

CRIPPS, THE CARRIER

BY
R. D. BLACKMORE

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

CHAPTER XV.

Mr. John Smith had surprised his friends, and disappointed the entire public, by finding out nothing at all about anything after his one great discovery, made with the help of the British army. For some cause or other, best known to himself, he had dropped his indefatigability and taken to very grave shakes of his head instead of nimble footings. He feigned to be very busy still with this leading case of the neighborhood; but though his superiors might believe it, his underlings were not to be misled. All of these knew whether Mr. John was launching thunderbolts or throwing dust, and were well aware that he had quite taken up with the latter process in the Beckley case.

But still, whatever his feelings were, or his desires in the matter, the resolute face and active step of this intelligent officer were often to be seen and heard at Beckley; and to several persons in the village they were becoming welcome. He had several good reasons of his own for haunting the village as he did; one of them being that he thus obeyed the general orders he had received. Also he really liked the Squire, his victuals, and his domestics. Among these latter he had quite outlived any little prejudice created by his early manner; and even Mary Hookham was now inclined to use him as an irritant, or stimulant, for the lukewarm Cripps.

"How is the fine old gentleman now? Mary, my love, how is he?" Mr. Smith asked, as he pulled off his cloak in the lobby, just after church time. "I hope you find him getting better. Everything now is looking up again."

"No, Mr. Smith; he is very sadly, thanking you, sir, for inquiring of him. He do seem a little better one day, and then there come something all over him again, the same as might be this here cloak, sir, thrown on the head of that there stick. But come in and see him, Mr. Smith, if you please. I thought it was the parson when you rang. But master will be glad to see you every bit the same as if you was, no doubt."

John Smith, who was never to be put down by any small comparisons, followed quick Mary with a steadfast march over the quiet matting. In the long, old-fashioned dining room at the Squire at the head of his table. For many years it had been his wont to have an early dinner on Sunday, with a knife and fork always ready for the clergyman, who was a bachelor of middle age. The clergyman came, or did not come, according to his own convenience, without ceremony or apology.

"I beg you to excuse," said the Squire rising, as Smith was shown into the room, "my absence from church this morning, Mr. Warbelow. I had quite made up my mind to go, and everything was quite ready, when I did not feel quite so well as usual, and was ordered to stay at home."

Squire Oglander made his fine old-fashioned bow when he had spoken, and held out his hand for the parson to take it, as the parson always did, with eyes that gave a look of grief and then fell, and kind lips that murmured that all things were ordered for the best. But instead of the parson's gentle clasp, the Squire, whose sight was beginning to fail altogether with his other faculties, was saluted with a strong, rough grasp, and a gaze from entirely unclerical eyes.

"How is your worship? Well nicely, I hope. Charming you look, sir, as ever I see."

"Sir, I thank you. I am in good health. But I have not the honor of remembering your name."

"Smith, your worship—John Smith, at your service; as he was the day before yesterday. 'Out of sight out of mind,' the old saying is. I suppose you find it so, sir?"

With this home thrust, delivered quite unwittingly, Mr. Smith sat down; his opinion was that Her Majesty's service levelled all distinctions. Mr. Oglander gave him one glance, like the keen look of his better days, and then turned away and gazed round the room for something out of sight, but never likely to be out of mind. The old man was weak, and knew his weakness. In the presence of a gentleman he might have broken down and wept, and been much better for it; but before a man of this sort, not a sign would he let out of the sorrow that was killing him. He begged Mr. Smith to take a chair; then, weak as he was, he tottered to the bell pull, rather than ask his guest to ring. John Smith jumped up to help, but felt uncertain what good manners were.

"Mary," said the Squire, when Mary came, "bring in the dinner, if you please. This gentleman will line with me, instead of Mr. Warbelow."

"Well, now, if I ever did!" Miss Hookham exclaimed to herself in the passage. "Why, a' must be a sort of a gentleman! Master wouldn't dine along of Master Cripps; but to my mind Zak be the gentleman afore he!"

The Squire's oblique little sarcasm—if sarcasm at all it were—failed to hit Mr. Smith; "give me the carving knife, ed plate and spoon, and fell to at the soup, which was excellent. The soup was followed by a fine sirloin; whereupon Mr. Oglander, through some association of ideas, could not suppress a little sigh.

"Never sigh at your meat, sir," cried Mr. Smith; "give me the carving knife, sir, if you are unequal to the situation. To sigh at such a sirloin—oh, he, or, fie!"

"I was thinking of some one who always used to like the brown," the old

man said, in the simplest manner, as if an apology were needed.

"Well, sir, I like the brown very much. I will put it by for myself, sir, and help you to an inner slice. Here, Mary, a plate for your master! Quick! Everything will be cold, my goodness! And who sliced this horse-radish, pray? for slicing it is, not scraping!"

Mary was obliged to bite her tongue to keep it in any way mannaesome; when the door was thrown open, and in came her mother, with her face quite white, and both hands stretched on high.

"Oh my! oh my! A sin I call it—a wicked, cruel, sinful sin!" Widow Hookham exclaimed as soon as she could speak. "All over the voilage! all over the parish in two days' time at the latest it will be! Oh, how could your worship allow of it? That Cripps! oh that Cripps! If ever a darter of mine hath Cripps, in spite of two stockings of money, they say—"

"What is it about Cripps?" asked the Squire, in a voice that required an immediate answer. The first news of his trouble had come through Cripps; and now, in his helpless condition, he always connected the name of the carrier with the solution, if one there should be.

"He hath done a thing he ought to be ashamed on," screamed Mrs. Hookham, with such excitement that they were forced to give her another glass of wine; "he hath brought into this parish, and the buzz of his family, pestilence and death, he hath. And who he be to do such a thing, a road-faring, two-penny carrier?"

"Cripps charges a good deal more than twopence," said Mr. Oglander quietly; for his hopes and fears were once more postponed.

"He hath brought the worst load ever were brought," cried the widow, growing eloquent. "Black death, and the plague, and the murrain of Egypt hath come in through Crippe the carrier. How much will he charge Beckley, your worship? How much shall Beckley pay him, when she mourneth for her children? when she spreadeth forth her hands and seeketh north and south, and cannot find them, because they are not?"

"What is it, good woman?" cried Smith impatiently, "what is all this up-roar? Do tell us, and have done with it."

"Good man," replied Widow Hookham tartly, "my words are addressed to your betters, sir. Your worship knoweth well that Master Kale hath leave and license for his Sunday dinner; ever since his poor wife died, he sitteth with a knife and fork to the right side of our cook-maid. He were that genteel, I do assure you, although his appearance bespeaketh it not, and city gents may look down on him; he had such a sense of propriety, not a word did he say all the time of dinner to raise an objection to the weakest stomach. But as soon as he see that all were done, and the parlor dinner forward, he layeth his finger on his lips, and looketh to me as the prime authority; and when I ask him to speak out, no secrets being among good friends, what he said were a deal too much for me, or any other Christian person."

"Well, well, ma'am, if your own dinner was respected, you might have showed some respect for ours," Mr. Smith exclaimed very sadly, beholding the noble sirloin weeping with lost opportunity. But Mr. Oglander took no notice. To such things he was indifferent now.

"To keep the mind dwelling upon earthly victuals," the widow replied severely, "on the Lord's day, and with the day of the Lord a hanging special over us—such things is beyond me to deal with, and calls for Mr. Warbelow. Carrier Cripps hath sent his sister over to nurse Squire Overshute."

John Smith pretended to be busy with his beef, but Mary, who made a point of watching whatever he did, startled as she was by her mother's words, this girl had her quick eyes upon his face, and was sure that it lost color, as the carved sirloin of beef had done from the trickling of the gravy.

"Overshute! nurse Mr. Overshute?" cried the Squire, with great astonishment. "Why, what ails Mr. Overshute? It is a long time since I have seen him, and I thought that he had perhaps forgotten me. He used to come very often, when—but who am I to tempt him? When my darling was here, in the time of my darling, everybody came to visit me; now nobody comes, and of course it is right. There is nobody for them to look at now, and no one to make them laugh a little. Ah, she used to make them laugh till I was quite jealous, I do believe; not of myself, bless your heart! but of her, because I never liked her to have too much to say to anybody, unless it was one who could understand her. And nobody ever turned up that was able, in any way, to understand her, except her poor old father, sir."

The Squire, at the end of this long speech, stood up and flourished his fork, which should have been better employed in feeding him, and looked from face to face, in fear that he had made himself ridiculous. Nobody laughed at him, or even smiled; and he was pleased with this, and resolved never to give such occasion again; because it would have shamed him so. And after all it was his own business. None of these people could have any idea, and he hoped they never might have. By this time his mind was dropping softly into some confusion.

For a few minutes Mr. John Smith had his flourish all about the Queen, and the law of the land, and the jurisdiction of the Bench, and he threatened the ab-

sent Cripps with three months' imprisonment, and perhaps the treadmill. He knew that he was talking unswept rubbish, but his audience was female. They listened to him without leaving off their work, and their courage increased as his did.

But presently Mr. Oglander, who had seemed to be taking a nap, arose and said, as clearly as ever he had said anything in his clearest days:

"Mary, go and tell Charlie to put the saddle on the mare at once."

"Oh, sir! whatever are you thinking of? I couldn't do it, I couldn't. You ain't abeen horseback for nigh four months, and your orders is to keep quiet in your chair, and not even look out o' winder, sir. Do 'e plaize to go into your slippers, sir."

"I will not go into my slippers, Mary. I will go into my boots. I hear that Mr. Overshute is ill, and I gather from what you have all been saying that his illness is of such a kind that nobody will go near him. I have wronged the young gentleman bitterly, and I will do my best to right myself. If I never do another thing, I will ride to Shotover this day. Order the mare, as I tell you, and the maid will do me good, please God!"

CHAPTER XVI.

Now was the happy time when Oxford, ever old, was preparing itself for the sweet leisure for which it is seldom ill prepared. The first and most essential step is to summon all her students, and send them to chapel to pay their vows. After this there need be no misgiving or fear of industry. With one accord they issue forth, all pledged to do nothing for the day, week or month; each intellectual brow is stamped with the strongest resolve not to open a book. This being so, whether winter shatters the Isid wave against Folly Bridge, or spring's arrival rustle in the wavering leaves of Magdalen, or autumn strews the chastened fragrance of many brewers on ripe air—how much more when beauteous summer fosters the coy down on the lip of the junior sophist like thistle-seed, and casts the freshman's shadow hotly on the flags of High street—now or never is the proper period not to overwork one's self and the hour for taking it easy.

After the Easter vacation was over, with too few fattening festivals, the most popular tutor in Brasenose came back to his college work with a very fine appetite for doing good. According, at least, to his own ideas of good and duty, and usefulness; all of which were fundamentally wrong in the opinion of the other tutors. But Hardenow, while he avoided carefully all disputes with his colleagues, strictly kept to his own course, and doing more work than the other five attempted, was permitted to have his own way, because of the trouble there might be in stopping him.

Hardenow took long tramps for the sake of collecting his forces. Saturday was not their proper day for this very admirable coat-tail chase. Neither did they swallow hill and plain in this manner on a Sunday. Lectures were needful to fetch them to the proper pitch for striding so. Wherefore on the morrow Mr. Hardenow was free for a cruise on his own account, after morning sermon at St. Mary's; and not having heard of his old friend Russel for several weeks, he resolved to go and hunt him up in his own home.

As he strode up the hill it was brought home suddenly to his ranging mind that he might be within view of Beckley. At a bend of the rising road he turned, and endwise down a plait of hills, and between soft pillow folds of trees, the simple old church of Beckley stood. Hardenow thought of the months he had spent, some few years back, in that quiet place; of the long, laborious, lonesome days, the solid hours divided well, the space allotted for each hard drill; then the glory of sailing into the air, inhaling grander volumes than ever from mortal breath proceeded, and plunging into leaves that speak of one great Author only. Nor in this pleasant retrospect of kindness and simplicity was the element of rustic grace and beauty wholly absent—the slight young figure that flitted in and out, with quick desire to please him; the soft pretty smile with which his improvements of Beckley dialect were received; and the sweet gray eyes that filled with tears so the day before his college met. Hardenow had feared, humble-minded as he was, that the young girl might be falling into liking him too well; and he knew that there might be on his own part too much reciprocity. Therefore (much as he loved Cripps, and fully as he allowed for all that was to be said upon every side), he had felt himself bound to take no more than a distant view of Beckley.

Even now, after three years and a half, there was some resolve in him to that effect. He turned from the gentle invitation of the distant bells, and went on with his face set towards the house of his old friend, Overshute. When he came to the lodge it caused him a little surprise to find the gate wide open, and nobody there. But he thought that, as it was Sunday, perhaps the lodge people were gone for a holiday.

In this way he came to the door at last, with the fine old porch of Purbeck stone heavily overhanging it, and the long wings of the house stretched out, with empty windows either way. Hardenow rang and knocked, and then set to and knocked and rang again; and then sat down on a stone balustrade; and then jumped up with just vigor renewed and pushed and pulled. Nobody answered. At last he pushed the great door, and lo! there was nothing to resist his thrust, except its sullen weight.

(To be continued.)

Additional Room.
Wife—John, dear, do you love me as much now as you did when we were married a year ago?
Husband—Yes, darling; and I guess I must love you more, for the doctor tells me I have enlargement of the heart.

TOPICS OF THE TIMES.

A CHOICE SELECTION OF INTERESTING ITEMS.

Comments and Criticisms Based Upon the Happenings of the Day—Historical and News Notes.

One of the latest is the lead trust. And that is no pipe dream.

When a man is dead effort is made to think of something good of him. It is so different while he is alive.

An Eastern fashion journal says women are wearing larger shoes. They are probably numbered as small as ever.

There is a great field for the Santo Domingo Improvement Company if it lives up to the improvement part of its name.

A New Jersey bishop says "society is soaked with alcohol." This condition of things renders the parlor match more dangerous than ever.

A man never quite thoroughly appreciates the truth of that old adage about beauty being only skin deep until he bites into a Ben Davis apple.

Carnegie announced a few days ago that he intended to aid the small colleges. He has found out since then that there are lots of them ready to be aided.

Now, if a mere man had made that remark attributed to Mrs. Carnegie even now he would be calling on the rocks to fall on him and the hills to cover him up.

Cadets at West Point and Annapolis are to be taught Jiu-Jitsu. It may not do them much good in war, but perhaps it will enable them to improve their football records.

Piano manufacturers are confronted with the necessity of making stronger instruments. When Paderewski is in good form he can hammer the life out of one in two sittings.

A Boston woman recently read a paper entitled "Are We Growing Old Gracefully?" Of course her conclusion was that "we" are not growing old gracefully or otherwise.

"The Japanese are not a yellow race at all," says the Philadelphia Inquirer; "they are only tanned." Have been under the impression all along that it was the Russians who were tanned.

The Boston Herald begs leave to amend the old adage, "Hate the sin, but love the sinner," by adding, "and the sinner's money." The American board of missions has accepted the amendment and also Mr. Rockefeller's \$100,000.

There is another vanishing industry. The jewelry industry is stated to be in a bad way, owing to the collapse of the demand among savage peoples. The advance of civilization has been so thorough that nowadays in Central Africa nothing short of Wagner will satisfy the native souls.

"It is mine!" "I tell you, you are mistaken; it is mine!" Divorce court. Which is a terse way of putting the sad history of many a marriage disagreement over the things mine and thine and the domestic misery that follows. The way to settle such a disagreement is for both parties to say, "It is ours!" Because of the struggle for mine and thine the records of history are rolled in blood, nations have fallen, barriers of hatred have been raised, brother has fought brother. Envy, dissension and division have come because men have contended for that which is not theirs, but "ours."

There has been a revival of the proposition to call into existence the half-cent or five-mill copper piece. Five or six years ago a bill with that purpose in view was introduced into Congress, but it seems to have died out of inattention. The call for the half-cent comes strongest from large cities in which there are great department stores, though it is quite likely that in all other cities the advent of the new money piece would be welcomed. Competition in trade in the great shopping centers is now so keen that a difference of half a cent in price often determines the mind of a would-be purchaser.

Our beliefs are largely directed by certain sayings that have come down to us, some of which are wholly untrue, and some of which contain only half truths. For instance: We quote as if it were a settled truism, the old adage, "Love is blind." It all depends upon the interpretation. If we mean that love is blind in the sense that it voluntarily shuts its eyes to the faults and failings of the loved one, there is some truth in the saying, otherwise not. The eyes of love are the keenest of all eyes. And the greater the love the keener the insight. No one better knows the weaknesses of a husband than an affectionate wife. And vice versa. In the eyes of the world which does not love the individual may be

without fault. But close companionship under the searching eyes that love reveals many defects. And this is the suffering inseparable from loving. The lover has a high standard for the loved. His is an ideal object of affection. And when the object of affection falls below the ideal of the lover, as usually happens, the heart is hurt. And yet the soul that truly loves, loves on, despite the faults, despite the disappointment. It is not a blind worship. It is divine love, open-eyed, saying to itself, "With all his faults, I love him still." And it is the instinct of this love that knows and loves on that seeks to hide from the world the imperfection of the loved one—to shield it with divinest pity and to cover it with the mantle of God-like perfection. And herein is the spiritual miracle: Not that love is blind; but that, clear-seeing, it continues to love and suffer and hide its pain—and is perfected in suffering.

That amiable old person the father of Frederick the Great was accustomed to rout the future hero out of bed on cold nights to give him only half enough to eat and otherwise to make him miserable on the theory that boys who were allowed anything like comfort never would amount to much. His paternal majesty was regarded as a crazy man, yet we have in these enlightened days some people who entertain his views to a certain extent. There are people, that is to say, who maintain that the things which are grouped under the designation of "modern conveniences" are bad for us and that we should be a great deal better off without them. We are told that steam heat softens us and renders us a prey to colds, coughs and pneumonia, that electric lights are ruining our eyesight, that elevators are making us lazy—in short, that about every comfort that we enjoy is really an insidious enemy of our physical or spiritual well-being. There is undoubtedly just a flavor of truth in these pessimistic outgivings as there is a slight foundation for most of the gloomy vaticinations which the dismal-minded among us indulge in with respect to other matters. There never has been a time when there were not people to proclaim that everything in the scheme of creation was going wrong and this is especially true when the prophet of disaster deals with anything like an innovation. That any departure from the established order of things is certain to result in disaster is a fundamental assumption of the pessimist. We may, nevertheless, make ourselves comfortable in spite of the declaries of "modern conveniences." It may be true that steam heat is responsible for some physical ills, but we can feel certain that the old system of shivering beside inadequate fires was responsible for more. Electric lights have their disadvantages, but they are infinitely to be preferred to candles. We go through the whole list of comforts that we enjoy and assure ourselves that they are worth all they cost and that their drawbacks are more than balanced by their advantages. The law of self-preservation is a safeguard against humanity indulging in things that would seriously menace the race. Modern comforts are the outgrowth of the human desire to utilize the physical resources of nature to the best advantage, and as such a desire never will be wholly satisfied we may be sure that the world will discover and enjoy more rather than less of such comforts as time goes on.

TOO SUDDEN ADVANCEMENT

Transports Some People Into Situations that They Do Not Fit.

In a flourishing city in Ohio a rather ignorant man had accidentally made a large fortune and was proceeding to spend it in a lavish way. It occurred to him that if he and his wife were going to entertain their friends—for, of course, they now had many—it would be well for them to build a new house. Accordingly they engaged an architect and proceeded to erect a costly mansion. One day someone chanced to meet the worthy wife of the ignorant millionaire and asked her what kind of a house they were going to build.

"Wal," said she, "I don't egerly know what kind of architecteh it is, but I think I heered the architect say as how it was a mixcher of the ironic and the cathartic."

The same lady was traveling this winter in Europe, and was, with many others, driven from the Riviera by the unusual cold, and took refuge in Egypt. One day she came bustling into the court of the Eden Place Hotel at Cairo and remarked to a young American lady who happened to fall a victim to her advances:

"Oh, we are havin' such a fine time here in Egypt; the other mornin' we went on camels an' were showed them periods an' that other thing." She did not trust herself to pronounce the word sphinx. She added: "I do think the Arabs is just magnificent; they're so straight and dignified, but the Gym-suns themselves ain't no great shakes, be they?"—Harper's Weekly.

The wife may be the patient one in the beginning, but as the years go by, the husband gets the patient look.