

LORNA DOONE

B. R. D. BLACKMORE. CHAPTER XXXVIII. A GOOD TURN FOR JEREMY.

John Fry had now six shillings a week, of regular and permanent wages, besides all harvest and shearing money, as well as a cottage rent free and enough of garden-ground to rear potatoes for his wife and all his family. Now the wages appointed by our justices, at the time of session, were four-and-sixpence a week for summer, and a fall less for the winter-time; and a week would be fined, and perhaps imprisoned, for giving more than the sums so fixed. Therefore John Fry was looked upon as the richest man upon Exmoor—

Now it is according to human nature, or is it a thing contradictory (as I would have believed)? But anyhow—there was, upon Exmoor, no more discontented man, no man more sure that he had not his worth, neither half so sore about it, than, or as, John Fry was. And one day, or indeed I may say, in any measure, reconcile with my sense of right, much as I labored to do John justice, especially because of his roguery; and this was, that if we could not get on with him, at all of laziness (which he must have known to be in him), he regularly turned round upon us, and quite contentedly to hold our tongues, by threatening to lay information against us for paying him too much wages.

Now I have not mentioned all this of John Fry from any disrespect for his memory (which is green and honest among us, far less from any desire to hurt the feeling of his grandchildren; and I will do them the justice, once for all, to avow, thus publicly, that I have known a great many bigger rogues, and most of them honest men, but that I have referred with moderation to this little flaw in a worthy character (or, if you will, as we call it, when a man is dead) for this reason only—that without it there was no explanation of John's dealings with Jeremy Stickle.

Master Jeremy, being full of London and Norwich experience, fell into the error of supposing that we clods and yokels were the simplest of the simple, and could be cheated at his good pleasure. Now this is not so; when once we suspect that people have that idea of us, we induce them in to the top of their heads, and then we should come out of it, as they do at last in amazement, with less money than before, and the laugh now set against them.

Ever since I had offended Jeremy by threatening him (as before related) in case of his meddling with my affairs, he had more and more allied himself with simple-minded John, as he was pleased to call him, being the only man in the parish who had any knowledge of politics, I gave John Fry to understand that he must not presume to talk so freely, as if he were at least a constable, about the constitution, which could be no affair of his, and might bring us all into trouble. At this he only tossed his nose, as if he had been in London at least three times for my one; which vexed me so that I promised him, if he would only let me whip, if even the name of a knight of the shire should pass his lips for a fortnight.

Now I did not suspect in my stupid noddle that John Fry would ever tell Jeremy Stickle's good graces, and that wizard of the Slough and the man in the white night-cap, because John had sworn on the blade of his knife not to breathe a word to any soul about my fall from grace. The very thing it appears that John related, for a certain consideration, all that had been said, and, doubtless, more which had accrued to it. Upon this Master Stickle was much displeased, and he was accordingly, having always accounted him a most loyal, keen and wary subject.

All this I learned upon recovering Jeremy's good graces, which came to pass in no other way than by the saving of his life. Being bound to keep the strictest watch upon the seven rooks' nests, and yet not bearing to be idle and to waste my mother's stores, I contrived to keep my work entirely at the western corner of our farm, which was nearest to Glen Doone, and whence I could easily run to a height commanding the view I coveted.

One day Squire Faggus had dropped in upon us, just in time for dinner; and very soon he and King's messenger were as thick as need be. Tom had brought his beloved mare to show her off to Annie, and he mounted his pretty sweetheart upon her, after giving Winnie notice to be on her very best behavior. The squire was in great spirits, having just accomplished a purchase of land which was worth ten times what he gave for it; and this he did by a merry trick upon old Sir Roger Bassett, who never supposed him to be in earnest, and not possessing the money. The whole thing was done on a bumper of claret in a tavern where they met; and the old knight having once pledged his word, no lawyers could hold him back from it. They accordingly say that Master Faggus, being attainted of felony, was not a capable grantee. "My pardon has been ready for months and months, as soon as I care to sue for it."

And now he was telling our Annie, who listened very rosy, and believed every word he said, that having been ruined in early morning by the mess of lawyers, it was only just, and fair turn for him, that, having become a match

for them by long practice upon the highway, he should reinstate himself, at their expense, in society. And now he would go to London at once, and sue out his pardon; and then would his lovely darling Annie, etc., etc.—things which I had no right to hear, and in which I was no way concerned.

Therefore, I strode away up the lane to my afternoon's employment, sadly comparing my love with theirs (which now appeared so prosperous), yet heartily for Annie's sake; only remembering now and then the old proverb, "Wrong never comes right." I worked very hard in the cope of young ash, with my bill-hook and a shearing-knife; cutting out the saplings where they stood too close together, making spars to keep for thatching, will corks to drive into the coils, for close sheep hurdles, and handles for rakes, and hoes, and two-bills, of the larger and straighter stuff. And all the lesser I bound in fagots, to come home on the sledge to the wood-criek; it is not to be supposed that I did all this work without many peeps at the seven rooks' nests; which proved my Lorna's safety. Indeed, whenever I wanted a change, either from cleaving or heaving, I would stooping, two much at binding, I was up and away to the ridge of the hill, instead of standing and doing nothing.

Soon I forgot about Tom and Annie, and fell to thinking of Lorna only, and how much I would make of her, and what I should call our children, and how I would educate them, to do honour to her rank; yet all the time I worked with my bill-hook, and I did not know of it. Fresh-cut spars are not so good as those of a little seasoning, especially if the sap was not gone down at the time of cutting. Therefore we always find it needful to have plenty still in stock.

It was very pleasant there in the cope, sloping to the west, as it was, and the sun descending brightly, with rooks and hawks, and the stems of mottled and dimpled wood, with twigs coming out like elbows, hung and clung together closely, with a mode of bending in, as children do at some danger; overhead the shrubbery leaves quivered and rustled ripely, having many points like stars, and rising and falling delicately, as fingers play and music. Along the bed of the slanting creek, all between the stools of wood, there were heaps of dead brown leaves and sheltered mats of lichen, and drifts of spotted stick gone rotten, and tufts of rushes here and there, full of gray and shivering ferns.

All by the hedge ran a little stream, a thing that could barely name itself, flowing scarce more than a pint in a minute, because of the sunny weather. Yet it had the smell of a running stream, and was as clear as crystal, and had in it many small stones, dark and bravely bearded, and a gallant rush through a redden pipe—the stem of a flag that was grounded; and here and there divided threads, and here and there a branching stick, into mighty pools of rock (as large as a grown man's hat almost) napped with moss all around the sides, and hung with corded grasses. Along and down the stream, which the only man in the parish who had any knowledge of politics, I gave John Fry to understand that he must not presume to talk so freely, as if he were at least a constable, about the constitution, which could be no affair of his, and might bring us all into trouble. At this he only tossed his nose, as if he had been in London at least three times for my one; which vexed me so that I promised him, if he would only let me whip, if even the name of a knight of the shire should pass his lips for a fortnight.

It was time to go home to supper now, and I felt very friendly toward it, having been all this season, because my love had only the voice of the little rill, and some hares and a pheasant for company. The sun was gone down behind the black wood, on the further cliffs of Bagworthy, and the rustling of the plow and spade beds was becoming gray, with the grayness of the sapling ash grow brown against the sky; the hollow curves of the little stream became black beneath the grass, and the fair fawn innumerable; while outside the hedge our clover was crimping its leaves in the dew-fall, like the cocked hats of wood-sorrel, when thinking God of it. I was not a little vexed, because my love had only the voice of the little rill, and some hares and a pheasant for company. The sun was gone down behind the black wood, on the further cliffs of Bagworthy, and the rustling of the plow and spade beds was becoming gray, with the grayness of the sapling ash grow brown against the sky; the hollow curves of the little stream became black beneath the grass, and the fair fawn innumerable; while outside the hedge our clover was crimping its leaves in the dew-fall, like the cocked hats of wood-sorrel, when thinking God of it. I was not a little vexed, because my love had only the voice of the little rill, and some hares and a pheasant for company.

Therefore I wiped my bill-hook and shearing-knife carefully, for I was to take to my bed, and I was looking whether I should try for another glance at the seven rooks' nest or whether I would be too dark for it. It was not a quarter of five, say I thought, since I had made my chopping noise, because I had been asserting my spars and tying them in bundles, instead of plying the bill-hooks; and the gentle clink of the stream was louder than my doing. To this, no doubt, owe my life, which then (without my dreaming it) was in no little jeopardy.

For, just as I was twisting the bine of my very last fagot, before touching the clef, long as there came three men outside the hedge, where the western light was yellow; and by it I could see that all three of them carried firearms. These men were walking carelessly, but following down the hedge-trough, as if to stalk some enemy; and for a moment it struck me cold to think it was I they were looking for. With this sudden terror I concluded that my visits to Glen Doone were known, and now my life was the forfeit.

It was a most lucky thing for me that I heard their clothes touch the brambles, and saw their hats under the rampart of ash, which is made by what we call "splashing" and lucky for me that I stood in a gully, and had the dark copse behind me. To this I had no time to fly, but with a sort of instinct threw myself flat in among the thick fern and held my breath, and lay still as a log. For I had seen the light gleam on their gun-bars, and knew the faults of the neighborhood, would faint avoid swelling their number. Then the three men came to the gap in the hedge where I had been in and out so often, and stood up and looked in over.

It is all very well for a man to boast that he has all his life, he has never been frightened, and believe that he never could be so. There may be men of that nature—I will not dare to deny it; only I have never known them. The night I was now in was horrible, and all my bones seemed to creep inside me; when lying there helpless, with only a billet and the comb of fern to hide me, in the dusk of early evening, I saw three faces in the gap; and what was worse, three gun-muzzles.

"Nonsense, man!" cried Marwood, "Somebody had at work here—it was the deep voice of Carver Doone; "jump up, Charlie, and look about; we must have no witnesses." "Give me a hand behind," said Charlie, the same handsome young Doone I had seen that night; "this bank is too devilish steep for me." "Spite is right," said Charlie, who was standing up high (on a rock, perhaps); "there is nobody there now, captain; and lucky for the poor devil that he keepeth workman's hours. For his chopney is gone, I see." "No dog, no man, is the rule about here, when it comes to coppice-work," continued young De Wiechealse; "there is not a man would dare work here, his chopney is gone, I see." "This is a big young fellow upon this farm," Carver Doone muttered sulkily, "with whom I have an account to settle. If he comes to the door, I will curse your us, because we shot his father. He was going to bring the lumps upon us, only he was afraid, last winter. And he hath been in London lately, for some traitorous job, I doubt."

"Oh, you mean that fool, John Ridd," answered the young squire; "a very simple clod-hopper. No treachery in him, I warrant; but he hath no sense for it. All he cares about is wrestling. As strong as a bull, and with no more brains." "A bullet for that bull," said Carver; "and could see the great old man's face; a bullet for ballast to his brain, the first time I come across him." "Nonsense, captain! I won't have him shot, for he is my old school-fellow, and I would not have any man's blood in a different mold, and ten times as dangerous."

"We shall see, lad, we shall see," grumbled the great black-bearded man; "his bill is little, but he hath a hinder me. But come, let us onward, no lingering, or the pipe will be in the bush from us. Body and soul, if he gives us the slip, both of you shall answer for it." "No fear, captain, and no hurry," Charlie answered, gallantly; "would I were as sure of living a twelvemonth as he is of dying within the hour! Extreme Company had so moved my curiosity, and Remember, I claim to be his confessor, because he hath insulted me."

"Thou art welcome to the job for me," said Marwood, as they turned away and left the three men in the bush; "but I would not have a man's sword to sword, not to pop at him from a fox-hole." "What answer was made I could not hear, for by this time the stout and sturdy man had taken us no other gap to be found in, until at the very bottom, where the corner of the cope was. Yet I was not quit of danger now; for they might come straight on, and I had no other resource; he trembled greatly when he heard what I had to tell him; but I grew more and more valiant; I saw my Marwood do what he said, and I did show my knowledge of the other men, for reasons of my own not very hard to conjecture.

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he left there, and so by the foreland to Glenhome, where his boat is in the cove. Do you think I have tracked him so many evenings, without knowing his line to a hair? Will you fool away all my trouble?" "Come, then, lad; we will follow thy lead. Thy life for his, if we fall of it."

"After me, then, right into the hollow thy legs are growing stiff, captain." "So shall thy body be young man, if thou leadest me astray in this." I heard them stumbling down the hill, which was steep and rocky in that part; and peering through the hedge, I saw them enter a covert by the side of the track which Master Stickle allowed almost every evening, when he left our house upon business. And then I knew who it was they were come upon purpose to murder—a thing which I might have guessed long before, but for terror and cold stupidity.

"Oh that God," I thought for a moment, waiting for my blood to flow—"oh that God had given me brains to meet such an enemy, as these are their villainy. The power to lie and the love of it; the stealth to spy and the glory in it; above all, the quiet relief for blood, and the joy in the death of an enemy, these are what any man must have to contend with the Doones upon even terms. And yet I thank God that I have not any of these."

There was no time to dwell upon that, only to try, if it might be to prevent the crime they were bound upon. To follow the armed men down the hill would have been certain death to me, because they would have shot me as I went, and I had no light hung upon it. It seemed to me that my only chance to stop the mischief pending was to compass the round of the hill as fast as my feet could lead to ground, and then to creep up the rocks and across the brook to the track from Slocombe, so as to stop the King's messenger from travelling any farther, if he should come to the door of the house. And this was exactly what I did; and a terrible run I had for it, fearing at every step to hear the echo of shots in the valley dropping down the scrubby hillsides, and the roar of the water when I crossed Bagworthy stream near the hill below Slocombe, and breasted the brook to the track from Slocombe, so as to stop the King's messenger from travelling any farther, if he should come to the door of the house. And this was exactly what I did; and a terrible run I had for it, fearing at every step to hear the echo of shots in the valley dropping down the scrubby hillsides, and the roar of the water when I crossed Bagworthy stream near the hill below Slocombe, and breasted the brook to the track from Slocombe, so as to stop the King's messenger from travelling any farther, if he should come to the door of the house.

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as if it had the moon itself for its mistress. No sooner was a thing done and fixed, being set far in advance (perhaps of all that was done before (like a new mole in the sea), but immediately the waters retired, lest they should undo it; and every one says how fine it is, but leaves other people to walk on it. Then after a while, the vague, endless ocean, having retired and lain still upon a breeze or murmur, frets and heaves again with impulse, or with lashes laid on it, and in one great surge advances over every rampart.

And so there was, at the time I speak of, a great surge in England, not rolling yet, but seething; and one which, as I have said, was as soft as a startled sheep, and as fierce as a volcano. But the worst of it was that this great movement took a wrong channel at first; not only missing legitimate line, but roaring out that the back ditch-way was the only one to follow, and that the present course of things was a mistake. Against this rash and random current nearly all the ancient manners of the State were set; not to allow the brave ship to drift there, though some little force might be exerted to correct it.

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allowed for it in one year's reckoning; "I am sure we should miss them very sadly; and something worse would come of it." TO BE CONTINUED.

PEPILLO

BY L. B. MATTHEWS. THE INDIAN LAD.

The sun was near its setting and the heat of the day had already begun to be tempered with the coolness of evening. Ever and anon there was the tinkle of tiny bells heard afar, likely the bells worn by the sheep that they might not stray too far away. The warm sunlight that still flooded the valley, subdued as it now was by approaching evening, gave a peaceful look to the whole scene—and it was one that could not but delight the eyes of the nature lover.

An Indian lad, emerging from the mesquite at one end of the valley, must have felt the thrill of it all, for he stopped to gaze on the scene before him and his face expressed a wondrous joy. Brown though he was, an observer would have pronounced him good to look upon, for he was like a dark straight and his features were not heavy, like those of so many of his countrymen, but were bright and intelligent. His eyes, as black as night, sometimes burned with hidden fire, at others were as soft as a startled fawn's. Judging from his looks, he was a youth of sixteen or seventeen years.

As he stood thus gazing on the scene before him he suddenly raised his eyes toward the heavens and his face grew pale. His voice was strong and mellow, and the song was one that he had been taught by the Padre at the Mission whose white walls made so conspicuous a landmark in the quiet valley. Scarcely at first the words rang out, then clearer and stronger, until he seemed but a living part of the pulsating scene.

The song ended, he picked up again the burden he had been carrying and hurried on toward a cluster of buildings not far from the Mission itself. As he drew nearer he singled out a small, neat-looking adobe house, toward which he bent his steps. The last rays of the sun had disappeared when he entered, having thrown down his burden near the door. A woman was preparing a meal of "atole" over the fireplace at one side of the room. She looked up as the young man entered.

"Ah, it is you, Pepillo! And did you get the yucca?" "That I did, and a heavy load, too—enough to make more than one of the cows that the white men seem so much to admire." "It is well that they admire them, lad, as the money they pay me for them helps get the few things we must have. Since the father has had such luck with the sheep we fare but poorly but for these and my lace."

"But we need not want—you know the Padre?" "I know he is goodness itself, but you must remember he is much burdened of late with many things. I can see the sorrow growing in his face, and I could not bear that we should add to it. I fear he would not be able to help us much, even if we asked. Things are not as they were once. Once all the broad lands surrounding here belonged to the Mission and the Indians; now the white men have taken all but the little we hold here."

"The eyes of the lad burned. "They had no right!" he cried hotly. "Why came they here to rob us? If I were a man I would have taken them by the throat and strangled them." "Hush, my child, you are talking wild talk. What could you do? Nothing, and better leave unsaid what can do no good. But come, eat your portion, and then go and send your father here to see me while you mind the sheep awhile—and tell your brothers it is time they, too, were in."

"The boy ate the portion she gave him without speaking, then went as he was told to a small enclosure near by, where his father had just driven in a few sheep that they might be safe through the night. He was busy, and his face, as he turned it toward his son, looked old and careworn.

"Mi madre wishes you to come and eat." "I will go as soon as the sheep are cared for." "Go now, I will finish here," and as the older man turned away he took up his uncompleted task, singing the while a soft song, for Pepillo was, his mother had heard, singing, and always his joyful notes were heard when he was busy.

When he had finished the work he threw himself on the ground and looked up at the stars that were beginning to appear one by one in the sky above. It was still, the stillness of early twilight, that mystic hour fraught with so much of pain and pleasure. Once in a while a gray laugh from some of the small adobe houses floated to him on the air, or the tinkling of some of the sheep-bells was heard, but they fitted as only a part of the hour. Again, too, he heard the twittering of some night bird; he heard, yet heeded not, for he was deep in dreams.

Dreamily he watched the twinkling stars. What were they? Other worlds much like ours, the Padre had told him, and he was wondering, if this were so, what they were like. Did people live on those little spots of light and if they did, were they white or brown? Did they look abroad as it did on this earth, where one race, because of their color, took away the lands of another?

guage, and now it was his aim also to learn the English. He was learning, too, for every cowboy he met, struck with his bright, intelligent face, liked him and good-naturedly helped him with his lace.

All this and much more passed through his mind as he watched the stars; then he arose and shook himself again. He heard his mother calling him again. He rose and shook himself. The heavy dew had been falling and his clothing was saturated with it; but he thought nothing of that, for he had not often lain all night with no covering and slept as sweetly as a babe?

He helped his mother put the yucca over the tiny fire. They had mustered he had brought in to soak, for it must go through quite a process before it could be transformed into the coles that the cowboys bought eagerly for saddles. First, it was soaked, then beaten to remove the fibres, then they were bleached, or sometimes colored brown, and lastly woven into the mat.

"You will go with the sheep on the morrow, will you?" asked the young man. He did not answer, but he was commanded without protest. His brothers, two lads younger than himself were nodding over the tiny fire, and he had heavy faces much like their father's, resembling Pep