

by sacrificing a bumper of claret on the altar of his success. He underwent, however, first of all, a good scolding from Betty for leaving the key in the house-door.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, that you ought," said Betty vigorously, for she at least stood in no fear of Hackit, who bowed deferentially to her opinions in domestic matters; "going on talking all that while about honesty and suchlike, and you knowing all the while, as you must have done, that that door was unlocked, and any thief as chose could come in and make off with what he pleased. Why didn't you say, when you were talking so much about the honest and virtuous man, 'Betty, I left the house-door open; please go and shut it, and bring me the key?'"

"But nothing has been stolen, has it?" said the parson meekly.

"And it's no fault of yours if it hasn't," said Betty, as she at last allowed the poor fellow to come inside the house and have his dinner, overwhelming him with a torrent of abuse all the way into the dining-room.

The vicar, however, very soon recovered his equanimity and set his mind at ease; he was too much accustomed to the tempestuous billows of domestic life to mind a storm now and then, and his triumph of the morning came into his heart and drove away all disquieting thoughts. By the time dinner was over he was as light-hearted and as benevolent as ever, and had quite forgotten, in considering the length of beam of Noah's Ark, whether such a person as Betty ever existed or no. At length, while he sat complacently sipping his wine (Betty had snappishly refused to allow him a bumper), the bell for evening service, which had been long ringing, stopped; and determined not to be late this time, he rose, and putting on his hat, set out to walk across to the church.

Scarcely had he got outside his door, however, when a most unusual sight met his eyes. In the road, by the church-gate, stood another strange man, covered with sweat and blood, his feet and head bare, and showing unmistakable signs of ill-usage, eagerly and angrily haranguing a circle of the parishioners, both ladies and gentlemen. The greatest confusion and excitement prevailed in the assemblage; all parties were talking to and at every one else, and nobody was listening to any one; and although the poor stranger was evidently the cause of the tumult, he was as little heeded as any, but was pushed backwards and forwards, and jostled up and down, as each person in turn used him as an illustration of his desire to do some one an injury. It was a most confused medley of tongues indeed, including, I am sorry to say, some excessively bad language, which met the poor parson's ears.

Anxious to know at once the meaning of this bawling outside his church on a Sunday afternoon, the parson went across the road and began a speech which was intended for conciliation; but his appearance was the signal for a burst of execration from both sexes; the ladies shook their fists in his face, and the gentlemen put their hands to their swords, and talked loudly about the protection which his cloth afforded him, whilst old Pennywinkle, the churchwarden, blue with rage, consigned him—yes, him, Hackit, the vicar of Denbury!—and his sermons to a place which it would be indelicate to mention. Amidst this Babel of tongues, which assaulted him whichever way he turned, from the sharp-shooting of the lady part of the crowd to the heavy artillery of Sir Charles Heavyboy and his satellites, mingled now and then with the oaths and execrations which Pennywinkle let off like minute guns whenever there was a chance of being heard, which was seldom, the poor parson at last turned in despair towards the apparent cause of the storm, and attempted to extract from him a statement of the position of affairs. From him he learnt the following particulars, though with much pain and difficulty; for although the gale of abuse that had been blowing was subsiding, yet talking across some eight or nine persons was a difficult matter, and there was yet sufficient emphasis in the language around to render any lengthy explanation a matter of some little trouble. The stranger was a merchant travelling to the north with goods of great value for a firm in Edinburgh. On his way he had been waylaid by thieves; his horse, affrighted, had escaped with his portmanteau, and the thieves had only managed to seize a small packet of jewels of immense value, with which they had made off, leaving him gagged and bound by the roadside. No one had passed till that morning, when he was released by some countrymen who went by. "If any gentleman," continued the stranger, "could lend me so much as would enable me to reach Edinburgh, I could then track the thieves, and easily repay so small a loan. I am but a poor man—" But Sir Charles Heavyboy declared, at this juncture, that it was getting very late for service, a proposition which was agreed to by all around; and the congregation, grumbling and swearing, flocked into the church, leaving the parson and the merchant face to face.

The first effect of this tale was to draw tears from the poor vicar's eyes, as he reflected on the immense injury which he had been the cause of inflicting on this man; but he was not long in this mood. A feeling of righteous indignation arose within him; all flushed and excited, stretching out his hands, he solemnly swore that Denbury should never see his face or hear his voice again until he had succeeded in catching those rascals and wresting their ill-gotten plunder from their hands; and, to his great surprise,

the words were hardly out of his mouth, when a hand was thrust within his, and old Squire Trimble vowed, with his usual strength of language, to be his partner in the enterprise, and return successful, or perish in the attempt.

Tradition says that the squire and the vicar tracked the thieves all the way to London, where they finally ran them to ground. They nearly caught them on the road, and were only balked by Squire Trimble's partiality for a pretty barmaid, who so fascinated him that he quite forgot to give the alarm till the rascals were far beyond reach. However, they traced them at last; and after much time spent in negotiations between the thief-takers and the thieves, the jewels much to Parson Hackit's disgust, who could not bear the thoughts of a compromise with such wicked men) were recovered and handed over to the parson and the squire.

The jewels were bought by Sir Charles Heavyboy as a memento of the event; but when Lady Heavyboy sold them, some five years afterwards, it was found that the clever thieves had substituted paste for the real jewels, and had so escaped with their prize.

As to the vicar, the recollection of his eloquent discourse, or any allusion to it, completely upset him. He paid a curate forever afterwards, and obstinately refused to preach another sermon.

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