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THE HEN-PECKED MAN.

FROM WILSON'S TALES OF THE BORDER.

Concluded.

I thought I had have dropped down wi' indignation. I could ha' strucken if I durst. Ye observe I am just five feet two inches and an eight, upon my stocking soles,—that is rather below the army standard,—and I must say it is a very foolish one, for a man o' my height stands a better chance to shoot another than a giant that wad fire ower his head. But she was aware that I was below the mark, and my breath was o' no avail; so I just had to sink away into the shop, rubbing my elbow.

But the crackly stool was but the beginning o' her driving; there wasna a week after that but she lee at me whatever came in the way, whenever I by accident crossed her cankered humour. It's a wonder that I'm in the land o' the living,—for I've had the skin peeled off my legs—my arms mostly broken,—my head cut, and other parts o' my body a black and blue, times out o' number. I thought her an angel when I was courting her, but O Robin! she has turn'd out I'll no say what an adder!—a tiger!—a sea-fury!

As for asking o'ny body to the house, it's a thing I durstna do for the life that's in my body. I never did it but once, and that was when an auld schoolfellow, that had been several years in America, call'd at the shop to see me. After we had cracked awhile—

"But I maun see the wife Patie," says he. "Whether he had heard about her behaviour orna I canna tell, but I assure ye his request was ony thing but agreeable to me. However I took him into the house, and I introduced him wi' fear and trembling.

"Tibby dear," said I, and I dinna think I had ca'd her dear for ten years afore, "here's Mr. W.—an auld schoolfellow o' mine, she's come a' the way frae America, an' ca'd in to see ye."

Ye're aye meeting wi' auld schoolfellows, or some set or other to take ye off your work," muttered she sulkily, but loud enough for him to hear.

I was completely at a loss what to say or do next; but pretending as though I hadna heard her, I said as familiarly and kindly as I could, though my heart was in a terrible swither—"Bring out the bottle lass."

"Bottle!" quo' she, "what bottle?"—what does the man mean?—has he perted wi' the little sense that he ever had? But had ye seen her as she said this—I've seen a cloud black when driven wi' a hurricane, and I've seen it awful when roarin' in the agony of thunder, but never did I see one that I was main in fear o' than my wife's face at that moment. But somehow or other I gathered courage to say—"Hoots woman, what's the use o' behaving that way, I'm sure ye ken well enough it's the sperit bottle."

"The sperit bottle!" cried she wi' a scream, "and when was there a sperit bottle within this door! I dinna shew yours' off to your American friend for a greater man than ye are Patie. I think if wi' a' that ye bring in, I get meot and bits o' duds for your bairns, I do very weel."

This piece o' impudence completely knocked me stupid, for wad ye believe it Robin, though she had lang driven a' my friends frae about the house, yet never did o'ny o' her friends ca'—and that was mainly every Sunday, and every Coldstream market-day,—but there was the bottle out frae the cupboard, which she always kept under lock and key, and a dram and a bit short-bread nae less, was aye and to this day handed round to every one o' them. They have discovered that it is worth while to make Patie the bickermaker's a half-way house. But if I happen to be in when they call, though she pours out a full glass a-piece for them, she takes aye good care to stand in before me when she comes to me, between them and me, so that they canna see what she is doing, or how meikle she pours out; and I assure ye it is seldom a thimble-ful that fa's to my share, though she hands the bottle lang up in her hand,—mony a time no a weotin'; and again have I shovred my head passed her side, and said—"your health Mrs. So-and-so,"—or "your Mr. Such-a-thing,"

wi' no as much in my glass as wad drown a midgie. Or if I was placed that she durstna but for shame fill out a glass within half an inch o' the top or sae, she wad gie me a look, or a wink, or make a motion o' some kind, which weid I ken the meaning o', and which was the same as saying—"Drink it, if ye dare!" O Robin man! it's weel for you that no kens what it is to be a footba' at your ain fireside. I daresay my friend burned to the bone for me, for he got up, and—

"I wish you good day, Mr. Crichton," said he, "I have business in Kelso to-night yet, and can't stop."

I was perfectly overpowered wi' shame, but it was a relief to me when he gaed awa'—and I slipped out after him, and into the shop again.

But Tibby's ina the only persecution that I ha'e to put up wi', for we bae five bairns, and she brocht them a' up to treat me as she does herself. If I offer to correct them, they cry out—"I'll tell my mother!"—and frae the oldest to the youngest o' them, when they speak about me, it is he did this, or he did that—they for ever talk o' me as *Him!*—*Him!*—I never got the name o' *Father* frae one o' them, and it is a' her doings. Now I just ask ye simply if ony father wad put up wi' the like o' that? But I maun put up wi' it. If I were offering to lay hands upon them for it, I am sure and persuaded she wad raise a Birgham about me,—my life wadna be safe where she is,—but indeed I needna say that, for it never is.

But, there is one thing that grieves me beyond a' that I have mentioned to ye. Ye ken my mother, poor auld body, is a widow now. She is in the thry seventy-sixth year o' her age, and very frail. She has naebody to look after her but me,—naebody that has a natural right to do it; for I never had ony brothers, or ye ken, and as for my twa sisters, I daresay they just have a saut evening fight wi' their ain families, and as they are at a distance, I dinna ken how they are situated wi' their gudemens,—though I must say for them, they send her a stone o' oatmeal, an ounce o' tobacco, or a pickle tea and sugar now and then, which is very likely as often as they have it in their power; and that is a great deal mair than I'm allowed to do for her,—me that has a right to protect and maintain her. A' that she has to support her, is fifteen pence a-week off the parish o' Mertoun. O Robin man!—Robin man!—my heart rages within me, when I talk to you about this. A' that I have endured is naething to it. To see my poor mother in a state o' starvation, and no to be allowed to gie her a sixpence! O Robin man!—Robin man!—is it no awful? When she was first left destitute and a widow I tried to break the matter to Tibby and to reman wi' her.

"O Tibby woman!" said I, "I'm very distressed. Here's my father laid in the grave, and I dinna see what's to come o' my mother poor body,—she is auld and she is frail—she has naebody to take care or provide for her but me!"

"You!" cried Tibby—"you! I wish ye wad mind what ye are talking about! Ye have as many dogs I can tell ye as ye have bones to pick! Let your mother do as other widows hae done before her—let the parish be k' after her."

"O Tibby woman!" said I, "but if ye'll only consider, the parish money is very sma',—and poor body, it will make her heart sair to receive a penny o' it; for she weel kens that my father would rather have died in a ditch, than been behanding to either a parish or an individual for a sixpence."

"An' meikle they have made by thei pride," said Tibby, "I wish ye wad hand your tongue."

"Aye, but Tibby," says I, for I was nettled mair than I durst shew it, "but she has been a good mother to me, and ye ken yours'! that she's no been an ill good-mother" to you. She never stood in the way o' you and me comin' together, though I was paying six shillings a week into the house."

"And what am I obliged to her for that?" interrupted my Jezebel.

"I dinna ken Tibby," says I, "but it's a Mother-in-law."

hard thing for a son to see a mother in want where he can assist her. Now, it isna meikle she takes,—she never was used wi' dainties, and if I may just take her home, little will serve her, and her meat will never be missed."

"Ye bonn idiot!" cried Tibby, "I aye thought ye a fool,—but ye are worse than a fool! Bring your mother here! An auld, cross-graine, fault finding wife, that I never could hae patience to endure for ten minutes in my days! Bring her here say ye! No! while I live in this house I'll tel ye ken that I'll be mistress!"

"Aye and maister too," thought I. I found it was o' nae use to argue wi' her. There was nae possibility o' getting my mother into the house, and as to assisting her wi' a shilling or twa at a time by chance, or paying for house-rent, or sending her a load o' coals, it was perfectly out o' the question and beyond my power. Frae the night that I went to Orange Lane to this moment, I ha'e never had a sixpence under my thumb that I could ca' my ain. Indeed, I never ha'e money in my hands, unless it be on a day like this when I ha'e, and go to a fair or the like o' that; and even then, before I start, her ledlyship sees every bowie, bicker, and piggins', that gauns into the cart—she kens the price of them as weel as I do; and if I shouldna bring home either money or goods according to her valuation, I actually believe she wad murder me—there is nae cheating her. It is by mere chance, that having had a good market, I've outreached her to-day by a shilling or twa; and one o' them I'll spend wi' you Robin, and the rest shall gang to my mother. O man! ye may bless your stars that ye dinna ken what it is to ha'e a terranant wife."

"I'm sorry for ye Patie," said Robin Roughhead, "but really I think in a great measure ye have yours' to blame for it a'!"

"Me!" said Patie—"what do ye mean Robin?"

"Why Patie," said Robin, "I ken it is said, that every one can rule a bad wife but he that has her,—and I believe it is true. I am quite convinced that naebody kens sae weel where the shoe pinches as they that ha'e it on; though I am quite satisfied, that had my case been yours, I wad ha'e brought her to her senses long before now, though I had—

"Dandling in wi' Rob Rorerson's bonnet, or gien her a hoop's like your friend the cooper o' Goldingham?"

"Save us man!" said Patie, who loved a joke, even though at second-hand and at his own expense,—but ye see the cooper's case is not in point, though I am in the same line, for as I have observed, I am only five feet two inches and an eight in height—my wife is not the weaker vessel—that I ken to my sorrow."

"Weel Patie," said Robin, "I wadna ha'e ye to lift your head,—I was but joking upon that account—it wadna be manly;—but there is one thing that ye can do, and I am sure it wad have an excellent effect."

"Dearsake! what is that?" cried Patie.

"For a' that has happened ye," said Robin, "ye have just yours' to blame for gien up the key and the siller to her management, that night ye gaed to Orange Lane. That is the short and the lang o' your troubles Patie."

"Do you think sae?" inquired the little bickermaker.

"Yes, I think sae Peter, and I say it," said Robin, and there is but one remedy left."

"Just this," said Robin, "stop the supplies."

"Stop the supplies!" returned Patie—"what do you mean Robin?—I canna say that I fully comprehend ye."

"I just mean this," added the other, "be your ain banker,—your ain cashier,—be maister o' your ain siller,—let her find that it is to you she is indebted for every penny she has the power to spend, and if ye dinna bring Tibby, to reason and kindness within a month, my name's no Robin Roughhead."

"Do ye think that wad do it?" said Patie.

"If that wadna, naething wad," answered Robin; "but try it for a twelvemonth,—begin this very night, and if we baith live and be spared to this time next year, I'll meet ye

again, and I'll be the death o' a mutchkin but that ye tel me Tibby's a different woman,—your bairns different,—your whole house different,—and you auld mother comfortable."

"O man if it might be sae!" said Patie; "this very night,—the moment I get home I'll try it,—and if I succeed, I'll treat ye wi' a bottle o' wine, and I believe I never drank ane in my life."

"Agreed," said Robin; "but mind ye're no to do things by halves. Ye're no to be fearee out o' your resolution because Tibby may fire and storm, and let drive the things in the house at ye,—nor even though she should greet."

"I thoroughly understand ye," said Patie "my resolution's taken and I will stand by it."

"Gies your hand on't," said Robin; and Patie gave him his hand.

New the two friends parted, and it is unnecessary for me either to describe their parting, or the reception which Patie, on his arrivin' at Birgham, met with from his spouse.

Twelve months went round, Dunsie fair came again, and after the fair was over, Patie Crichton once more went in quest of his old friend Robin Roughhead. He found him standing in the Horse Market, and—

"How's a' wi' ye, my friend?" says Patie.

"O, hearty, hearty!" cries the other; "but how's a' wi' you?—how is your family?"

"Come and get the bottle o' wine that I've to gie ye," said Patie, "and I'll tell ye a' about it."

"I'll do that," said Robin, "for my business is done."

So they went into the same house in the Castle Wynd where they had been twelve months before, and Patie called for a bottle of wine,—but he found that the house had not the wine licence, and was therefore content with a gill of whiskey made into toddy.

"O man," said he to Robin, "I wad pay ye a' a dozen bottles o' wine wi' as great cheerfulness as I raise this glass to my lips. It was a grand advice that o' yours—stop the supplies."

"I am glad to hear it," said Robin; "I was sure it was the only thing that would do."

"Ye shall hear a' about it," said Patie. "After parting wi' ye, I trudged home to Birgham and when I got to my house,—before I had the sneck o' the door weel out o' my hand—

"What's stopped ye to this time o' night, ye footless, feckless creature ye?" cried Tibby—"where ha'e ye been?—gie an account o' yours'!"

"An account o' myself?" says I, and I gied the door a drive behind me, as if I wad driven it off the hinges—4 for what should I gie an account o' myself?—or who should I gie it to? I suppose this house is my ain, and I can come in and gang out when I like!"

"Yours'!" cried she, "is the body drunk?"

"No," says I, "I'm no drunk, but I wad ha'e you to be decent. Where is my supper?—it is time that I had it."

"Ye might have come in in time to get it then," says she, folk canna keep suppers waiting on ye."

"But I'll gang where I can get it," said I, and I offered to leave the house.

"I'll take the life o' ye first," said she; "gie me the siller. Ye had five cogs, a dozen o' bickers, twa dozen o' piggins, three howies, four cream dishes and twa lads,—besides the wooden spoons that I packed up myself; gie me the siller,—and your profligate let me see what ye ha'e spent."

"Giesyou the siller!" says I, "na, na, I've done that lang enough—I ha'e stopped the supplies my woman."

"Stop your breath!" cried she; "gie me the siller, every farthing, or woe betide ye!"

It was needless for her to say every farthing, for had I done as I used to do, I kened she wad search through every pocket o' my claes,—the moment she thought me asleep,—through every hole and corner o' them to see if I had cheated her out o' a single penny,—aye, and taken them up, and shake them, and shake them after a' was done. But I was determined to stand fast by your advice.

"Do as ye like," says I, "I'll bring you to your senses—I've stopped the supplies."