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THE JUBILEE.

BY D. F. LONG,

EDITOR AND PROPRIETOR.

TERMS:

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Selected Tale.

THE BAFLED VILLAIN.

BY AN OLD BACHELOR.

Just after breakfast one fine spring morning in 1837, an advertisement in the Times, for a Curate, caught, and fixed my attention. The salary was sufficiently remunerated for a bachelor, and the parish, as I personally knew, one of the most pleasantly situated in all Somersetshire. Having said that, the reader will readily understand that it could not have been a hundred miles from Taunton. I instantly wrote, enclosing testimonials, with which the Rev. Mr. Townley, the rector, was so entirely satisfied, that the return post brought me a positive engagement, unclogged with the slightest objection to one or two subsidiary items I had stipulated for, and accompanied by an invitation to make the rectory my home till I could conveniently suit myself elsewhere. This was both kind and handsome, and the next day but one I took coach with a light heart for my new destination. It thus happened that I became acquainted, and in some degree mixed up with the train of events it is my present purpose to relate.

The rector I found to be a stout, portly gentleman, whose years already reached to between sixty and seventy. So many winters, although they had plentifully besprinkled his hair with grey, shone out with ruddy brightness in his still handsome face and keen, kindly, bright hazel eye, and his voice, hearty and ringing, had not as yet one quaver of age in it. I met him at breakfast on the morning after my arrival, and his reception of me was most friendly. We had spoken together but for a few minutes, when one of the French windows that led from the breakfast room into a shrubbery and flower garden gently opened and admitted a lady, just then, as I afterwards learned, in her nineteenth spring. I use this term almost unconsciously, for I cannot, even now, in the glowing summer of her life, dissociate her image from that season of youth and joyousness. She was introduced to me, with old-fashioned simplicity, as "My grand daughter, Agnes Townley." It is difficult to look at beauty through other men's eyes, and in the present instance, I feel that I should fail miserably in the endeavor to stamp upon this blank, dead paper any adequate idea of the fresh loveliness, the rose-bud beauty of that young girl. I will merely say, that her perfectly Grecian head wreathed with wavy locks of bright hair undulating with golden light, vividly brought to my mind Raphael's halo-tinted portraits of the Virgin, with this difference, that in place of the holy calm and resignation of the painting, there was in Agnes Townley a sparkling youth and life that even amid the heat and glare of a crowded ballroom, or of a theatre, irresistible suggested and recalled the freshness and perfume of the morning—of a cloudless, rosy morning of May.—And for higher charms than feature beauty, however exquisite, a sweetness of disposition, a kind gentleness of mind and temper, was evinced in every line of her face, in every accent of the low pitched silver voice that breathed through lips made only to smile.

Let me own that I was greatly struck by so remarkable a combination of rare endowments, and that, I think, the sharp-eyed rector must have perceived, or he might not perhaps have been so immediately communicative with respect to the near prospects of his idolized grand-child as he was at the moment the young lady, after presiding at the breakfast table had withdrawn.

"We shall have gay doings, Mr. Tyrell, at the rectory, shortly," he said. "Next Monday three weeks will, with the blessing of God, be Agnes Townley's wedding-day."

"Yes," rejoined the rector, turning towards and examining some flowers which Miss Townley had brought in and placed on the table. "Yes; it has been for some

time settled that Agnes shall on that day be united in holy wedlock to Mr. Arbuthnot."

"Mr. Arbuthnot, of Elm Park?"

"A great match, is it not, in a worldly point of view?" replied Mr. Townley, with a pleasant smile at the tone of my exclamation.

And much better than that, Robert Arbuthnot is a young man of high and noble nature as well as devotedly attached to Agnes. He will, I doubt not, prove in every respect a husband deserving and worthy of her; and that from the lips of a doating old grand-papa must be esteemed high praise. You will see him presently."

"I did see him often, and quite agreed in the rector's estimate of his future grand-son-in-law. I have not frequently seen a finer looking young man—his age was twenty-six, and certainly one of more honorable and kindly spirit, of a more genial temper than he, has never come within my observation. He had drawn a great prize in the matrimonial lottery, and I felt deserved his fortune.

They were married at the time agreed upon, and the day was kept not only at Elm Park and in its neighborhood, but through our "parish," as a general holiday. And strangely enough, at least, I have never met with another instance of the kind—it was held by our entire female community high as well as low, that the match was a perfectly equal one, notwithstanding that wealth and high worldly position were entirely on the bridegroom's side. In fact, that nobody less in the social scale, the representative of an old territorial family ought in the nature of things, to have aspired to the hand of Agnes Townley, appeared to have been a foregone conclusion with everybody. This will give the reader a truer and more vivid impression of the bride than any words or colors I might use.

The days, weeks, months of wedded life flew over Mr. and Mrs. Arbuthnot without a cloud save a few dark, but transitory ones which I saw now and then fit across the husband's countenance, as they came to be more and more spoken of.

"I should not survive her," said Mr. Arbuthnot one day, in reply a chance observation of the rector's, "nor indeed desire to do so."

The grey headed man seized and warmly pressed the husband's hand, and tears of sympathy filled his eyes, yet did he nevertheless as in duty bound utter grave words on the sinfulness of despair under any circumstances, and the denying in all trials, however heavy, of patient submission to the will of God. But, the venerable gentleman spoke in a hoarse and broken voice; it was easy to see he felt with Mr. Arbuthnot, that the reality of an event, the bare possibility of which, shook them so terribly, were a cross too heavy for human strength to bear and live.

It was of course decided that the expected heir or heiress should be entrusted to a wet nurse, and a Mrs. Danby, the wife of a miller, living not very far from the rectory, was engaged for that purpose. I had frequently seen the woman; and her name, as the rector and I were one evening gossiping over our tea, on some subject or other that I forgot, came up.

"A likely person," I remarked; "healthy, very good looking, and one might make oath, a true-hearted creature. But there is withal a timidity; frightenedness, in her manner, at times which, if I may hazard a perhaps uncharitable conjecture, speaks ill for that smart husband of hers."

"You have hit the mark precisely my dear sir. Danby is a very bad fellow, and a domestic tyrant to boot. His wife, who is really a good, but meek hearted person, lived with us once. How old do you suppose her to be?"

"Five and twenty, perhaps."

"Six years more than that. She has a son of the name of Harper by a former marriage, who is in his tenth year. Anne wasn't a widow long. Danby was caught by her good looks, and she by the bait of a well provided home. Unless, however, her husband gives up his corn speculations, she will not I think have that much longer."

A sad accident occurred about a month subsequent to the foregoing conversation. The rector was out riding upon a usually quiet horse which all at once took it into his head to shy at a scare-crow it must have seen a score of times, and thereby, threw its rider. Help was fortunately at hand, and the reverend gentleman was instantly conveyed home, when it was found that his left thigh was broken. Thanks, however, to his temperate habits it was before long authoritatively pronounced that although it would be a considerable time before he was released from confinement, it was not probable that the lusty winter of his life would be shortened by what had happened. Unfortunately the accident threatened to have evil consequences in another quarter. Immediately after it occurred, one Matthews, a busy, thick headed, lout of a butcher, rode furiously off to Elm Park with the news. Mrs. Arbuthnot, who daily looked to be confined, was walking with her husband upon the lawn in front of the house, when the great burly blockhead rode up, and blurted out that the rector had been thrown from his horse and it was feared killed.

The shock of such an announcement was of course, overwhelming. A few hours afterwards, Mrs. Arbuthnot gave birth to a healthy male child; but the young mother's life, assailed by fever, was for many days utterly despaired of—for weeks held to tremble so evidently in the balance that the slightest adverse circumstance might in a moment turn the scale downward. At length the black horizon that seemed to encompass us so hopelessly lightened and afforded the lover husband a glimpse and hope of his vanished and well nigh despaired of Eden. The promise was fulfilled. I was in the library with Mr. Arbuthnot, awaiting the physician's morning report, very anxiously expected at the rectory, when Dr. Lindley entered the apartment in an evidently cheerful mood.

"You have been causelessly alarmed," he said. "There is, no fear whatever of a relapse. Weakness only remains, and that will be more and more spoken of."

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"Corn speculations! Surely, Danby has no means adequate to indulge in such a game as that."

"Not he. But about two years ago he bought on credit, I believe, a considerable quantity of wheat, and prices happening to fly suddenly up just then he made a large profit. This has quite turned his head, which, by-the-by, was never, as Cockneys say, quite rightly screwed on." The announcement of a visitor interrupted anything further the rector might have to say, and I soon afterwards went back home.

some coming. Not a word remember—not a word! At the same time he wheeled his chair half round, so that his back should be towards the servant we heard approaching.

"I sent, sir," said Mrs. Arbuthnot's maid, "to ask if the post has arrived?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Arbuthnot, with wonderment of his voice. "Tell your mistress I shall be with her almost immediately and that her—her son is quite well."

"Mr. Tyrell," he continued, as soon as the servant was out of hearing, "there is, I think, a liquor-stand on the side board in the large dining-room. Would you have the kindness to me unobserved—mind that unobserved by any one?"

"I did as he requested; and the instant I placed the liquor-frame before him, he seized the brandy carafe, and drank with fierce eagerness. 'For goodness sake,' exclaimed, 'consider what you are about, Mr. Arbuthnot; you will make yourself ill!'"

"No, no," he answered, after finishing his draught. "It seems scarcely stronger than water. But I—am better now. The letter," he added after a long and painful pause, "during which he eyed me, I thought with an eye of suspicion—the letter you saw me open just now comes from a relative, an aunt, who is very ill, and wishes to see me instantly. You understand?"

"I do understand, or at least I feared that I did to well. I however, bowed acquiescence, and he presently rose from his chair and strode about the apartment in great agitation, until his wife's bed-room bell rang. He then stopped suddenly short, shook himself, and looked anxiously at the reflection of his flushed and varying countenance in the magnificent chimney glass.

"Do not look, I think—or, at least shall not, in a darkened room—odd, more out of the way that is, more agitated—than one might, than one must appear, after hearing of the dangerous illness of—of an aunt?"

"Yes, yes: much better, much better. I am glad to hear you say so. That was my wife's bell. She is anxious, no doubt to see me."

He was thought less nervous than before. I rose to go. "Give my respects," he said, "to the good rector; and as an especial favor, he added, with strong emphasis, let me ask of you not to mention to a living soul that you saw me so unmanned as I was just now; that I swallowed brandy. It would appear so strange, so weak, so ridiculous."

I promised not to do so, and almost immediately left the house, very painfully affected. His son was, I concluded, either dead or dying, and he was thus bewildered by casting about for means of keeping the terrible, perhaps fatal tidings from his wife. I afterwards heard that he left Elm Park in a post-chaise, about two hours after I came away, unattended by a single servant.

He was gone three clear days only, at the end of which he returned with Mrs. Danby and—his son—in fabled health, too, and one of the finest babies of its age about nine weeks only—I had ever seen. Thus vanished the air-drawn Doubting Castle and Giant Despair which I had so hastily conjured up. The cause assigned by Mr. Arbuthnot for the agitation I had witnessed was doubtless the true one; and yet (and the thought haunted me for months, years afterwards), he opened only one letter that morning, and had sent a message to his wife that the child was well.

Mrs. Danby remained at the Park till the little Robert was weaned, and was then dismissed, very munificently rewarded. Year after year rolled away, without bringing Mr. and Mrs. Arbuthnot any additional little ones, and no one, therefore could feel surprised at the enthusiastic love of the delighted mother for her handsome, nobly promising boy. But that which did astonish me, though no one else, for it seemed that I alone noticed it, was a strange defect of character which began to develop itself in Mr. Arbuthnot. He was positively jealous of his wife's affection for their own child. Many and many a time have I remarked, when he thought himself unobserved, an expression of intense flash from his fine, expressive eyes, at any more than usually fervent manifestation of the young mother's gushing love for her first and only born. I as much as possible forbore to dwell upon the subject.

Nine years passed away without bringing any material change to the parties involved in this narrative, except those which time brings ordinarily in his train. Young Robert Arbuthnot was a healthy tall and fine looking of his age; and his great grand-papa, the rector, though not suffering under any actual physical or mental infirmity, had reached a time of life when the announcement that the golden bowl is broken, or the silver cord is loosed, may indeed be quick

and sudden, but scarcely unexpected.—Things had gone well, too, with the nurse, Mrs. Danby and her husband; well, at least, after a fashion. The speculative miller must have made good use of the gift to his wife for her care of little Arbuthnot, for he had built a genteel house near the mill, always rode a valuable horse, kept it was said, a capital stable; and all this, as it seemed, by his clever speculations in corn and flour, for the ordinary business of the mill was almost entirely neglected. He had no children of his own, but he had apparently taken to his step-son, a fine lad, now about eighteen years of age. This greatly grieved the boy's mother, who dreaded above all things that her son should contract the evil, dissolute habits of his father-in-law. Latterly, she had become extremely solicitous to procure the lad a permanent situation abroad, and this Mr. Arbuthnot had promised should be effected at the earliest opportunity.

Thus stood affairs on the 16th of October, 1849. Mr. Arbuthnot was temporarily absent in Ireland, where he possessed large property, and was making personal inquiries as to the extent of the potatoe rot, not long before announced. The morning's post had brought a letter to his wife, with the intelligence that he should reach home that very evening; and as the rectory was on the direct road to Elm Park, and Mrs. Arbuthnot came with her son to pass the afternoon there, and in some slight degree to anticipate her husband's arrival.

About three o'clock, a chief clerk of one of the Taunton banks rode up in a gig to the rectory, and asked to see the Rev. Mr. Townley, on pressing and important business. He was ushered into the library, where the rector and I were at the moment rather busily engaged. The clerk said he had been to Elm Park, but not finding either Mr. Arbuthnot or his lady there, he had thought that perhaps the Rev. Mr. Townley might be able to pronounce upon the genuineness of a check for £300, purporting to be drawn on the Taunton Bank by Mr. Arbuthnot, which Danby, the miller, had

ded, that the bank had refused payment and returned the check, believing it to be a forgery.

"A forgery!" exclaimed the rector after merely glancing at the document, "No question that it is, and a very clumsily executed one, too, besides, Mr. Arbuthnot is not yet returned from Ireland."

This was sufficient and the messenger, with many apologies for his intrusion, withdrew and hastened back to Taunton. We were still talking over this sad affair, although some hours had elapsed since the clerk's departure—in fact, candles had been brought in, and we were every moment expecting Mr. Arbuthnot, the sound of a horse at a hasty gallop was heard approaching, and presently the pale and haggard face of Danby shot by the window at which the rector and myself were standing. The gate bell was rung almost immediately afterwards, and but a brief interval passed before Mr. Danby was announced to be in waiting. The servant had hardly gained the passage with leave to show him in, when the impatient visitor rushed rudely into the room in a state of great and it seemed angry excitement.

"What, sir, is the meaning of all this ill mannered intrusion?" demanded the rector sternly.

"You have pronounced the check I paid away at Bath a forgery; and the officers are, I am told, already at my heels. Mr. Arbuthnot, unfortunately, is not at home, and I am come, therefore, to seek shelter with you."

"Shelter with me sir?" exclaimed the indignant rector, moving as he spoke, towards the bell. "Out of my house you shall go this instant!"

The fellow placed his hand upon the reverend gentleman's arm and looked with his bloodshot eyes keenly in his face.

"Don't!" said Danby, "don't for the sake of yourself and yours! Don't I warn you; or if you like the phrase better, don't, for the sake of me and mine."

Your's fellow! Your wife, whom you have so long held in cruel bondage through her fears for her son, has at length shaken off that chain. James Harper sailed two days ago from Portsmouth to Bombay; I sent her the news two hours since."

"He! Is that indeed so?" cried Danby, with an irrepressible start of alarm. "Why, then—But no matter here luckily comes Mrs. Arbuthnot and her son. All's right! She will, I know, stand bail for me, and, if need be, acknowledge the genuineness of her husband's check."

The fellow's insolence was becoming unbearable, and I was about to seize and thrust him forcibly, from the apartment, when the sound of wheels was heard outside.

"What! what does he mean?" exclaimed Mrs. Arbuthnot, bewilderingly, and at the same time clasping her son—who gazed on Danby with kindled eyes, and angry boyish defiance—tightly to her side. Did the man's strange words give form and significance to some dark shadowy, indistinct doubt that had previously haunted her at times? I judged so. The rector appeared similarly confused and had sunk nerveless upon a sofa.

"You guess dimly, I see, what I have to say," resumed Danby with a malignant sneer. "Well, hear it, then, once for all, and then, if you will, give me up to the officers.—Some years ago," he continued, and steadily—some years ago, a woman, a nurse, was placed in charge of two infant children, both boys; one of these was her own; the other was the son of rich, proud parents. The man's husband was a gay, jolly fellow, who preferred spending money to earning it, and just then it happened that he was more than usually hard up. One afternoon, on visiting his wife, who had removed to a distance, he found that the rich man's child had sickened of the small pox, and that there was no chance of its recovery. A letter containing the sad news was on the table, which he, the husband, took the liberty to open and read. After some reflection, suggested by what he had heard of the lady-mother's state of mind, he copied the letter for the sake of embodying in it a certain suggestion. That letter was duly posted, and the next day brought the rich man, almost in a state of distraction; but his chief and mastering terror was lest the mother of the already dead infant should hear, in her then precarious state of what had happened. The tidings, he was sure, would kill her. Seeing this, the cunning husband of the nurse suggested that for the present, his, the cunning one's child might be taken to the lady as her own and that the truth could be revealed when she was strong enough to bear it. The rich man fell into the artful trap, and that which the husband of the nurse had speculated upon came to pass, even beyond his hopes. The lady grew to idolize her fancied child—she has, fortunately, had no other to part with him.—The rich man's every year it became more difficult, more impossible to do so; and very generously, I must say, he paid in purse for the forbearance of the nurse's husband. Well now, then, to sum up: the nurse was Mrs. Danby; the rich, weak husband, Mr. Arbuthnot; the substituted child, that handsome boy—my son!"

A wild scream from Mrs. Arbuthnot broke the dead silence which accompanied this frightful revelation, echoed by an agonized cry, half tenderness, half rage, from her husband, who had entered the room unobserved, and now clasped her passionately in his arms. The carriage wheels we had heard were his. It was long before I could recall with calmness the tumult, the terror and confusion of that scene. Mr. Arbuthnot strove to bear his wife from the apartment, but she would not be forced away, and kept imploring, with frenzied vehemence, that Robert—that her boy should not be taken away from her.

"I have no wish to do so—far from it," said Danby, with gleeful exclamation, "only folks must be reasonable, and not threaten their friends with the hulks!"

"Give him anything!" broke in the unhappy lady. "O Robert! Robert she added, with a renewed burst of hysterical grief, how could you deceive me so?"

"I have been punished, Agnes," he answered in a husky, broken voice, "for my well intended but criminal weakness; cruelly punished by the everpresent consciousness that this discovery must one day be surely made. What do you want?" he after a while added, with recovering firmness, addressing Danby.

"The acknowledgement of that little bit of paper in dispute, of course; and say a genuine one to the same amount."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Mrs. Arbuthnot, still wildly sobbing, and holding the terrified boy strained in her embrace, as if she feared he might be wrenched from her by force.—"Anything; pay him anything!"

At this moment, chancing to look towards the door of the apartment, I saw that it was partially opened, and that Danby's wife was listening there. But what might that mean? But what of hopeful meaning in such a case could it have?

"Be it so, love, said Mrs. Arbuthnot soothingly. "Danby, call to-morrow at the Park. And now, begone at once."

"I was thinking," resumed the rascal, with swelling audacity, "that we might as well come to some permanent arrangement, in black and white. But never mind I can always put the screw on; unless, indeed, you get tired of the young gentleman, and in

some way or other, you get tired of the young gentleman, and in