

#### XXXV. COURTING AND MARRYING.

Of course, in order to keep up the population, it was necessary to marry and be given in marriage that the earth might be multiplied and replenished, and therefore there was "courting" among the young folks, and when a wedding was announced, until it finally came off the country for miles around was on the tip-toe of expectation, for everybody of respectability knew that they would be invited to the wedding and "infair ."

Before the wedding occurred, to the high contracting parties the most

important feature in connection with the interesting event was getting ready, or in other words, "courting," or "sparking," as it was generally called in those days. Spelling schools, singing schools, corn husking, quilting bees and the like through the week furnished opportunities for meetings when the expectant groom would accompany his best girl home through the woods along the Indian trail.

Don't you remember those evening strolls with her who was to be your partner for life leaning gently on your arm, her face upturned, wreathed in smiles of perfect satisfaction, heart pouting cherry red lips ready for the osculatory greeting that was sure to be forthcoming? Of course you do. On one of these occasions, after the first part of the night had been nearly spent in arranging the details for the wedding, if our information is correct, about the time the roosters were crowing for the midnight hour, the expectant groom bade his fiancée good night at the gate and started home alone through the woods. After leaving the cabin and getting into the dark forest he was not long in becoming convinced that he had made one of the greatest mistakes of his life. The night was in the darkest hours, and soon the angry, howling wolves were collecting in large numbers. He knew his life was in danger, but he took his chances and went along blundering and stumbling over brush, stumps and logs, until he came in sight of a cabin a half mile or so in the distance, and on arriving there he climbed up on the shed for horses and cattle. The pack of wolves were but a few rods behind him. Finding they were unable to capture the fugitive, they gave up the chase and apparently retreated back into the woods. He climbed down and resumed his journey through the woods with all possible speed. He had not gone far, however, until he heard the wolves coming again. They were a considerable distance away, and he hurried on as fast as his legs would carry him until he reached another cabin. Here a new trouble confronted him. Two or three savage dogs came out of their kennels and seemed to be determined to tear him to pieces, but the wolves coming within hearing distance they started after them, leaving our hero to make the remainder of his way home unmolested.

One Sunday morning he had occasion to visit some friends on the other side of Yellow river. He was the owner of a dugout canoe in which he paddled himself across to the other shore, where he tied it to the limb of a projecting tree. That evening he had an engagement to visit his girl, and having been detained longer than he expected, it was nearly dark when he started back. When he reached the river he found his canoe had been untied and was nowhere to be found. What to do he did not know. The river was pretty well up, and quite deep, and he was not sure whether he could wade across or not. He walked up and down the bank for some distance and finally found a place where the water appeared not to be so deep as at the ford where he had crossed with his boat. Here he made up his mind he would make an attempt to cross. He, therefore, removed his shoes and clothing, and, rolling them up into a convenient bundle, started in to wade across. The further he went the deeper he found the water until he was into it up to his armpits. He held his clothing above his head and felt his way carefully, the water getting deeper every step. Finally, when he was sure he had reached the deepest place, he unfortunately stumbled against a rock and fell headlong over into the water. When he came

to the surface, his bundle of clothing was gently floating off down stream. Being a good swimmer he started after his bundle, and, overtaking it a few rods distant, with it swam to shore. When he landed on the bank he was thoroughly exhausted; his clothes were dripping wet, and what to do he didn't know. Finally he wrung the water out as well as he could, and began the task of putting them on. How he ever succeeded in this undertaking will never be known. It was an hour before the task was ended, and as he started on his way home through the woods two or three miles distant, he was the most miserable, forlorn individual it is possible to imagine. He found his way home all right, but too late to re-dress and fulfill his engagement with his best girl.

He was the owner of a fine young horse which his father had given him as a birthday present on the occasion of his becoming "his own man." He was neatly caparisoned with saddle, bridle and martingales, and the rider provided with spurs and a rawhide whip. One Sunday afternoon he dressed in his best suit of clothes, which included a pair of white linen trousers, and started on his famous charger to see his girl. It was late when he got to his destination, and he unbridled and unsaddled his horse and turned him loose in a convenient clover field. It was after midnight when he bade his girl good night and started to go home. A heavy dew had fallen, and the clover, about two feet high, was thoroughly wet, which meant ruin to his white linen pants. So he concluded to take them off and hang them on the fence until he could go and catch his horse and saddle and bridle him ready for riding home. As he approached, the horse saw him coming. It was in the gray of the morning, and the animal took fright at the ghostly appearance of his master and ran away as fast as his legs could carry him. Our hero took after him and tried to head him off. Round and round the field they went, but he couldn't overtake the thoroughly frightened horse. Daylight was now approaching, and what to do was the all important question uppermost in his mind. There seemed to be no hope of catching him, and so he concluded to let down the bars and permit the horse to escape and go home. The poor horse, worse frightened than ever, jumped over the bars and away he went, head and tail erect, as though the old scratch was after him. The bars were put up, but when our hero went to get his pants he found a calf had got hold of them and chewed them so badly, tearing them into shreds, as to completely spoil them. The horse was gone, his pants were torn to pieces and spoiled. What was to be done under the circumstances? As it was then daylight, after mature deliberation he concluded to take to the woods and await results. The horse arriving home in such a sorry plight naturally alarmed the family, and, they immediately started in search of the unfortunate young man. The neighborhood was aroused and on examination of the field they found pieces of his white pants, and supposing he had been foully murdered or eaten up by some ravenous wild beast, armed parties were sent in every direction through the woods to see if any trace of him could be found. The women of the neighborhood, including his heart-broken best girl, followed at a distance and the most intense excitement prevailed. Finally the lost young man was found concealed in a brush heap awaiting the coming of night so he could reach home without exposing his nakedness.

After the courting was done, and the all important "question" had been "popped," and the party of the second part had said "yes" and vowed eternal fidelity to the party of the first part; and the old man and old woman had been consulted in regard to the all important matter, and had willingly given their consent to the union, and the day had been fixed, then arranging the details for the interesting event was begun.

The marriage was generally celebrated at the house of the bride, and she was always accorded the privilege of choosing the officiating clergyman, or preacher, as the case might be. A wedding, however, engaged the attention of the whole neighborhood. It was anticipated with the liveliest interest by both old and young. Everybody, great and small, in the whole neighborhood knew all about it long before it was to come off.

In those days they didn't have any printed invitations to send around. Whenever there was to be any inviting done a small boy would be put on a bareback horse and he would ride all around the neighborhood delivering as loud as he could speak it, a message like this:

"Say, there's to be a weddin' down to the old man's next Tuesday and they want all you'uns to come!" That was all there was to it, and then he rode off on a canter to the next house. And everybody went, too. There was no holding back for fear of not having been invited the right way.

Marrying wasn't done then as it is now. Everybody had to be married by a preacher. They were generally itinerants, or circuit riders, and they were few and far between; didn't get around sometimes oftener than once in two or three months, and so the boys and girls had to make calculations about popping the question and winding up their courting so as to be ready, as it might be a long time between chances.

On the morning of the wedding day the groom and his intimate friends assembled at the house of his parents and after due preparation departed en masse for the house of his bride. The journey was sometimes made on horseback, sometimes on foot, and sometimes in farm wagons and carts. It was always a merry journey, and to insure merriment the "little brown jug" was occasionally one of the invited guests. On reaching the house of the bride the ceremony took place. The young folks stood up and the preacher required them to join their right hands, and after making them promise to love, honor and obey each other until death parted them they were pronounced duly and truly married, and thus

Two souls with but a single thought,  
Two hearts that beat as one,

were tied up into a double-bow knot, thus to remain forever and a day. Then came the kissing of the bride by the preacher and invited guests.

The young folks didn't wear the fine clothes they do now, because there were no such fine clothes to be had. But they were as good looking and better than the average young people nowadays. Tall and straight, and healthy and happy they were, and they loved each other and no mistake. After the ceremony was over they all sat down to dinner, as many as could find places, and the table, which was a big one, just grouped with wild turkey, and venison, and bear meat, roasted and stewed, and honey, and potatoes, and beans, and the Lord knows what all. Those that couldn't

find room at the table sat around out of doors and told jokes and nursed their appetites till the guests at the first table got through, when they had a chance to go and do likewise.

After dinner there were some presents to be given to the newly married couple. There were no stoves in the settlement then, and there was no finery to be bought, and so the people gave of just what they had, and it was generally something good to eat or useful to wear, or that would come handy when they set up housekeeping.

When dinner was over the dancing commenced. There was only one fiddle within a dozen miles, and it was there, and its owner was the biggest man in the house as soon as he began to tune up.

The figures of the dances were three and four-handed reels, "down outside and up the middle," or square sets and jigs. The commencement was always a square four, which was followed by what was called in those days "jigging ;" that is, two of the four would single out for a jig and were followed by the remaining couple. The jigs were often accompanied with what was called "cutting out," that is, when either of the parties became tired of the dance, on intimation the place was supplied by someone of the company without interruption of the dance. In this way the reel was often continued until the fiddler was exhausted.

About 9 or 10 o'clock in the evening a bevy of young girls stole off the bride and put her to bed. In doing this they had to ascend a ladder from the kitchen to the upper floor, which was made of loose boards. Here, in this pioneer bridal chamber, the young, simple-hearted girl was put to bed by her enthusiastic friends. This done, a deputation of young men escorted the groom to the same apartment and placed him snugly by the side of his bride. The dance still continued, and if seats were scarce, which was generally conveniently the case, every young man when not engaged in the dance was obliged to offer his lap as a seat for one of the girls.

The "infair," which was held at the home of the groom's parents, took place on the following afternoon and", evening, and generally the same program was substantially carried out. The young married folks soon settled down to the stern realities of life in a log cabin in the woods, provided with a few articles of home-made furniture, and many who have grown old since then look back upon those early scenes as the happiest days of their lives.