

SUNSET.

BY W. L. ALDEN.

"I don't claim," continued the landlord, "that the Blue Mountain Mansion House is the biggest hotel in the United States; and I don't profess to keep a brass band to play while folks are eating their dinners and to keep them from digesting their food. There is nothing that will give a man dyspepsia so quick as listening to a brass band while he's eating. Any intelligent doctor will tell you that music is a slight more indigestible than fried sole leather; and as I calculate to look after the health of my guests, I don't allow any music at all times. But as a moderate sized hotel without a brass band, I'm prepared to back my hotel against any other summer resort in the country for general healthiness, good cooking, first-class liquors and elevated moral tone. You've been here a fortnight, and I reckon that you'll agree with me."

"Of course, I do," replied I. "It is so common here that I can't tell a week day from Sunday."
"Just so," exclaimed the landlord. "I've always said that there's a sort of holy Sabbath calm about this place. I suppose that it would astonish you some if I were to tell you that three ladies that have been in the habit of spending every summer here for the last nine years left me this morning on the ground that my house ain't moral enough for a respectable woman."

"I can't imagine what they could find to offend their sense of propriety in your hotel," I said.
"As you were saying," said the landlord, in an unnecessarily loud tone, "the Republicans ain't as sound on the hard money question as they ought to be."
Just then an old man, white-haired and feeble, crossed the veranda, leaning on the arm of a lady of at least 60 years, whose wonderfully peaceful and happy face I had often noticed. When they had disappeared into the interior of the hotel, the landlord said, in a lower tone:—
"Excuse me, but I didn't want those folks to think that we were talking about the hotel, for it was on account of them that the three ladies I told you of left me."

"I was certainly very much astonished, and promptly said so; for a more inoffensive couple than the old man and his sweet-faced wife I had never seen. The landlord seemed to take counsel with himself in silence for a moment, and then he said:—
"Seeing as it is you, and seeing as it always does me good to talk when I'm riled, I'll just tell you the whole story. That there old gentleman and the lady that is with him are a runaway couple and somehow my three old patrons found it out, and wouldn't consent to stay any longer unless I turned 'those creatures' out, as they called them. Now, I don't allow no woman and no three women to dictate to me how to run a hotel."

"Besides, the old couple are friends of mine—leastways the lady is—and I wouldn't hurt her feelings to please the whole bill of guests. I said so pretty plain, and consequently my three ladies packed up and left, and a nice reputation they'll give me among their friends. How did these old people come to elope? Well, that's what I'm going to tell you. It ain't a very long story, but in case you get tired, just say so, and I'll shut up."
"I've only been in this place a little more than nine years. Before that time I kept the Grand Eastern Hotel, in East Yaphank, where I was born and raised. Forty years ago the prettiest girl in the whole town of Yaphank was Miranda Smith, and she was similarly the richest and the smartest. Her mother was dead, and her father was Judge Smith, who perhaps you have heard about. He was a very distinguished man, having been justice of the peace for 33 years, and having had the delirium tremens 18 times."

"He died accidentally in the prime of life, in consequence of having called the postmaster a liar, because the postmaster, who was a kind-hearted man, had told the judge that he was too drunk to be on the street alone, which was strictly true, though, of course, the judge resented it, and of course the postmaster had to shoot when he heard himself called a liar in the presence of a crowd of leading citizens, who wouldn't have left him in office a week longer if he had cravished and made no attempt to defend his honor, for naturally the judge drew just as soon as he had freed his mind about the postmaster, and if the latter hadn't been particularly spy with his weapon he would have been shot before he could get out his gun."

"I thought that perhaps you might have heard of Judge Smith over in England, for he was a powerful enemy of your country, and was everlastingly making speeches denouncing the atrocious conduct of England, just in a general way."

The landlord paused for breath, and I seized the occasion to remind him that he had promised to tell me the story of an elopement.
"Speaking of Miranda Smith," continued my friend "while she was as good a girl as ever stepped, there is no denying that she had a temper of her own, and a way of saying things that wasn't calculated to please the general public. She might have had the pick of all the young men in town, but she made the majority of them mad by saying things that no human young man would allow to pass without shooting, if they were said by anybody but a woman, and the balance of the young men were actually afraid to make her acquaintance."

"There was a young chap in particular, who played the organ in the Second Presbyterian Church—Sam Bartlett was his name—who, being naturally timid, and having had what little courage he was born with pretty near blown out of him by the organ, was that afraid of Miranda that he would go a mile out of his way to avoid meeting her in the street. What it was that Miranda saw in him I never could tell; but she made a dead set at him, and, after making his acquaintance, and taming him, so to speak, she actually promised to marry him, and the two used to walk out arm in arm, to all appearances as sweet as

one another. In my two young idiots that you ever knew."
"Everybody was astonished at the news of the engagement of Sam and Miranda. Not that there was anything against the young man, except that he was a little too exact in his habits. He was rather small and insignificant-looking, and you would have said that he hadn't as much muscle as an ordinary school girl. But this would have been a mistake. The way he yanked the sound out of that church organ, till he made the whole building shiver as if it had an attack of chills and fever, showed that he had considerable strength concealed about him. I never took to him very much, for he used to write poetry for the weekly newspaper, and poetry is something that I never could get on with."

"When you come to look at it, what is poetry? Why, it is just a fashion of saying things wrong at first, and a man who gets into any such habit isn't to be trusted. If you or I was wanting to say that it was raining hard, we'd say so; but the man who writes poetry would take about 40 times as many words, and would contrive to give us his information about the weather upside down and wrong end first. Still, I'm ready to admit that Sam Bartlett was honest and straightforward when he wasn't fooling with his poetry, and there isn't any doubt that he had read a powerful sight of books and knew no end of useful things."

"Then, again, he was an amiable sort of fellow—the kind of man who can never altogether make up his mind whether he'll be a man and act accordingly, or whether he'll pass his time in showing that he is sorry that he wasn't born a woman."

"I suppose he was fond of Miranda, but my idea is that most of the courting was done by her. She was in love with Sam from head to foot. If anybody ventured to say the least thing reflecting on him Miranda was ready to fight then and there. Of course, I don't mean that she carried a gun and was in the habit of drawing on people; but what I mean to say is that she would show every sign of being fighting mad. She always treated Sam as if she was the man and he was the woman. To see them together you would have said that she was Sam's dotting mother, instead of his young woman. Well, it wasn't any business of mine."

"I suppose there's many different ways of loving. There was old Smedley's wife—Smedley the carpenter—who built the major portion of this identical hotel. Well, his wife was as fond of him as a woman could be of any man; but she used occasionally to knock him flat with the frying pan, and Smedley always maintained that it was only her way of showing her affection. I never fell in love myself, and don't pretend to know much about the business; but I must say that when a woman's affections takes the shape of a frying pan, and hits you on top of the head, knocking you senseless for, say, half an hour at a time, I can get along without it. Then, again, there was Dea Bradford's wife—one of the meekest little women that ever lived. Dea Bradford was one of our leading men, being a direct descendant of Gov. Bradford, who came over in the Mayflower, which most people seem to think was a mighty smart performance, though I can't see it in that light."

"My own idea is that the people who came over in the Mayflower had to come, for the reason that nobody could endure them any longer on the other side of the Atlantic. As for their descendants, they make me tired. Why, there was a meeting of descendants of the Mayflower gang held in this very hotel two years ago, and if I had to go through with another such experience I'd close the hotel and go out of the business. If you are a Mayflower descendant I hope you won't take any offence, for I don't mean any, and, of course, there are exceptions to all general rules."

"For instance, a nigger, as a rule, will steal chickens. Everybody knows that to be a fact, and yet I once had a nigger in my employ who wouldn't steal a chicken under any consideration. He stole nothing but ducks and turkeys. Now, you'll admit that was strange!"

"You were saying," I remarked, without answering the landlord's question, "that Miss Smith was engaged to Mr. Bartlett. Did she marry him?"
"Not a bit of it. They were just on the point of being married when Judge Smith had a birthday, and celebrated it in his usual style. He was living at the time, that there unfortunate difficulty with the postmaster, that I think I mentioned, not taking place till the following December. The judge was a master hand at making punch, and on his birthdays he used to have about half a dozen of his most intimate friends up to his house to drink punch in the evening. Considering that Sam was pretty near a member of his family, the judge insisted on his coming to the birthday celebration, and naturally Sam came."

"Now, Sam had never drunk a drop of punch in his life, being, as I have already said, altogether too correct in his habits; but he didn't dare to refuse the judge's punch, and finding it particularly good he drank a middling fair lot of it, and, consequently, it collared him. That's the danger of never drinking anything. Now, you and I, who are accustomed to take our whiskey when we want it, know just how it will act, and know when we've had enough. But Sam had never had any experience, and that was the reason why he found himself pretty considerably drunk long before the judge or any of his friends had laid in half the cargo that they were entitled to carry."

"Knowing that something was wrong with him, Sam managed to get away from the judge's about 8 o'clock, and went straight, or perhaps I should say, considering his condition, went crooked, to the Second Presbyterian Church, where he was to play the organ at a meeting of a missionary society that was due at half-past 8. He got there all right and played the organ, but he didn't give general satisfaction."

"He kept bursting out with tunes every time a man rose up to speak, and the noise that organ made was so tremendous that folks thought there must be a riot in progress and came rushing into the church from all over the town."

They had to get the constable to remove Sam before the meeting could get a chance to hear itself think, and I needn't say that Sam was never allowed to play the organ in that church again."

"When Sam woke up the next morning with a head about the size of Daniel Webster's and Abraham Lincoln's rolled into one, he found a letter from Miranda waiting for him, in which she gave him particular 'Hail Columbia!' I never saw the letter, but knowing Miranda I can guess pretty well what was in it. Any way, she told him that, after his disgraceful conduct, she would never see him again, and that if he dared to write to her he would get himself into the biggest kind of trouble. Sam knew that it was all up, for Miranda was the sort of girl who had rather lose \$5 any day than go back on her word."

"After getting that letter and losing his place as organist, and ruining his reputation, Sam sort of wilted generally, and the first thing we knew an Irish widow had gathered him in, and made him marry her, and help her keep a boarding house for the hands in Macdonald's big carriage factory."

"Now, Miranda, seeing that she had driven Sam to, and knowing perfectly

well that his disgraceful conduct at her father's birthday party was owing entirely to Sam's want of experience, began to feel sorry for what she had done. A little while after Sam's marriage the old judge met with his last accident, and, I suppose, it sort of softened Miranda; for when a person loses a beloved relative, no matter if that relative has been in the habit of having the delirium tremens once a year regular, and mistaking his daughter for a blue monkey or some other style of animal, and trying to cut her throat, naturally that person feels more kindly toward other people than usual. I ain't saying that I'm built that way, for I never lost but one relative of any consequence, seeing that both my parents were cut off by a railroad accident when I was too young to appreciate the circumstances, and when that particular relative, who was my uncle on my mother's side, and who was as rich as a Cresset, died of typhoid fever, as the doctor said, though I always considered that what really killed the old man was the defeat of the Democratic party in 1880, for then he was the worst kind of a Democrat, being that ignorant that he could hardly read and write, and was calculating on being made judge of the supreme court in case the Democrats carried the election."

"My uncle hadn't a relative in the world, excepting myself, and, of course, I supposed that all his money would come to me; but after I had given him a funeral that cost me \$800, and was calculated to make every corpse in the churchyard green with envy if they were capable of knowing what was going on, the lawyer produced a will in which all my uncle's property was left to a lot of hospitals and such. His death never softened me a particle. On the contrary, they do say that for the next fortnight after that will was opened, any man that wanted a difficulty had only to mention the word 'funeral' in my presence. But, then, you—"

"For heaven's sake get on with the story of the elopement!" I interrupted. "I've got to sail for England, in six weeks more, and I'd like to hear the end of your story before that time."

"All right," said the landlord. "I'll try to get through before you leave. I think I was telling you that Miranda showed signs of being sorry for having shook poor Sam. The way she showed it was by making acquaintance with Mrs. Sam, and trying to smooth things between man and wife. You see, Sam's wife used to take more whiskey than was good for her, she being a woman, and not having as sound a judgment as a man would have had."

"And then, being what you might call a violent woman at all times, she made the house considerably warm for Sam when she wasn't quite sober. She didn't actually take a club to him, and she never, so far as I know, threw anything at him that was calculated to do damage to the furniture or anything else that it might strike; but she used to abuse him with her tongue till his life was a burden to him. Miranda did her level best to exercise a good influence over the woman, and to make her appreciate Sam's good qualities, and to go easy with him; but it wasn't much use. In course of time Sam and Miranda got to be friendly again."

"I don't mean to say for a single minute that either of them ever said a thing that a married man and a woman that wasn't his wife ought not to say; but it was a great comfort to Sam to know that Miranda felt kindly to him, and she enjoyed herself considerable in thinking that she was helping to make Sam a little less miserable than he would have been without her."

"Things were going on in this way when I got a first class offer for my hotel, and, after selling it, came here, where I have lived since. I lost sight of Sam and Miranda, and had pretty near forgotten all about them when one day they drove up to this identical front door, and said they had come to spend the summer with me. I fixed them up as comfortable as I could, and you never saw two people as happy as they were from the first minute they landed here. I could see that old age and trouble, combined with a naturally weak head, had told on Sam, and that he was nothing more or less than a feeble old man."

"But Miranda took as much care of him as if he had been a baby, and all day long she was walking with him or reading to him, or sitting under the trees holding his hand and talking to him. Such a pair of lovers I had never had in my house before, though in the season we generally have half a dozen young married couples working through their honeymoon here."

"The next night after Sam and Miranda came, she walked into my office, and said she wanted to talk confidential to me. Then she told me that she and Sam were not married, and that she had eloped with him. I was clean knocked over with astonishment that I just sat with my mouth wide open, not being able to find any words that would do justice to my feelings, though I'm considered to have a pretty good flow of language."

"Then Miranda told me all about it. She said that Sam had been a good husband to that Irishwoman for going on to 20 years, but that his life wasn't any better than a hell on earth."

"I did my level best," said Miranda, "to make them do their duty to one another, but it wasn't any use; and I could see that Sam was clean brokenhearted, and that the time was drawing near when he'd give up trying to live. Now, you know what a good man Sam always has been. He's the only man I ever loved, and it was all my fault that he took up with the Irishwoman. If I'd been reasonable and married him, he would have had a happy life; but I ruined him by my silly and wicked conduct in breaking off our engagement. I went round to his house one night, and there was Sam, sitting in a chair and looking at his wife, who was lying dead drunk on the floor with a whip in her hand. There was a big welt over Sam's face, and I hadn't any need to ask how it came there. I went up to him and put my arms around his neck. I said:—

"Sam, we haven't but a few more years to live, and I ain't going to have you die without ever knowing what it is to be happy. You just go upstairs and pack your trunk, and in an hour's time I'll come to take you to the railroad depot. We'll go to some place where that woman can't find you, and I'll take care of you every minute for the rest of your life. You put your trust in me, and we'll see if I can't make up, for all the years that you've had to spend with that woman—

"I wanted to say 'that fiend,' but I knew that Sam didn't like to have any one use language about his wife."

"You're a pretty sharp man and can see your eyes; so there's no need for me to tell you that Sam's mind ain't what it once was, and that he's got consider-

able distance into his second childhood. That don't make any difference to me. I love him just the same, and I'll never leave him as long as the breath is in his body. He's perfectly happy with me, and, though you'll say that I've disgraced myself, and that I ain't fit to stay in a decent hotel, I'm not a bit ashamed of what I've done; for I did the whole of it, and you can't blame Sam any more than you could a baby. I'd do the same thing again to-morrow if I hadn't done it already. Now, I've told you the truth, and I want to know if you're going to turn us out of the hotel?"

"What did you say?" I asked, for the landlord had suddenly become silent.

"What did I say? Why, I told Miranda that she and Sam should stop with me forever, if they wanted to, and that I'd lose every guest in the hotel sooner than inconvenience her. And so I would, b'gosh! And I said so last night to those three ladies that somehow had got hold of the fact that Sam and Miranda had eloped, and said that either 'those creatures'—that what they called Miranda and Sam—should leave the hotel, or they would leave for good and all. Hush! Here they come! Yes Sir. There ain't nothing better for rheumatism than syrup of wild turnip, and I'm surprised to hear you say that they never use it in England."

"The slanting rays of the setting sun fell on the lovers as they crossed the veranda."

They were on their way to the pine grove that stood just behind the hotel. Sam was leaning on Miranda's arm, and she was shading his head with her parasol. He walked slowly, and with the uncertain tread of an old and falling man. She walked with head erect, as though defying the judgment of the world, except when she spoke to her companion, when the unutterable tenderness of a mother to a dying child was shown in her face. The lovers passed into the shadow of the pine trees, and as I glanced at the landlord I saw that his eyes were moist.

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