

POOR DOCUMENT

THE AMERICAN BARON.

(By James De Mille.)
(Continued.)

If you had made inquiries at Rome, you would have found this out and never would have thought of this road.

And you advise me not to travel it, I do, ma'am.

What would you advise me to do? I would advise you, ma'am, most earnestly, to turn and go back to Rome and leave by another route.

Lady Dalrymple looked at him, and a slight smile quivered on her lips.

I see, ma'am, that for some reason or other you doubt my word. Would you put confidence in it if another person were to confirm what I have said?

That depends entirely upon who the other person may be.

The person I mean is Lord Hawbury.

Lord Hawbury? Indeed? said Lady Dalrymple, in some surprise. But let's be sure.

No, ma'am, he's not. He's here—in this hotel.

In this hotel? Here?

Yes, ma'am.

I'm sure I should like to see him very much, and hear what he has to say about it. I'll go and get him, then, said the Baron, and rising briskly, he left the room.

In a short time he returned with Hawbury. Lady Dalrymple expressed surprise to see him, and Hawbury explained that he was travelling with a friend, Lady Dalrymple, of course thought this a great proof of his infatuation about Minnie, and wondered how he could be a friend to a man whom she considered as Minnie's persecutor and torment.

The Baron at once proceeded to explain how the matter stood, and to ask Hawbury's opinion.

Yes, said Lady Dalrymple, I should really like to know what you think about it.

Well, really, and Hawbury, I have an acquaintance with the thing, you know. Never been on this road in my life. But, at the same time, I can assure you that this gentleman is a particular friend of mine, and one of the best fellows I know. I'd stake my life on his perfect trust and honor. If he says any thing, you may believe it because he says it. If he says there are brigands on the road, they must be there.

Oh, of course, said Lady Dalrymple. You are right to believe your friend, and I should trust his word also. But do you not see that perhaps he may believe what he says, and yet be mistaken?

At this the Baron's face fell. Lord Hawbury's warm commendation of him had excited his hopes, but now Lady Dalrymple's manner had destroyed them.

For my part, she added, I don't really think any of us know much about it. I wish we could find some citizen of the town, or some reliable person, and ask him. I wonder whether the inn-keeper is a trustworthy man.

The Baron shook his head.

I wouldn't trust one of them. They're the greatest rascals in the country. Every man of them is in league with the brigandage and highway robbery. This man would advise you to take whatever course would benefit himself and his friends.

But surely we might find some one whose opinion would be reliable. What do you say to one of my drivers? The one that drove our carriage looks like a good honest man.

Well, perhaps so; but I wouldn't trust one of them. I don't believe there's a honest fellow in all Italy.

Lady Dalrymple elevated her eyebrows and threw at Hawbury a glance of despair.

He speaks English, too, said Lady Dalrymple.

So do some of the worst rascals in the country, said the Baron.

Oh, I don't think he can be a very bad rascal. We had better question him, at any rate. Don't you think so, Lord Hawbury?

Well, yes; I suppose it won't do any harm to have a look at the beggar.

The driver alighted to be summoned, and soon made his appearance. He was a square-headed fellow with a grizzled beard, and one of those non-committal faces which may be worn by either an honest man or a knave. Lady Dalrymple thought him the former the Baron the latter. The result will show which of these was in the right.

The driver spoke very far English. He was two or three times over the road. He had not been over it later than two years before. He didn't know it was dangerous. He had never heard of brigands being here. He didn't know there was a sign on the hotel which might know. He was travelling to Florence alone. He was on horseback.

As soon as Lady Dalrymple heard this she suspected that it was Count Girasole she determined to have his advice about it. So she sent a private request to that effect.

It was Count Girasole. He entered and threw his usual smile around. He was charmed, in his broken English, to be of any service to them.

To Lady Dalrymple's statement and question Girasole listened attentively. As she concluded a faint smile passed over his face. The Baron watched him attentively. I know no brigand on this road, said he.

Lady Dalrymple looked triumphantly at the others.

I have travelled this road many times. No danger—all safe.

Another smile from Lady Dalrymple. The Count Girasole looked at Hawbury and then at the Baron, with a slight dash of mockery in his face.

As for danger, he said—'pou! dere is none. See, I go alone—no arms, not a knife—no yet gold in my porte-monnaie. And he drew forth his porte-monnaie, and opened it so as to exhibit its contents.

A little further conversation followed, Girasole evidently was perfectly familiar

with the road. The idea of brigands appeared to strike him as some exquisite piece of pleasantries. He looked as though it was only his respect for the company which prevented him from laughing outright. They had taken the trouble to summon him for that. And besides, as the Count suggested, even if a brigand did appear, there would be always travellers within hearing.

Both Hawbury and the Baron felt humiliated, especially the latter, and Girasole certainly had the best of it on that occasion, whatever his lot had been at other times.

The Count withdrew. The Baron followed in company with Hawbury. He was deeply dejected. First of all, he had hoped to see Minnie. Then he had hoped to frighten the party back. As to the brigands he was in most serious concern. All he said he believed. He could not understand the driver and Count Girasole. The former he might consider a second; but why should Girasole mistake? And yet he believed he was right. As for Hawbury, he didn't believe much in the brigands, but he did believe in his friend and he didn't think much of Girasole. He was sorry for his friend, yet didn't know whether he wanted the party to turn back or not. His own trouble was Hawbury, who now was watching the Italian like a blood-hound, who had seen him, no doubt, go up to the table, and, of course, had seen that Mrs. Willoughby had sent for him.

As for the ladies, their excitement was great. The doors were thin and they had heard every word of the conversation. With Mrs. Willoughby there was but one opinion as to the Baron's motive; she thought he had come to get a peep at Minnie, and also to frighten them back to Rome by silly stories. His signal failure afforded her great triumph. Minnie, as usual, sympathized with him, but said nothing. As for Edith, the sudden arrival of Lord Hawbury was overwhelming, and brought a return of all her former excitement. The sound of his voice again vibrated through her, and at first there was an air of wild hope, which, however, was quickly dispelled. The question arose, what brought him there? There seemed to her but one answer, and that was his infatuation for Minnie. Yet to her, as well as to Lady Dalrymple, it seemed very singular that he should be so warm a friend to Minnie's tormentor. It was a puzzling thing. Perhaps he did not know that the Baron was Minnie's lover. Perhaps he thought that his friend would give her up, and he would win her. Amidst these thoughts there came a wild hope that perhaps he did not love Minnie so very much, after all. But this hope soon was dispelled as she saw that he was just, and raved on in his cool and easy indifference to every thing connected with her.

Such emotions as these actuated the two, and when the guests had gone they joined their aunt once more, and departed. Minnie took no part in the debate, but sat apart looking like an injured being. There were among them all the same opinion, and that was that it was all a clumsy device of the Baron's to frighten them back to Rome. Such being their opinion, they did not occupy much time in debating about their course on the morrow. The idea of going back did not occur to their heads.

This event gave a much more agreeable feeling to Mrs. Willoughby and Lady Dalrymple than they had known since they had been aware that the Baron had followed them. They felt that they had struggled with the difficulty. They had met the enemy and defeated him. Besides the presence of Hawbury was of itself a guarantee of safety.

There could be no further danger of any unpleasant scene with Hawbury was with him. Girasole's presence, also, was felt to be an additional guarantee of safety.

It was felt by all to be a remarkable circumstance that so many men should have followed them on what they had intended as quite a secret journey. These gentlemen who followed them were the very ones, and the only ones whom they wished to cancel it. Yet it had all been revealed to them, and lo! here they all were. Some drove away as to whether it would not be better to go back to Rome now, and defy the Baron, and leave by another route. But this debate was soon given up, and they looked forward to the journey as one which might afford new and peculiar enjoyment.

On the following morning they started at an early hour. Girasole left about half an hour after them, and passed them a few miles along the road. The Baron and the Reverend Saml left next and last of all came Hawbury and Dacres. The latter was, if possible, more gloomy and vengeful than ever. The visit of the Italian on the preceding evening was fully believed by him to be a scheme of his wife's. Nor could any amount of persuasion or vehement statement on Hawbury's part in any way shake his belief.

No, he would say, you don't understand. Depend upon it, she got him up there to lead her eyes on him. Depend upon it she managed to get some note from him and pass one to him in return. He had only to turn it under the leaf of a table, or stick it inside of some book; no doubt they have it all arranged, and pass their internal love-letters forward. But I'll soon have a chance. My time is coming. It's near, too. I'll have my vengeance; and then for all life that demon of a woman shall pay no dear.

To all which Hawbury had nothing to say. He could say nothing; he could do nothing. He could only stand by his friend, go with him, and watch over him, hoping to avert the crisis which he dreaded, or, if it did come, to lessen the danger of his friend.

The writing was clear and beautiful. The road wound among the hills. The party went in the order above mentioned.

First Girasole, on horseback.

Next, and two miles at least behind came the two carriages with the ladies and their maids.

Third, and a half mile behind these came the Baron and the Reverend Saml.

Last of all, and half a mile behind the Baron, came Hawbury and Dacres.

The last drove along at about this distance. The scenery around grew grander, and the mountains higher. The road was smooth and well constructed, and the carriage rolled along with an easy, comfortable motion.

They were driving up a slope which would along the side of the hill. At the top of the hill trees appeared on each side and the road made a sharp turn here.

Suddenly the report of a shot sounded ahead.

Then a scream.

Good Lord! Dacres, did you hear that? cried Hawbury. The driver then tried to stop his horse, but Hawbury would not let him.

Have you a pistol, Dacres?

No.

Get out! he shouted to the driver; and kicking him out of his seat, he seized the reins himself, and drove the horses straight forward to where the noise came.

It is the brigands, Dacres. The ladies are there.

My wife! O God! my! I groaned Dacres. But a minute before he had been cursing the man who had shot at him.

Get a knife! Get something, man! Have a fight for it!

Hawbury murmured something, and Hawbury leaped the horse and drove them straight toward the woods.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CARRY IN AMERICA.

The ladies had been driving on, quite unconscious of the neighborhood of any danger, admiring the beauty of the scenery, and calling one another's attention to the various objects of interest which from time to time became visible. Thus engaged, they ascended the incline already spoken of, and began to enter the forest. They had not gone far when a sudden crash was heard, and here a starting spectacle burst upon their view.

The road now turning descended slightly into a hollow. On the right rose a steep acclivity, covered with the dense forest. On the other side the ground rose gradually, and was covered over by a forest much less dense. Some distance in front the road took another turn, and was lost to view among the trees. About a hundred yards in front of them a tree had been felled, and lay across the way, barring their progress.

About twenty armed men stood before them close by the place where the turn was. Among them was a man on horseback. To their amazement it was Girasole then came forward.

Miladi, said he, I had the honor of inviting you to descend.

It means that I war wrong. Here are brigands on an instant resolved to rush into the midst of danger. First of all he thought that a struggle might be going on between the driver, the other travellers, and the brigands, in which event assistance would be of great value. Though unarmed, he thought he might be able to do some good. He was an enemy. In addition to this he wished to strike a blow to save the ladies from captivity, even if his blow should be unavailing. Even if he had known how to do it, he would probably have acted precisely in the same way. As for Dacres, he had but one idea. He was sure that some trick connected by his wife and the Italian, though they wish they should do so, he did not stop to enquire.

To be Continued.

Well, by thunder! he exclaimed. Girasole rode up and called out. Surrender! You are my prisoners. What's your name? said the Baron, and he glared for a moment with a vengeful look at Girasole. You must be Dacres, said Girasole. You must be bound.

Bound? All right, here I am, you jump down and let them tie your hands, and the road made a sharp turn here.

The Baron stood up. The Reverend Saml stood up too. The Reverend Saml began to step down very carefully. He was just preparing to follow. The brigands were impatient to secure them, when suddenly, with a quick movement the Baron gave a spring out of the carriage, and ran straight toward the woods.

The brigands were taken completely by surprise, and before they could prepare to follow him, he had sprung into the forest, and with his hands, was rushing up the steep hill and out of sight.

It was fired after him, and that was the shot that Hawbury and Dacres heard. The two men spring after him with the hope of catching him.

In a few moments a loud cry was heard from the woods.

MIX!

Minnie leaped it; a scream of fright flashed from her eyes; a million thoughts came over her lips.

What's that? she called in reply.

What's that? was the cry that came back—and this was the cry that Hawbury and Dacres had heard.

I'm sure I don't know what he means by telling me that, said Minnie. How can I wait if this horrid Italian won't let me? I'm sure he ought to be more considerate.

For Mrs. Willoughby who for a moment had been roused to hope by the escape of her friend, she was now again wept and moaned and clung to Minnie. Lady Dalrymple still lay senseless in spite of Edith and the maids. The carriage had been more or less taken by a more encounter with brigands. It was the thought of her own carelessness that overwhelmed her. In an instant the thought of the Baron's warning and his solemn entreaties flashed across her memory. She recollected how Hawbury had commended his friend, and how she had turned away from these to the very man who had betrayed her. These were the thoughts that had overwhelmed her.

But now there arose once more the noise of rolling wheels, advancing more swiftly than the last, accompanied by the lash of a whip and shouts of a human voice. Girasole spoke to his men, and they moved nearer to the band, and stood in readiness.

What Hawbury's motive was it is not difficult to tell. He was not armed, and therefore could not hope to do much, but he had in an instant resolved to rush into the midst of danger. First of all he thought that a struggle might be going on between the driver, the other travellers, and the brigands, in which event assistance would be of great value. Though unarmed, he thought he might be able to do some good. He was an enemy. In addition to this he wished to strike a blow to save the ladies from captivity, even if his blow should be unavailing. Even if he had known how to do it, he would probably have acted precisely in the same way. As for Dacres, he had but one idea. He was sure that some trick connected by his wife and the Italian, though they wish they should do so, he did not stop to enquire.

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