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Regardless of Denunciation from any Quarter.—Gov. FORSTER.

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The Hermit of Cripplegate.*

BY CHARLES OLIVER, AUTHOR OF "FERRERS."

"The works and ways, and all thy good endeavor,
I shall not behind, nor in the grave were trod;
But as Faith pointed with her golden rod,
I shall rise up to joy and bliss forever."
MILTON.

On a glowing day, about two centuries and a half ago, a great bustle and hurry making roused the little village of Boscombe, in Wiltshire, from its usual pastoral quiet. This festivity was caused by the marriage of Mistress Anne Welby, only daughter and heiress of the lord of the manor, to Sir Christopher Hilliard, a gentleman of a large possessions in Yorkshire. Never was a more auspicious wedding; nor one which, in all its circumstances, could be more flattering to the bride and groom. Village inhabitants, old and young, lads and lasses, were present in all their country bravery, busily paying homage after their fashion, to the young couple; gentry living round assembled at Welby Hall to honor to the occasion; the road through which our wedding pageant passed to church was for the most part draped and canopyed by elm-boughs; and the church itself was a quaint, picturesque, and ancient edifice, of which the pavement was decorated in several places with brass effigies and armorial bearings of certain ancestors of the Welby's, laid on the stones. Last though not least, the marriage was to be solemnized by the illustrious Richard Hooker, at that time rector of this parish, to which living he had been presented by Mistress Anne's father, Henry Welby, Esquire, of Yale, Priory, in Lincolnshire, and of Boscombe, in Wiltshire.

It has been held by many that the form of marriage, as prescribed in our ritual, is much weakened by certain omissions and additions, tolerated in the present day. We do not know whether in the sixteenth century such deviations were permitted, or not, in the celebration of this solemn nuptial; but be this as it may, it is quite certain that Richard Hooker was too much of a ritualist to epitomize a sacred order of the church. He, who at this time was composing his great work, "Ecclesiastical Polity," would never dream of abridging ecclesiastical forms, nor would Mr. Welby have assented in so irreverent an indecorum, when had the minister been inclined to perpetuate it. The ceremony was, therefore, performed in all its impressive details before a congregation which had every part of the humble fanes, when the "Blessing" on the newly married pair had been pronounced, a choir of skilful singing men chanted learned counterpoint the "Benedicamus." Then followed other observations which, being completed, the young couple devoutly received the benediction. A pealing voluntary was heard from the organ, and as the bride died away, Mr. Hooker ascended the pulpit, and preached a marriage sermon with much of the rich eloquence and apostolical fervor, fertility of thought and erudite illustration, which distinguished his immortal "Ecclesiastical Polity."

When the sermon had concluded, the lower windows nearest the altar were suddenly darkened by the entrance of a man who looked earnestly at the preacher. "Master Welby," was whispered from one to the other when the eyes of the congregation were simultaneously turned on the disconcerted by so universal a gaze, he gradually drew back from the pulpit, and disappeared. Though Hooker, in common with others, had seen the intruder, and knew that his places were directed especially at him, he passed on in his discourse, without an atom of his fervid emotion. When all was over at the church, the young party returned in state to Welby Hall, where a sumptuous banquet had been prepared. The bride and bridegroom, however, remained not long with the father's guests; and having received Mr. Welby's tearful benediction, departed for London, where they were to remain a few days preparatory to the removal of Lady Hilliard to her husband's seat in Yorkshire, where at that time she was welcomed as the daughter by Sir Christopher's relations.

It is, however, unamixed with regret, that in this world of ours—where Anne, it is true, was united to her election, who deserved no more she had won; still, she had left, in comparative loneliness, her father, whom she dearly loved, and residing in so distant a coun-

ty. Mr. Welby, though cordially approving Hilliard for his son-in-law, felt the separation even in a greater degree than his daughter. It was a melancholy contradiction to his habits; his table would be desolate; the loss of Anne would make an irreparable void in his house. How could he endure the sight of her vacant chair—how beguile the time till he again should see her? In fact, a wedding, even when, as in the present case, congenial hearts are linked together, is not in reality, and ought not to be, a merry affair.—Trick it out as you may in external gauds and triumphs, the exultation will generally be dashed with lurking sadness. The sacrifice of parental home, of old associations, of caresses which, from infancy, were daily renewed—these form, during many weeks, a canker in the very core of happiness.

But time mitigates every kind of suffering. The father and daughter, though separated, were not without the comfortable intercourse of frequent letters; and as Lady Hilliard had every reason to be happy in her new home, and in the devoted fondness of her husband, Mr. Welby became, in a manner, reconciled to the loss of his only child's society, and derived pleasure from considering how adequately she was settled in life, and how fortunate in a partner who would protect her both now and when her father should have descended to the grave.

One only source of disquietude remained to Welby, and this originated in his brother—a dissolute, violent, and unprincipled man, who, hoping to secure for his own emolument, certain church-preferments, in the gift of his family, had taken orders, but more than once had been in danger of losing his gown in consequence of his quarrelsome disposition and intemperate habits. On the death of the last incumbent of Boscombe, Mr. Welby found it impossible, without incurring great scandal, to confer the living on his brother. To the learned, pious, and eloquent Hooker, it was offered, and by him it was accepted.

One day, when Mr. Welby was walking in his park, "chewing the cud of sweet and bitter melancholy," (for he was a man of sensitive temperament, and much given to lonely musing,) he saw his brother striding with hurried pace towards him. Knowing, from painful experience, that he was thus sought, only to be entangled in an altercation, he turned towards the house, determining, if possible, to seclude himself and to decline any interview with the unworthy churchman. The latter, however, soon overtook him.

"Henry," ejaculated he, "I do not wonder that you wish to avoid me; but I will not allow you to do so. I have suffered many grievances at your hands. I have much to say, and you shall hear me. Brother, you have done me great wrong."

"You have done yourself great wrong, Basil," returned Mr. Welby quietly.

"Have you nothing else to say?—Can you invent no newer rhetoric?" retorted Basil. "I have heard this wailing fusian so often, that I sick at its repetition. Sir, I directly charge you with cheating me of my birthright. This is a plain, straight-forward accusation, and must be answered plainly. Under the cloak of a legal device, you have committed a real injury, and deprive me of that to which by the laws of nature and common sense, I am as fully entitled as yourself."

"Be explicit, Basil."

"I will. Presuming unworthily—treacherously, on the foolish right of eldership, you have proved yourself a dishonest steward of property to which my claim is equal to your own. Am I not the son of my father?"

"Oh, Basil," sorrowfully ejaculated Welby, "fortunate for him is it that our father lived not to hear of your riotous course, and to know of the disgrace you have brought on his name, and on your own calling."

"Disgrace!" echoed Basil furiously. "Take more heed, elder brother, of your words, or by this light, my hand shall thrust them down your throat."

"I am no stranger to your violence," returned Welby, "but it shall not daunt me, nor turn me from the path of duty."

"The path of duty, sir, should tend towards your kindred," said Basil.—"Have you not basely strayed from it in giving to Master Hooker that which was part of my father's privilege and property?"

"It is mine now by the same right through which it descended to our father," answered Welby. "I have never denied you money, Basil; never

stood upon accounts, or reckoning, or over-payments. You almost held the string of my purse, and I have tried to be content. But the cure of souls is a weightier matter; and the parish have a sacred right to demand, from me a fitting and pious minister."

"Well, sir?"

"Ask yourself, Basil, if my duty would not have been discharged had I given to you the rectory of Boscombe. Would the congregation have relied on your spiritual teaching? would meditation have any weight with men at variance? Would a trembling conscience have sought counsel from you? Would any one in the time of tribulation, and in the hour of death, have sent for Master Basil Welby to point the way to Heaven? Oh, brother, ponder on your past life, think of your graceless bearing, your divers excesses, your tavern brawls (unmeet in any one, but fearfully so in the minister of God's church); reflect moreover, on the manner in which all men are forced to estimate you! Then supplicate for grace, and let me love you, dear Basil."

"These are mere words, Henry—idle words. What have they to do with your daring appropriation of my paternal right? How do they warrant you in bestowing on a low born mongrel—a beggar who was fain to accept doles, palsy alms, pitiful groats, from Bishop Jewel—a man to whom his lordship could not lend even a walking staff without a strong and iterated injunction that he would not forget to return it—how, I ask, do your piling phrases justify your overlooking me, your brother—a born gentleman, in favor of such an upstart cozener?"

"Fie, Basil—fie! Verily, you know not the man of whom you speak. Master Hooker is no cozener, but a holy priest, whose life and actions are no doubt pleasing in the sight of his Creator. The world will reverence his memory for centuries to come. But you know Basil, I have another offer living in my gift—that of—in Lincolnshire, of which the present incumbent is very old and infirm. Mend your life—draw down oblivion upon your past errors, and this living shall be yours in due time. How my heart will be comforted when I shall be able to bestow it on you!"

"I care not for the living you speak of, and I will not have it," returned Basil. "Death, sir, you shall not banish me to fenny Lincoln! I like not its marshy fens. No; Boscombe is the parish wherein I was born; it is the parish which holds my father's house, and the best of his lands; in it I was christened, and in its church my ancestors have assembled for generations. By being excluded from its pulpit, I am indelibly disgraced! You have stamped upon my brow a burning shame, for the sake of a Devonshire clown—anarrant adventurer."

"All men know you are skilful in railing," rejoined Welby. "Had you ever heard or read any of Master Hooker's discourses, even you would speak with respect of a man, who, if I err not widely, is destined to be a pillar of our English church. He is so learned a divine, so abounding in grace, so zealous and effectual in his calling, so gifted with saintly faculty, that it is impossible he should long remain hidden in our sequestered rectory of Boscombe. Therefore, dear Basil, reform, and Boscombe shall yet be yours."

"I place no faith in your promises, Henry."

"How!" exclaimed Welby, "Have I ever deceived your expectations?"

"Yes, in alienating Boscombe from your own blood. But come, I'll test your sincerity. Will you solemnly swear here, before we part, that as soon soever as Master Hooker shall vacate the living, you will induct me into it? Do this, and much as I have been wronged, there shall be peace between us."

"I will not do it, Basil, save upon conditions."

"Then," vociferated Basil, foaming with rage, "you are a villain—a base colluder with a hypocritical priest.—May the burning lake of hell surge eternally over your head! One of you shall soon be there," continued he, suddenly presenting a pistol at his brother's head, and pulling the trigger.

The weapon missed fire; but Welby heard the click and saw the flash.—Rushing on his brother with a view to disarm him, a desperate struggle ensued, which terminated by Basil being thrown to the ground with such violence as to be stunned; when taking the pistol from his grasp, Welby walked to his house, thoughtfully and with sorrow.

Having shut himself up in his library, and locked the door, he sat down to meditate on the strange event which had just occurred. "That his life should have been attempted within sight of his own home, in mid-day, and by the hand of his brother, was almost too monstrous for belief. It was like a phantasma, or a hideous dream."

"He could not have meant to destroy me," soliloquized Welby. "No, no! rash and violent as he is, he never intended that. His design, no doubt, was to terrify me into compliance with his demand. The pistol merely flashed in the pan. Surely, surely it was not loaded. Still, the very pretence to do such a deed was outrageous and iniquitous. How can he look me in the face again? I must nevertheless do what I can to reclaim him. No, no; I will never believe that Basil intended to slay his brother."

The pistol was on the table before him. Welby looked at it. "There," said he, to himself, "is an evidence capable of strengthening my belief that no worse harm than frightening me was meditated. I might examine it, and so prove Basil's innocence of murder, even in thought."

Welby took up the weapon, and held it awhile irresolutely; then, with a shudder, laid it down again, exclaiming, "God help me! I have not courage to dare the test. What if I should discover a damning proof of guilt? Better be in ignorance than wither under so terrible a conviction."

It was some time before he recovered his consciousness. But what an utter, what a dreadful, change had been wrought during that interval. A total revolution had taken place in his mind. By this one blow, the world and all in it was suddenly darkened to poor Welby—a wide blank was before him.—Though not destroyed, his reasoning powers were stunned; and he desperately resolved to avoid for ever any intercourse with mankind. "He was shocked," says Mr. Leigh Hunt, "by the strangeness as well as inhumanity of his brother's attempt; it gave him a horror of the very faces of his fellow creatures; perhaps, also, something of a personal fear of them, and very likely a hypochondriacal dread even of himself, and of the blood of which his veins partook."

Without apprising any one of his intention—without seeing the good and great Hooker, whom, under any less overwhelming calamity than the present, he would doubtless have consulted—without even leaving a letter for his well beloved daughter—he ordered a horse to be saddled and brought to him, and having turned his back for ever on his ancestral mansion, and on the haunts of his youth and manhood, arrived, after two days' journeying, in London. This was in the year 1592. He now authorized an agent to dispose of all his property in Wiltshire and Lincolnshire, and then, according to the old pamphlet, published in 1837, "took a fair house in the lower end of Grub street, near Cripplegate, and contracting a numerous retinue into a small family, having the house prepared for his purpose, he selected three chambers for himself, the one for his diet, the second for his lodging, and the third for his study. As they were one within another, while his diet was set on the table by an old maid-servant, he retired into his lodging room; and when his bed was making, into his study, still doing so till all was clear.

That a man should leave the country, and repair to London for solitude, may, at first sight, appear unreasonable, but Welby desired to destroy all former associations of his life. He thought, moreover, that in such an intricate wilderness of houses his brother would be unable to trace him; and that while he could render his seclusion as inviolable as he chose, the neighborhood of other men would make it safe.

It could not be otherwise than that so strange and obstinate a determination should be much talked about, and that it should soon travel to his daughter's ears, who immediately, on learning what had happened, left her house in Yorkshire, and, accompanied by her husband, repaired to London, sought out her father's residence, and desired the old maid-servant to tell her master that his daughter was come to see him. But alas! Welby had taken an oath that he would never again behold a human being, save the serving-woman he had hired to tend him, after many ineffectual attempts, the poor lady was constrained to return without the blessing of an interview with her woe-stricken father. No circumstance, of what kind soever, had strength enough to shake, or even to modify the strange

resolve he had formed. From middle age, when he first plunged into his solemn seclusion, till he died, at a very advanced time in life, (a space of forty-four years,) he was never seen by any of his fellow creatures; though divers attempts were made during that period by his son-in-law, his daughter, and his grand-children.

Though in the world, Welby was not of the world. In one small, narrow room, which, as it looked towards an open space formed by Moorfields, and pasture land of Finsbury, was hushed and silent, he spent forty-four summers and winters, "debarring himself from the fresh and comfortable air," and staining his windows, to veil from his eyes the cheerful scene without. Yet was the day not tedious, nor the night unvisited by sweet and lofty thoughts. The walls of his room were clothed with books; and in his intercourse with those silent chroniclers of men's minds, he found indemnity for his self-imposed exclusion from their living companionship. He gave direction that every new book, immediately on its publication, should be brought to him; but such as had a controversial turn, he laid aside and never read; even Hooker's "Ecclesiastical Polity," he did not look into, probably fearing it might be polemical. The books which he rejected were found from time to time by his servant on the table in his dining-room, with a written instruction to send them away. It must have pained his gentle spirit to discard the great work of Richard Hooker, his sometime pastor and dear friend; but he yearned for peace of mind, and consolation, and hermit-like tranquility, dreading debate even as an adder's sting. In the books which most engaged his mind, he was in the habit of making marginal observations, as appeared on inspecting his library after his death, when it must have been delightful to ascertain the vast amount of pleasure he had derived from the imagination, nature, affluent thoughts, knowledge of the human heart, and profound, but bland philosophy in the plays of Shakespeare, which he eagerly read, as they successively appeared in quarto. His servant frequently found on the dining room table a slip of paper, with these words: "Inquire whether any thing new be extant of Master Shakespeare! If there be, send to the stationer for it with all speed." Some of these plays had more or less affinity to Welby's own situation, as referring either to outrages of brother upon brother, or to more general family feuds, or to the ingratitude of men, or to their vile selfishness which necessitates not at the perpetration of any wrong, however mean or treacherous, so that its own ends may be compassed. I might seem that works thus cognate with Welby's circumstances would have been shunned by him as opening anew his wounds; and so they would, had not our herling wisdom—the demonstration of "a soul of goodness in things evil"—been every where apparent in them. In the above category are "As You Like It," wherein are two Cains, Cains at least in intention; "Frederick and Oliver," and two gentle Welbys, the *Senior Duke* and *Orlando*; "The Tempest," with *Prospero* driven in "a rotten carcass of a boat," to the mercy of winds and ad waves by his brother *Antonio*, and though thrown upon a desert island, finding his comfort in priceless books; "Hamlet," wherein the ghost of the royal Dane relates, in words sounding of the sepulchre, that he was murdered by his brother; "Lear," mad with the monstrous cruelty of his children, (besides the terrible underplot of *Edmund*, foully practising against his brother *Edgar*'s life); and "Timon," hunted, by the ingratitude of his fellows, from the haunts of men, and howling his resentment to the wild woods. Welby must have been especially interested in the "As You Like It," for the top, bottom and sides of nearly every page of the serious portions of that drama, whose irresistible strength is in its tenderness, were covered with expressions of loving admiration. A note on the six lines (Act 2, scene 1,) beginning—

"Sweet are the uses of adversity?"

was very touching. "Were it not," wrote he, "for my fore-passed oath, methinks I should much rejoice to look into the face of that man who can write thus, and who has done so great service to poor human nature, in other his all-salvaging conceits. But alas, alas, I may not." "The Tempest," too, seemed to have absorbed the recitose's attention deeply; but "Timon of Athens," had evidently not much attracted him—perhaps its wrangling scenes

and general tone of acerbity had repelled his meek spirit. Fear had been carefully perused, as was obvious from the reader's many written observations. It would seem, however, from a note at the end, that his pleasure in it was unqualified. The note ran thus: "Lear doth not win my sympathy so much as the banished duke, in 'As You Like It.'" Lear's agony date from his own foregone willfulness.—According to mine own conceit, it is borne with too much impatience, and giveth birth to too many blazing bursts of passion and proud defiance. He looketh to repair his wrongs by wrath and impotent resentment; and the fury of his imprecations shocks me.—Peradventure, Master Shakespeare is right for all this." Welby's misgivings of his own criticism were evidenced (so it was said at the time,) by marks of his fears on the pages of this great tragedy.

His servant, Elizabeth, saw her master but seldom (and then only in cases of extraordinary necessity,) during his seclusion of four and forty years.—She stated that, except for the mildness of his eyes, his appearance was wild and startling. The white tresses of his head fell down his shoulders, and partly over his face, shadowing his thin, pale, and prophet-like visage; and his breast was covered by his beard.—He moved under a veil of hair. It is probable, from this description, that Shakerly Marmion, in alluding to Welby, says:

"Yet saw we one of late, that when he stood,
He look'd as he were born before the flood."

His habit was plain and without ornament; of a sad colored cloth, only to defend him from the cold. In diet he was remarkably temperate, subsisting chiefly on oat-meal gruel; and now and then, in summer, he would indulge in a salad of cool herbs. He never tasted wine, or strong water, but contented himself with weak beer. "Nevertheless," says the old pamphlet, "he kept a bountiful table for his servants, and sufficient entertainment for any stranger or tenant who had occasion of business at his house."

In Christmas holidays, at Easter, and other festivals, he had great cheer provided with all dishes in season, served into his own chamber, with stores of wine, which his maid brought in; then, after thanks to God for his good benefits, he would pin a clean napkin before him, and putting on a pair of white Holland sleeves, cutting up dish after dish in order, he would send one to one poor neighbor, the next to another, whether it were brawn, beef, capon, goose, &c., till he had left the table quite empty; when, giving thanks again, he laid by his linen, and caused the cloth to be taken away; and this would he do, dinner and supper, upon those days, without tasting one morsel of anything whatsoever! How beautiful—how affecting—is this!—Benignity the most liberal, and self-privation the most severe, acting together—fulfilling their separate purposes hand in hand! Then the formal preparation for the no meat, and the grateful thanks to God before and after meat—for others! Kind, good, and pious Welby! Long suffering should not have been the destiny of thy meek heart.

His pecuniary charities were numerous and judicious. He would occasionally inquire, "what neighbors were industrious in their callings? and without, if their labor and industry could not sufficiently supply their families?"—To such, he would liberally send, and relieve them according to their necessities!

But no benefits of this kind can be conferred, without subjecting the giver to importunities from persons who may not be deserving; and Welby knew that to this penalty his good deeds must submit, though he did not, at first, reckon that applications would be made by sturdy mendicants to see him personally. Whatever might have been given to many of them, had a different mode of solicitation been adopted, was certain to be withheld when sought in this way. In the last year of Welby's life—namely, 1636—his house was much pestered by the repeated visits of an old woman, who, though admittance was constantly denied to her, came again and again, with a plea that she knew Master Welby would see her if he could anticipate what she came about. It was to no purpose that Elizabeth told the woman her master would not grant admittance to any human being, under any circumstance whatever, in vain; one day's repulse was sure to be followed by renewed application. At length, she brought a man with her—a wretched looking, squallid, [OVERLOOKED ON FORBETH PLACE.]