

An Odd Man.

NAME, eh? O, it doesn't matter. Say for me, of course. And look here; there will be five shillings for you if the chaise is here in time. Ay, you may well make a bow; I told the gentleman it was too much for you."

"I'm very much obliged to you both," said Sam, slyly. "I'm sure, sir; I'll be off at cock-crow."

"There, Sam Shears," said Molly, as soon as they had the kitchen to themselves again, "did you ever hear of one of your new what-d'ye-call-ums ordering a chaise to go ranting about in, I should like to know? What have you got to say now?"

"I say," said Sam, "as he's a gentleman, and no mistake."

The evening passed away very quietly in the little parlor. The favorable impression made upon Bolton by his guest's manners and conversation was certainly deepened by their further intercourse; but the position seemed felt by both parties to be an awkward one; and when his departure early on the following morning was proposed, Bolton of course made no effort to detain him. Both employed most of the evening in reading; and one or two remarks made by the stranger, as he made his selection from the curate's library, proved at least his acquaintance with the works which it contained, though nothing escaped him, as he wiped the dust from some of Harry's presentation volumes, which could indicate either his agreement or disagreement with the sound divines he was handling, and his clever criticisms were rather those of the bibliographer than the theologian. At last he seemed to bury himself in a volume of old South, and carried it off with him early to his chamber.

The morning came, and eight o'clock brought breakfast, and half-past eight the chaise, with Sam Shears fast asleep inside of it. The curate and his guest parted with mutual good-will, and with a short but warm acknowledgment, on the part of the latter, of the hospitality he had received. Sam was not forgotten; he received the promised gratuity, with many bows, and did not put his hat on again until the chaise had fairly turned the corner.

"Uncommon nice gentleman that, sir, to be sure," said he to his master, with whom he seldom missed the chance of a little conversation, if he could help it—and Bolton was generally good-natured enough to indulge him—"uncommon nice gentleman; what a thousand pities it is he should be a Methody!"

"A what?" inquired the curate, turning round upon him in ludicrous dismay.

"A Methody preacher, sir," said Sam, boldly; for Harry's countenance quite confirmed his suspicions. "O, I know all about it, sir; but it ain't of no account with me, sir, you know, not none whatever,"—and he redoubled his negatives with a confidential mysteriousness which made Harry inclined to kick him. "I met Joe Haines, as drives the Regulator, this morning, and he asked me very particular about you, you see, sir, and how you got home o' Saturday night; and then I told him as how this gentleman came with you; and when he heard he'd been staying here all day yesterday, how he did laugh, to be sure; and then he told me—"

"I'll tell you something, Sam, too. You had much better mind your own business, and not trouble yourself to talk to Joe Haines, or anybody else, about what goes on in my house."

There was no mistaking the fact that his master was angry; and as such a thing had very seldom happened within Sam's experience, it was a result of which he stood considerably in awe; and he hastened, in some confusion, to apologize, and to resume his praises of the "very nice gentleman, whatever he was."—"And as you say, sir, that's no business of mine: I'm sure I should be most happy to wait upon him at any time, sir—"

But Bolton had retired, and shut the door of his little sitting-room in an unmistakable manner. So Sam was obliged to soliloquize the rest of his apologies, which began to be very sincere, as he consoled himself by gazing at the two half crowns which had come into his possession so easily. "Of course; if so be as he's a gentleman, what matters? That's what I say; that's what I said to master: that's what I said to Molly; halloo? hey?—if this here half crown ain't a smasher!"

"Twas too true: it rung upon the flagstone like an unadulterated piece of lead."

"What's the matter now, Sam?" said Mrs. Molly, who heard the sound, and met his blank face in the passage.

"I told you what he was," said Sam—"look here!" Molly examined the unfortunate coin with every wish to give it the benefit of a doubt, but was obliged finally to pronounce against it. She had to listen, also, to the story which Sam had heard from Joe Haines; and though she clung pertinaciously to her previously-formed conclusions in the stranger's favor, Sam had now decidedly the best of the argument, which he clinched at last with what he considered an unanswerable proposition—"If you says as he's a parson and a gentleman, will you give me two-and-sixpence for this here half-crown?"

Weeks passed on, and other events were

out the interest of the stranger's visit, even in those dull localities. Binn's wife had a baby; and another piece of the church roof fell in, and nearly carried Brooks the church warden with it, as he was mounted on a ladder estimating its repairs—for there was an archdeacon's visitation coming on, and not even the vulcanized conscience of a parish functionary could be brought to pronounce, on oath, its present state of repair to be good and sufficient. And Harry received an invitation to dine with the said archdeacon, who was a good kind of man on the whole—that is, his good qualities would not very well bear taking to pieces: but he rather patronized the younger clergy in his neighborhood, provided that they were young men of tolerable family, and good address, and not, as he expressed it, *ultra* in any way. It so happened, that he was almost the only acquaintance that Harry had made in the neighborhood. He had written to request his interference in enforcing the repair of the church; and as that was a compliment seldom paid to his official dignity, the archdeacon had actually driven over thirteen miles to inspect the place personally; and, arriving quite unexpectedly, had caught the curate just sallying forth equipped for fishing—an art to which he himself occasionally condescended—for even archdeacons do unbend. And very soon ascertaining that there was no tendency to an objectionable *ultra*, of any kind, in our hero, and that he was in fact, rather an eligible rear-rank man for a dinner-table, he had made a mental memorandum of the fact, and, in consequence, had twice favored him with an invitation, which Harry, according to his present humor, had declined. On this occasion, however—as a third refusal would have seemed ungracious—he had determined to go; and, with some compunction at the expense (he had thought nothing at Oxford of a hunter, and a "beam" to cover, at about five guineas for the day), he found himself in a hired gig at the archdeacon's door, a little before the dinner hour on the day appointed. None of the guests were yet assembled. His host, however, met him in the drawing-room, and presented him, with considerable cordiality, to his lady, and her daughters.

"It was very good indeed of Mr. Bolton to come so far to see us," said the archdeacon. "Indeed, I am particularly glad you came to-day," continued he, with a sort of pompous kindness, "for I have the bishop staying here, and I wished you to meet him."

Harry was interrupted in his acknowledgments, by the entrance of two men of the expected party: the Honorable and Reverend Mr. Luttridge, a young man, who eyed his brother curate, on his introduction, with what he intended for a critical and interrogative glance, which had by no means the effect upon that party which he intended; and another archdeacon, or dean, or some other dignitary, who made Bolton a very low bow indeed; and, turning his back upon him forthwith, began to discourse with the other two upon the business of the last Petit Sessions. A discussion upon some point of magisterial law was interrupted by a burst of shrill and hearty laughter from the younger of the Misses Archdeacons—a fat merry girl, with whom Harry had struck up an acquaintance instantly—that was a point he never failed in; and although the other two gentlemen looked rather astonished, and turned round again to resume their argument. The father—she was his favorite daughter, and ludicrously like him—was delighted to see her amused, and insisted upon knowing what the fun was between them. Some absurd remark of Harry's was repeated as well as her continued merriment would allow her; and the archdeacon, after a preparatory shaking of his sides, had just burst into a stentorian "ha-ha," when the drawing-room door again opened, and the Bishop of F——was most audibly announced.

Every one tried to look deferential, of course; and the two gentlemen in front of Harry separated, and took open order to receive his lordship. Everybody recovered their propriety, in fact, in an instant, except Miss Harriet, to whom a bishop was no treat at all—not to be compared with an amusing young curate. She kept her eyes fixed upon Harry Bolton—she thought he was going to faint. Could it be possible—O, there was no doubt about it. Schematic Doctor Bates, or Bishop of F——there he was!—there was the man he had walked home in the rain with!

Harry's quondam guest walked forward with an easy grace, which contrasted strikingly with the stiff dignity of his subordinates. He shook hands politely with Mr. Luttridge, and returned the greeting of his companion somewhat more warmly. The archdeacon was preparing to introduce Bolton, without noticing his embarrassment, when the bishop anticipated the introductory speech by saying, as he held out his hand, "Mr. Bolton and I are old friends—may I not say so?"

A man of less self-possession than our friend the curate might have been put quite at ease by the kind tone and manner, and warm grasp of the hand. "Certainly," was his reply, "your lordship and myself have met under rather different circumstances." The archdeacon's respectable face expressed considerable astonishment, as well it might; and the other two gentlemen be-

gan to eye his lordship's "old friend" with interested and inquisitive glances.

"My dear archdeacon," said the bishop, laughing, "pardon my mystification; this is the friend with whom I spent a day or two on my last visit to this neighborhood, when you really thought you had lost me altogether; though, if you had told me I was to have the pleasure of meeting him at your table to-day, I might, perhaps, have let you into the secret."

"But, my dear Bolton," said the host—he had dropped the Mr. at once, and forever—"why did you not tell me that you knew his lordship?—eh?"

Harry laughed, and got a little confused again; but the bishop answered the question for him, before he had time to frame an intelligible reply.

"O, that's a long story; but it was no mystery of Mr. Bolton's, be assured. I am afraid, indeed, it will tell rather better for him than for me; but I promise you the explanation, some day," continued the bishop, good-humoredly, "when we have nothing better to talk about." The archdeacon took the hint, and turned the conversation. Another guest or two joined the party; dinner succeeded, and passed off much as such affairs usually do. The bishop, although he did not address much of his conversation directly to Bolton, took care to make him feel at his ease; and Mr. Luttridge, who sat next to him, became remarkably friendly—was quite surprised that he had not heard of him before, being in fact, quite a near neighbor—only nine miles—nothing at all in that part of the country—should ride over to call on him one of the first days he could spare—and, in fact, said what became him to the bishop's friend and protegee.

Whatever curiosity might have been felt on the subject by the rest of the company, it was not until they had taken their departure that the bishop thought proper to explain to Bolton and the archdeacon the circumstances which led to his paying an incognito visit to the former. He had only lately been appointed to the diocese, and was therefore personally known to but few of his clergy. The archdeacon and himself however, were old college acquaintances, and he had accepted an invitation to spend a few days with him, at the time of his casual meeting with Harry Bolton. Being averse at all times to any kind of ceremony or etiquette, which he could reasonably dispense with, it had been arranged that the archdeacon's carriage should meet him at B——, to which place his own had conveyed him. Upon his arrival in the town somewhat before the hour appointed, he had, according to his custom, walked out quietly to make himself acquainted with the localities, and had unconsciously passed some hours in exploring some ruins at a little distance.

Meanwhile, the archdeacon, not so punctual as his diocesan, drove up to the hotel door in hot haste, considerably too late for his appointment, and was saluted with the pleasant information that his lordship had been there, and was gone on these two hours—for his previous orders had been duly obeyed, and the episcopal equipage, with a portly gentleman inside who sustained the dignity of his position as chaplain very carefully, had really rolled away on its road homeward. The archdeacon doubted, but 'mine host was positive; and strengthened his position by the assertion that his lordship had said he was going to Bircham rectory, a piece of intelligence picked up from the servants, with exactly enough truth in it to do mischief. Off went the archdeacon again, annoyed at his own dilatoriness; and great was his consternation on reaching home to find no bishop; and great was the bishop's surprise, on returning at last to the hotel to find no archdeacon; and great the confusion throughout the King's Arms; the landlord throwing the blame upon the waiters, and the waiters upon each other.

Post-horses to S——, which was within a short three miles of the archdeacon's rectory, were ordered at once. But, alas! after many delays and apologies, none were to be had; almost every quadruped in the town was engaged in taking parties home from the opening of the Independent college. The bishop was not a man to make difficulties; so, leaving his only remaining servant to await any remedial measures which the archdeacon might take when he discovered his error, and to give us an intelligible account of his movements, he himself, without mentioning his intention to any other person, walked down to the coach office at the Swan, paid his fare, and became an inside passenger by the Regulator.

Of course when the archdeacon discovered his mistake, no time was lost in procuring fresh horses and sending back the carriage to B——, in the hope that his lordship might still be forthcoming; but it brought back to the anxious expectants at the rectory only a servant and a portmanteau; and as they did not pass the spot where the accident occurred, and all inquiries made at S——only resulted in the intelligence that "there had been an upset, that no one was hurt, and that the passengers had walked home," they made up their minds to await some accurate information as to his lordship's whereabouts from himself, when he relieved his friends from their uncomfortable suspense by making his appearance personally at breakfast on the Monday

morning; though, to punish, as he jokingly said, the archdeacon, for leaving him in such a predicament, he could tell them nothing more than that he had spent the Sunday very pleasantly with a friend.

Much amusement ensued at the bishop's details of his visit, though he good-naturedly avoided any allusion that could be embarrassing to his late host. Bolton had accepted the offer of a bed, and it was late before they separated for the night. Before he took his leave on the following morning, the bishop, to his surprise, announced his intention of paying him a second visit. "I think, Mr. Bolton," said he, "that, having intruded on you once in disguise, as I may say, I am bound to come and preach for you some Sunday, if it be only to clear my own character in the eyes of your parishioners" (for Harry had confessed, to the exceeding amusement of all parties, his own and his clerk's suspicions). "So, if you please, and if my good friend here will accompany me, we will drive over to you next Sunday morning; and I'll try," continued the bishop, slyly, "if I cannot get Mr. Churchwarden Brooks to put your church a little to rights for you."

The morning arrived, and the archdeacon and the bishop. A proud woman had Molly been from the moment the announcement was made to her of the intended honor; and the luncheon which she had prepared was, considering her limited resources, something extraordinary. But when his lordship alighted, and, catching sight of her eager face in the passage called to her by name, and addressed her kindly—and she recognized the features of the unknown guest, whom Sam had so irreverently slandered—the good old woman, between shame and gratification, was quite overcome, and wholly unable to recover her self-possession throughout the day. During the whole of the service, she looked at the bishop instead of the prayer-book, made responses at random, and was only saved by the good-natured interference of his lordship's own man from totally ruining the luncheon. Of course the church was crowded; the sermon was plain and impressive; and when, after service, the whole of the rustic congregation, collected in the churchyard to see as much as they could of a personage they had never seen before, formed a lane respectfully, with their hats off, for him to pass to the gate, the bishop, taking off his hat and claiming their attention for a few moments, spoke a few words, homely and audible, approving their behavior during the service, and representing to them the advantages they might derive from the residence among them of an exemplary minister, such as he believed they had at present, and such as he would endeavor to provide them with in the possible event of his removal. And when afterwards he begged to be introduced to the churchwarden, and, taking him familiarly by the arm, walked with him round the building, pointed out indispensable repairs, and, without any word of reproach, explained to him the harm done by injudicious patching, and put into his hands a liberal contribution towards the expenses—it might have seemed quite wonderful to those who either overrate or underrate poor human nature, how much more popular a notion, and how much better understood a bishop was in that remote village, from that time forth.

The landlord of the Crown and Thistle was quite surprised at the change that had come over Mr. Brooks. He used to be rather a popular orator on club nights and other convivial occasions, taking that economical view of church dignitaries and their salaries which, by an amusing euphemism, is called "liberal" in politics; but subsequently to this occasion he seldom joined in these discussions, was seen less frequently by degrees in the taproom of the Crown and Thistle, and more regularly at church; and once, when hard pressed for an opinion by some of his former supporters, was asserted to have told them that the Crown and Thistle took more money out of people's pockets than ever the bishops did.

Harry had anticipated much amusement from Sam Shear's confusion, when he should encounter, in his full canonicals, the bishop of the diocese in the person of the apocryphal Dr. Bates; but whatever that worthy's secret discomfiture might have been, he carried it off wonderfully well, and met his lordship in the vestry with a lurking smile in his humble obeisance, as if he had all along penetrated the mystery of his incognito. With Molly in the kitchen, indeed, he had for some evenings a hard time of it; but a threat of absenting himself altogether which he ventured in some fear of being taken at his word, had the effect of moderating her tone of triumph. Before the bishop left, he called Sam aside, and presented him with a substantial token of remembrance; when Sam took the opportunity of producing, with many prefaces of apology, the condemned half-crown, which had fretted in his pocket ever since.

"Please your lordship's worship and reverence," said Sam, "this here ain't a very good half-crown; at least, I can't pass it noways down here; I dare say as your lordship's worship might pass it away easy enough among your friends, but—"

"Have, here," said the bishop, laughing heartily, "here's another for you, by all means, my man; but pay excuse my having anything more to do with the bad one."

Again the bishop parted with his entertainer with many expressions of regard and an invitation to spend some time with him at his palace, which Bolton did, much to his satisfaction; and received from him so much valuable advice and paternal kindness, that he always considered the snug living with which, some months afterwards he was presented, one of the least of his obligations.

"And that's how Harry Bolton came to be a neighbor of mine," concluded Long Lumley; "and a nice place he has here, and a capital neighbor he is."

We discussed the whole story over Lumley's wine after dinner the next day, when the Hon. and Rev. Mr. Luttridge, who had since married the bishop's niece, and was said to have been a disappointed expectant of the living given to Bolton, made one of our party.

"A very odd man, certainly, the bishop is," was that gentleman's remark; "very strange, you know, to go poking about the country, in that kind of way. Scarcely the thing, in fact, I must say."

"Upon my honor," said Lumley, "you persons ought to be better judges of what is or is not 'the thing' for a bishop, than I can be; but if the bishop of F——is an odd man, I know, if I had the making of bishops, I'd look out for a match for him."

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