

An Odd Man.

ONE of the greatest enjoyments which can befall a man, is to spend a week or so with an old school fellow who was a jovial companion, and who you have not seen since.

I was heartily glad, therefore, when at last I found that there was nothing to prevent me paying a visit (long promised and looked forward to, but against which I began to think, gods and men had conspired) to my old true friend Lumley. I dare say he has a Christian name; indeed, I have no reason to doubt it, and, on the strength of an initial not very discernible, prefixed to the L in his signature, I have never hesitated to address him, "J. Lumley, Esq.;" but I know him as Long Lumley, and so does every man who, like myself, remembers him at Oxford; and as Long Lumley do all his contemporaries know him best, and esteem him accordingly; and he must excuse me if I immortalize him to the public, in spite of god-fathers and godmothers, by that more familiar appellation. A cousin was with him at college, a miserably sneaking fellow, who was known as "Little Lumley;" and if, as I suspect, they were both Johns or Jameses, it is quite desirable to distinguish them unmistakably; for though the other has the best shooting in the country, I would not be suspected of spending even the first week of September inside such a fellow's gate.

But Long Lumley was and is of a different stamp; six feet three, and every inch a gentleman. I wish he was not, of late years, quite so fond of farming; a man who can shoot, ride, and translate an ode of Horace as he can, ought to have a soul above turnips. It is almost the only point on which we are diametrically opposed in tastes and habits. We nearly fell out about it the very first morning after my arrival.

Breakfast was over—a somewhat late one in honor of the supposed fatigues of yesterday's journey, and it became necessary to arrange proceedings for the day. What a false politeness it is, which makes a host responsible for his guests' amusement; and how often, in consequence, are they compelled to do, with grimaces of forced satisfaction, the very thing they would not! However, Lumley and myself were too old friends to have any scruples of delicacy on that point. I had been eyeing him for some minutes while he was fastening on a pair of formidable high-lows, and was not taken by surprise when the proposal came out, "Now, old fellow will you come and have a look at my farm?"

"Can't I see it from the window?"

"Stuff! come I must show you my sheep; I assure you they are considered about the best in this neighborhood."

"Well, then, I'll taste the mutton any day you like and give you my honest opinion."

"Don't be an ass now, but get your hat and come along; it's going to be a lovely day; and we'll just take a turn over the farm—there's a new threshing machine I want to show you, too, and then back here to lunch."

"Seriously, then, Lumley, I won't do anything of the kind. I do you the justice to believe, that you asked me here to enjoy myself; and that I am quite ready to do in any fairly rational manner; and I flatter myself I am in no wise particular; but as to going bogging myself among turnips, or staring into the faces and poking the ribs of short-thorns and southdowns—why, as an old friend, you'll excuse me."

"Hem! there's no accounting for tastes," said Lumley, in half a disappointed tone.

"No," said I, "there certainly is not."

"Well, then," said he—"he never lost his good-humor—what shall we do? I'll tell you—you remember Harry Bolton? rather your junior, but you must have known him well, because he was quite in our set from the first—to be sure, didn't you spill him out of a tandem at Abington corner? Well, he is living now about nine miles from here, and we'll drive over and see him. I meant to write to ask him to dine here, and this will save the trouble."

"With all my heart," said I; "I never saw him since I left Oxford. I fancied I heard of his getting into some mess—involvement in some way, was he not?"

"Not involved exactly; but he certainly did make himself scarce from a very nice house and curacy which he had when he first left Oxford, and buried himself alive for I don't know how long, and all for the very queerest reason, or rather without any reason at all. Did you never hear of it?"

"No; only some vague rumor, as I said just now."

"You never heard, then, how he came into this neighborhood? Have the dog-cart around in ten minutes, Sam, and we dine at seven. Now, get yourself in marching order, and I'll tell you the whole story as we go along."

He did so, but it was so interrupted by continual expostulations with his horse, and remarks upon the country through which we were driving, that it will be at least as intelligible if I tell it in my own words; especially as I had many of the most graphic passages from Bolton's own lips afterwards.

It was before he left Oxford, I think, that Bolton lost his father, and was thrown

pretty much upon his own resources. A physician with a large family, however good his practice, seldom leaves much behind him; and poor Harry found himself, after spending a handsome allowance and something more, left to begin life on his own account, with a degree, a good many bills, and a few hundreds, quite insufficient to pay them. However, he was not the sort of man to look upon the dark side of things; and no heir, long expectant, and just stepping into his thousands per annum, carried away from the university a lighter heart and a merrier face than Harry Bolton. He got ordained in due course; and though not exactly the material out of which one would prefer to cut a country curate, still he threw off with his sporting coats and many colored waistcoats, most of the habits thereto belonging, and less suited to his profession. To live upon a curate's stipend he found more difficult; and being a fair scholar, and having plenty of friends and connections, he announced his intention of "driving," as he called it, a pair of pupils, whom he might train up in so much Latin and Greek, and other elements of general knowledge (including, perhaps, a little shooting and gig-driving), as they might require for their matriculations. The desired youths were soon found; and Harry entered upon his new employment with considerable ardor, and a very honest intention of doing his best. How the Latin and Greek prospered is a point in some degree obscure to present historians; but all the pupils were unanimous in declaring the wine to be unexceptionable, and their preceptor's dogs and shooting first rate; in fact he sustained with them, as with the public generally, the reputation of being one of the heartiest and best fellows in the world. From the poorest among his parishioners, to whom he was charitable above his means, but who felt almost more than his gifts the manner of his giving, to the squire ten miles off, who met his pleasant smile once a year at a dinner party, all spoke well of Harry Bolton. No wonder his pupils looked upon him as the very paragon of tutors, and found their path of learning strewn with unexpected flowers. How many scholars he made is still unknown; but he made many friends. With the uncalculating gratitude of youth, all remembered the pleasant companion when they might have forgotten the hard-working instructor; and frequent were the tokens of such remembrance, varying with the tastes of the senders which reached the little parsonage by the Oxford coach, from those who successfully assumed the *toga virilis*, and became (university) men. Collars of brawn and cases of claret were indeed but perishable memorials; but there came also whips extravagantly mounted, and tomes of orthodox divinity in the soberest bindings, all bearing inscriptions more or less classical, from his "*quondam alumni*." The first named delicacies were duly passed on, with Harry's compliments, to grace more fittingly the tables of some of his hospitable entertainers; and, in an equally unselfish spirit, he seldom sat down alone to any of his literary dainties, but kept them in honorable state on his most conspicuous bookshelf, for the use and behoof of any friend who might wish to enjoy them.

But here I am anticipating. For some time the puzzling went on pretty smoothly. Two or three couple of youths were fairly launched upon the university, and nothing particularly untoward had occurred to ruffle the curate's good-humor or injure his reputation. There had been no attempt at elopement with the cook or house-maid (Bolton's precaution had secured ugly ones); no poaching on Sir Thomas' favorite preserve, though close at hand, and sportsmen of eighteen are not over nice in their distinctions; a tall Irishman had been with him, summer vacations and all, for nearly two years, and had not made love to either of the squire's undeniably pretty daughters. In short, the pupils were less of a bore than Harry had supposed it possible, and in some cases, very agreeable companions to enliven the occasional dullness of a country parish.

But somehow or other, in one chief point which he had aimed at, he found himself disappointed. In counting so many additional hundreds to his scanty income, Harry Bolton had fancied he was going to make himself a rich man. He was not avaricious, or even selfish—far from it; but he wanted to be independent; there were visions, perhaps, flitting indistinctly before him, of a time when he might tire of a solitary home, and resign in some fair and gentle hand the reins of the liberty he was so fond of boasting as a bachelor. He did not grudge his time or labor; he had cast off much of his old habit of idleness, and took a real interest in his pupils; still he had expected some of the results to himself would take the tangible shape of pounds, shillings and pence. But though the checks came duly in at midsummer and Christmas, the balance at his bankers increased very slowly; in short, he found that the additional expenses, necessary and unnecessary, entailed upon him by the change in his establishment, nearly counterbalanced the additional income. Not to speak of such ordinary matters as butchers' and bakers' and wine merchants' bills—for his table was always most liberal, now that he had to entertain others, as it had been simple and economical while alone—indeed the

hospitality of the neighborhood had then made his housekeeping almost a sinecure; but, independently of this, Harry had been led to extend his expenses—he said unavoidably—in other directions. A rough pony had hitherto contented him to gallop into the neighboring town for letters, and to carry him and his valise to the dinner parties even of the most aristocratic entertainers. But now, inasmuch as sometimes a hospitable invitation extended itself to "the young men," he had felt in duty bound, for his and their joint accommodation, to replace the pony by a showy looking mare, and to invest the legal sum of nineteen pounds, nineteen shillings and sixpence in the purchase of a dog-cart. As an almost necessary consequence, the boy "Jim" gave way to a grown-up groom, who did rather less work for considerable more wages, hissing and whistling over the said mare and dog-cart in the most knowing manner, and condescending, though with some scruples of conscience, to clean boots and knives. Harry's reminiscences of his more sporting days were yet fresh enough for him to make a point of seeing his turnout "look as it ought to do." Jim and the pony, and all their accoutrements, were rough, and useful, and cheap, and made no pretensions to be otherwise. Now, things were changed, and saddlery and harness of the best (there was no economy, as Harry observed, in buying a poor article) found their place among the bills at Christmas. In short, he was led into a maze of new wants, individually trifling, but collectively sufficient to tell upon his yearly expenditure; and he was beginning gravely to attempt to solve that universal problem—the asses' bridge, which the wisest domestic economist stick fast at year after year—"where the deuce all the money goes to?"—when circumstances occurred which put all such useless inquiries out of his head, and indeed put his debtor and creditor transactions on a much more primitive footing.

In the final settlements of the accounts of one of his pupils, who was leaving him for the university, some misunderstanding arose between himself and the father. The sum in question was but a few pounds; but the objection was put forward in a manner which Bolton considered as reflecting upon his own straightforward and liberal dealing; and it so happened that the young man had, from circumstances, been indebted in an unusual degree to his kindness. He therefore, I have no doubt, took the matter up warmly; for those who remember him as I do, can well imagine how his blood would boil at anything he considered mean or unhandsome. It ended in his insisting on the whole amount—a hundred or so—respecting which the difference had arisen, being paid into the treasurer of the county hospital instead of to himself; and he vowed silently and determinedly, to renounce pupilizing thenceforth forever. In vain did some of his best friends persuade him to change his resolution; he kept two who were with him at the time for a few months, when they also were to enter college; but he steadily refused any other offers. He sold off at once all his superfluous luxuries, and, as soon as practicable, gave up his curacy, and quitted the neighborhood, to the general regret of all who knew him, and to the astonishment of all but the very few who were in the secret.

When Bolton's friends next heard of him, he was living in a most remote district of H—shire, on an income necessarily small; for it could have been scarcely more than the proceeds of his curacy; and curacies in that part of the country were then but a wretched provision for any man—especially for one accustomed as he had been to good living and good society. However, he was not much troubled with the latter in his present position; not to speak of the fact that his nearest conversable neighbor lived seven miles off. Wherever parsons are mostly poor, and many of them ill-educated, they are not much thought of, by either farmers or noblemen. And as it did not suit Harry's tastes to enjoy his pipe and pot in the society of the first, as his predecessor had done with much contentment, nor yet to wait for the arrival of the one landed proprietor in the parish before he commenced the morning service, he was voted by the overseers and churchwardens to be "mighty set up," and by the squire to be "a d— unmanly fellow." Both, indeed, soon found out that they were wrong; and the farmers had the grace to confess it, and came, in course of time, to believe it possible for a curate to be a gentleman without being proud, and that it was at least as well for him to be visiting the sick and poor, and overlooking the parish school, and able to give him a little good advice to themselves in matters of difficulty, as to be boozing in their company at the Crown and Thistle. And, in course of time, those rough and honest people came to respect him almost as much perhaps, in their way, as his more enlightened neighbors had done in his former position. It must have been a great change, however, to a man like Bolton, used to good society, fond of it, and readily welcomed in it, as he had always been. No doubt he felt it; yet he declared that after the first few weeks, he never was happier in his life. His gun was given up, as an indulgence too expensive, but there was excellent trout fishing for miles on both sides of his cottage; and, though a sport to which

he had no great liking in his early day, he now took to it vigorously as the only amusement at hand, and became no unworthy disciple of Isaac. The worst effect of this new life of isolation was, that he became somewhat negligent in his habits; took to smoking a great deal, and made his tobaccoist's account a good deal longer than his tailor's. He had still many old friends and connections at a distance, with whom he might have spent half the year if he had pleased; but with his first pique with the world general, he had fixed himself purposely as far out of their reach as possible; traveling was expensive (railways as yet were not); assistance in his clerical duties was not easily obtained; and so, partly from choice, and partly from necessity, his new life became one of almost utter isolation.

Of course there were occasions when he found it necessary to visit the neighboring market-town—if it could be called neighboring when it was twelve miles off. The main road lay about a mile from Harry's little cottage, and a coach, passing daily, would usually deposit him safely in High Street in the course of the afternoon—allowing an hour for waiting for it at the crossing (it was always after its time), and about two more, if the roads were not unusually heavy, for getting over the distance. It was not a very luxurious style of traveling; and Harry often preferred to walk in one day and return the next. It was one of these rare visits that a soaking rain discouraged him from getting out for home on foot, and giving the Regulator the unusual full complement of one inside and one outside passenger. On the box was our friend Harry, inside a rather precise-looking personage, whose costume, as far as a cloak allowed it to be seen, looked somewhat more clerical than the curate's, the latter being clad in a smart upper benjamin of the laudlord's of the Swan, finished round the throat with a very gay shawl of his daughter's, both forced upon him in consideration of the weather; for Harry, though by no means a frequent, was a highly favored guest, and they would sooner have kept him in No. 1 for a week gratis, than have allowed him to turn out in the rain without due protection.

Slower than usual that day was the Regulator's progress through the mud and against the wind, and briefer than usual its driver's replies to Harry's good-humored attempts at conversation.

"Whom have we inside, do you know, Haines?"

"Well, I reckon it's what you'd call a hopposion coach like," grunted out Joe Haines.

"Eh? I don't exactly understand."

"Why, I mean a Methodist bishop, or sum'n o' that sort. You see there was a great opening of the Independent College here o' Tuesday, and there was a lot o' them gentry about the town, looking too good to live. I druv' five of 'em down yesterday, and they gev' me a shilling and a fourpenny amongst the whole lot. O! I love them sort, don't I just?" and Joe gave his nigh wheeler a cut, illustrative of his affection. It was a longer speech than he had made all the way, and relapsed into a gloomy silence.

The wind was driving right into their teeth, and the evening closed fast, and they were passing the last milestone to the turning without any further attempt at conversation, when there came first an ominous crack from under their feet, then a jolt, an unsteady wavering motion for a few seconds, when, with scarcely time for an exclamation, the coach toppled over on one side, and Bolton found himself reclining on the portly person of Mr. Joseph Haines, who in his turn, was saved from contusions by a friendly heap of mud by the roadside. Beyond a broken axle, however, no damage was done. The horses were glad of any opportunity to stand still. Bolton got up, shook himself, and laughed. Joe Haines was proceeding to philosophize rather strongly on the accident, not exactly after the manner of Job or Seneca, when the inside passenger, putting his head out of the only practicable window, begged him to spare his oaths, and help him out of his prison.

The stranger was soon extricated, and the horses taken out; and the driver, requesting his passengers to await his return, set off to seek assistance at the nearest cottage. As to the coach proceeding further until partially repaired, that was evidently out of the question; and so Harry observed to his companion, who did not appear very known in such matters.

"And how far might we be from B—, sir?" inquired he, upon receiving this not very agreeable intelligence.

"Fifteen miles at least," replied Bolton. "Indeed! so far, and is there no place near where I could procure a conveyance of any kind? I have an engagement there I particularly wish to keep to-morrow." Concluded in two weeks.

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