

CRIPPS, THE CARRIER

R. D. BLACKMORE

Author of "LORNA DOONE," "ALICE LORRAINE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

The little village of Beckley lies in the quiet embrace of old Stow Wood, well known to every Oxford man. This wood or forest spread in the old time across the main breadth of the highland to the north of Headington, between the valley of the Cherwell and the bogs of Dimoor. Beckley itself, though once approached by the Roman road from Ailchester, must for many a century have nursed its rural quietude, lying in a tangle of narrow lanes leading only to one another. Beckley took that cheerful view of life which enabled the fox to disdain the blandishments of the vintage, and prided itself on its happy seclusion and untroubled honesty. But as all sons of Adam must have something or other to say to the rest, this little village carried on some commerce with the outer world, and did it through a carrier.

The name of this excellent man was Cripps; and the carrier's mantle, or woolly coat, had descended on this particular Cripps from many generations. And ever since roads were made, or rather lanes began trying to make themselves, one great tradition had confirmed the dynasty of Crippses. This was that the eldest son should take the carrying business; the second son should have the baker's shop in Oxford over against old Balliol College; the third should have the queer old swine farm in the heart of Stow Forest; the fourth should be the butcher of Beckley, and the fifth its shoemaker. As for the girls, the carrier being the head of the family, and holding the house and the stable and cart, was bound to take the maids, one by one, to and fro under his tilt twice a week, till the puddle fell in love with them.

Zachary Cripps, the Beckley carrier, under the laws of time, was crossing the ridge of manhood towards the western side of forty, without providing the due successor to the ancestral driving board. Public opinion was already beginning to exclaim at him; and the man who kept the chandler's shop, with a large-small family to maintain, was threatening to make the most of this, and set up his own eldest son on the road; though "dot and carry one" was all he knew about the business. Zachary was not a likely man to be at all upset by this; but rather one of a tarry order, as his name might indicate.

Truly intelligent families living round about the city of Oxford had, and even to this day have, a habit of naming their male babies after the books of the Bible. So that Zachary should have been "Genesis," only his father had suffered such pangs of mind at being cut down, by the ever-strengthening curtness of British diction, into "Jenny Cripps," that he laid as thumb to the New Testament when his first man-child was born to him, and finding a father in like case quite relieved of responsibility, took it for a good sign, and applied his name triumphantly.

But though the eldest born was thus transferred into the New Testament, the second son reverted to the proper dispensation; and the one who went into the baker's shop was Exodus, as he ought to be. The children of the former Exodus were turned out testamentarily, save those who were needed to carry the bread out, till their cousin's boys should be big enough.

All of these doings were right enough, and everybody approved of them. Leviticus Cripps was the lord of the swine, and Numbers bore the cleaver, while Deuteronomy stuck to his last, when the public house could spare him. There was only one more brother of the dominant generation, whose name was "Pentateuch," and he had been compendiously kicked abroad to seek his own fortune right early.

But as for the daughters, for the moment it is enough to say that all except one were now forth and settled. Some married farmers, some married tradesmen, one took a miller's eldest son, one had a gentleman more or less, but all with expectations. Only the youngest was still in the tilt, a very pretty girl called Esther.

All Beckley declared that Esther's heart had been touched by a college lad, who came some five years since to lodge with Zachary for the long vacation, and was waited on by this young girl, supposed to be then uripre for dreaming of the tender sentiment. That a girl of only fifteen summers should allow her thoughts to stray, contrary to all common sense, and her duty to her betters, for no other reason than that a young man ate and drank with less noise than the Crippses, and went on about the moonlight and the stars, and the rubbishy things in the hedges—that a child like that should know no better than to mix with a gentleman said with his inner meaning—put it right or left it showed that something was amiss with her. However, the women would say no more until it was pulled out of them. To mix or meddle with the Crippses was like putting one's fingers into a steel trap.

When another child was born to him Mr. Exodus sent up the crumpet boy all the way from Broad street in Oxford to Beckley to beg and implore Miss Esther Cripps to come down. And the crumpet boy, being short of breath, became so full of power that the carrier scarcely knew what to do in the teeth of so urgent a message. For he had made quite a pet of his youngest sister, and the twenty years of age betwixt them stopped the gap of rivalry. It was getting quite late in the afternoon when the crumpet boy knocked at the carrier's door. It certainly was an unlucky thing that the day of the week should be Tues-

day—Tuesday, the 19th of December, 1837. For Zachary always had to make his rounds on a Wednesday and a Saturday, and if he were to drive his poor old Dobbin into Oxford on a Tuesday evening how could he get through his business to-morrow? For Dobbin insisted on a day in stable whenever he had been to Oxford.

Zachary Cripps was a thoughtful man, as well as a very kind-hearted one. In the crown of his hat he always carried a monthly calendar gummed on cardboard, and opposite almost every day he had dots, or round O's, or crosses. Each of these to his very steady mind meant something not to be neglected; and being a pretty fair scholar, with the help of his horse he could make out nearly every place he had to call at. So now he looked at the crumpet boy, to receive and absorb his excitement, and then he turned to young Esther, and let her speak first, as she always liked to do.

"Oh, please to go back quite as fast as you can," said Esther to the crumpet, "and say that I shall be there before you; or, at any rate, as soon as you are. And, Crumpey, there ought to be something for you. Dear Zak, have you got twopenny?"

"Not I," said the carrier, "and if I had it would do him a deal more harm than good. Run away down the hill, my lad, and you come to me at the Golden Cross, perhaps as soon as Saturday, and I'll look in my bag for a halfpenny. Run away, boy; run away, or the bogies will be after you."

The baker's boy felt that his luck was asked upon this day of his existence, for Carrier Cripps was vexed much at this sudden demand for his sister.

"Zak, what made you send the boy away?" Esther asked, when she came downstairs, with her bonnet and short duck cloak on. "Of course, I am very foolish, but he would have been some little company."

"There, now, I never thought of it! I am doiled, a' d' believe sometimes. Tramp with you to the Bur myself, I will. Sarge me right for a doin' of it." "Indeed, then, you won't," she answered firmly. "There's a hard day's work for you, Zak, to-morrow, with all the Christmas parcels, and your touch of rheumatics so bad last week."

"Why, bless the cheeld, I be as hearty as ever!"

"Of course you are, Zak; of course you are, and think nought of a sack of potatoes. But if you declare to come with me one step, backward is the only step I take."

"Well, well," said the carrier, glad on the whole to escape a long walk and keep conscience clear; "when you say a thing, Etty, what good is it? Round these here parts none would harm 'e. And none of they furriners be about just now."

"Good night, Zak, good night, near," cried Esther to shorten departure, for Cripps was a man of a slow turn of mind, and might go on for an hour or two; "I shall sleep there to-night, of course, and meet you at the Golden Cross to-morrow. When had I best be there?" "Well, you know better than I do. It might be one o'clock, or it might be two, or it might be half past three a'most. All you have to do is this—to leave word at the bar, with Sally Brown."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," she answered; "I don't like cars, and I don't like Miss Brown. I shall look in the yard for the cart, brother."

"You'll do pretty much as you like. That much a' may be sure of." But before he could finish his exposition of his sister's character, she was out of sight; and he dropped his grumble, and doubted his mind about letting her go.

As Esther turned the corner from the Beckley lane into the road, the broad coach road to Oxford, she met a wind that knew its mind coming over the crest of Shotover, a stern east wind that whistled sadly over the brown and barren fields, and bitterly piped in the roadway. To the chill of this blast the sere oak-leaves shivered in the dusk, and rattled; the gray ash saplings bent their naked length to get away from it; and the surly stubs of the hedge went to and fro to one another. The slimy dips of the path began to rib themselves, like the fronds of fern, and to shrink into wrinkles and snowy knobs; while the broader puddles, though skirred by the breeze, found the network of ice veiling over them. This, as it crusted, began to be capable of a consistent quivering, with a frail multitude of spikulets, crossing, and yet carrying into one another.

Esther Cripps took little heed of these things, or of any other in the matter of weather, except to say to herself now and then how bitter cold the wind was, and that she feared it would turn to snow, and how she longed to be sitting with a cup of "Aunt Exie's" candle in the snug room next to the bakehouse, or how glad she would be to get only as far as the first house of St. Clement's, to see the lamps and the lights in the shops, and be quit of this dreary loneliness. For now it must be three market days since fearful rumors began to stir in several neighboring villages, which made even strong men discontent with solitude towards nightfall; and as for the women—just now poor Esther would rather not think of what they declared. It was all very well to pretend to doubt it, while hanging the clothes out, or turning the mangle; but as for laughing, out here in the dark, and a mile away from the nearest house! How that white owl frightened her!

Being a sensible and brave girl, she forced her mind as well as she could into another channel, and bit the cover of

the books in which she had some nice things for "Aunt Exie," and then she set off for a bold little run, until she was out of breath, and trembling at the sound of her own light feet. For though all the Crippses were known to be of a firm and resolute fiber, who could expect a young maid like this to tramp on like a Roman sentinel?

And a lucky thing for her it was that she tried nothing of the sort; but glided along with her heart in her mouth, and her short skirt tucked up round her. Lucky also for her that the ground was in that early stage of freezing, or of drying to forestall frost, in which it deadened sound as much as the later stage enlivens it. Otherwise it is doubtful whether she would have seen the Christmas-dressing of the shops in Oxford.

For a little further on, she came, without so much as a cow in the road or a sheep in the field for company, to a dark, narrow place, where the way hung over the verge of a stony hollow, an ancient pit which had once been worked as part of the quarries of Headington. This had long been of bad repute as a haunted and ill-omened place; and even the carrier himself, strong and resolute as he was, felt no shame in whispering when he passed by in the moonlight. And the name of the place was the "Gipsy's Grave." Therefore, as Esther Cripps approached it, she was half inclined to wait and hide herself in a bush or gap until a cart or wagon should come down the hill behind her, or an honest dairyman whistling softly to reassure his shadow, or even a woman no braver than herself.

But neither any cart came near, nor any other kind of company, only the violence of the wind. So that the girl made up her mind to put the best foot foremost, and run through her terrors at such a pace that none of them could lay hold of her.

Through yards of darkness she skimmed the ground without looking forward, or over her shoulders, or anywhere, when she could help it. And now she was ready to laugh at herself and her stupid fears, as she caught through the trees a glimpse of the lights of Oxford, down in the low land, scarcely more than a mile and a half away from her. In the joy of relief she was ready to jump and pant without fear of the echoes, when suddenly something caught her ears.

This was not a thing at first to be at all afraid of; but only just enough to arouse a little curiosity. It seemed to be nothing more or less than the steady stroke of a pickaxe. The sound came from the further corner of the deserted quarry, where a crest of soft and shingly rock overhung a briary thicket. Any person working there would be quite out of sight from the road, by reason of the bend of the hollow.

The blow of the tool came dull and heavy on the dark and frosty wind; and Esther almost made up her mind to run on, and take no heed of it. And so she would have done, no doubt, if she had not been a Cripps girl. But in this family firm and settled opinions had been handed down, concerning the rights of property, and the rights that overcome all wrongs, and outlive death. The brother Leviticus of Stow Wood had sown a piece of waste at the corner of the cleeve, with winter carrots for his herd of swine. The land being none of his thus far, his right so to treat it was not established, and therefore likely to be attacked by any rapacious encroacher. Esther felt all these things keenly, and resolved to find out what was going on.

To this intent she gathered in the skirt of her frock and the furling of her cloak, and fending the twigs from her eyes and bonnet, quietly slipped through a gap in the hedge. The heavy sound of the pickaxe ceased, as she came near and nearer, and the muttering of rough voices made her shrink into a nook and listen.

"Tell 'e, I did see zumat moving," said a man whom she could dimly make out on the beetling ridge above her, by the light of the clearing eastern sky; "a zumat moving down yonner, I tell 'e."

"No patience, I hain't no patience with 'e," answered a taller man coming forward, and speaking with a guttural twang. "Skeary Jem is your name and feature. Gie me the pick if thee beest aveared. Is this job to be finished to-night, or not?"

In a short or a long time, as she still lay hid and dared not show her face above the gorse tuft, a sound of sliding and falling shale heavily shook her refuge. She drew herself closer and clasped her hands before her eyes, and covered, expecting to be killed at least. And then she peeped forth, to know what it was about. She never had harmed any mortal body; why should she be frightened so?

In the catch of the breath which comes when sudden courage makes gulp at uncertainty, she lifted herself by a stiff old root, to know the very worst of it. Better almost to be killed and be done with than bear the heart pang of this terrible fear. And there she saw a thing that struck her so aback with amazement that every timid sense was mute.

Whether the sky had begun to shed a hovering light, or the girl's own eyes spread and bred a power of vision from their nervous dilation—at any rate, she saw in the darkness what she had not seen till now. It was the body of a young woman lying, only with white things round it, in the black corner, with gravel and earth and pieces of rock rolling down on it. There was nothing to frighten a sensible person now that the worst was known perhaps. Everybody must be buried at some time. Why should she be frightened so?

However, Esther Cripps fell faint, and lay in that state long enough for tons of burying rock to fall, and secret buriers to depart.

(To be continued.)

Most Likely.

"It is said," remarked the man with the quotation habit, "that a king can do no wrong."

"That saying," replied the wise guy, "probably originated with a man who held four acres."—Bangor News

will resist the work of a saw has been patented by a Philadelphia inventor. It has a number of longitudinal holes near the surface, which are filled with glass. This is very severe on the s.w., and is likely to discourage the sawyer.

The importations of pig tin last year were 68,000,000 pounds, against 7,000,000 in 1890.

Chinese women never think of taking the hairpins out of their hair when they go to bed.

Compulsory cleanliness prevails in the public schools of Copenhagen. Three times a week the pupils have to bathe at the schools, and while they are disporting themselves in the swimming baths their clothes are purified in steam ovens.

I notice that a great many bachelors are advertising for wives in some of the eastern papers.

Yes, I suppose there has never been a time when so many bachelors could almost support themselves.—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

Mere talent, to a literary man, isn't worth more than half as much as lively impudence; no man ought to chain himself to a pen and ink stand unless he has got genius.

You can learn virtue out of the catechism, but to understand vice you lay to mix in with it just a little.

I don't think that anyone has ever realized the amount of happiness or misery he anticipated.

In Sweden bricks are laid in zero weather by heating the sand for the mortar.

Ask Your Dealer for Allen's Foot-Ease. A powder to shake into your shoes. It rests the feet. Cures Corns, Bunions, Swollen, Sore, Hot, Callous, Aching, Sweating feet and Ingrowing Nails. Allen's Foot-Ease makes new or tight shoes easy. Sold by all druggists and shoe stores, 25c. Sample mailed FREE. Address Allen S. Olmsted, Le Roy, N. Y.

At the burial of a South London man his six dogs, draped in black, followed the cortege.

The density or relative population of Cuba is nearly the same as that of the United States.

"I had inflammatory rheumatism, but I am well now, thanks to Dr. David Kennedy's Favorite Remedy. It's my best friend." Garrett Lansing Troy, N. Y.

Sweden sent three-quarters of four million gross boxes of matches imported into this country last year.

Salzer's Home Bullder Corn.

So named because 50 acres produced so heavily, that its proceeds built a lovely home. See Salzer's catalog. Yielded in Ind. 157 bu., Ohio 160 bu., Tenn. 198 bu., and in Mich. 220 bu. per acre. You can beat this record in 1905.



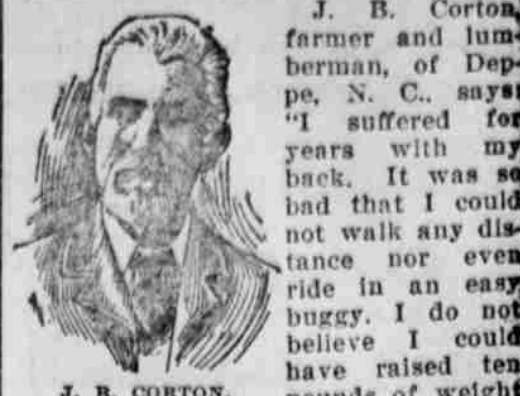
WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THESE YIELDS?
120 bu. Beardless Barley per acre.
310 bu. Salzer's New National Oats per A.
80 bu. Salzer Speltz and Macaroni Wheat.
1,000 bu. Pedigree Potatoes per acre.
14 tons of rich Billion Dollar Grass Hay.
60,000 lbs. Victoria Rape for sheep—per A.
160,000 lbs. Teosinte, the fodder wonder.
55,000 lbs. Salzer's Superior Fodder Corn—rich, juicy fodder, per A.
Now such yields you can have in 1905, if you will plant my seeds.

JUST SEND THIS NOTICE AND 10c

in stamps to John A. Salzer Seed Co., La Crosse, Wis., and receive their great catalog and lots of farmseed samples. [C. N. U.]

COULDN'T LIFT TEN POUNDS.

Doan's Kidney Pills Brought Strength and Health to the Sufferer, Making Him Feel Twenty-five Years Younger.



J. B. CORTON, farmer and lumberman, of Deppe, N. C., says: "I suffered for years with my back. It was so bad that I could not walk any distance nor even ride in an easy buggy. I do not believe I could have raised ten pounds of weight from the ground, the pain was so severe. This was my condition when I began using Doan's Kidney Pills. They quickly relieved me, and now I am never troubled as I was. My back is strong and I can walk or ride a long distance and feel just as strong as I did twenty-five years ago. I think so much of Doan's Kidney Pills that I have given a supply of the remedy to some of my neighbors, and they have also found good results. If you can sift anything from this rambling note that will be of any service to you, or to any one suffering from kidney trouble you are at liberty to do so."

A TRIAL FREE—Address Foster-Milburn Co., Buffalo, N. Y. For sale by all dealers. Price 50 cts.

Uncle Josh—You've heard of them agricultural colleges, haven't you?

Uncle Silas—Yes, but what do they amount to? I read where one of them graduated lot of fellers the other day and not one of them is willin' to take up farmin' as an occupation.

Uncle Josh—Well, that kind of looks as if they'd learned a good deal about it—Success.

Mrs. Winslow SMOOTHING YRUP for children cutting, softens the gums, reduces inflammation, always cures colic. Price 25c bottle.

The surplus of the Western Union Telegraph Company has risen, as shown by the reports just issued, to \$13, 619,000.

Found Gold in Nebraska.

Investors in Nebraska Real Estate will find this true. Now is the time to get in on the ground floor. We have some choice investments. Write us for further information.

Schumacher & James, Orleans, Neb.

Great Britain spends \$112,500,000 a year on the support of the poor. This does not include private charities.

I have used Pilo's Cure for Consumption with good results. It is all right.—John W. Henry, Box 642, Fostoria, Ohio Oct. 4, 1901.

The peat bogs of Ireland could give an annual output of 100,000 electrical horse-power for the next 1,250 years.

TO CURE A COLD IN ONE DAY. Take Laxative Bromo Quinine Tablets. All druggists refund the money if it fails to cure. Z. W. Grove's signature is on each box. 25c.

Warfare between the sexes exists in Knoxville, Tenn. A gambling house there was recently raided and a number of well-known young men were arrested. The girls of the city demanded that the police make public the names of the men, threatening to cut the offenders' acquaintance. The men have asked the hairdresser of the town to publish the names of all the girls who wear "sex shoes."

There are Many Imitations of Baker's Cocoa

Baker's Chocolate

Don't be misled by them!



Look for this Trade-Mark

Our trade-mark is on every package of genuine goods. Under the decisions of several United States Courts, no other chocolate or cocoa than Walter Baker & Co.'s is entitled to be sold as "Baker's Cocoa" or "Baker's Chocolate"

Our handsomely illustrated recipe book sent free.

Walter Baker & Co. Ltd.

Established 1700 Dorchester, Massachusetts

45 Highest Awards in Europe and America