



The above picture was made from a negative on a WELLINGTON 'Xtra Speedy Plate, and the half-tone from a print on Carbon Bromide.

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The Scarecrow.

A Fantasy. By Alec Lambie.



THAT was a pleasant shower," said the scarecrow to himself. "So sudden, so fresh and, withal, so cool! The song of the robin and the lilt of the lark are not more welcome. No weather like April weather. A light breeze, a bright sky, a streaky cloud in the west. A sudden shadow, a swish of raindrops and the sun in the tail of the shower again, like a marriage gift in the pocket of a lover. To feel the joy of it all is to be more than recompensed for the long, weary winter's incarceration in the dusty hay loft. Truly, the vernal impulse is beyond question, the most tranquillizing thing in Nature. The oat in its husk, the bee in its hive, the wild duck and the swallow flying north, all feel its genial influence as much as does this old withered form—this battered and weather-stained piece of masculinity I call myself."

"Everyone who is at all observant must have noticed that we scarecrows are a profoundly meek and modest race, and that, like all other servitors of man, we are each of us endowed with our own particular degree of sense and sensibility. To this broad rule I profess myself no exception. Although duty invariably compels us to wear a ferocious aspect, I am, nevertheless, at heart as mild and gentle as the burnished dove. The clothes that adorn my somewhat angular anatomy, and the hat which, with unmistakable artistry protects my venerable locks, proclaim, in no uncertain manner, the transparent simplicity of my life and the amiable quality of my sentiments. Indeed, I am disposed to have it accounted unto me for righteousness, rather than matter for self-condemnation and reproach, that I hold the fashions of today in light esteem. I cannot but admit that those of yesterday have an irresistible fascination for me. Rather a thousand times would I prefer to hold true to the customs, forms, manners and dress of yesterday than trick myself out in all the gay absurdities of the hour. How often have I beguiled the solitude of moonless nights, in sad-eyed contemplation of the apathetic attitude of present-day people towards the dress and ceremonies of their fathers and mothers? When I reflect that what is the joy and pride of one generation, becomes, inevitably, the pet aversion of the next, I confess to a boyish desire to put my tongue in my cheek. But, after all, the difference between my point of view and theirs is not to be stated with the gravity of a clown in a circus ring. For the truth is, most people dress to create a good impression, whilst I dress to create a bad one. Of my own success there can be no question, but, in the language of Dave Carruthers, "I hae my doots about their's."

"Yesterday was my first day in the open this spring. As usual, my long imprisonment had reduced me to the condition of a frosted bean-sheaf. I was wilted and woe-begone. Today, thanks to the genial April breezes, I am already beginning to fill out a little. But I must guard against any expansive tendency in my general appearance. No self-respecting scarecrow, I am convinced, would ever think of cultivating a rotund form. A lean and hungry aspect is the one adorable quality of our race: our hall-mark and patent-office number, our cover design and frontispiece.

"It was early morning when Dave Carruthers, otherwise known as "Westerha," brought me down from the dim regions of the hay-loft, and set me in this pleasant corner of the field, over-looking the river. I had not seen the old man for many months. He was bright and cheerful as ever, but his appearance served to confirm a belief I had previously entertained, namely, that he was guilty of occasional lapses in the matter of sobriety. From various expressions I had overheard in the field, I was aware of a secret sorrow that gnawed like a canker, at the old man's heart. It required no great stretch of fancy, therefore to connect the one circumstance with the other.

But there was no sign of trouble in his face as he raised me upon his shoulder and started across the yard. Indeed, before he was clear of the farm buildings he was humming one of his favorite tunes.

"Aye work awa, my frien', aye work awa;

'Mang the simmer sunshine, and the cheerless snaw;

Never lippen to yer frien's, though they may loudly blaw,

Help yersel' where'er ye gang, and aye work awa."

"Westerha's song ceased as he entered the field, but in a little he began to speak his thoughts aloud:

"He's comin' hame! He's comin' hame!" he mused with evident enjoyment. "Do you hear that, you auld bogle? He's comin' hame! It's eight lang years since we partit, but there's an end to grief at last,—and he's comin' hame! Haud up your heid, you puir misshapen bundle o' clouts, "Mang the simmer sunshine and the cheerless snaw." Let me tell you, my frien', it was a cauld day and a bleary ane when Magnus went oot frae amang us. Nae blither lad e'er stepped ahin a ploo, till that feckless, faithless limmer jilted him on the very night we met to celebrate the waddin'. Magnus, puir callan, took his trouble without a word, but eh! the heart o' him was wae! and, like a shadow across the face of the harvest moon, he drifted oot o' oor ken. But even as he went the judgment o' God was on the track o' his heartless queen. Her rinagate loon proved as wicked and as cruel as herself! And within a year she and her bairn cam' back to spend her last hours in the hame she had done her best to wreck. The laddie, I'm free to admit, has been a source o' comfort through it a', but what have I tawld you? Magnus has written and there's an end to a' oor grief at last. He's comin' hame! He's comin' hame!"

"As Dave concluded, I spied from the vantage point of his own broad shoulder, two boys start from the farmplace towards the wood on the right of the field we were traversing. Something in their manner told me that they did not desire to attract the attention of Westerha. The wood was separated from the field by hawthorn and beech hedgerow. Behind this the youngsters ensconced themselves for a little, then proceeded to creep along the edge of the wood towards the angle of the field of which, (I say it with unassuming humility,) I am the sole warden. By the time that Dave had set me in mine own appointed place, the boys had reached a point immediately behind us. Westerha did not return by the way he had come, but dropped over the fence on to the roadway and proceeded along the river path. Not till he was out of view did the lads venture to speak above a whisper. It was Hugh, the old man's protegee, who broke the silence:

"I aye said I wad dae it, Tam," he exclaimed. "Last summer I often thoct about gettin' an auld pair o' shoon for the scarecrow. It seemed gey cruel to let the puir chap stau' nigh and day in the field withoot onything on his feet. Hoo wad you like to be treated like that yersel', Tam? Juist tell me. Nannie, the housekeeper, says it was wet feet that gaed her the sair hoast that keeps her at hame frae the kirk on sawbath. I'm thinkin' a tattie bogle wi' a hoast like Nannie's would be a fearsome thing? What do you say, Tam? Often at night when the raid played dire on the window, I used to lie and think of the puir bogle shiverin' in the field. Ane I dreamed I saw him cowerin' under the hedge, blae and chitterin', his een stelled in his heid and glourin' like a tabbie-cat in a damp cellar. I minded this when I saw grandfeyther carry him doon frae the hay loft this mornin', and sae I slipt into the hoose and brocht this awld pair o' Sunday buits. I ettled to bring a pair o' stackin's forbye, but Nannie kind o' jaloused I was up to some mischief. She watched me over her specks like a weasel watchin' a rabbit; and when the housekeeper looks that gait it's time to steek the door