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TALES OF THE JURY-ROOM.

Eamus in jus. PLAUT. Pomilius, Act v. Dogberry. Are you good men, and true? Much Ado about Nothing.

BY GERALD GRIFFIN. AUTHOR OF "TALES OF THE MUNSTER FESTIVALS," ETC.

THE SECOND JURYMAN'S TALE.

THE STORY-TELLER AT FAULT.

"Cudgel thy brains no more about it, for your dull ass will not mend his pace with beating." HAMLET, Act V., Sc. 1.

At the time when the Tuatha Dananns held the sovereignty of Ireland, there reigned in Leinster, a king, who was remarkably fond of hearing stories. Like all the princes and chieftains of the island at this early date, he had a favorite Story-teller, according to the custom of those times, who held a large estate from his Majesty, on condition of his telling him a new story every night of his life, before he went to sleep, and sometimes with the laudable purpose of lulling him into that blissful condition. So inexhaustible was the genius of the king of Leinster's Story-teller, that he had already reached a good old age, without failing even for a single night to have a new story for the king; and such was the skill and tact which he displayed in their construction, that whatever cares of state or other annoyances might prey upon the monarch's mind, one of his Story-teller's narratives was sure to make him fall asleep.

In the course of his career, the Story-teller had married a wealthy and high-born lady, daughter of a neighboring lord of that country, with whom he lived in peace and prosperity during many years. There is nothing however in this world which is not subject to decay or change, and even the human mind, which from its spiritual nature, might well be supposed incorruptible, is doomed to share the infirmities of the frame, with which it is so mysteriously united. The progress of old age began to produce a sensible influence on the imagination of the Story-teller. His fancy grew less brisk and active, and the king observed that he began to diversify his incidents with a greater number of moral and philosophical reflections than he conceived to be necessary to the progress of the narrative. However, he made no complaint, as the Story-teller's reflections evinced a great deal of judgment, and the grand object in view, that of setting the king to sleep, was as perfectly accomplished by his philosophy, as by his wit or invention.

Matters thus proceeded, the Story-teller growing older and older and more philosophical, and less and less fanciful, but he was yet true to his engagement, and never failed to have a new story at night-fall for the king's amusement. Every day however brought increasing indications of an intellectual crisis, which would not be very distant.

One morning the Story-teller arose early, and, as his custom was, strolled out into his garden, and through the adjacent fields, in order to turn over in his mind some incidents which he might weave into a story for the king at night. But this morning he found himself quite at fault; after pacing his whole demesne, he returned to his house, without being able to think of anything new or strange. In vain he sent his fancy abroad, it returned as empty as it left him. He found no difficulty in proceeding as far as "there was once a king who had three sons," or "there lived in the reign of Ollav Folla;" or "one day the king of all Ireland," but further than that, he found it impossible to proceed. At length a servant came to announce to him that breakfast was ready and his mistress waiting for him in the house. He went in and found his wife seated at the table, and looking much perplexed at his delay. She was not long observing the air of chagrin, that over-spread his countenance.

"Why do you not come to breakfast, my dear?" said his wife. "I have no mind to eat anything," replied the Story-teller. "As long as I have been in the service of the king of Leinster I never yet sat down to breakfast without having a new story to tell him in the evening, but this morning my mind is quite shut up and I don't know what to do. I might as well lie down and die at once. I'll be disgraced for ever this evening, when the king calls for his Story-teller."

"That's strange," said the wife, "can't you think of anything new at all?" "Nothing whatever; the door of my mind is locked against it."

"Nonsense," said his wife, "can't you invent something about a giant or a dwarf, or a Bean Mhor (huge woman) or a booch (champion) from foreign parts?" "Oh, it is easy enough to find heroes," replied the Story-teller, "but what am I to do with them when I have them?"

"And can't you invent anything at all?" "I cannot; our estate is gone from us for ever; besides the open show that will be made of me to-night at the palace."

When the Story-teller's wife heard this dreadful news, she broke into a fit of crying and weeping, as if all her friends and relations were dead. At length her husband prevailed on her to be composed.

"Well," said she, "let us sit down to breakfast at any rate; the day is long yet, and may be you'd think of something or another in the course of it."

The Story-teller shook his head, as if to intimate his distrust of its contents, but sat down to breakfast as his wife desired. When all was removed, and they had sat for a while in silence:

"Well," she asked, "do you think of anything yet?"

"Not a pinworth," said the Story-teller. "I might as well lie down and die at once."

"Well, my dear," said the lady, "I'll tell you what you'll do. Order your horses and chariot, and let us take a good long drive, and may be something might come into your head."

The Story-teller complied, and the chariot was prepared. Two of his finest horses were harnessed in the carriage, and three favourite hounds followed them. After driving a long distance, they took the road homeward once more, and towards evening, when they came within sight of their own demesne, the lady again asked her husband if he had yet thought of anything to tell the king?

"There is no use in my attempting it," he replied, "I can think of nothing. I'm as far from having anything new, as I was when we left home."

At this moment it happened that the lady saw something dark at the end of a field at a little distance from the road.

"My dear," said the wife, "do you see something black at the end of that field?" "I do," replied her husband.

"Let us drive towards it," said the wife, "and perhaps it might be the means of putting something into your head which it would answer to tell the king."

"I'll do as you desire," replied the Story-teller, "though I am sure it is no use for me." They turned the horses' heads and drove in the direction pointed out by the lady. When they drew nigh, they saw a miserable looking old man lying on the ground with a wooden leg placed beside him.

"Who are you, my good man?" asked the Story-teller. "Oh, then, 'tis little matter who I am. I'm a poor, old, lame, decrepit miserable creature, sitting down here to rest awhile."

"And what are you doing with that box and dice I see in your hand?"

"I am waiting here to see whether any one would play a game with me," replied the old booch (beggar man).

"Play with you?" exclaimed the Story-teller. "Why what has a poor old man like you to play for?"

"I have one hundred pieces of gold here in this leathern purse," replied the old man. "Do you go down and play with him," said the Story-teller's wife; "and perhaps you might have something to tell the king about it in the evening."

He descended, and a smooth stone was placed between them as a gaming table. They had not cast many throws, when the Story-teller lost all the money he had about him.

"Much good may it do you, friend," said the Story-teller. "I could not expect better hap in so foolish an undertaking."

"Will you play again?" asked the old man. "Don't be talking, man; you have all my money."

"Haven't you a chariot and horses and hounds?"

"Well, what of them?" "I'll stake all the money I have against them."

"Nonsense, man!" exclaimed the Story-teller, "do you think for all the gold in Ireland, I'd run the risk of seeing my lady obliged to go home on foot?"

"May be you'd win," said the booch. "May be I wouldn't," said the Story-teller. "Do play with him husband," said the lady. "It is the second time, and as he won before, you might win now. Besides I don't mind walking."

"I never refused you a request in my life, that it was possible to comply with," said the Story-teller, "and I won't do so now."

He sat down accordingly, and in one throw lost horses, hounds, and chariot.

"Will you play again?" asked the booch. "Are you making game of me, man?" said the Story-teller, "what else have I to stake?" "I'll stake the whole money and all against your lady," said the old man.

Now, gentlemen of the Jury, although these were pagan times, the Story-teller could not help thinking the booch had a great deal of impudence to make him such a proposition. However, he only looked at him with an expression of great surprise, and was turning away in silence, when his wife spoke to him again:

"Do, my dear," said she, "accept his offer. This is the third time, and how do you know what luck you may have? Besides, if you lose your estate to-night, as you are afraid, sure I'd be only a bother to you all our life."

"Is that the way you talk!" said the Story-teller, "you that I never refused a request to, since first I saw you."

"Well," said she, "if you never refused me a request before, don't refuse me this one now, and may be it would be better for us both.—You'll surely win the third time."

They played again, and the Story-teller lost. No sooner had he done so, than to his great astonishment and indignation, he beheld his lady walk over and sit down near the ugly old booch.

"Is that the way you're leaving me?" said the Story-teller.

"Sure I was won my dear," said the lady, "you would not cheat the old man, would you?"

"Have you any more to stake?" asked the old man.

"You know very well I have not," replied the Story-teller.

"I'll stake the whole now, your lady and all, against yourself," said the old man.

"Nonsense, man!" said the Story-teller, "what in the world business could you have of an old fellow like me?"

"That's my own affair," said the booch, "I know myself what use I could make of you; it is enough for you if I am willing to consider you a sufficient stake against all I have."

"Do, my dear," said the lady; "surely you do not mean to leave me here after you?"

The Story-teller complied once more and lost.

"Well," said he with a desolate look, "here I am for you now, and what do you want with me? You have the whole of us now, horses and carriage and mistress and master, and what business have you of us?"

"I'll soon let you know what business I have of you at any rate," said the old man, taking out of his pocket a long cord and a wand.

"Now," he continued, "as I have possession of your property, I do not choose to be annoyed by you any longer, so I propose transforming you into some kind of an animal, and I give you a free choice to be a hare, or a deer, or a fox, whichever of the three best hits your fancy."

The Story-teller in dismay looked over towards his wife.

"My dear," said she, "do not choose to be a deer, for if you do, your horns will be caught in the branches, and you will be starved with hunger; neither choose to be a fox, for you will have the ears of everybody down upon you, but choose to be an honest little hare, and every one will love you, and you will be praised by high and low."

"And that all the compassion you have for me?" said the Story-teller. "Well, as I suppose it is the last word I have to say to you, it shall not be to contradict you at any rate."

poor hare taken a skip or two, in order to divert himself when the lady called the hounds and set them after him. The hare ran, the dogs followed. The field in which they happened to be was enclosed by a high wall, so that the course continued a long time in the sight of the old man and the lady, to the great diversion of both. At length the hare, panting and weary, ran to the feet of the latter for protection. But then was witnessed a singular instance of the caprice and mutability of the sex, for the Story-teller's wife, forgetful of all his kindness experienced during a long course of years, unfeelingly kicked him back again towards the dogs, from whence arose the proverb long current in after times, *caith se a glab no eom*, (she threw him into the hound's mouth), as applied to all who act with similar ingratitude. They cursed him a second and a third time, and at the end of each, the lady acted with the same heartlessness, until at length the old man struck the hounds, and took the hare into his lap, where he held him for some time, until he sufficiently recovered his strength. He then placed him on the ground, and putting the cord around him struck him with the wand, on which he immediately re-assumed his own form.

"Well," said the old man, "will you tell me how you liked the sport?"

"It might be sport to others," replied the Story-teller, looking at his wife, "but I declare I don't find it so entertaining, but I could put up with the loss of it. You're a droll man whoever you are. Would it be asking an impertinent question to know from you who you are at all, or where you came from, or what is your trade, that you should take a pleasure in plaguing a poor old man of my kind in that manner?"

"Oh," said the stranger, "I'm a very odd kind of man—a sort of a walking, good-for-nothing little fellow—one day in poverty—another day in plenty—and so on—but if you wish to know anything more about me or my habits, come with me in some of my rambles, and perhaps, I might show you more than you would be apt to make out if you were to go alone."

"I'm not my own master to go or stay," replied the Story-teller, with a resigned look.

When the stranger heard this, he put one hand into the wallet which he carried at his side, and drew out of it before their eyes a well-looking middle-aged man, to whom he spoke, as follows:

"I command you by all you heard and saw since I put you into my wallet, to take charge of this lady, together with the carriage and horses and all, and have them ready for me at a call whenever I shall require them."

He had scarcely said these words when all vanished from the Story-teller's sight and he found himself on a sudden, transported he knew not how, to a place which he recognized as the Fox's Ford, well known as the residence of Red Hugh O'Donnell. On looking around he saw the old man standing near him in a dress still more grotesque than before. His figure was now crest, though tall and lank, his hair grey, and his ears sticking up through his old hat. The greater part of his sword was exposed behind his hip; he wore a pair of tattered brogues, which, at every prodigious stride he made over the marshy ground, sent the water in jets up to his knees; and in his hand he carried three green boughs. It happened on this very day that O'Donnell and his followers and kinsmen were partaking of a splendid banquet in his house. They were very merry, feasting and drinking together, and as the Story-teller and his companion drew near, they heard one of the guests exclaim in a loud and commanding tone:

"Who will say he ever heard finer music than that? Is it possible that twenty-two musicians could be found from this to the shores of Greece, better skilled in their art than the twenty-two who are here to-day? I mean Darby McGilligan Cormad O'Gregon, Timothy O'Connell, and many more whom I do not mention now by name?"

"We do not suppose," said several of his hearers, "that any such thing is possible."

At this moment the Caol Riava (thin grey man) and the Story-teller entered the house. "Save all here!" said the Caol Riava. "And you likewise, replied O'Donnell, "where do you come from now?"

"I slept last night," replied the stranger, "in the palace of the king of Scotland."

"Call the door-keeper before me," said O'Donnell.

He was summoned accordingly.

"Was it you let in this man?" asked O'Donnell.

"I give you free leave to whip the head from my two shoulders," replied the door-keeper, "if ever I laid eyes upon him before this present moment."

"Let it pass," said the Caol Riava, "for it would come just as easy to me to go out as to come in, whether the door was open or shut."

Then turning to the musicians:

"Play something for us," said he, "that I may judge whether all that I have heard in your praise be merited or otherwise."

They began to play, first successively, and then in full concert, all kinds of airs and elaborate pieces of music, both on wind and stringed instruments, and when they had concluded, all looked to the new comer to learn his opinion of their performance.

"I assure you," said the Caol Riava, "that since I first heard of Belzebub and Moloch and Satan and the rest of their infernal compeers, and of the hideous noise and uproar compounded of rage and lamentation which prevails in the dreary region of the demons and in the court of the sable princes of Hell, I never could imagine worse music than what you are just after playing."

"Play something for us yourself, then," said O'Donnell.

"May be I will, and may be I won't," replied the Caol Riava, "for you may be certain I will do exactly what I like myself and nothing else."

"I don't doubt you," said O'Donnell.

The Caol Riava then took a harp and began to play in such a manner that the dead might have come out of their graves to hear him without occasioning any astonishment to those who knew the cause they had for so doing. As to the company who were present, sometimes he would make them weep, sometimes he could lull them asleep with the power of his enchanting strains.

"You are a sweet man, whoever you are," said O'Donnell.

"Some days sweet and some days bitter," replied the Caol Riava.

"Go higher and sit in company with O'Donnell, and eat along with him," said one of the attendants.

"I will do no such thing," replied the Caol Riava, "for a pleasing accomplishment in an ugly fellow like me, is like honey in the body of a man who is going to be hanged; so I will go no higher up than where I am; but let me see his goodness here, if he has a mind to show it at all."

He kept his place, and O'Donnell sent him by the hands of an attendant a suit of attire, consisting of a cloak of many colors, a fustian and other garments to match.

"Here," said the attendant, "is a full suit that O'Donnell sends you."

"I will not accept it," replied the Caol Riava, "for a good man shall never have to say that he lost so much by me."

"He is either an enemy or something more than mortal," said O'Donnell, when he heard that the stranger had refused his gifts. "Let twenty horsemen in full armour keep guard outside the house, and as many foot soldiers be stationed inside to watch his movements."

"What are you going to do with me?" asked the Long Grey Man, when he saw the soldiers gathering round him.

"We mean to have a sharp eye on you, that you may not give us the slip 'till dinner is over," said O'Donnell.

"You are very hospitable," replied the Caol Riava, "but I give you my word, if you were as good again it is not with you I'll dine to-day."

"Where else will you dine?" asked O'Donnell.

"Far enough from you, you may be satisfied," replied the Caol Riava.

"I pledge you my word," said one of the galliglasses on guard, "if I find you attempting to stir against O'Donnell's wish, I'll make pound pieces of you with my battle axe."

The Caol Riava made no reply, but took an instrument and began to play as before, in such a manner that all within hearing were enchanted with his music. He then laid aside the harp and stood up in his place.

"Now," he said, "look to yourselves, you who are minding me, for I am off!"

The instant he uttered these words, the soldier who had menaced him, raised his battle axe, but instead of wounding the stranger as he intended, he struck a heavy blow on the harness of the man who stood next him. The latter returned the stroke with the best of his will, and in a few moments the whole score of foot guards were hewing at each other's heads and shoulders with their battle axes, until the floor was strewed with their disabled bodies. In the midst of this confusion the Caol Riava came to the door-keeper and said to him:

"Go to O'Donnell and tell him that for a reward of twenty cows and a large farm rent free, you will undertake to bring his people to life again. When he accepts your proposal (as I know he will be glad to do), take this herb and rub a little of it to the roof of each man's mouth, and he will be presently in perfect health again."

The door-keeper did as he directed, and succeeded perfectly, but when he returned to thank his benefactor, to his great astonishment he could discover no more of either him or the Story-teller.

It happened at this very time that a wealthy man,