

# Tristram of Blent.

Being An Episode in a Story of An Ancient House.

BY ANTHONY HOPE.

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Adelade, wife of Sir Randolph Edge of Blent Hall, closed with confidence. "Sir Randolph dies in Russia, presumably in time for Lady Edge and Fitzherbert marry and so make their son, Harry, legitimate. They learn later, however, that the date of Sir Randolph's death has been given incorrectly and Harry is not the rightful heir. They keep the matter secret and eventually marry Fitzherbert. He becomes the barony of Tristram of Blent and resides with Harry at Blent Hall. Unknown to Lady Tristram, the late Sir Randolph, Mr. Jenkinson and Miss Zabriska, with her young Major Dupuy, while residing at Merrion Lodge, near Blent Hall. Harry learns from his mother that he is not the rightful heir to the title for him at any cost. To further his cause he decides to marry Janie Iver, heiress to Fairholme, and join two rivals in Blent Broodery and Major



"MY DEAR HARRY, THE FACT IS THE BUSINESS WON'T STAND MORE THAN A CERTAIN AMOUNT. I'LL GIVE YOU, 30—" "MY PRICE IS 50," SAID HARRY, IMMOVABLY.

Dupuy. The latter learns of Harry's unfortunate birth from Nina Zabriska. He informs him that he is interested in Iver and they quarrel. Harry winning in a brick battle. Ned becomes the guest of Iver and they form a compact to protect Harry's interests. The two men meet at Blent. Harry and Janie Iver, heiress to Fairholme, and Major Dupuy, while residing at Merrion Lodge, near Blent Hall. Harry learns from his mother that he is not the rightful heir to the title for him at any cost. To further his cause he decides to marry Janie Iver, heiress to Fairholme, and join two rivals in Blent Broodery and Major

"I suppose you had't the least idea what you were doing?" "I was as cool as you were when you gave me Blent." "You're cool enough now, anyhow." He admitted, in admiration of her party. "Quite, thanks." The hand behind her head trembled sorely. She was not afraid of a blow any more—she, for a moment she had been, and she had borne him no ill will for the idea, false as it was—but his eyes were on her and a confusion threatened to overwhelm the composure of which she boasted. "I gave you Blent because it was yours." "What I offered you is mine." "By no means, never yours to give till you've lost it." With an effort to keep her pose, his words humbled through her head. "Did you say that to Janie Iver?" she muttered coolly to ask him meaningly. He thrust away the faint with a motion of his hand; one of Gainsborough's gim-cracks fell, smashed on the floor. Cecily laughed, glad of the excuse to seem as she really felt. "Hang the thing! If you'd loved me, you'd have been ashamed to do it!" "I was ashamed without loving you, Cousin Harry." "Oh, do drop 'cousin' Harry." Her only refuge now was in the quips and verbal victories. They served her well, for Harry, less master of himself than usual, was hindered and tripped up by them. "Still, if you'd never met again, I'll say 'Harry' if you like." "Of course we shall meet again." She surprised that out of him. "I'll be so awkward for me now," she laughed lightly. But her mirth broke off suddenly as he came closer and stood over her. "I could hate you for coming to me with that offer," he said. "Almost hating herself now, yet sorely wounded that he should think of hating her, she answered him in a fury. "Well, then, shouldn't I hate you for giving me Blent? That was worse. You could refuse. I couldn't. I have it, I have to keep it. In her excitement she rose and faced him. "And because of you I can't be happy," she cried resentfully. "I see, I ought to have drowned myself instead of merely going away. Oh, I know I owe the world a large apology for my existence. I couldn't. I have it, I have to keep it. Unfortunately though, I intend to go on existing. I even intend to live a life of my own—not the life of a hanger-on if you'll allow me." "Would any other man in the world talk like this after—"

her dressing gown, holding a candle. The sudden turn of events, the introduction of this new figure, the intrusion that seemed so absurd, overcame Cecily. She sank back in her chair and laid her head on her hands on the table, laughing hysterically. Harry's brows grew heavier. "Oh, you're there," he said to Mina. "You're in it, too, I suppose? I've always had the misfortune to interest you, haven't I? You wanted to turn me out first. Now you're trying to put me in again, are you? Oh, you women, can't you leave a man alone in peace?" "I don't know what you are talking about. And what are you doing here? Do you know it's half-past 11?" "It would be all the same to me if it was half-past 12," said Harry, contemptuously. "You've been here with her all the time?" "Oh, Lord, yes. Are you the chap?" He laid his hand on her shoulder and unconsciously clasped his hat on his head. "We've had an evening-out, my cousin and I, and I saw her home. And now I'm going home. Nothing wrong, I hope, Miss Zabriska." Cecily raised her head; she was laughing still, with tears in her eyes. "Mina looks at her. Considerations of propriety fell into the background. "But what's it all about?" she cried.

"I'll leave Cecily to tell you." He was quiet now, but with a vicious quietness. "I've been explaining that I have a preference for being left alone. Perhaps it may be superfluous to mention the fact to you, too, Miss Zabriska. My cab's waiting. Good night." He looked a moment at Cecily and his eyes seemed to dwell a little longer than he had meant. In a tone rather softer and more gentle he repeated, "Good night." Cecily sprang to her feet. "I shall remember," she cried, "I shall remember!" Her voice was full of bitterness. Her manner proudly defiant. Harry hesitated a moment, then smiled grimly. "I shouldn't be able to complain of that," he said, as he turned and went out to his cab. Cecily threw herself into her chair again. The bewildered Imp stood staring at her.

objection, or even a sort of welcome for her presence. "Grave and critical! Sloyd's nervous excitement and uneasy deference toward Iver were the only indications of any such thing. Dupuy was there in the background, cool and steady. Iver himself was inclined to gossip with Harry and to chaff him on the fresh departure he had made, rather than to settle down to a discussion of Blenthampton. That was, after all, a small matter—so his manner seemed to assert; he had been in town, anyhow, so he dropped in." "Well, now," said Iver, with a glance at his watch, "we must really get to business. You don't want to live in Blenthampton, you gentlemen, I suppose? You want to leave a little better for your visit, eh? Quite so. That's the proper thing to do. I'll see to it. But you can't expect to find fortunes growing on the beach. Surely Major Dupuy mistook your figures?" "Unless he mentioned 50,000 he did," said Harry, firmly. "H'm, I did you injustice, major—with some excuse, though. Surely, Mr. Sloyd—"

"Iver looked at him curiously. "Well, I'd rather talk to you, Harry," he said. "And I'll tell you plainly what I think, Mr. Sloyd's a young business man. So are you." "I'm a baby," Harry agreed. "And blackmailing big people isn't a good way to start." He watched Harry, but he did not forget to watch Sloyd, too. "Of course, I use the word in a figurative sense. The estate's not worth half the money to you; we happen to want it. Oh, I'm always open! So—" He gave a shrug. "Sorry to introduce new and immoral methods into business, Mr. Iver. It must be painful to you, after all these years." Harry laughed good-humoredly. "I shall corrupt the major too," he added. "We'll give you 5,000 for your bargain—25 in all." "I suggested to Major Dupuy that being ahead of you was so rare an achievement that it ought to be properly recognized."

Dupuy whispered to Iver. Sloyd looked thoughtful. "Let it go for 30—don't make an enemy of him," had been Sloyd's secret counsel. "My dear Harry, the simple fact is that the business won't stand more than a certain amount. If we put money into Blenthampton, it's because we want it to come out again. Now, the crop will be limited." He paused. "I'll make you an absolutely final offer—20." "My price is 50," said Harry, immovably. "Out of the question." "All right," Harry lit a cigarette with an air of having finished the business. "It simply can't be done on the figures," Iver declared, with genuine vexation. "We worked it out, Harry, and it can't be done. If I showed our calculations to Mr. Sloyd, who is, I'm sure, willing to be reasonable—" "Yes, Mr. Iver, I am—I am, I hope, always desirous of—of meeting gentlemen half way. And nothing could give me greater pleasure than to do business with you, Mr. Iver." "Unfortunately you seem to have a partner—"



"SHE'S BEEN SILLY AND HE'S BEEN HORRID, MR. DISNEY."

"I didn't know where you were." Mina complained, but to accept the situation. Blenthampton is not essential to me; and your hotel and so on won't flourish much if I leave my tumblidown cottages and piesjays just behind them. Will you put these papers together, Dupuy?" The major obeyed leisurely. Sloyd was licking his lips and looking acutely unhappy. "You're absolutely resolved, Harry?" "Absolutely, Mr. Iver." "Well, I give it up. It's had for me—and it's worse for you. In all my experience I never was treated so. You won't even discuss it! You said 35, well, I'd have listened. If you'd even said 40 I'd have—"

"I say, Done for 40," said Harry quietly. "It's a sort of idea all the time and I might as well limit it. I expect the thing really wouldn't stand 50, you know. O, that's just my notion." "Iver's face was a study. He was surprised, he was annoyed, Harry's acting had been good. That obstinate uncompromising mutability that Iver had really believed in. And forty had been his limit—his extreme limit. "I'll give you forty," he said at last. "For the whole thing, lock, stock and barrel—forty." "It's a bargain," said Harry, and Iver, with a sigh (for forty was the extreme figure), pushed back his chair and rose to his feet. "We've got a good many plans, sir," suggested Sloyd, very anxious to establish pleasant relations. "I'm sure we should be very glad if you found them of any service." "You're very good, Mr. Sloyd, but—"



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"Now there's an end of business! Walk down to the Imperium with me, Harry, and have a bit of lunch. You've earned it, eh? How do you like the feeling of making money?"

"Well, I think it might grow on a man. What's your experience?"

"Sometimes better than this morning, or I should hardly have been your neighbor at Fairholme."

The two walked off together, leaving Dupuy and Sloyd very amicable. Iver was thoughtful.

"You did that well," he said as they turned the corner into Berkeley square.

"I suppose I learned to bluff a bit when I was at Blent."

"You put your finger on the figure?"

"I don't know. It looked like being about that, you know."

"It was very exactly that," admitted Iver.

"Rather a surprise to find our friend, the major, going into business with you?"

"He'll be useful, I think, and well, I'm short of help." He was eyeing Harry now, but he said no more about the morning's transaction till they reached the club.

"Perhaps we shall find Ned here," he remarked as they went in. They did find Ned and also Lord Southend, the latter gentleman in a state of disturbance about his curry. It was not what any man would seriously call a curry; it was no more than a fortuitous concurrence of mutton and rice.

"It's an extraordinary thing," he observed to Iver, that whenever Wilmot Edge is away the curries in the club go to the devil—the devil, and he's always going off somewhere, confound him!"

"He can't be expected to stay at home just to look after your curry," Iver suggested.

"I suppose he's in South America, South Africa or south somewhere or other, out of reach. Waiter!" The embarrassed servant came. "When is Colonel Edge expected back?"

"In a few weeks, I believe, my lord."

"Who's chairman of the committee while he's away?"

"Mr. Gore-Marston, my lord."

"There—what can you expect?" He pushed aside his plate. "Bring me some cold beef," he commanded. "As soon as ever Edge comes back I shall draw his attention to the curry."

"Everybody else had rather lost their interest in the subject. Ned and Harry were in conversation. Iver sat down by himself. He had lunch and was endeavoring to distract his mind by giving him a history of the morning. Southend, too, was concerned in Blenthampton. Gradually the curry was forgotten as he listened to the story of Harry's victory.

"Sort of young fellow who might be useful," he suggested, presently.

"That's what I was thinking. He's quite ready for work, too, I fancy."

Southend regarded his friend. He was thinking that if this and that happened—and they were things now within the bounds of possibility—Iver might live to be sorry that Harry was not to be his son-in-law. Hastily and in ignorance he included Janie in the scope of this supposed regret. But at this moment the guilty and incompetent Mr. Gore-Marston had the misfortune to enter in. Southend, all his grievance revived, fell on him tooth and nail. His defense was feeble; he admitted he knew next to nothing of curries, and—yes, the cold did get careless when Wilmot Edge's vigilant eye was removed.

"He'll be home soon," Gore-Marston pleaded. "I've had a letter from him; he's just got back to London and he'll be here in a month now, I think."

"We shall have to salary him to stay," growled Southend.

Harry was amused at this little episode and listened smiling. Possessing a knowledge of curries seemed an odd way to acquire importance for a fellow creature, a strange reason for a man's return being desired. He knew who Wilmot Edge was and it was funny to hear of him again in connection with curries. And curries remained in Colonel Edge's return. Not till they met again in the smoking room were the curries finally forgotten.

In later days Harry came to look back on that afternoon as the beginning of many new things, and Harry found himself listening.

"You never thought of anything but yourself all the way through. You were lecturing me? O, no, you were posing and posturing. Being very nice and very heroic! And then at the end you turned round and—as good as struck her in the face. O, I hope she'll never speak to you again!"

"Did she send you to say this?"

"Of course not. You're right there. If it had happened to be in any way your business—"

"Ah," cried the Imp triumphantly. "You've no answer, so you turn round and abuse me! But I don't care. I meant to tell you what I thought of you and I've done it."

Southend agreed to every suggestion with an emphatic nod. But there was something more in his mind. With every evidence of capability that Harry showed, even with every increase in the chances of his attaining position and wealth for himself, the prospect of success in the other scheme—the scheme still curly—grew brighter. He quite forgot his curries—and

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"A post card would have done it as well," Harry suggested.

"But you've gone too far. O, yes, you have. If you ever change your mind—"

"What about? O, don't talk nonsense, Mrs. Zabriska."

"It's not nonsense. You behaved even worse than I think if you're not at least half in love with her."

Harry threw a quick glance at her.

"That would be very unlucky for me," he suggested.

"Very—now," said the Imp with every appearance of triumph.

"London will be dull without you, Mrs. Zabriska."

"I'm not going to take any more trouble about you, anyhow."

He rose and walked over to her.

"In the old days," said Mrs. Zabriska, "what's your complaint against me?"

"You've made Cecily terribly unhappy. I couldn't help it. She—she did an impossible thing."

"After which you made her spend the evening with the Imp. A Tristram must have had a reason for that."

"I've told you. I felt friendly and I wanted her to be friendly. And I like her. The whole thing's a ludicrous trifle." He paused a moment and added, "I'm sorry if she's distressed."

"You've made everything impossible—that's all."

"I don't understand. It so happens that today all sorts of things have begun to seem possible to me. Perhaps you've seen your uncle."

"I have—and—and it would be splendid if you hadn't treated her as you did."

"You hint at something I know nothing about."

"I'm growing angry again. I really believe I could manage my own affairs." He returned to his pet grievance.

"You don't understand? Well, you will soon." She grew cooler as her mischievous pleasure in puzzling him overcame her wrath. "You'll know what you've done soon."

"Shall I? How shall I find it out?"

"You'll be sorry when—a certain thing happens."

He threw himself into a chair with a peevish laugh.

"I confess your riddles rather bore me. Is there any sense in this one?"

"Yes; very soon, I've been to see Lady Everswood."

"She knows the answer, does she?"

"Perhaps." Her animation suddenly left her. "But I suppose it's all no use now," she said dolefully.

"They sat silent for a minute or two, Harry seeming to fall into a fit of abstraction.

"What did you mean by saying I oughtn't to have taken her to dinner and so on?" he asked as Mina rose to go.

She shook her head. "I've nothing more to say," she declared.

"And you say I'm half in love with her?"

"Yes, I do," she snapped viciously as she turned towards the door. But she looked back at him before she went out.

"As far as that goes," he said slowly. "I'm not sure you're wrong, Mrs. Zabriska. But I could never marry her."

The Imp launched a prophecy, confidently, triumphantly, maliciously.

"Before very long she'll be the one to say that—and you've got yourself to thank for it, fool! Goodby!"

She was gone. Harry sat down and slowly lifted and lit his pipe. It was probably all nonsense, but again he recollected Cecily's words: "If ever the time comes I shall remember!"

Whatever might be the state of his feelings towards her, or of hers toward him, a satisfactory outcome seemed impossible. And somehow this notion had the effect of spoiling the success of the day for Harry Tristram. So that amongst the Imp's whirling words there was perhaps a grain or two of wisdom. At least his talk with her did not make Harry's visions less constant or less intense.

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**Tristram of Blent.**