

THE BROAD HIGHWAY

A Tale of 19th Century England, Full of the Thrills of Adventure and Spirit of Romance

By JEFFERY FARNOL

Copyright, 1915, Little, Brown & Co. Peter Viner, an English school...

man, laying his hand upon my arm, 'Peter don't mind Old Nick no more...

my head, for I knew this was Donald's last farewell...

CHAPTER XXV. (Continued). WHEN you still believe in the ghost?

"Why, 'ssee, Peter, we do know as a man 'ung 'isself there, 'cause Gaffer found un-'likewise I've heard it scream-but as for believin' in it, since you say contrarywise-why, 'ow shud I know?"

"But why should I deny it, George? why should I tell you all a Scotsman?"

"Why, 'ssee, Peter," said George, in his heavy way, "ye are such a strange sort o' chap!"

"George," said I, "let us get back to work."

Yet, in a little while, I set aside the hammer, and turned to the door.

"Peter, when ye go!"

"To try and make my peace with the Ancient," I answered, and forthwith crossed the road to 'The Bull.' But with my foot on the step I paused, arrested by the sound of voices and laughter within the tap, and loudst of all, was the voice of the pseudo blacksmith, Job.

"If I were only a bit younger," the Ancient was saying. Now, peeping in through the casement, a glance at his dejected attitude, and the blatant bearing of the others, explained to me the situation then and there.

"Ah! but you ain't!" retorted old Amos, "you're an old man ana 'gettin' older w' every tick o' the clock, you be, an' gettin' mazed-like w' years."

"Haw! haw!" laughed Job and the five or six others.

"Oh, you-Job! if my by Simon was 'ere 'd pitch 'e out into the road, so 'e would-ame as Black Jarge done," quavered the Ancient.

"P'raps, Gaffer, p'raps!" returned

CHAPTER XXVI. WHAT wonder if, at this time, my earlier dreams and ambitions faded from my ken; what wonder that Petronius Arbitrator and the Jolly Sieur de Brantome lay neglected in my dusty knapsack.

But let it not be thought my leisure hours were passed in idle dreaming and luxurious ease; on the contrary, I had, with much ado, rethatched the broken roof of my cottage as well as I might, mended the chimney, fitted glass to the casements and a new door upon its hinges. This last was somewhat clumsily contrived, I grant you, and of a vastly strength quite unnecessary, yet a very excellent door I considered it, nevertheless.

Having thus rendered my cottage weather-proof, I next turned my attention to furnishing it. To which end I turned, and with infinite labor, constructed a bedstead, two elbow-chairs and a table; all to the profound disgust of Donald,

who could by no means abide the rasp of my saw, so that, reaching for his pipes, he would fill the air with eldritch shrieks and groans or drown me in a torrent of martial melody.

It was about this time-that is to say, my second bedstead was nearing completion, and I was seriously considering the building of a press with shelves to hold my crockery; also a shelf for my books-when, chancing to return home somewhat earlier than usual, I was surprised to see Donald sitting upon the bench I had set up beside the door, polishing the buckles of that identical pair of square-toed shoes that had once so pliqued my curiosity.

As I approached he rose and came to meet me with the brogues in his hand.

"Man, Peter," said he, "I maon just be gainin'."

"Goin'?" I repeated, "going where?"

"Back the Glenure-the year is a'mout up, ye ken, an' I wadna' hae ma brither Allan afore me w' the lassie forbye he's an' uno' braw an' sony man, ye ken, an' a lassie's mind is aye a little thing."

"True," I answered, "what little I know of woman would lead me to suppose so; and yet-heaven knows! I shall be sorry to lose you, Donald."

"Ay-I ken that fine, an' ye'll be unc'om' lonesome w'out me an' the pipes, I'm thinkin'."

"Very!"

"Eh, Peter, man! if it wadna' for the lassie, I'd no hae the heart ta leave ye. Ye'll no be forgettin' the 'Wullie Wallace Lament'?"

"Never!" said I.

"Oh, man, Peter! it's in my mind ye'll no hear sic pipin' again, forbye there's the one man-Hislander nor Lowlander-has just the trick o' the 'warblers' like me, an' it's no vera like we shall e'er meet again! I this world, man, Peter, but I'll aye think o' ye-away there in Glenure, when I play the 'Wullie Wallace' bit tune-I'll aye think o' ye, Peter, man."

After this we stood awhile, staring past each other into the deepening shadows.

"Peter," said he at last, "it be no a vera genteel present ta be makin' ye, I doot," and he held up the battered shoes.

"They're uno' worn, an' w' a clout here an' there, ye'll notice, but the buckles are gude siller, an' I has naething else to gie ye. Ay, man! but it's many a weary mile I've marched in these at the head o' the Ninety-second, an' it's mony a stark fecht they've been through-Victoria, Salamanca, Talavera, the Quatre Bras an' Waterloo; tak' 'em, Peter, tak' 'em-tae mind ye sometimes o' Donald Stuart. Ah! now-gie us a group o' ye hand. Gude keep ye, Peter, man!"

So saying, he thrust the brogues upon me, caught and guessed my hand, and turning sharp about, strode away through the shadows, his hat awaying, and tartan streaming gallantly.

And so the bellows roar hoarsely, the hammers clang, and the sparks fly, while the sooty face of Black George, now in shadow, now illumined by the fire, seems like the face of some P're-god or Salamander. In the corner, perched securely out of reach of stray sparks, sits the Ancient, snuff-box in hand as usual.

I stand, feet well apart, and swing the great "sledge," to whose diapason George's hand-hammer beats a tinkling melody, coming in after each stroke with a ring and clash exact and true, as is, and has been, the way of masters of the smithing craft all the world over from time immemorial.

"George," said I, during a momentary lull, leaning my hands upon the long hammer-shaft, "you don't sing."

"No, Peter."

"And why not?"

"I think, Peter."

"But surely you can both think and sing, George?"

"Not always, Peter."

"What's the trouble, George?"

"No trouble, Peter," said he, above the roar of the bellows.

"Then sing, George."

"Ay, Jarge, sing," nodded the Ancient; "it is a poor 'eart as never rejoices, an' that's in the Scriptures-so sing, Jarge."

George did not answer, but, with a turn of his mighty wrist, drew the glowing iron from the fire. And once more the sparks fly, the air is full of the clink of hammers, and the deep-throated Song of the Anvil, in which even the Ancient joins, in a voice somewhat quavery, and generally a note or two behind, but with great gusto and good will notwithstanding:

"Strike! ding! ding! Strike! ding! ding!"

In the middle of which I was aware of one entering to us, and, presently, turning round, espied Prudence, with a great basket on her back. Hearing so, hammers were thrown aside and we straightened our backs, for in that basket was our supper.

Very fair and sweet Prudence looked, lithe and vigorous, and straight as a young poplar, with her shining black hair curling into little tight rings about her ears, and with great, shy eyes, and red, red mouth. Surely, a man might seek very far ere he found such another maid as this brown-cheeked, black-eyed village beauty.

"Good evening, Mr. Peter," she said, dropping me a courtesy with a grace that could not have been surpassed by any duchess in the land; but, as for poor George, she did not even notice him, neither did he raise his curly head nor glance toward her.

"You came just when you are 'most needed, Prudence," said I, relieving her of the heavy basket, "for here were two hungry men."

"Three!" broke in the Ancient; "so 'unry as a lion, I be!"



"Good evening, Mr. Peter," she said.

Job, "but I sez again, I believe what Peter sez, an' I don't believe there never was a ghost at all." "Ay, lad, but I tell 'ee there was-I seed un!" cried the old man eagerly, "seed un w' these two eyes, many's the time. You, Joel Amos-ye be a-a-roo-in-an' an a-roo-in-an-you believe as I seed un, don't 'ee now-come?" "Haw! he!" chuckled Old Amos, "I don't know if I do, Gaffer-ye see you'm gettin' that old!" "But I did-I did-oh, you chaps, I tell 'ee I did!" "You'm gettin' old, Gaffer," repeated Amos, dwelling upon the theme with great unctious, "very, very old!" "But so strong as a bull, I be!" added the Ancient, trying manfully to steady the quaver in his voice.

"Haw! haw!" laughed Job and the others, while Old Amos chuckled shrilly again.

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"Three!" broke in the Ancient; "so 'unry as a lion, I be!"

"Three hungry men, Prudence, who have been hearkening for your step this half hour or more."

Quoth Prudence, shyly: "For the sake of my basket?"

"Ay, for sure!" croaked the Ancient; "so ravenous as a tiger, I be!"

"No," said I, shaking my head, "basket or no basket, you are equally welcome, Prudence-how say you, George? But George only mumbled in his beard. The Ancient and I now set to work putting up an extemporized table, but as for George, he stood staring dumbly, moodily, into the yet glowing embers of the forge. Having put up the table, I crossed to where Prudence was busy unpacking her basket toward her.

"Prudence," said I, "are you still at odds with George?" Prudence nodded.

"But," said I, "he is such a splendid fellow! His outburst the other day was quite natural, under the circumstances; surely you can forgive him, Prudence?"

"There be more nor that betwix us, Mr. Peter," sighed Prudence. "His drinkin'; six months ago he promised me never ta eat another drop-an' he broke his word w' me."

"But surely good ale, in moderation, will harm no man-nay, on the contrary!"

"No; he is much bigger and stronger!" said I, "and I never saw a handsome fellow."

"Yes," nodded the girl, "so strong as a giant, an' so weak as a little child!"

"Indeed, Prudence," said I, leaning nearer to her in my earnestness, "I think you are a little unjust to him, so far as you know him. George is anything but weak-minded, or liable to be led into anything."

Hearing the Ancient chuckle gleefully, I glanced up to find him nodding and winking to Black George, who stood with folded arms and bent head, watching us from beneath his brows, and, as his eyes met mine, I thought they gleamed strangely in the firelight.

"Come, Prue," said the Ancient, bustling forward, "table's ready-let's sit down an' eat-fa-in't an' famishin' w' me!"

So we presently sat down, all three of us, while Prudence carved and supplied our wants, as only Prudence could. And after a while, our hunger being appeased, I took out my pipe, as did the Ancient and George theirs likewise, and together we filled them, slowly and carefully, as pipes should be filled, while Prudence folded a long, paper spill wherewith to light them, the which she proceeded to do, beginning at her grandfather's churchwarden. Now, while she was lighting mine, Black George suddenly rose, and, crossing to the forge, took thence a glowing coal, with the tongs, thus doing the office for himself. All at once I saw Prue's hand was trembling, and the spill was dropped or ever my tobacco was well alight; then she turned swiftly away, and began replacing the plates and knives and forks in her basket.

"Be you'm a-goin', Prue?" inquired the Ancient unblinking, for his pipe was in full blast.

"No, Peter."

"And why not?"

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SCRAPPLE

IT'S ALL RIGHT IF YOU CAN GET AWAY WITH IT THE PADDED CELL



Chill Breezes Poor Father



Cold the winds of winter sighing bend the swallows southward flying. Some birds we know with shivers flock to get their overcoats from hock!

The Way of Wimpin



Much Worse



What's the Use? An Indication of Temperament

Telling Your Wife About the Great T...le Play You Saw That Afternoon

This Tries One's Patience



Songs Without Words

Quite Correct

No Hardship

The Boy for the Place

Butcher (to applicant for the situation)-Let me hear you go through the weight table, boy.

Boy-Fourteen ounces make one pound, and- Butcher-That will do. You're engaged.

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