

A RUNAWAY MATCH.

BY JEANETTE LINDEK.



YOU were asking about John Aikin. You had not gone to China, had you, when his windfall came?

"Inheriting his uncle's property, do you mean? It was just before I left. What a pompous old jackass he was, to be sure, but his daughter was a little darling."

"You are right in both statements! Take another cigar. But if you thought John Aikin pompous when he was schoolmaster at Eyreville, you should have seen him after he came into possession of ten thousand a year and his uncle's splendid home. I've heard of people you can't touch with a forty-foot pole," and he was surely one of them. Airs! To see him riding about in his open barouche and bowing to his neighbours, was a study of condescension for an emperor. And poor little Polly had a hard time of it."

"When didn't she have a hard time of it? There wasn't a boy in the school who didn't pity Polly, if she was the schoolmaster's daughter. When we were all out shouting and playing, we could see her, buried in a big check apron, resting from Latin grammar and Euclid by beating eggs for her father's puddings, or roasting herself over a hot fire cooking his chops. Why, he actually let that mite of a girl black his boots. I have seen her do it!"

"You never would have imagined it, however, if you had met Miss Aikin for the first time at Aikin Place. Aikin Place was what the ex-schoolmaster called his uncle's house, as soon as it became his own. And poor little Polly never had a harder time cooking his chops and blacking his boots than she had in acquiring the dignity he considered proper in his daughter's position. To see his frown when she nodded to an old friend, instead of sitting stiffly erect and inclining her head half an inch, was to know something of the child's daily martyrdom. She must never walk in the roads or lanes—Miss Aikin's carriage was always at her command. She must never wear a dress in which she could romp or run—Miss Aikin's wardrobe contained the richest silks and velvets. She must never run out to see an old friend, or invite one to tea—Miss Aikin made formal calls and gave stately entertainments."

"Poor little Polly! It must have been amusing to see the wee bright child trying to be a grand lady."

"John Aikin allowed the business of the estate to remain in my hands, and I was a frequent visitor at the house. But never did he come down off his stilts for me or allow Polly to forget one ruffe of her new dignities. Sometimes, if she chanced to be alone, I found the bright, unaffected Polly we all loved, but as soon as her father entered the room she froze."

"She was always afraid of him."

"And yet she did defy him at last. You remember Will Marshall?"

"Well! And, bless me, he was Polly's lover when she had not conquered the alphabet."

"And remained her lover ever after. That was the trouble."

"But what was the matter? He was as fine a fellow as ever breathed, and old Marshall was rich?"

"How rich, you see. As long as Mr. Marshall was one of the richest in the state, Polly's love affairs ran on smoothly. Will's horse was fastened at the gate of Aikin Place every day, and many an hour Polly and he spent riding through the shady lanes about Eyreville. Not one word of opposition was made to their engagement, and if Polly ever did have any natural free enjoyment, it was when she was with Will, and away from her father. Her wedding cards were out, and Mr. Aikin was preparing to astonish the country by the magnificence of the marriage festivities when old Mr. Marshall suddenly became bankrupt and committed suicide. At first it was supposed that the wedding was postponed out of respect to the memory of the bridegroom-elect's father, but that idea exploded very speedily. Mr. Aikin strutted about the village swelling with indignation at the villany that would have made his daughter the wife of a pauper."

"Bless me! how long was this after he ceased to be but a few removes from a pauper himself?"

"About three years. Miss Aikin, he boasted, could marry anybody—the best in the land. But Polly did not want to marry anybody. Her ideas on that subject were very positive, and she wanted to marry Will Marshall. There were terrible scenes. I was confidential friend of all the parties, and I was amazed to see what courage and spirit shy, timid little Polly possessed. The war lasted several months, and Mr. Aikin pushed forward the claims of other suitors with great energy and perseverance. But Polly was as resolute as he was, and one morning took the train to York, met Will at the station, and was married by noon. I had the telegram announcing that fact, with the request to "Please tell papa."

"There was a lively scene then, I imagine."

"It was awful. I have seen men in a rage, plenty of them, but I never saw such fury as John Aikin's in my life. He was fairly livid."

"I hate white rage."

"It means mischief. John Aikin cursed Polly in terms that made me shiver, old lawyer as I am; he swore that not one penny of his should go to Will Marshall if they both starved."

"That was not likely. Will Marshall was not a man to depend upon a rich father-in-law, were he ever so amiable."

"No, but still—but I will tell that that afterwards. I did not send back the telegram John Aikin wrote out, because I am not a brute, but I sent one of my own telling Polly that her father was very angry, and that there was no hope of present forgiveness. I know she wrote several times, and her letters were tossed into the fire unopened. Then I lost sight of her for several years. In that time it became a sort of grin joke to me to draw up John Aikin's will two or three times a year, and destroy it, to make a new one. I think I drew up at least a dozen, not one of which was ever signed. Sometimes he left his property split up into portions for fifty different charities; sometimes he divided it amongst his relatives; sometimes he left it in bulk to a

library; sometimes to a hospital; but never one shilling was left to Polly or her husband."

"But why did he never sign them?"

"Superstitions. He believed that signing a will always preceded speedy death. Why, there are wills in this office my father drew up forty years ago, and the testators-to-be are alive yet. But I never told John Aikin that. I told him every year I ever heard about men who dropped dead going home from the lawyer's after they had signed their wills, all the cases of heart disease and apoplexy that followed their testamentary efforts. I knew if he died without a will Polly must inherit his property, and I wasn't going to stand in Polly's light if I could help it."

"I see! Did he die then?"

"It was long after we had lost sight of Polly that people began to strap their shoulders and talk in low tones about John Aikin. Nobody liked him. Such airs of superiority are hard to swallow in a free country, and there was not a man in Eyreville quite ready to eat humble pie to John Aikin. So when he began to show signs of mental weakness there were plenty to nod and wink and laugh behind his back. The first inkling I had was in the wild directions I got about his business affairs, and when one day I had five directly contradictory orders in one note, I went for Dr. Hay. After seeing his patient he sent for a York physician, and they both decided that he was as "mad as a March hare." We introduced a keeper into the house as an old friend came to make a visit, and I undertook to find Polly. Little I knew the task it would be. Letters were returned, visits to York were unavailing, and advertisements of the most urgent kind were unheeded. I was breaking down with the weight of responsibility, for Mr. Aikin was in full bodily health, and cunning as a fox. I was in terror all the time lest he should do some mischief, and yet I had no authority for shutting him up in an asylum."

"I should have taken the authority."

"And perhaps he would have recovered in a month and sued you for false imprisonment. You see he was not a raving lunatic, and there were times when he was as sane as anybody. Just when I was getting desperate I received a letter written by the superintendent of an institution for the instruction of the blind, stating that having seen my advertisement, he wrote to say that he had had a man named William Marshall under his care, and thought he might be found if I so directed. He was quite sure this William Marshall had a son named John Aikin, and thought it might be the man I was seeking."

"Blind! Poor little Polly!"

"I took the next train, and three days later I found Will Marshall, Polly, and their three children. You might well say poor little Polly then. Will had injured his eyesight by writing late into the night, earning a mere pittance as a clerk. He had never had any business training, and found it very hard to obtain any employment. I fear they came very near the starvation of which Polly's father spoke, and that it was a want of proper nourishment that at last broke Will down with typhoid fever, from which he recovered blind. But this was after years of struggle, and when the youngest of the children was nearly a year old. Brave little Polly never lost heart. Will spoke of her as he might have done of an angel as he told me of her cheerfulness, her courage, her hopeful spirit that never broke under all the burdens laid upon it. She had taken in sewing, had tended in a store, had forty times turned every penny earned before spending it. She had never let an opportunity to work pass by when her little hands could accomplish the task. When I at last found her she had established a school for little children, and managed to live on what she earned; but it was well Will was blind. Could he have seen the pale little Polly who came in while he talked, with haggard face, gray hair and hollow eyes, I think his heart would have broken. Only the cheery ring of her voice was left of the Polly of old, and that, I am sure, was cultivated to meet Will's ear. Shabby in dress, weariness printed on every line of her face, with three pale, thin children as shabby as herself, Polly wrung my heart, tough as it is. It took some argument to make her return to Eyreville, but she came at last, as my guest. To my relief and amazement, Mr. Aikin received them all as distinguished guests from abroad. The best in the house was not too good for them, and I could supply money for all needs. Our first care was to place Will under the treatment of an oculist, who gave but little hope at first, but after a year of "building up" of the whole system, undertook an operation that was successful. By that time there was no question of Mr. Aikin's insanity, and the necessary legal measures to give his son-in-law control of his property were easily managed. He lived three years after Polly came home, never once recognising her, but sometimes insisting he was entertaining one royal visitor, sometimes another. They were very kind to him, humoured all his whims, and I think little Polly mourned sincerely when he died. But if you call at the house now, I am sure you will have cordial greeting from your old schoolmates, Will Marshall and Polly."

"I will certainly call. Midnight! How time flies! There are a lot of other people I want to ask about, but if there is as long a story for each one as you have just told me, we must postpone our gossip until to-morrow."

"Good-night, then. But, beware! Don't tell my clients that I gossip, or the results will be dreadful!"

FLAG BRAND, PICKLES AND SAUCE cannot be equalled. HAYWARD BROS., Manufacturers, Christchurch.—(ADVT.)

D.I.C. WHOLESALE & FAMILY WAREHOUSES, CASSELL STREET, CHRISTCHURCH; AND AT DUNEDIN AND LONDON.

Largest Stock and best variety in the colony to choose from, sold in any quantities at WHOLESALE PRICES. Special facilities for country orders and distant customers. Samples, prices, and full particulars on application.

B. HALLENSTEIN, Chairman. E. C. BROWN, Manager.

STRANGERS visiting Christchurch are frequently at a loss to know where they can buy Additions to their TOILET or OUTFIT to best advantage. We can recommend

MESSRS SHAW, ROBINSON, AND CO., THE HALL, HIGH-STREET.

as holders of Extensive Stocks, who offer every facility for business, and are reliable people.

LONDON AND PARIS FASHIONS.

(SEE FASHION-PLATE, PAGE 306.)

SOME of the smartest and daintiest Parisian millinery, especially designed for late winter and early spring, may be seen at the present moment. These designs represent invariably all that is newest and most chic in the way of French fashions. Our artist has sketched a selection of these bonnets on page 306, which cannot fail to be of interest.

No. 1 is quite a novel little bonnet, with the sharply-pointed sugar-loaf crown so much worn in Paris. It is made of jet open-work, with a becoming brim of lace and jet, and a full rosette bow of black velvet ribbon at the back. The strings are also of black velvet.

No. 2 is a large shape in black open-work crinoline straw, trimmed with a big bow of gold-coloured surah, and having in front a large jet buckle, through which is drawn a band of gold surah. High at the back the crown is trimmed with clusters of black ostrich feathers and a gold aigrette.

No. 3 is an exceedingly smart bonnet of fine black net, trimmed both in front and at the back with bows of gold galon, embroidered with jet. Small wing-shaped jetted ornaments are placed on either side, and at the back there is a tall black spray. Tied with strings of black velvet, this will be found a wonderfully becoming bonnet.

No. 4 is a novel kind of hat made in red-and-black striped straw, and with the brim very prettily caught up at the back. The trimming consists of smart bows of red velvet and groups of small birds of black plumage. The bows and birds are placed some at the back of the hat and some in front, with an excellent and most original effect.

No. 5 is one of the newest variations on the torador shape, suitable for summer wear. The crown is of fawn *crêpe de chine*, very fully gathered, while the brim is of brown velvet, closely covered with fawn straw passementerie. The brim is cut away on one side to show a small bow of dark brown velvet. Ostrich tips and an aigrette, with some ribbon bows, form the trimming at the back.

FASHION SCRAPS.

The 'sheath skirt' is 'uncomplimentary' to tall, slim women, and it outlines and emphasises the adipose contours of a stout stout one. Women who like neither the bell nor the sheath skirt, with fan back, and who have tired of plaitings, take refuge in the moderately gored skirt, with either a long apron overdress open up the side to the belt, or with a similar foundation, graced with draperie à la Grecque.

Square-toed and round-toed boots are coming in, say the knowing. We are seeing the last of the pointed forms. Women with small feet are smiling, for they think they can button themselves into shorter sizes.

Long, grey pearl kid gloves seem to be the proper things at the matinees. They go with the inevitable bunch of violets most excellently.

Pale green, apricot, light blue, and rose de chine are preferred colours in spring millinery.

A new material is tulle etacelle—that is, tulle sparkling with powdered gold. It makes a toque with a large white velvet bow arranged as an aigrette in the back, with in front a great gold butterfly.

Five pretty bridesmaids at a pretty wedding wore crepon frocks of the pale shade of Neapolitan violets, looped with silver girdles over petticoats of silver brocade. Their white hats had Neapolitan violets for trimmings, and they carried baskets of the same flowers mixed with valley lilies.

DON'T BE A BACHELOR.

YOUNG man, don't live a spinster bachelor.

It is not good for you. It will neither improve your morals, your health, nor your beauty.

Marry as you can make it convenient, and as you can shape your affairs to support a wife.

But when you marry don't fall in love with a face instead of a woman.

Remember that common sense is a rare virtue, much better than silver, and gold, and fashion.

Don't court and marry dress and money-bags, simply because it is dress and gold in plenty, but look for some practical sense in a woman first; that is the touchstone to try her other qualities by.

When you have that all else comes. Your wife that is to be, if she is full of common sense will grow to your way of thinking, and make you grow to hers.

A woman that has womanly love in her heart will find ways to make your love towards her grow as the years grow over you both.

And another thing needs to be heeded, and that is—a common-sense woman is not to be found where fashion insists upon dragging your females into a whirl, where there is simply idle gossip and tattle.

Young man, don't stand looking after that young woman with the distinguished air, the reputation of a flirt and belle, and whose father has heaps of cash; for it is not impossible that while you are straining your eyes that way, you may be turning your back upon some unobtrusive damsel, whom nature has cut out for your better-half, and who may be just that pleasant-faced, placid-tempered, lovable little creature who will think enough of you to go with you to the end of the world, and stay by and comfort you when you get grey-haired and fidgety.

Marry, young gentlemen, and keep yourselves out of scrapes.

Have something to live for.

A man alone in the world isn't more than half a man, and the world wants entire men.

So mend yourself and be happy.

To lengthen the life of cut flowers, chip the stems and let them rest for a while in steaming hot water. This will restore their freshness.

Young husband (meeting his wife at the railway station): "Didn't I telegraph you not to bring your mother?" Young wife: "I know you did. That's what she came to see you about. She read the telegram."