

BARNABY RUDGE

By CHARLES DICKENS

CHAPTER I.

In the year 1775, there stood upon the borders of Epping Forest, at a distance of about twelve miles from London—measuring from the Standard in Cornhill, or rather from the spot on or near to which the Standard used to be in days of yore—a house of public entertainment called the Maypole; which fact was illustrated to all such travellers as could neither read nor write (and sixty-six years ago a vast number, both of travellers and stay-at-homes were in this condition) by the emblem reared on the roadside over against the house, which, if not of those goodly proportions that Maypoles were wont to present in olden times, was a fair young ash, thirty feet in height, and straight as any arrow that ever English yeoman drew.

The Maypole—by which term from henceforth is meant the house, and not its sign—the Maypole was an old building, with more gable ends than a lazy man would care to count on a sunny day; huge zig-zag chimneys, out of which it seemed as though even smoke could not choose but come in more than naturally fantastic shapes, imparted to it in its tortuous progress; and vast stables, gloomy, ruinous and empty. The place was said to have been built in the days of King Henry the Eighth; and there was a legend, not only that Queen Elizabeth had slept there one night while upon a hunting excursion, to wit in a certain oak-paneled room, with a deep bay-window, but that next morning, while standing on a mounting-block before the door, with one foot on the stirrup, the virgin monarch had then and there boxed and cuffed an unlucky page for some neglect of duty. The matter-of-fact and doubtful folks, of whom there were a few among the Maypole customers, as unluckily there always are in every little community, were inclined to look upon this tradition as rather apocryphal; but, whenever the landlord of that ancient hostelry appealed to the mounting-block itself as evidence, and triumphantly pointed out that there it stood in the same place to that very day, the doubters never failed to be put down by a large majority, and all true believers exulted as in a victory.

Whether these and many other stories of the like nature, were true or untrue, the Maypole was really an old house, a very old house, perhaps as old as it claimed to be, and perhaps older, which will sometimes happen with houses of an uncertain age, as with ladies of a certain age. Its windows were old diamond-pane lattices, its floors were sunken and uneven, its ceilings blackened by the heat of time and heavy with massive beams. Over the doorway was an ancient porch, quaintly and grotesquely carved; and here on summer evenings the more favored customers smoked and drank—ay, and sang many a good song, too, sometimes—reposing on two grim-looking high-backed settles, which, like the twin dragons of some fairy tale, guarded the entrance to the mansion.

In the chimneys of the disused rooms, swallows had built their nests for many a long year, and from earliest spring to latest autumn whistled colonies of sparrows chirped and twittered in the eaves. There were more pigeons about the dreary stable yard and out-buildings than anybody but the landlord could reckon upon. The wheeling and circling flights of runts, fantails, tumblers, and pouters, were perhaps not quite consistent with the grave and sober character of the building, but the monotonous cooing, which never ceased to be raised by some among them all day long, suited it exactly, and seemed to lull it to rest. With its overhanging stories, drowsy little panes of glass, and front bulging out and projecting over the pathway, the old house looked as if it were nodding in its sleep. Indeed, it needed no very great stretch of fancy to detect in it other resemblances to humanity. The bricks of which it was built had originally been a deep dark red, but had grown yellow and discolored like an old man's skin; the sturdy timbers had decayed like teeth; and here and there the ivy, like a warm garment to comfort it in its age, wrapt its green leaves closely round the time-worn walls.

It was a hale and hearty age though, still; and in the summer or autumn evenings, when the glow of the setting sun fell upon the oak and chestnut trees of the adjacent forest, the old house, partaking of its lustre, seemed their fit companion, and to have many good years of life in him yet.

The evening with which we have to do, was neither a summer nor an autumn one, but the twilight of a day in March, when the wind howled dismally among the bare branches of the trees, and rumbling in the wide chimneys and driving the rain against the windows of the Maypole Inn, gave such of its frequenters as chanced to be there at the moment an undeniable reason for prolonging their stay, and caused the landlord to prophesy that the night would certainly clear at eleven o'clock precisely,—which, by a remarkable coincidence, was the hour at which he always closed his house.

The name of him upon whom the spirit of prophecy thus descended was John Willet, a burly, large-headed man with a fat face which betokened profound obtuseness and slowness of apprehension, combined with a very strong reliance upon his own merits. It was John Willet's ordinary boast in his more placid moods, that if he were slow he was sure; which assertion could, in one sense at least, be by no means gainsaid, seeing that he was in everything unquestionably the reverse of fast, and withal one of the most dogged and positive fellows in existence—always sure that what he thought or said or did was right, and holding it as a thing quite settled and ordained by the laws of nature and Providence, that anybody who said or did or thought otherwise must be inevitably and of necessity wrong.

give way to and so acquire an additional relish for the warm blaze, said, looking round upon his guests,—"It'll clear at eleven o'clock. No sooner and no later. Not before and not afterwards."

"How do you make out that?" said a little man in the opposite corner. "The moon is past the full, and she rises at nine."

John looked sedately and solemnly at his questioner until he had brought his mind to bear upon the whole of his observation, and then made answer, in a tone which seemed to imply that the moon was peculiarly his business and nobody else's.—"Never you mind about the moon. Don't you trouble yourself about her. You let the moon alone, and I'll let you alone."

"No offence I hope?" said the little man.

Again John waited leisurely until the observation had thoroughly penetrated to his brain, and then replied, "No offence as yet," applied a light to his pipe and smoked in placid silence; now and then casting a side-long look at a man wrapped in a loose riding-coat with huge cuffs, ornamented with tarnished silver lace and large metal buttons, who sat apart from the regular frequenters of the house, and wearing a hat flapped over his face, which was still furrowed by the hand on which his forehead rested, looked unobscured enough.

There was another guest, who sat, booted and spurred, at some distance from the fire also, and whose thoughts—to judge from his folded arms and knitted brows, and from the untasted liquor before him—were occupied with other matters than the topics under discussion of the persons who discussed them. This was a young man of about eight and twenty rather above the middle height, and though of a somewhat slight figure, gracefully and strongly made. He wore his own dark hair, and was accounted in a riding-dress, which, together with his large boots (resembling in shape and fashion those worn by our Life Guardsmen at the present day), showed indisputable traces of the bad condition of the roads. But travel-stained though he was, he was well and even richly attired, and without being over-dressed, looked a gallant gentleman.

Lying upon the table beside him, as he had carelessly thrown them, as he had carelessly thrown them, was a heavy riding-whip and a sheathed sword, the latter worn no doubt as being best suited to the inclemency of the weather. There, too, were a pair of pistols in a holster-case, and a short riding-cloak. Little of his face was visible, except the long dark lashes which concealed his downcast eyes, but an air of careless ease and natural gracefulness of demeanor pervaded the figure, and seemed to comprehend even these slight accessories, which were all handsome and in good keeping.

Towards this young gentleman the eyes of Mr. Willet wandered but once, and then as if in mute inquiry whether he had observed his silent neighbor. It was plain that John and the young gentleman had often met before. Finding that his look was not returned, or indeed observed by the person to whom it was addressed, John gradually concentrated the whole power of his eyes into one focus, and brought it to bear upon the man in the flapped hat, at whom he came to stare in course of time with an intensity so remarkable, that it affected his friends cronies, who all, as with one accord, took their pipes from their lips, and stared with open mouths at the stranger likewise.

The sturdy landlord had a large pair of dull fish-like eyes, and the little man who had hazarded the remark about the moon (and who was the parish-clerk and the bell-ringer of Chigwell; a village hard by), had little round black shiny eyes like beads; moreover this little man wore at the knees of his rusty black breeches, and on his rusty black coat, and all down his long flapped waistcoat, little queer buttons like nothing except his eyes; but so like them, that as they twinkled and glistened in the light of the fire, which shone too in his bright shoe-buckles, he seemed all eyes from head to foot, and to be gazing with every one of them at the unknown customer. No wonder that a man should grow restless under such an inspection as this, to say nothing of the eyes belonging to short Tom Cobb the general chandler and post-office keeper, and long Phil Parkes, the ranger, both of whom, infected by the example of their companions, regarded him of the flapped hat no less attentively.

The stranger became restless; perhaps from being exposed to this raking fire of eyes, perhaps from the nature of his previous meditations—most probably from the latter cause, for as he changed his position—and looked hastily round, he started to find himself the object of such keen regard, and darted an angry and suspicious glance at the fireside group. It had the effect of immediately diverting all eyes to the chimney, except those of John Willet, who, finding himself, as it were, caught in the fact, and not being (as has been already observed) of a very ready nature, remained staring at his guest in a particularly awkward and disconcerted manner.

"Well?" said the stranger.

"Well. There was not much in well. It was not a long speech. 'I thought you gave an order,'" said the landlord, after a pause of two or three minutes for consideration.

The stranger took off his hat, and disclosed the hard features of a man of sixty or thereabouts, much weather-beaten and worn by time, and the naturally hard expression of which was not improved by a dark handkerchief which was bound tightly round his head, and, while it served the purpose of a wig, shaded his forehead and almost his eyebrows. If it were intended to conceal or divert attention from a deep gash, now healed into an ugly seam, which when it was first inflicted must have laid bare his cheek-bone, the object was but indifferently attained, for it could scarcely fail to be noted at a glance. His complexion was of a cadaverous hue, and he had a grizzled jagged beard of some three weeks' date. Such was the figure (very mean) and poorly clad) that now rose from the seat, and stalking across the room, sat down in a corner of the chimney, which the politeness or fears of the little clerk very readily assigned to him.

"A highwayman!" whispered Tom Cobb to Parkes, the ranger.

"Do you suppose highwaymen don't dress handsomer than that?" replied Parkes. "It's a better business than you think for, Tom, and highwaymen don't need or use to be shabby, take my word for it."

Meanwhile, the subject of their speculations had done due honor to the house by calling for some drink, which was promptly supplied by the landlord's son Joe, a broad-shouldered, strapping young fellow of twenty, whom it pleased his father still to consider a little boy, and to treat accordingly. Stretching out his hands to warm them by the blazing fire, the man turned his head towards the company, and after running his eye sharply over them, said in a voice well suited to his appearance,—

"What house is that which stands a mile or so from here?"

"Public-house?" said the landlord, with his usual deliberation.

"Public-house, father!" exclaimed Joe,—"where's the public-house within a mile or so of the Maypole? He talks of the great houses—the Warrens—naturally, of course. The old red-brick house, sir, that stands in its own grounds—?"

"Ay," said the stranger.

"And that fifteen or twenty years ago stood in a park five times as broad, which with other and richer property has bit by bit changed hands and dwindled away—more's the pity?" pursued the young man.

"Maybe," was the reply. "But my question related to the owner. What it has been I don't care to know, and what it is I can see for myself."

The heir-apparent to the Maypole pressed his finger on his lips, and glanced at the young gentleman already noticed, who had changed his attitude when the house was first mentioned, replied in a lower tone.—

"The owner's name is Haredeale, Mr. Geoffrey Haredeale, and—again he glanced in the same direction as before—"and a worthy gentleman, too—hem!"

Paying as little regard to this admonitory cough, as to the significant gesture that had preceded it, the stranger pursued his questioning.

"I turned out of my way coming here, and took the footpath that crosses the grounds. Who was the young lady that I saw entering your carriage? His daughter?"

"Why, how should I know, honest man?" replied Joe, contriving in the course of some arrangements about the hearth, to advance closer to his questioner and pluck him by the sleeve, "I didn't see the young lady, you know. Whew! There's the wind again—and rain—well it is a night!"

Table with columns: DAY OF MONTH, DAY OF WEEK, COLOR OF VESTMENTS, and text for the month of April 1905, including the Fourth Sunday of Lent, Passion Sunday, Palm Sunday, Easter Sunday, and Low Sunday.

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the truth, you may do that easily; for so far as I can make out, you mean nothing. What do you mean, I ask again?"

"That," returned the landlord, a little brought down from his dignity by the stranger's surliness, "is a Maypole story, and has been many times these four and twenty years. That story is Solomon Daisy's story. It belongs to the house; and nobody but Solomon Daisy has ever told it under this roof, or ever shall—that's more."

The man glanced at the parish clerk, whose air of consciousness and importance plainly betokened him to be the person referred to, and, observing that he had taken his pipe from his lips, after a very long whiff to keep it alight, and was evidently about to tell his story without further solicitation, gathered his large coat about him, and shrinking farther back, was almost lost in the gloom of the spacious chimney-corner, except when the flame, struggling from under a great fagot, whose weight almost crushed it for the time, shot upward with a strong and sudden glare, and illumined the figure for a moment, seemed afterwards to cast it into deeper obscurity than before.

By this flickering light, which made the old room, with its heavy timbers and paneled walls, look as if it were built of polished ebony—the wind roaring and howling without, now rattling the latch and creaking the hinges of the stout oaken door, and now driving at the casement as though it would beat it in—by this light, and under circumstances so auspicious, Solomon Daisy began his tale—

(To Be Continued)

Mother and Child

That a mother's life is necessarily one of supreme self-sacrifice, every woman should realize before she goes to the altar; and unless she is willing to accept her new responsibilities with good heart and to be a mother in the truest sense of the word, it were better for her to retrace her steps while yet there is time. If the love of husband and children and the pleasures of home do not hold out sufficient allurements to compensate for a continual round of clubs, receptions and theatre going, her career as a mother and home-maker will be a failure, and to fail in the purpose for which God intended her, is the saddest blunder a woman can make.

There are, unfortunately, nowadays too many women who wish to dabble in all things save those that most deeply concern them. They attend meetings to discuss social betterment and a broader field for women, forgetting that the while their own little ones are starving for the mother-love which is their right. In this respect the children in the tenement quarters are frequently more favored than the offspring of the rich.

Women of wealth and leisure are the ones who should be able to rear their children under ideal conditions, yet how can they do so when they are almost strangers in their own households?

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of a higher destiny or a greater work?

A writer in the Youths' Companion, in speaking of the advantage that country children enjoy over those from the city, in having the constant companionship of their mothers, gives the following, which is worthy of consideration.

"You see," said a little girl who lived on a farm, "I've seen my mother almost the whole time ever since I was born. I almost always could do everything she did and go every place she went. It was so unusual when I couldn't that I always heard afterwards every word about what happened. Now, my cousin, who lives in the city, doesn't do that way with her mother. They couldn't. Her mother goes to too many places and does too many things that she says are not for children, and it takes her so much time to do them that she wouldn't have time to tell about them, even if her daughter wanted to hear, which she doesn't much."

Naming the Trees

Boys and girls can have lots of fun playing the following game, and will find some of the questions are not very easy to answer, either. The questions are given out on slips of paper, without the answers, and the one who gets the largest number of correct answers is the winner of the game.

- Which is the most level tree? Plane.
Which is the brightest colored tree? Redwood.
Which tree suggests the thoughts of the ocean? Beech.
Which tree would we prefer on a very cold day? Fir.
Which tree contains a domestic animal? Mahogany.
Which tree might very properly wear a glove? Palm.
Which tree is a pronoun? Yew.
Which is the most melancholy tree? Blue gum.
Which tree is a tale teller? Peach.
Which tree is an insect? Locust.
Which is the dandy among trees? Spruce.
Which tree is an invalid? Pine.
Which tree never is barfooted? Sandalwood.
Which tree can best remember numbers? Date.
Which tree has passed through fire? Ash.
Which is the most ancient tree? Elder.

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