted speech, but there are times when young men can't be sensible.

"Pop knows I'm perfectly able to take care of myself," said the girl, with an arch smile which robbed Jack at once of his senses, though it made him respect the speaker all the more. Still, he ventured to say:

"If you're not, you're welcome to call upon me any time, now or forever"

The girl's eyes opened wide, though without a bit of fear. Jack went on:

"I came up to ask you as a special favor to let me become well acquainted with you. I don't amount to much, but such as there is of me is genuine, and I'd be very glad if you could learn to like me."

"I like you now," said the girl, as honestly as if she was talking of some matter-of-fact affair.

"But I want you to like me more," the young man persisted. "I don't understand much but honey and human nature, but I do profess to know all that's worth knowing about both of them. I'm filling my boat with the best honey that ever was taken North, but it would be a great deal sweeter, and so would my life be forever, if I could take you, too."

"Are you joking?" asked the girl, with a very serious face.

"I never was more in earnest in my life," said Jack, lifting his hat and bowing his head.

"I'll follow you all over the world," murmured the girl. Jack looked up quickly, and saw a face so transfigured that he took it to his heart to make sure that it was real. He found that it was; so he kept it there for some moments, releasing it only for a second or two at a time for purposes which need not be explained to any one who has been in love.

Jack never could explain to his family and friends; all he could say was that there was something peculiar and delicious about the air of the Louisiana lowlands. Certain it is that he married Lizzie within the week, for the bees were demanding fresh flowers, and there began among the hives a honeymoon so long that it has not yet ended.

[THE END.]

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Buttercups.

Most people fancy that this bright little flower takes its name from butter itself. This history of its name reveals a different origin, however. In old English this flower was known as the "button-cop," which means simply "button-head," in allusion to the round button-shaped flowers. The word cop meant head in old English, but it has now been superseded by cup, and the old meaning has been wholly lost. Button gradually degenerated into butter, until every one now says "butter-cup." This is a peculiar instance in which the common name of a plant suggests its own origin, but suggests it falsely. The buttercup was once known as "gold-cop," or "gold-head," and "king-cop," names which are still preserved in England in "gold-cup" and "king-cup." The buttercup is a native of Europe, where for centuries it has been held in much esteem. It was once worn by lovers at their betrothals, and in more classical history its golden color was dedicated to Hymen. The buttercup was introduced into America many years ago, and has now become a weed. The double garden variety has long been cultivated. When eaten, it leaves a harsh, bitter, and acrid sensation, often so intense as to produce serious poisoning. In fact, it is a common notion in many countries that the pretty buttercup is poisonous to cattle. Certain it is that cattle seldom eat it unless it is dried in hay, when its poisonous properties are lost.

An erroneous idea seems to prevail with some people that they can make any machine for their own use, no matter whether it is patented or not, so they go no farther than making for their own use. Section 4884, of the patent laws, however, gives to the patentee the "exclusive right to manufacture, use and sell," and to grant to others these rights, for seventeen years, after which the inventor gives his invention to the public. Many parties have gotten themselves into serious trouble and expense by such misconception of the patent laws, and we consider it our duty to call attention to this section of the United States laws.

The extent to which civilization has been carried into Africa is indicated by the fact that the Zulu singers who are now interesting London have seventy-seven English songs on their repertoire, and are particularly fond of rendering "Bid Me Discourse" and "Annie Laurie." It may be, however, that, like the wild men from Borneo and Circassian girls of the dime museums, these dark-skinned artists are native productions of Great Britain or Ireland.

A reform of young ladies' handwriting is proposed by a "matron," who is indignant at the want of grace which is shown in the calligraphy of the rising generation. She calls it "bold, coarse, and vulgar," and compares the writing with the pretty Italian style that was the fashion a few years ago. The young ladies have themselves altered, perhaps, as handwriting, according to the modern notion, is a sure test of character.

In Japan a play called the "Extermination of Christianity" is on the boards. In the slaughter of make-believe missionaries to the shrieks of the orchestra the act is wildly applauded. However displeasing this circumstance may be, it is less to be deplored than the more practical method of China, in which real missionaries are used.

A ruling by the postmaster of Brooklyn is rather interesting. He holds that a letter carrier is not obliged to take packages piled on top of a letter box because they are too large to go in, and that the government is not responsible if they are stolen.

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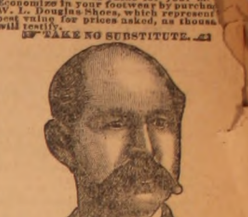

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