

## Selections.

## RED RUM.

(BY HENRY IRVING DODD)

We were standing at the counter of one of the sumptuous barrooms of San Antonio.

Barclay had a ranch to sell, and the two Englishmen with us had offered him a very handsome price for it. I was the broker in the transaction.

We met at 'Dan's place' by appointment, and I hoped to conclude the deal at once, as a fat commission stared me in the face. It was twelve o'clock outside—but in 'Dan's place' no account was ever kept of time.

The Englishmen were a couple of sturdy, red-faced, high-booted fellows, with a good deal of the 'sport' in their natures. They were thoroughly Texanized, and could gamble or drink rum with the best or worst plausmen. Our friends had just made some very profitable trades, and were by no means inclined to omit the functions usually described as 'celebrating'.

'Dan' put out glasses for four, and a bottle of old rye, in a very proper anticipation of our order. The Englishmen and myself turned out a good 'three fingers' into our glasses, but Barclay hesitated. I shoved the bottle along to him. 'I think I'll take sarsaparilla,' he said, quietly.

The Englishmen glanced at each other significantly. 'We're not buying soft drinks to-day, partner,' said Todd.

I looked at Barclay. He was evidently agitated, and I began to feel very nervous.

'Come, old chap,' exclaimed Todd, slapping him on the back, 'this is a big transaction, and deserves christening in something better than strained water.'

I nudged Barclay. 'For goodness sake, old man, don't let a drink of whiskey stand in the way.' I was trembling, lest some foolish slip in the deal should happen. The Englishmen had paused with half-lifted glasses and were looking impatiently at Barclay. Suddenly he straightened himself up to his full height. His face was full of a new determination. His left hand reached out and grasped the bottle; and, pouring out a good stiff drink, he raised it to his lips and turned with a smile to the Englishmen. They nodded their approval to his action. A strange thing then occurred. Barclay took off his hat and looked into the crown of it for a moment; he turned very pale. Then he sat the untouched liquor upon the bar again. 'Gentlemen,' he said, 'you'll have to pardon my seeming unsociability, but I cannot drink liquor.'

We were all astonished at Barclay's action. Todd, who by this time was a little the worse for wear, swore a mighty oath and cried: 'If you can't drink with us, you can't trade with us—that's all'; and he banged his fist down on the table to emphasize what he said.

Barclay turned to him; he was perfectly calm, but his face was very white. He saw the chance of recouping his fortunes slipping through his fingers—but he said, very slowly:

'Then the deal is off, gentlemen.'

To think that he would let a stupid, fanatical prejudice obstruct the opportunity, was too harrowing for words. I ground my teeth in silent rage. I felt my heart sink within me. In my impatience at the absurdity of his course, I could scarcely restrain a sudden impulse to grasp him roughly by the arm.

An embarrassed silence followed. I was secretly furious. Presently Barclay spoke. Addressing us all, he said:

'You are all reasonable men and will hear what I have to say. I'll admit I would like to trade with you, gentlemen, but the trade may go to the devil if I have to drink whiskey in order to make it. What annoys me most, however, is that you may consider me an unsociable boor. I want you to listen—we'll take seats at one of these tables, and I'll tell you why I don't drink whiskey or any other alcoholic product.'

The independence of Barclay's sentiments, and the earnestness of his tone, compelled respect, and we took seats at the table indicated, and composed ourselves to listen.

He began: 'This is a story I have never told to a soul in Texas and I don't believe any one in this State knows it. I would not tell it now, but Mr.—— (meaning me) has worked very hard in my interest, and I consider him entitled

to my reason for acting as I have in this matter. You may think it took courage to refuse the drink,—I tell you it would have taken a good deal more courage to have accepted.' Then he stopped and fumbled in his pockets for a moment, saying: 'I have a few picturesque exhibits which go with the story. The first is this.' He drew from his inner waistcoat pocket a great leather pocketbook, and from one of its many compartments extracted a newspaper clipping, and, holding it up by one corner, allowed it to unfold itself, and then put it on the table before us. 'That's Exhibit One,' he remarked, eyeing us curiously, to see how we took it. For a moment we stared in wild-eyed amazement at the great black words whose heavy lines covered the top of the column like a mourning band.

'GUILTY!'

The subcaption ran on in the 'sky-rockety' style of the small western town: 'John Barclay, convicted of murder in the first degree.' And then, oh, horror! 'A most spectacular aerial performance anticipated. Sentence postponed through respect for the prisoner's aged mother, who dropped dead in the courtroom upon hearing the verdict.'

'That's nice stuff for a man to read about himself,' said Barclay, with a groan.

He folded the slip, put it back where it belonged, and produced another.

'Exhibit No. 2,' he said, in a matter-of-fact way; 'that looks more like business.' It read: 'Barclay to be hanged on the twenty-first instant. It was dated 'the fourteenth,' many years ago.

'Things were getting pretty warm,' observed Barclay, with anything but enthusiasm. We all shrugged our shoulders, and he proceeded: 'Gentlemen, the immediate cause of those two most unflattering notices was murder. The prime cause was—well, what is 'murder' spelled backward?' Without waiting for an answer, he traced the letters of the word with his pencil, in the order suggested:

'RED RUM!'

'Gentlemen, the rum that I drank murdered my mother. It was with malice prepense it did it, too. It was just as deliberately done as if I had crept into the poor soul's bedroom at night and pressed a knife down into her trusting old heart. I knew that my intemperance—nay, my brutal debauchery—was killing her by inches—the cruellest way ever devised. She did nothing but good to me. It is no excuse for a man's acts that he was drunk. It is not then he commits the crime—no, it is when, in his sober senses, he takes the first drink, knowing full well the devil he lets loose in his brain when he does it. At that time,' continued Barclay, 'my mother and I were living in a boarding house in a small town in the North. Our landlady was an old maid. She was a person of uncertain means and temper. I had been drinking most brutally for a long period, and would, no doubt, have been put out of my boarding house unceremoniously, but for Miss C.'s consideration for my mother, for whom she seemed to have a genuine affection. I had never had any words with her; but, as it subsequently developed, I had been heard to complain about her exceeding exactingness where money was due her. It was known, at the time, that I had but recently met with several business reverses, and was unusually 'hard up.'

'I had been on one of my cattle-trading trips; and, upon my return, was regaling 'the boys' with a little up country gossip and some hot rum—for they all laughed at my jokes when my money was buying the drinks. I remember, it was about eleven o'clock at night. The whole scene comes back to me now; the hot rum-and-water-laden air; the great corpulent stove, red with rage and energy, and the steaming calves of the countrymen who stood near it. There the scene ends. When I slowly awoke, or recovered consciousness, it was still dark, but I felt that I was in a strange place. Something, a certain subtle, inner consciousness that goes on recording our actions where the brain itself is incapacitated, seemed striving to tell me that some awful disaster had befallen me. I started up and stood upon the floor. It was hard and cold. An awful shudder ran over me. I spread out my arms to their full length, and to my horror, touched the two opposite sides of my room at once—stone walls.

'I was thoroughly terrified. Going in the direction I believed the door to be in, I put out my hand and thrust it through what seemed a hole, but later proved to be one of the interstices between iron bars. I must have dropped in a faint, because I do not remember going back to my bed. However, when I next came to, it was broad daylight. The jailer stood at the door, looking in, and evidently waiting for me to awaken, for, as soon as he caught my eye, he exclaimed:

'Remember! Anything you say may be used against you.'

'A great dread sat, like a lump of ice, on my heart. I begged him to explain. Anything but that awful suspense!

'Then he told me I had murdered Miss C.'

'My trial was put down for a date about a month away, and my angel mother secured the ablest counsel in the country to defend me: but, best of all, she came to me in my agony and put her hand upon my forehead, and then kissed me and told me that she believed me innocent. How she could logically do it, with evidence enough against me to damn an angel, I do not know, but she did it with her woman's heart, and her woman's heart broke when, at length the jury told her she had been mistaken.

'Gentlemen,' resumed Barclay, after a pause, 'I used to believe all lawyers rascals until that time. But the way that man worked for me was nothing short of sublime. He labored with me day in and day out, morning, noon and night, striving by all means known to philosophy, science and practice, to recover from the sensitive plates of my memory the pictures printed on them by a rum-enslaved spirit between the hours of eleven p. m. and two a. m. on the night of the murder. But it was of no use. Evidently the films of memory had been temporarily desensitized by the stupefying influence of the alcohol. Anyway, nothing could bring the dreaded pictures of that awful period to the surface.

'I shall not bore you with the harassing details of that trial. It was shown, however, that I had been discovered in Miss C.'s room. I was on the floor, in a drunken sleep, when the officers arrived, and was completely dressed, even to my overcoat and hat. Near my right hand, as if I had but recently relaxed my hold upon it, lay my pistol. One of my cartridges had been discharged, and the bullet found in Miss C.'s body fitted the empty shell.

'My lawyer used to come to my cell and implore me to use every trick and device that I knew of to bring back the chain of events of that fateful night, but I could only gaze at him stupidly. So far I could go, but no further. At a certain point, the cloud of oblivion would drop before my mind and I could not penetrate it. I thought that, by thinking with great rapidity and running with exact sequence along the chain of occurrences leading up to a certain hour, the mental momentum thus acquired might carry me through into the realms of my mental darkness. But it was without avail. You can drive a horse at a furious rate right up to the brink of a lake, but there he will stop, and not budge an inch further; and the blackness of the lake in front of him is no blacker than the blackness of that hell-born period of five or six hours of oblivion that confronted me. O, the helplessness of it all! I used to sit and watch my lawyer fight against such overwhelming odds that the admiration I felt for his skill would, at times, so absorb me that I forgot the part I was taking in that awful tragedy.

'To make a long story short, the case finally went to the jury. You have seen the newspaper clippings. The verdict killed my mother, who had never once left my side during the trial, except at night—and then only to resume her place the first thing in the morning. She had been hoping against hope. When mother dropped dead, I offered a silent prayer of gratitude that she had not lived to witness the last act.

On the morning of the twenty-first, as the clipping says, I was brought before the judge, an old friend of my father, and sentenced to be hanged by the neck until dead. Gentlemen, there's an experience not many ever had and lived to tell of it. I tell you, words are feeble when one tries to tell of it.

'Talk about timely rescues in the dramas—all nicely planned to occur with the regularity of clockwork. Why they actually had that awful black cap drawn over my face and the noose adjusted before the Governor's 'stay' arrived. I heard a commotion in the crowd and wondered rather impatiently what the delay was about. Then hands removed the cap and noose, and I was led back to my cell. I was too astonished to speak and no one vouchsafed any explanation. When I reached my cell and sat upon my bed, I couldn't realize what had occurred, and pinched myself to see whether I were really there or my spirit had come back to haunt the place.

'Presently the head jailer came to me and told me that a fire had taken place in the neighborhood the night before, in which two strange men were so badly burned that death was but a matter of hours with them. One of the men, when he was told that he could not live, sent for the minister and confessed to having committed the murder I had been convicted of. His story, which was subsequently confirmed by the other burglar, was, substantially, that they had come to our town in quest of proper prey. They had learned that Miss C. had many well-to-do boarders in her house, some of whom carried money with them in large amounts, and they had determined to rob the house. The hour was late, and the night very tempestuous and black—the very elements seeming to favor the wicked purpose of those men. Their plan was to go first to Miss C.'s room and secure the keys of the house, after which they could loot at leisure. Accidentally, however, they awakened the landlady, who immediately set up such an unearthly screaming that it was found necessary to despatch her without more ado. One shot was enough for the dastardly purpose, and the poor old creature, who had never done any other harm than ask for her just dues, went quickly 'over the river.' The robbers then paused for a moment to ascertain if anyone in the house had been aroused by the shot. Concluding finally that the storm had drowned the report of the pistol, they determined to leave at once, as the murder had so unnerved them that they had no thought of theft, but cared only to get away. As they were going out, however, they discovered a man lying in the hall at the landing, near Miss C.'s door, in a drunken stupor. Then it occurred to them to drag the man noiselessly into her room, and leave him there with a pistol on the floor near his hand. Their motive in doing this was to divert suspicion from themselves, as they were strangers in the place.

When they discovered that I had a pistol in my pocket similar to their own, they exchanged cartridges; hence the empty shell in mine.

'On my release from prison, I was met by my old enemy, who exclaimed: 'Mighty close shave you had, my lad, but don't be discouraged—keep right on as you have been doing and you will get there yet. I don't know but we ought to swing you anyhow: for, if you didn't kill one, you certainly did the other.'

'Gentlemen, that is my story.'

Barclay paused, and we all sat silent. Presently he said:

'I know there's one question you all want to ask. You want to know what I've got in my hat that had such a startling effect upon me. I will tell you what it is—it's a picture—it's not that of mother, nor my sweetheart, but,—and he held his hat with the inside turned towards us.

There was a picture there, one that caused us all to shudder. It was the picture of a gallows.

Todd extended his hand.

'The deal will go through,' he said.

## Good Work

The prohibitory law is being vigorously enforced in the city of Topeka, Kan., with good results. A letter from Guy Hayer in the Alliance News gives an account of his visit to this city, during which he thoroughly investigated the conditions, and found that it was almost impossible to secure any intoxicating liquor. Fifteen convictions have been recorded against one of the worst law violators, who has been sentenced to 450 days' imprisonment and \$4,500 fine. Not being able to give bonds for the amount of his crime he has been committed to prison.