

The True Witness

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TALES OF THE JURY-ROOM.

Eamus in ius.

PLAUT. *Pomilia*, Act v.

Dogberry. Are you good men, and true?

Much Ado about Nothing.

BY GERALD GRIFFIN.
AUTHOR OF "TALES OF THE MUNSTER FESTIVALS," ETC.

THE THIRD JURYMEN'S TALE:
THE KNIGHT WITHOUT REPROACH.

Honor that is ever living,
Honor that is ever giving;
Honor that see all and knows,
Both the ebb of man and flows;
Honor that rewards the best,
Sends thee thy rich labor's rest!

VALENTINIAN.

CHAPTER I.—(CONTINUED).

A few days before that on which the foregoing dialogue took place, the two individuals between whom it passed were walking together at a short distance from the camp, when the chevalier complained of thirst. A cottage, apparently belonging to a farmer of the very humblest class, stood with the door invitingly open. A middle-aged country woman, meanly clad, and a young girl, whose beauty, both of form and features, received additional grace from the modest gentleness of her demeanour, were the only persons whom they found within. The elderly woman complained much of the ruin which the continuance of the war had brought upon the country, while her daughter listened with a grieved and downcast look. It was this picture which came before the mind of the chevalier (not for the first time since he had looked upon it), on the remote suggestion of his attendant.

"Hast thou learned any thing further, Le Jay?" he asked, after a pause, "of those people?—that querulous mother, and her well-shaped daughter?"

"I have not, my lord," replied the écuyer, "nor sought it."

"And wherefore, tell me, good Le Jay? Thou knowest what a time I have spent since I entered that cottage!"

"In good truth, my lord, I will take no pains about it. A poor écuyer hath a body and a soul to save as well as a chevalier; and I have heard too much good counsel in your worship's excellent service, to be ready to fling mine away, for no better hire perchance than a round half hour's lecture for my pains."

"Tush!" said the Knight, "I was in the sour vein that morning. I had been with the Admiral, who has the flattering knack of always soliciting another's counsel, and always following his own; and his fears, and his wavering, and his shifting to this side and to that; lighting on every measure, and resting upon none—neither bold enough to be victorious, nor cautious enough to be secure, were such that it soured my spirit to speak with him; and as he was Commander in chief, and thou wert but the écuyer of an insignificant chevalier, I made thee compliment of the full measure of chagrin which it were more just than seemly to bestow upon the Admiral!"

The écuyer acknowledged the preference by a grateful bow.

"Therefore, dost thou hear?—prosecute this matter, and speake of it no more, unless to tell me thou hast succeeded: I trust all to thy discretion; of thy genius, I have had proofs in many ways, so I doubt not of its efficiency in this; and the sooner thou hast executed thy commission the better."

The third Juror here paused to replenish his tumbler, which had insensibly become exhausted since he commenced speaking. "We will take advantage of the pause to close this first chapter of his narrative," said the Knight, "and then we will proceed to the second."

"Umph! And what did Jacopo Pecciolli?"

"Me? No, indeed, I am not fit to judge."

"Well, in that part at least thou didst right for once in thy life. This Jacopo might very well have remained where he was. We are poor enough in our selves, without tying him down to our own. But nevertheless, I must say, he did well in his endeavour to get the old man to go with him. Now, said I, 'tis well to be bold and valiant; but it is not good to be impudent."

CHAPTER II.—(CONTINUED).

Le Jay required no more. As the day declined, he left the company, and hastened in the direction of the cottage of Francesco Pacheco. The sound of a voice, high in anger, made him pause, as he drew nigh, and remain a little time, overheard by some in the neighbouring street, the import of which he could not then understand. "Now, said I, 'tis well to be bold and valiant; but it is not good to be impudent."

"Don't tell me—don't tell me!" exclaimed the voice, tremulous with passion; "it is little wonder we should be poor, and hungry, and needy. At thy rosary, truly. And I must drudge like a plough-horse while thou art chapel-hunting. What with masses, and rosaries, there is nothing done in the house from sunrise to sunset as it should be, except what I am obliged to do myself, to the sacrifice of the little remains of health, that old age and care have left me."

"I thought I had left nothing undone, mother."

"What hast thou to do with masses, and rosaries, and pious sodalities? It is for those who are at their ease, and have a heavy purse and a well-stocked cellar to spend so much time upon the concerns of their soul, and not for poor, wretches like us, who know not when we rise in the morning, where we are to provide the means of subsisting until nightfall."

"I was wrong, I know, mother."

"Thou art ever so when we differ. I ask thyself, had I ever to reprove thee yet, that in the end thou hast not to make the same confession? Is it not the invariable termination of all our disputes, that in the end thou art compelled thus to entwine thy hands together, and cry bitterly, and say, 'I was wrong mother?' Is it not, I ask thee?"

"I believe it is indeed, mother."

"Do—cry away—didst thou ever once hear me make such an acknowledgment?"

"Never, indeed, that I remember."

"To thee, or to any one else."

"Never, I believe."

"Didst thou ever see me thus fold my hands together and burst out a crying, and say 'I was wrong, daughter?' No, I warrant you, nor any one else in the parish. I am four and thirty years old come next Assumption, (Dame Francesca had come to a halt at four and thirty, for fifteen years past at least), and no one can say that since I first learned the use of my tongue, I ever yet was heard to acknowledge myself on the wrong side in a dispute;—never."

There was a brief pause, as if intended to allow the triumphant assertion to make a due impression.

"But thou art ever in the wrong," the voice continued, "and the proof of it is, that thou art always thyself compelled to acknowledge it. Ayé, cry—it may do thee good—though I cannot say that it ever hath produced that effect upon thee yet, any more than anything else. But it is no fault of mine. I am sure I say enough to thee. Do I not? Do I suffer a day to pass without talking myself hoarse in striving to make thee sensible of the misconduct? Do I?"

There was an answer in the negative, almost inaudible for timidity.

"And what is my return? the reward for all my counsels? to find thee after day repeating the same scene, listening, without a word to say in thy defence, and in the end, bursting out a crying and acknowledging thy fault. But I cannot help it—I can but give my counsel; if thou wilt not follow it, the guilt is upon your head. Yea—thou addest the black crime of ingratitude to all thy other offences, for I do think that never was so pains-taking a mother afflicted with so disobedient, so idle, so self-willed a daughter."

Dame Francesca Pacheco had by the force of conviction, that she was indeed the very paragon of mothers, and the young Rosalia, anything but the paragon of daughters,—nay, such is the power of eloquence, that she had by the same persevering strength of asseveration, persuaded her daughter likewise, into the full belief that her mother was a very model of goodness as a mother, and that she was herself one of the most worthless, and disobedient, and incorrigible daughters, in all Milan. So in answer to the foregoing invective, she could only multiply her penitent tears.

"But didst thou tell me all?" the louder of the two voices resumed. "Hast thou been now where else than to the convent?"

"No where indeed, mother. I did but wait until the Angelus had ended."

"Nor staid to gossip or ask questions by the way?"

"I—oh, yes—I spoke for a few moments, with one person only."

"I thought so. Oh, this art! I could forgive anything but art and cunning. But I promise thee, clever as thou art, and simplicit as thou thinkest me, thou shall not find me simple enough to be thy mother."

Rosalia, who was the last person in the world to make a dape of anybody, could only weep afresh at this new charge.

"And who was this person with whom you had the heart to remain idly gossiping, while you knew that your poor, feeble, widowed parent was occupying out her existence, to find the means of prolonging yours at home?"

"It was Maria Peccio."

"Umph! I might have guessed as much. And what was the important subject of your conversation? No artifice! no hiding of the truth! Thou mightest as well speak plainly, for I shall be sure to find it out. Thou knowest that when I once have got fairly a-foot to trace a secret, there is not a hole in the Duchy of Milan in which it can escape me."

"Indeed, dear mother, I have no desire to hide it from you. She did but stop me on the by-path near Renzo Cerli's vineyard, to tell me that—that Jacopo had returned," she added, blushing and looking down at her sandals.

"So—so—so—bit after bit the whole plot is coming forth. I see the whole at length—Maria Peccio, came to tell thee that Jacopo had returned, and thou and Maria went together by the vineyard to Peccio's house, and thou remainedst talking with Jacopo, while I supposed thou wert piously joining in the Angelus."

"Me, mother, I remain talking with Jacopo! I go to Jacopo's house. Indeed I did not—I scarcely stopped to hear Maria say he had arrived, when I hurried back."

"Umph! And what did Jacopo Pecciolli?"

"Me? No, indeed, I am not fit to judge."

"Well, in that part at least thou didst right for once in thy life. This Jacopo might very well have remained where he was. We are poor enough in our selves, without tying him down to our own. But nevertheless, I must say, he did well in his endeavour to get the old man to go with him. Now, said I, 'tis well to be bold and valiant; but it is not good to be impudent."

CHAPTER III.—(CONTINUED).

Le Jay required no more. As the day declined,

the shameful indolence and artifice, with which thou hast disgraced the day."

Rosalia entered the cottage without reply, and Dame Francesca remained without deliberating some matter silently in her own mind. She was not so blind to her daughter's merits, as to suppose that, apart from all which had relation to herself, Rosalia was already destitute of any claim to esteem or admiration. Her beauty spoke for itself so plainly, that it was not to be called in question, like her unseen graces of character and disposition. It is true there were few young men of their rank in the neighborhood, who could afford in the choice of a wife to be influenced by ornamental, rather than useful qualities, but the case might be otherwise, when both were combined as they actually were in Rosalia, in a sufficient degree to render her worthy the esteem of any individual, with the exception of unparallelled a mother. These reflections, which had their weight with even Dame Francesca herself, had led her to look with less approving eyes than hitherto, upon the long projected union between Jacopo Peccio, one of the many younger sons of a neighboring farmer, and her daughter!

Whatever prospect Jacopo had a year before of being able to provide for a wife and family, was now entirely annihilated, in Dame Francesca's eyes at least, by the sudden interruption on the country, of conflicting armies, and she had accordingly in her own mind determined to see, whether Rosalia's good qualities, both of mind and person, might succeed in obtaining for her a settlement, more conducive to their common advantage. It was true Jacopo had been their friend from childhood, and at all times regarded Francesca with the feelings of a son. But circumstances had changed, and one's feelings must not be put in the balance against an imperative necessity.

There were several comfortable young farmers in the neighborhood, who when they should understand that Rosalia was at liberty, and— Francesca had proceeded so far in her train of thought, when it was suddenly interrupted by a voice so near, that she started as if her silent reflections were liable to observation. In justice to the good lady, it should be stated that the tone of severe animadversion, in which she conceived it, was almost invariably to address her daughter, was not extended indiscriminately to all who had the happiness of enjoying her acquaintance. She could upon occasion be gracious and amiable to an extreme, more especially when the individual she addressed, was one wholly beyond the sphere of her authority, and who, either by superior rank or wealth, or an influential interest with those who possessed either, might possibly have it in his power to gratify her taste for some of the good things of this life, for which Francesca was said to entertain a fondness, that sometimes interposed painfully with her stricter notions of morality. Such an individual was he, who now stood before her, for she had little hesitation in recognising the esquire of the cavalier, whom she had the honour of receiving in her cottage a few days before. Accordingly, the close knit eyebrows relaxed, the contemptuous curve, described by the protruded lips, making them resemble those of frog emerging from his pond, and prudently reconnoitring the country before he will venture ashore, or the arch of a lofty bridge spanning a very narrow stream, now became smilingly inverted to a semblance of the same arch, reflected in the glassy stream beneath; the likeness of a battered dollar vanished from the chin, and Dame Francesca returned the Parisian greeting of the écuyer with one of her power to gratify her taste for some of the good things of this life, for which Francesca was said to be exceeded into grief—"there was a time when I could not be insulted; but there is no one to stand up for the door widow. Ah, villian that thou art if my poor Formosa Pacheco were alive, he would teach thee to of such errands to this house; but well thou knowest that he is where my voice cannot reach him, or thou durst not for thine head to come so near."

The artful emissary did not think it prudent to make any reply.

"But I will see whether there is justice to be had in your camp," said Francesca, "the Admiral shall bear of it."

"The Admiral?" Le Jay exclaimed, with a care-

less laugh, "you know not who my master is, Signora, when you menace him with the displeasure of the Admiral."

"And who may he be then, Signor Impudence?"

The écuyer mentioned the name of the knight, and had the satisfaction to observe that it produced its full effect upon the mind of the angry widow.

"What? he?" she exclaimed, "he send thee on such an errand? Impossible!"

"Thou wilt find it true, however."

"Why, they say he has more of the monk about him than the soldier, although he be as brave a knight as ever mounted steed. Thou wilt never persuade me that he gave thee such a commission. He bears too high and too fair a name to soil it with such a deed as this. They say he is a very father to the poor, and will go disguised about the streets in his own country, in order to discover those who are ashamed to beg, and to scatter his gold among them without being recognized."

"They may say what they will, Signora, and thou mayest imagine what thou will, but I assure thee it was he and no other who spoke with thee in this cottage some day since and why this day comissioned me to make on his behalf a proposal, which any rational mother in Europe would have received as one of the highest honours which fortune could bestow."

Francesca paused. Had the tempter been less estimable, she would in all probability have continued to spurn the guilty proposition of his ambassador; but the high reputation of the Chevalier effected what all the arts of a known profligate might have failed to accomplish. The horror of the offence became diminished to her eyes, when she found it recommended by so admirable an example. She did not, however, think it proper immediately to allow the alteration in her sentiments to become apparent. She contended herself for the present, with uttering a new volley of reproaches in somewhat less angry tone, and expressing her determination to ascertain, without loss of time, whether the unprincipled écuyer were not audaciously calumniating one of the noblest and most exemplary knights in Christendom. Le Jay took his departure; it being understood that he was to return on the following day, merely for the purpose of ascertaining whether Francesca had satisfied herself as to the truth of his mission, and Francesca consenting to allow him another interview with the same harmless object.

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"Never! can take place?" exclaimed Jacopo.

"Dismiss it from my mind! How easily, you talk!

"That hope or dream, if you will have it so, which has supported and encouraged me in every effort I have been making since I was capable of making any."

"Do you tell me now that it is never to take place?"

"Never, Jacopo; I have made up my mind upon it and I am determined that it never shall."</p