

# CRIPPS, THE CARRIER

BY

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## CHAPTER III.—(Continued.)

There was nothing more to be learned from Cripps, except that he passed the "Black Horse" that day a little earlier than usual, and had not brought his sister Esther, who was to have met him at the "Golden Cross." He had come home by way of Elsfield, having something to deliver there, and had given a lift to old Shepherd Wakeling; but that could have naught to do with it.

It was now getting dark, and the Squire every moment grew more and more uneasy. "Keep all this nonsense to yourself now, Cripps," he said, as he stowed the bag under a tub, and carefully covered his daughter's hair, and the piece of paper, with a straining sieve; "it might annoy me very much if this joke went any further, you know. I can trust Thomas to hold his tongue, and I hope I can trust you, neighbor Cripps."

"Our honor knoweth what I be," answered the loyal carrier. "Ever since I were a boy—but there, they all knows what I be."

Master Cripps, with his brain "a good piece doiled," as he afterwards said of it, made his way back to the cart. He took up the reins, and made a little flourish with his brass-bound whip, and Dobbin put up his head, and started with his most convenient foot.

"I dunno what to make of this here start," said Cripps to himself, and his horse and cart, as soon as he had smitten his broad chest long enough to arouse circulation, "seemeth to me a queer thing truly. But I never were a hand at a riddle. Wugg then, Dobbin! Wun't go home to-night?"

Meanwhile the old Squire, with a troubled mind, kept talking and walking about, and listening for the rumble of his sister's carriage, the clank of horse's hoofs, and the ring of wheels upon the frozen road. He could not believe that any one in the world would hurt his darling Grace. Everybody loved her so, and the whole parish was so fond of her, and she had such a way of easing every one's perplexities, that if any villain durst even think of touching a hair of her blessed head—yet whose hair was it—whose hair was it? And such a quantity as never could have been cut with her consent!

"This is too much! I cannot bear it!" he said to himself, after many a turn, and anxious search of the distance; "Joan's carriage should have been here long ago. My darling would have made them keep their time. I cannot stop here; I must go to meet them. But I need not startle any one."

Heavy snow-clouds had been gathering all the afternoon; and as he passed through a side gate into the lane, and turned his mare's head eastward, the forward flakes were borne by the sharp wind into his white whiskers. "We shall have a coarse night of it, I doubt," he said to himself, as he buttoned his coat. At every turn of the lane he hoped to meet his sister's chariot. But corner after corner he turned, and met no carriage, no cart, no horse, nor even so much as a man afoot; only the snow getting thicker and sharper, and the wind beginning to wail to it.

Fear struck colder to his heart than frost, as he turned the last corner of his way, without meeting presence or token of his sister or darling daughter. In the deepening snow he drew his horse up under the two great yew trees that overhung his sister's gate, and fumbled in the dark for the handle. The bell in the porch of the house clanged deeply, and the mastiff heavily bayed at him; but he had to make the bell clang thrice before any servant appeared.

"Who be you there?" at last a gruff voice asked, without stretch or courtesy. "Open the gate, you young oak," cried the Squire. "I suppose you are one of the new lot, eh? Not to know me, Worth Oglender?"

"Why couldn't you have said so then?" the surly fellow answered, as he slowly opened one leaf of the gate.

"Such a fellow wouldn't be with me half a day. Are you too big for your work, sir? Run on before me, you piercer in pumps, or you shall taste my whip, sir."

The footman, for once in his life, took his feet up and ran in a bluster of rage and terror to the front door. Mr. Oglender struck his mare, and she started so that he scarcely pulled her head up under the cognie of his sister's porch. "What is all this, I would beg to know? If you think to frighten me, you are mistaken. Oh, Worth, is it? Worth, whatever do you mean by making such commotion?"

Three or four frightened maids were peeping, safe in the gloom of the entrance hall; while the lady of the house came forward bravely in the lamp light. "I will speak to you presently, Joan," said the Squire, as he vainly searched, with a falling heart, for some dear face behind her. "Here, Bob, I know you at any rate; take the old mare to the stable."

Then, with a sign to his sister, he followed her softly into the dining room. At a glance he saw that she had dined alone, and he fell into a chair and could not speak.

"Have you brought back the stockings? Why, how ill you look! The cold has been too much for you, brother. You should not have come out. What was Grace doing to let—"

"Where is my daughter Grace?" "Your daughter Grace! My niece Grace! Why, at home in her father's house, to be sure! Worth, are your wits wandering?"

"When did Grace leave you?"

"At 3 o'clock yesterday. How can you ask, when you sent in such hot haste for her? You might be quite sure that she would not linger. I thought it rather—let me tell you—"

"I never sent for Grace. I have not seen her."

Mrs. Fermitage looked at her brother steadily, with one hand fencing her forehead. He answered her gaze with such eyes that she came up to him, and began to tremble.

"I tell you, Joan, I never sent for Grace. If you don't know where she is—none but God knows."

"I have told you all," his sister answered, catching her breath at every word almost—"a letter came from you, overruling the whole of our arrangement—you were not ill; but you wanted her for some particular purpose. She was to walk, and you would meet her; and walk she did, poor darling. And I was so hurt that I would not send—"

"You let her go, John! You let her go! It was a piece of your proud temper. Her death lies at your door. And so will mine."

Mr. Oglender was very sorry, as soon as he had spoken thus unjustly; but the deep pang of the heart devoured any qualms of conscience.

"Are you sure that you let her go? Are you sure that she is not in this house now?" he cried, coming up to his sister, and taking both hands to be sure of her; "she must be here. And you are joking with me."

"Worth, she left this house at 2 o'clock by that timepiece yesterday, instead of to-day, as we meant to do. She would not let any one go with her, because you were coming down the hill to meet her. Not expecting to go home that day, she had a pair of my silk stockings on, because—well, I need not go into that—and knowing what a darling little fidget she is, I thought she had sent you back with them, and to make your peace for so furling me."

"Have you nothing more to tell me, John? I shall go mad while you dwell on your stockings. Who brought that letter? What is become of it? Did you see it? Can you think of anything? Oh, Joan, you women are so quick witted! Surely you can think of something!"

Mrs. Fermitage knew what her brother meant; but no sign would she show of it. The Squire was thinking of a little touch of something that might have grown into love; if Grace had not been so shy about it, and so full of doubts as to what she ought to do. Her aunt had been anxious to help this forward; but not for the world to speak of it.

"Concerning the letter, I only just saw it. I was up—well, well, I mean, I happened! to have something to do in my own room then. The dear creature knocked at my door, and I could not let her in at the moment—"

"You were doing your wig—well, well, go on."

"I was doing nothing of the kind—your anxiety need not make you rude. Worth. However, she put the letter under the door, and I saw that it was your handwriting, and so urgent that I was quite hurried, and she was off in two minutes, without my even kissing her. Oh, poor dear! my little dear! She said good-bye through the key hole, and could not wait for me even to kiss her!"

At this thought the elderly lady broke down, and could for the moment do nothing but sob.

"Dear heart, dear heart!" cried the Squire, who was deeply attached to his sister; "don't take on so, my dear good Joan. We know of no harm as yet—that is—" for he thought of the coil of hair, but with strong effort forbore to speak of it—"nothing, I mean in any way positive, or disastrous. She may have, you know, she may have taken it into her head to—leave us for a while, Joan."

"To run away! To elope!" Not she. She is the last girl in the world to do it. Whatever may have happened, she has not done that. You ought to know better than that, Worth."

## CHAPTER IV.

Meanwhile, Esther Cripps, who perhaps could have thrown some light on this strange affair, was very uneasy in her mind. She had not heard, of course, as yet that Grace Oglender was missing. But she could not get rid of the fright she had felt, and the dread of some dark secret. Her sister-in-law was in such a condition that she must not be told of it; and, as for her brother Exodus, it would be worse than useless to speak to him. He had taken it into his head, ever since that business with the "Oxford man," that his sister was not "right-minded"—that she dreamed things, and imagined things; and that anything she liked to say should be listened to, and thought no more of. And Baker Cripps was one of those men from whose minds no hydraulic power can lift an idea—laid once, laid forever. Esther had no one to tell her tale to. She longed to be home at Beckley.

Such weather had set in that even Cripps, with his active turn and pride in his honest calling, was forced to stay at home and holl the bones the butcher sent him, and nurse his stiff knee, and smoke his pipe, and go no further than his bed of hardy kale, or Dobbin's stable. Except that when the sun went down his social instincts so awoke, that he managed to go to the corner of the lane, where the blacksmith kept the public house. This was a most respectable house, frequented very quietly. Master Cripps, from his intercourse with the world, and leading position in Beckley,

as well as his pleasant way of letting other people talk, and nodding when their words were wisdom—Cripps had long been accepted as the oracle; and he liked it.

His, the blacksmith and the landlord, felt that on his heavy shoulders lay the duty of promoting warmth and cordiality. He sat without a coat, and his woolsey sleeves rolled back displayed the proper might of arm. In one grimy hand he held a pipe, at which he had given the final puff, and in the other a broad-brimmed penny, ready to drop it into the balance of the brass tobacco box, and open it for a fresh supply. First he glanced at the door, to be sure that his daughter Mealy could not hear; for ever since her mother's death he had stood in some awe of Mealy; and then receiving encouragement, he fixed his eyes on him through the smoke, and uttered what all were inditing of.

"I call this a very rum start, I do, about poor Squire's daughter."

The public of the public gazed with admiring approval at him. The sentiment was their own, and he had put it well and briefly. In different ways, according to the state and manner of each of them, they let him know that he was right, and might hold on by what he said.

"Gentlemen," said Grocer Batts, the very same man who had threatened to put his son into the carrying line, "I bow, in course, to superior wisdom, and them as is always to and fro. But every man must think his thoughts, right or wrong, and speak them out, and not be feared of no one. And my mind is that in this here business, we be all of us going to work the wrong way altogether."

As no one had any sense as yet of having gone to work at all, in this or any other matter, and several men had made up their minds to be thrown out of work on the Saturday night, if the bitter weather lasted, this great speech of Grocer Batts created some confusion.

"Let 'un go to work himself!" "What do he know about work?" "Altogether wrong! Give me the sawdust, for to clear my throat." These and stronger exclamations showed poor Batts that it would have been better for trade if he had held his tongue.

"Touching what neighbor Batts have said," began Carrier Cripps, in his slow and steadfast voice, "it may be neither here nor there; and all of us be liable, in our best of times, to error. But I do believe as he means well, and hath a good deal inside him, and a large family to put up with. He may be right, and all us in the wrong. Time will show, with patience. I have knowed so many things as looked at first unlikely come true as gospel in the end, and so many things I were sure of turn out quite contrary, that whenever a man hath ought to say, I likes to hearken to him. There, now, I ha'n't no more to say; and I leave you to make the best of it."

Zacchary rose, for his time was up; he saw that hot words might ensue, and he detested brawling. Moreover, although he did not always keep strict time with his horse and cart, no man among the living could be more punctual to his pillow. With kind "good nights" from all, he passed, and left the smoky scene behind. As he stopped at the bar to say good-bye to Amelia, for whom he had a liking, a short, quick, rosy man came in, shaking snow from his boots, and seeming to have lost his way that night. By the light from the bar, the carrier knew him, and was about to speak to him, but received a sign to hold his tongue, and pass on without notice. Clumsily enough he did as he was bidden, and went forth, puzzled in his homely pate by this new piece of mystery.

For the man who passed him was John Smith, not as yet well known, but held by all who had experience of him to be the shrewdest man in Oxford. The man quietly went into the sanded parlor, and showed good manners to the company. They set him down as a wayfarer, but a pleasant one, and well to do; and as words began to kindle with the friction of opinions, he listened to all that was said, but did not presume to side with any one.

The arrows of the snowy wind came shooting over Shotover. It was Saturday now of that same week with which we began on Tuesday. Trusty and resolute Dobbin never had a harder job than now. Some parts of Headington Hill give pretty smart collar work in the best of times; and now with deep snow scarred by hoofs, and ridged by wheels, but not worn down, hard it seemed for a horse, however sagacious, to judge what to do. But now on the homeward road, with a heavy Christmas laden cart to drag, this fine old horse took good care of himself. He kept his tongue well under bit, and his eyes in sagacious blinkers, and sturdily up the hill he stepped, while Cripps, his master, trudged beside him. Finally he stopped, and shook himself, and panted with large resolutions; and Cripps from his capacious pockets fetched the two oak wedges, and pushed one under either wheel; while Esther, who was coming home at last, jumped from her seat, to help the load, and patted his kind nose, and said a word or two to cheer him.

"The best horse as ever looked through a bridle," Zacchary declared across his mane; "but he must be hoomed with his own way now, same as the rest on us, when us grows old. Etyy, my dear, no call for you to come down and catch chills."

"Zak, I am going to push behind. I am not big enough to do much good. But I would rather be alongside of you, through this here bend of the road, I would."

For now the dusk was gathering in, as they toiled up the lonesome and snowy road, where it overhung the "Gipsy's Grave."

(To be continued.)

## His Reason for Asking.

"Where were you educated?" "At the University of Delaware. Going to send your son there?" "No."—Houston Post.

## COMMISSIONER GARFIELD'S REPORT.

It Is Found to Be Favorable to the Great Packers.

The report of Commissioner of Corporations Garfield on the beef industry, after about eight months' investigation in Chicago and elsewhere, shows that there has been an enormous amount of exaggeration in the statements that have appeared for some time past in regard to the beef business. This investigation was set on foot by a resolution of the House of Representatives adopted March 7, 1904, and the ascertained facts after a most rigid examination of the methods and general conduct of the business are contained in a report covering 308 pages. Its figures and tables conclusively show that the popular belief in enormous profits made by the large packers, such as Armour & Co., Swift & Co. and Nelson Morris & Co., and in the exclusive control of the business which many think they enjoy, is really without foundation.

The report made to President Roosevelt by Commissioner Garfield is really the first official statement of the actual conditions of the beef business that has been made, and as all the conclusions arrived at are based, as shown by him, upon data officially obtained, there seems to be no reason why they should not be regarded as reliable and in all respects trustworthy.

This report shows why the price of both cattle and beef advanced to the highest level ever known after the short corn crop of 1901, and states that because of the decrease in number of cattle and also in decreased weight, "the high prices of beef which caused so much complaint among consumers at this time were attributable wholly to these abnormal cattle prices."

All the figures of the live weight and live cost of all dressed beef cattle were obtained from actual killing records and all information of every kind obtained by the Commissioner was voluntarily and freely offered by the packers, all books of record and papers connected with the business having placed at his disposal.

To make certain that the results of the investigation should be absolutely accurate, the Commissioner states that a double method of ascertaining profits was adopted, and, without going into detail here, it is found that the conclusion arrived at shows an average profit of 99 cents per head. The Commissioner says "the close parallelism in the results of the two methods of ascertaining the profits confirms completely the correctness of the general conclusions." It is clearly established that "western packers do not control more than half of the beef supply of the United States," the conclusion of the Commissioner being that the business done by them amounts to "about 45 per cent" of the total slaughter of the country.

The whole report is extremely interesting and well worthy of careful perusal. As an official report it may be regarded as worthy of confidence and it certainly leads the reader to the conclusion arrived at by the Commissioner when he states that "the capitalization of none of these concerns is excessive as compared with its actual investment" and that from thorough and rigid examination of original entries in books and papers to which he had access there was also "indirect evidence that the profits of the packers in their beef business are less than is frequently supposed," as shown by comparison between the total profits and the total amount of sales.

A Parisian called "Father Cockroach" makes his living by riddling houses of cockroaches.

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## Oxtail Soup.

Take two oxtails, an onion, two carrots, one stalk of celery, parsley and a small piece of pork. Cut the oxtails at the joints; slice the vegetables and mince the pork. Put the pork into a saucepan. Then add the onions, and when they begin to brown add the oxtails. Let them fry a little, then cut them to the bone that the juice may run out in boiling. Place oxtails and browned onions in a soup kettle with four quarts of cold water. Let them simmer for four hours. Then add the other vegetables, stirring in also pepper, salt and two or three cloves. When the vegetables are entirely cooked the soup is done. Strain it and serve. If you wish, a few joints (one for each plate) may be trimmed and sent to the table with the soup.

## Cream Caramels.

Dissolve two pounds of granulated sugar in a little milk, add a quart of a pound of cream of tartar and cook very slowly over a low fire, stirring steadily. When a little dropped in cold water is like soft putty pour into a large shallow pan and set in a cool place until so stiff that a dent made on the surface remains. Beat to a creamy mass, then turn upon a sugared board and knead and roll out as you would a biscuit dough. Cut into squares and wrap each one in waxed paper. The vanilla flavoring may be stirred into the candy just before taking from the fire.

## Coffee Cake.

Add to a pint of risen bread- sponge a gill of warm milk, a pinch of salt, a quarter of a cupful of melted shortening and two eggs that have been beaten light with three-quarters of a cup of sugar. Now put in a little graded nutmeg, some currants or seeded raisins and as much flour as can be worked in with a spoon. Set into a broad greased pan to rise and when very light brush over the top of the cake with milk, sprinkle with sugar and cinnamon and bake in a slow oven for three-quarters of an hour. Cover with brown paper for the first half hour.

## Baked Apples.

Wash and core smooth, round apples and place them in cake pans, pouring over them a goodly amount of syrup made by dissolving granulated sugar in water. Fill the holes left by the cores with maple sugar and set in the oven to bake. Baste the apples two or three times while in process of cooking with the syrup which was left in the pan, and when done serve with stiffly whipped cream as individual dessert dishes.

## Rice Pudding.

Boil half a pound of rice in milk until it is quite tender, beat it well with a wooden spoon to wash the grains; add three quarters of a pound of sugar and the same of melted butter; half a nutmeg, six eggs, a gill of wine, some grated lemon peel; put a paste in the dish and bake it. For a change it may be boiled and eaten with butter, sugar and wine.

## Desert Puffs.

Take one pint of milk and cream each, the whites of four eggs beaten to a stiff froth, one heaping cupful of sifted flour, one scant cupful of powdered sugar; add a little grated lemon peel and a little salt. Beat these ingredients all together until very light, bake in gem pans, sift pulverized sugar over them and eat with a sauce flavored with lemon.

## Short Suggestions.

A little chloride of lime mixed with water will quickly remove ink stains from silver inkstands, etc.

A little sugar added to the water used for basting the roast, especially if it be veal, improves its flavor.

Clean fire irons with very finely powdered brick dust and paraffin. Polish with dry brick dust or emery cloth.

It is said that a sound, ripe apple placed in a tin cake box will keep the loaves from drying or crumbling.

Iron rust must be effaced by rubbing the spots with lemon juice and salt. After both treatments, the goods must be hung in the sun.

Soda should be used for washing greasy things, for the alkali added to the grease makes soap, which does the work of cleansing.

Sweeping with the carpet sweeper will be more effectual if the sweeper is pushed in the same direction as the warp of a rug—not against it.

A cement made by adding a tea-spoonful of glycerin to a gill of glue is a great convenience in the kitchen and is especially good for fastening leather, paper or wood to metal.

Milk will immediately and effectually extinguish the flames from gasolene or any form of petroleum, since it forms an emulsion with the oil, whereas water only spreads it.