

DARREL OF THE BLESSED ISLES

By IRVING BACHELLER.
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"Dri and L" Etc.

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Two or three of the older men wore suits of black broadcloth, the stock and rolling collar—relics of "old decency" back in Vermont or Massachusetts or Connecticut. Most were in rough homespun over white shirts with no cuffs or collar. All gathered about Darrel, who sat smoking outside the door. He rose and greeted each one of the women with a bow and a compliment. The tinker was a man of unfailing courtesy, and one thing in him was extremely odd—even there in that land of pure democracy—he treated a scrub woman with the same politeness he would have accorded the finest lady. But he was in no sense a flatterer. None that saw him often were long in ignorance of that. His rebuke was even quicker than his compliment, at many had reason to know.

Half an hour before dark the yard was thronged with people. They listened, with smiles or a faint ripple of merry feeling, as he greeted each.

"Good evening, Mrs. Beach," he would say. "Ah, the snow is falling on thy head. An' the sunlight upon thine dear girl," he added, taking the hand of the woman's daughter.

"An' here's Mr. Tilly back from the far west," he continued. "How far ye, sor?"

"I'm well, but a little too fat," said Thurston Tilly.

"Well, sor, unless it make thy heart heavy, be content."

"Good evening Mrs. Hooper. That's a cunning hand with the pies."

"Ah, Mrs. Rood, may the mouse never leave thy meal bag with a tear in his eye."

"Not a gray hair in thy head, Miss Tower, nor even a gray thought."

"An' here's Mrs. Barbour. 'Twill make me sweat to carry me pride now. How goes the battle?"

"The Lord has given me sore affliction," said she.

"Nay, dear woman," said the tinker, "in that tone so kindly and resistless."

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Tunk, who had been outside the door in his best clothes, but who, since he put them on, had looked as if he doubted the integrity of his suspenders and would not come in the house, began to laugh loudly.

"That man Tunk can see the comedy in all but himself," was Trove's thought as he returned with a smile of amusement.

Soon Trove and Polly came out and stood by the lilac bush at the gate.

"You worry me, Sidney Trove," said she, looking off at the moonlit fields.

Then came a silence full of secret things like the silence of their first meeting there by the same gate long ago. This one, however, had a vibration that seemed to sting them.

"I am sorry," said he with a sigh.

Another silence in which the heart of the girl was feeling for the secret in his.

"You are so sad, so different," she whispered.

Polly waited full half a minute for his answer. Then she touched her eyes with her handkerchief, turned impatiently and went halfway to the door.

Darrel caught her hand, drawing her near him.

"Give me thy hand, boy," said he to Trove, now on his way to the door.

He stood with his arms around the two.

"Every shadow hath the wings of light," he whispered. "Listen."

The house rang with laughter and the music of "Money Musk."

"Tis the golden bell of happiness," said he presently. "Go an' ring it. Nay—first a kiss."

He drew them close together, and they kissed each other's lips and with smiling faces went in to join the dance.

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effort to control himself, "but I am not worthy to touch the hem of your garment."

"Tell me why, Sidney."

"Some day—I do not know when—I will tell you all. And if you can love me after that, we shall both be happy."

"Tell me now," she urged.

"I cannot," said he. "But if you only trust me, Polly, you shall know. If you will not trust me."

He paused, looking at the snow path.

"Good night!" he added presently.

They kissed and parted, each going to the company of bitter tears.

As of old, Trove had many a friend—schoolfellows who came of an evening now and then for his help in some knotty problem. All saw a change in him. He had not the enthusiasm and good cheer of former days, and some ceased to visit him. Moreover, they were free to say that Trove was getting a big head. For one thing, he had become rather careless about his clothes, a new trait in him, for he had the gift of pride and the knack of neatness.

A new student sought his acquaintance the very first week of the term, that rather foppish young man who got off the cars at Hillsborough the day of the first coming. He was from Buffalo and, although twenty-two years of age, was preparing to enter college. His tales of the big city and his frank good fellowship made him a welcome guest. Soon he was known to all as Dick, his name being Richard Roberts. It was not long before Dick knew everybody and everybody knew Dick, including Polly, and thought him a fine fellow. Soon Trove came to know that when he was detained a little after school, Dick went home with Polly. That gave him no concern, however, until Dick ceased to visit him and he saw a change in the girl.

One day two letters came for Trove. They were in girlish penmanship and bore no signature, but stung him to the quick.

"For heaven's sake get a new hat," said one.

"You are too handsome to neglect your clothes," said the other.

As he read them his cheeks were burning with his shame. He went for his hat and looked it over carefully. It was faded, and there was a little rent in the crown. His boots were tattered and mended, his trousers threadbare at the knee, and there were two patches on his coat.

"I hadn't thought of it," said he, with a sigh. Then he went for a talk with Darrel.

"Did you ever see a more shabby-looking creature?" he inquired as Darrel came to meet him. "I am so ashamed of myself I'd like to go lie in your wood box while I talk to you."

"What hempen homespun have we swagging here?" Darrel quoted in a rallying voice.

"I'll tell you," Trove began.

"Nay, first a roundel," said the tinker, as he began to shuffle his feet to the measure of an old fairy song.

"If one were on his way to the gallows, you would make him laugh," said Trove, smiling.

"An' I could, so would I," said the old man. "A smile, boy, hath in it 'some relish o' salvation.' Now, tell me, what is thy trouble?"

"I'm going to leave school," said Trove.

"An' wherefore?"

"I'm sick of this pinching poverty. Look at my clothes. I thought I could make them do, but I can't."

He put the two notes in Darrel's hand. The tinker wiped his spectacles and then read them both.

"Tut, tut, boy," said he presently, with a very grave look. "Have ye forgotten the tatters that were as a badge of honor an' success? Weeks ago I planned to find thee better garments; but, on my word, I had no heart for it. Nay, these old ones had become dear to me. I was proud of them. Aye, boy, proud of them. When I saw the first patch on thy coat, said I, 'It is the little ensign o' generosity.' Then came another, an' said I, 'That is for honor an' true love, an' these bare threads—there is no loom can weave the like o' them. Nay, boy,' Darrel added, lifting an arm of the young man and kissing one of the patches, "be not ashamed of these. They're beautiful, aye, beautiful. They stand for the dollars ye gave Polly."

Trove turned away, wiping his eyes. He looked down at his coat and trousers and began to wonder if he were, indeed, worthy to wear them.

"I'm not good enough for them," said he, "but you've put new heart into me, and I shall not give up. I'll wear them as long as I can make them do, and girls can say what they please."

"The magpies!" said Darrel. "When they have a thought for every word they utter, there'll be then a second Sabbath in the week!"

Next evening Trove went to see Polly.

As he was leaving she held his hand in both of hers and looked down, blushing deeply, as if there were something she would say had she the courage.

"What is it, Polly?" said he.

"Will you—will you let me buy you a new hat?" said she soberly and hesitating much between words.

He thought a moment, biting his lip, he, looking down at the faded hat. "I know it's shabby; but, after all, I'm fond o' the old thing. I love good clothes, but I can't afford them now."

"Then he bade her good night and came away."

CHAPTER XXVII.

IT was court week, and the grand jury was in session. There were many people in the streets of the shire town. They moved with a slow foot, some giving their attention to squirts of curiosity and others to tobacco. Squire Day and Colonel Ardson were to argue the famous maple

sugar case, and many causes of local celebrity were on the calendar.

The third day of that week—it was about the middle of the afternoon—a score of men gossiping in the lower hall of the court building were hushed suddenly. A young man came hurrying down the back stairs with a look of excitement.

"What's up?" said one.

"Sidney Trove is indicted," was the answer of the young man.

He ran out of doors and down the street. People began crowding out of the courtroom. Information, surprise and conjecture—a kind of flood-pouring out of a broken dam—rushed up and down the forty streets of the village.

Soon, as of old, many were afloat and some few were drowning in it. For a little, busy hands fell limp and feet grew slow and tongues halting. A group of schoolgirls on their way home were suddenly overtaken by the rushing tide. They came close together and whispered. Then a little cry of despair, and one of them fell and was borne into a near house. A young man ran up the stairway at the Sign of the Dial and rapped loudly at Darrel's door. Trove and the tinker were inside.

"Old fellow," said the newcomer, his hand upon Trove's arm, "they've voted to indict you, and I've seen all the witnesses."

Trove had a book in his hand. He rose calmly and fung it on the table.

"It's an outrage," said he, with a sigh.

"Nay, an honor," said Darrel quickly. "Hold up thy head, boy. The laurel shall take the place of the frown."

He turned to the bearer of these evil tidings.

"Have ye more knowledge o' the matter?"

"Yes, all day I have been getting hold of their evidence," said the newcomer, a law student, who was now facing his friend Trove. "In the first place, it was a man of blue eyes and about your build who broke into the bank at Milldam. It is the sworn statement of the clerk, who has now recovered. He does not go so far as to say you are the man, but does say it was a man like you that assaulted him. It appears the robber had his face covered with a red bandanna handkerchief in which square holes were cut so he could see through. The clerk remembers it was covered with a little white figure, that of a log cabin. Such a handkerchief was sold years ago in the campaign of Harrison, but has gone out of use. Not a store in the county has had them since 1845. The clerk fired upon him with a pistol and thinks he wounded him in the left forearm. In their fight the robber struck him with a slung shot, and he fell and remembers nothing more until he came to in the dark alone. The skin was cut in little squares where the shot struck him, and that is one of the strong points against you."

"Against me?" said Trove.

"Yes—that and another. It seems the robber left behind him one end of a bar of iron. The other end of the same bar and a slung shot—the very one that probably felled the clerk—have been found."

The speaker rose and walked half across the room and back, looking down thoughtfully.

"I tell ye what, old fellow," said he, sitting down again. "You're mighty strange. If I didn't know you well, I'd think you guilty. Here comes a detective who says under oath that one night he saw you come out of your lodgings about 11 o'clock and walk to the middle of the bridge and throw something into the water. Next morning bar and shot were found. As nearly as he could make out, they lay directly under the place where you had halted."

Darrel sat looking thoughtfully at the speaker.

"A detective?" said Trove, rising erect, a stern look upon him.

"Yes, Dick Roberts."

"Roberts, a detective?" said Trove in a whisper. Then he turned to Darrel, adding, "I shall have to find the Frenchman."

"Louis Leblanc?" the young man asked.

"Louis Leblanc," Trove answered, with surprise.

"He has been found," said the other. "Then I shall be able to prove my point. He came to his home drunk one night and began to bully his family. I was boarding with the Misses Tower and went over and took the shot and from his hands and got him to bed. The woman begged me to bring them away."

"He declares that he never saw the shot or the iron."

Darrel rose and drew his chair a bit nearer.

"Very well, but there's the wife," said he quickly.

"She will swear, too, that she never saw them."

"And how about the daughter?" Trove inquired.

"Run away and nowhere to be found," was the answer of the other young man. "I've told you bad news enough, but there's more, and you ought to know it all. Louis Leblanc is in Quebec, and he says that a clock tinker lent him money with which to leave the States."

"It was I, an' God bring him to repentance, the poor beggar!" said Darrel. "He agreed to repay me within a fortnight an' was in sore distress, but he ran away, an' I got no word o' him."

"Well, the inference is that you, being a friend of the accused, were trying to help him."

"I'm caught in a web," said Trove, leaning forward, his head upon his hands, "and Leblanc's wife is the spider. How about the money? Have they been able to identify it?"