



H. B. MASSER, EDITOR AND PROPRIETOR.

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SELECT POETRY.

SWEET BETHY DREAMS.

Sweet bethy dreams a lunatic sleep. Her something influence round thee throust. What if my eyes should weep?

A Thrilling Sketch.

THE CHILD'S COFFIN: OR, A MYSTERY EXPLAINED AT A FUNERAL.

In a recent reprint of a book of English stories, entitled "Scond S rices of the Diary of a London Physician," we find the following thrilling narrative:

I was coming home one night from attending a patient who resided at Hendon, and who promised not to be long for this world, when, as I crossed a stile which led me into the high road, after making which, I had a near cut across some fields.

"You shall carry it," cried the man, with a brutal oath, you shall carry it. I know well that if I don't take care that you have a good hand in it, you will be preaching upon the whole affair some of these days."

"Oh! John, John, I am ill—so ill!" "I'll be hanged, come on. It's an excuse. You don't like to carry a coffin, but you shall!"

"I am faint, John. I do not know what it is that has come over me, but—"

"Silence, will you? D—n it—how do I know but some one may be listening. Give me the coffin. Confound you, won't you come on? I wish I had the buying of your own coffin, instead of the child's—"

I heard a blow or a kick given; and I commenced whistling with all my might as I tramped on after them with a quick step.

"A fine evening," I said—"halloo! anything amiss?" "Oh! dear—God bless you—no, sir," said the man, in a canting voice.

"The woman struggled to her feet, and tottered on with difficulty." "Good evening, sir," said the hypocritical scoundrel; "good evening, thank you, sir."

"Oh! I'm going your way," said I. He passed a moment. "Oh!" said he; "to Hampstead, sir, I suppose. Come old woman, keep up—"

"Partly to Hampstead," said I, "and partly no. It's a bracing night, ain't it? I have come across the fields, and do not know much about here. Is that a public house?"

"Yes, sir. This is a resort of sinners, called the 'Bull and Bush.' Ah, sir, if people would think of their immortal state, it would be better for all. Why—why, old woman, can't you get on? Dear, dear, the Lord help us!"

"But for the offered assistance of my arm, the woman would have fallen. Dim as the light was, I could see vexation depicted in the man's face; and he shifted the coffin first on to one shoulder and then on to the other, to see if he could not manage to help the woman without me, but that I took good care he should not do; and I said—"

"She seems very ill, indeed. I will help you to your own door, if you are not going far." "Oh! we are going far," said he, "the Lord willing!"

"Oh, well!" replied I, "never mind, I have plenty of time." There was no such thing as getting rid of me without a quarrel, and that he seemed to be afraid of; so we all walked on in silence for some distance down a dark tunnel, and then down another, until we stopped at the door of a cottage, when he said—"

"Good night, sir—good night. We are at home now. Good night. The Lord be with you, sir."

"Amn," said I; "good night." And away I walked at a brisk pace, never once looking behind me for nearly a quarter of a mile; and then I turned and ran back swiftly upon my toes, for I felt a strong conviction that something was wrong, although I had no direct clue to what it was.

It was one of those cottages with a door in the centre, and a latticed window at each side, but there were shutters to the windows on the inside, which provoked me to get a glimpse; and there I stood, fancying there was some secret within, but totally unable to find out what it was.

"Oh! I know it," said I, "and I darted over the road to a house where there was a blue lamp, sure enough, indicative of the dwelling of Mr. Spragg. I should not wonder but that I rung rather violently, for Mr. Spragg's bell handle came off in my hand; and when a servant appeared, she had quite a terrified look."

"Is Mr. Spragg at home?" said I. "Ye-ye-ye, sir, he is at home. But if it's an accident, Mr. Spragg would rather not be foiled, if possible, I found my way to the back of the cottage; there was a little garden, the palings of which I easily surmounted, and thence got into a kind of scullery or wash house. There was a window exactly the level of my eyes, and I at once saw into a room, where a scene was going on which transfixed me with horror and astonishment."

The man and woman were both in the room, and on a chair was placed a small common rough looking child's coffin. At the moment that I looked into the apartment the woman was upon her knees, with both hands uplifted as if in supplication, while the man stood over her with his fist clenched, and in an attitude as if to strike her.

"Oh! John, John?" said she, you know he is not dead. John have mercy—have mercy. Do not do it. "Oh, God, do not let him do it!"

"Peace, fool—peace I say, or you will tempt me to silence you most effectually. Get the child, get the child!"

"John, John, it only sleeps—it is not dead. Oh, God, oh! God, it is not dead. John, you know I got the husband from Mr. Spragg, and you gave it. Oh, no, no, no. You cannot, now that it has come to the point, put the living child in the coffin. It will wake—it will recover. Oh! oh! oh! Kill me first!"

"D—n you, you consented. You know you consented; and when Mrs. Blanchard left you the twenty pounds, and said she would not be back from France for a year, you consented to make away with the brat!"

"You are mad now. But if you don't get the child, I will. It won't wake till it is under ground, in the morning, I'll be bound, and then it don't matter. We haven't killed it, after all. Didn't we send for Mr. Spragg, and didn't he look at it, and say it was dead?"

"No, no, no, John. Mr. Spragg came, but he never went into the room where the child lay. You know he did not."

"What's that to you? Confound you, the coffin is too small, or you should go into it as well. Oh, you won't leave go, won't you? We'll soon see about that—"

A blow struck her down, and then he stepped to a little bed that was in the room, and took from it what looked like a sleeping child, and crammed it into the coffin. His wife recovered sufficiently to see what he was about, and clung to his knees, shrieking. He struck her with his disengaged hand, and commenced putting on the lid of the coffin. I ran round the house, and snatching up a stake, was about to dash in one of the windows, but I stayed my hand, for I thought I might do better.

"John, John, John!" I shouted, "a gentleman wants you at the 'Bull and Bush' directly!"

I hid myself instantly, and in about a minute the door opened, and the fellow appeared, shading a light with his hand.

"Who's that? What's that?" he cried, "who calls me? Mr. Lane, is it, eh? Who wanted me? I—I must have fancied it, and yet it was so plain. I could have sworn it. Never mind."

"He closed the door again, but I was not disposed to give him any peace. He had given me a hint upon which I acted."

"John, John," I cried again in a loud voice; "Mr. Lane wants you at the 'Bull and Bush' directly!"

"Who the devil is it?" said he coming to the door again in a moment; "where are you Mr. Lane, did you say? I'll come, of course, directly."

He went into the cottage, as I guessed, to say something to his wife; and then in about half a minute he came out with his hat on, and walked off in the direction of the public house I had named. I did not now hesitate a moment, but went to the door of the cottage and rapped at it. As I did so, I found that it yielded to my hand, being merely placed close without fastening; so I went in at once, and passing through the first room, reached the inner one, where the woman was, whose countenance for the deed she had consented to, had brought up her so much ill usage—"

"She was on her knees by a chair, with her face hidden in her hands." "Woman!" said I.

"She sprang up with a cry of terror; and I laid my hand upon the coffin lid, which I saw was nailed down. With my other hand I pointed upwards, and said, "God has seen this night's work!"

She shook for a moment or two, and then fell into a swoon at my feet with a heavy thud, as if she had been a corpse. A hammer and a chisel lay upon the next chair to that which held the coffin, and my first care was to wrench open the lid of the death-like receptacle, and rescue the child. The woman never moved; and a thought struck me that I at once carried into practice. I recollected having seen some loose bricks in the yard, and dashing out, I got four of them, which I laid in the coffin—"

"They filled it well, being rather jammed in. I then fastened the lid again as I had found it; and taking the child in my arms, I departed from the cottage, closing the door behind me, and ran on towards Hampstead. I had not gone far before I met a woman, to whom I said:—"Do you know where Mr. Spragg, the medical man, lives?"

"Why, Lor', a massy," said she, "you're only just passed his blue lamp. May I make so bold as to ask, sir, what you—"

"Thank you, that will do," said I, and I darted over the road to a house where there was a blue lamp, sure enough, indicative of the dwelling of Mr. Spragg. I should not wonder but that I rung rather violently, for Mr. Spragg's bell handle came off in my hand; and when a servant appeared, she had quite a terrified look."

"Now," said I, "the church will be open; and what I want you to do, is to watch there, until I call for you with the child—"

"I know it will," said Julia. "Indeed?" "Yes, I went to the Bigg's cottage, sir after you left here last night, and listened at the door. I heard Bigg's say in a loud voice, "You have been dreaming woman—"

"No one has been here. Look here is the coffin all nailed down. "Open it—Oh! open it," she cried; and then he swore fearfully, and replied, "The worms will open it by degrees in the church-yard."

"This was quite conclusive, and just as I expected it would be; so I packed off Spragg with the child at once, and followed myself. It only wanted ten minutes to twelve when we reached the sacred edifice, and Spragg went inside, while I, seeing an individual with a white handkerchief, at the door said to him—"

"Is there any funeral this morning?" "Two," said he; "Mr. Bumpus is to be buried; and a child will be put into the same grave by leave of Mrs. Bumpus, who is quite convinced that the child is respectable."

"This is very liberal of Mrs. Bumpus," said I. "Oh! very, very," he replied, without at all perceiving that I intended paying Mrs. Bumpus a very ironical compliment indeed. At that moment, I saw John Bigg's sink into the church-yard."

"Who is that man?" said I. "I don't know, sir. I think he is one of Mr. Lane's set. They don't belong to the church. Prayer meetings, you know, sir, and all that sort of thing. Very bad, sir. Nothing like the regular parson, and the regular service. But here comes poor Mrs. Bumpus."

A funeral cavalcade wound its way in at the church yard gates, and almost immediately following, there came a man with a child's coffin on his shoulder, followed by one woman—that woman was Mrs. Bigg—I could not see what sort of expression was on her face, for the mourning hood she wore entirely covered it, but I could see that she shook and staggered so much as she walked, as to be scarcely capable of getting on along the church-yard path. I carefully kept out of her way, for she had seen me, although her husband had not. There was a subdued sort of bustle in the place, as if I had saved from the horrible death intended for it, that I could not speak to Spragg for some minutes. I rose and made Spragg assist me in giving the child exercise. An emetic, too, brought it round wonderfully; and in half an hour I had the inexpressible pleasure of seeing a little sweet looking fellow, of about three years of age, quite restored, and sleeping gently upon Spragg's sofa. By the bye Spragg never left off crying, and holding an Eau de Cologne bottle to his nose.

"Now, Spragg, don't you go on crying in that way," said I; "you are only a fool." "Thank you, sir, I am. Oh! dear, yes." "Who and what are the people with whom this child was?"

"Very religious, sir. But I don't know what John Bigg's was. He is merely kept, I have heard, by Mr. Lane, a very religious gentleman, who has prayer meetings. They told me, sir, the child was to be buried in the yard of Hampstead church, at twelve o'clock to-morrow."

"Very well. Now, I rather think I have not done enough to alarm the Bigg's, and that the funeral will still take place."

"Still—still. Bless me, doctor, you don't mean—"

"I see I must tell you all," said I; "and if you don't keep it secret, I retract my promise to say nothing about your conduct."

"He closed the door again, but I was not disposed to give him any peace. He had given me a hint upon which I acted."

"John, John," I cried again in a loud voice; "Mr. Lane wants you at the 'Bull and Bush' directly!"

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