

# The Woodstock Age.

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Whole Number 206.

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## THE STORY OF A FEATHER.

BY DOUGLAS JERROLD.

### CHAPTER XXI.

I AM AGAIN TAKEN ABROAD.—THE WIDOW LOSES HER LOVER AND MYSELF.

It may be supposed that Mrs Cramp was offended at the ruthless sacrifice of her cap—one of the few tokens by which she remembered her departed husband; which, whenever she passed the looking-glass, convinced her that she was a widow. To say the truth, she had a liking for the cap; there was a significant prettiness about it that pleased her mightily. Hence, she was majestically indignant with Edward. He was a brute—a ruffian; and then, her passion suffering a sweet diminution, he was finally a very foolish fellow. She would not take a glass of wine with him; she would not even touch the liquid; well, she would touch it and no more. She was not the foolish weak woman he thought her; but if he was very good, she might go to play with him on Tuesday. Should she ever see his mother, she would tell her what a scapegrace son she had—that she would.

And thus with the prettiest affection of remorse on the part of the highwayman, and with a coy, wayward pettishness on the side of the widow, who never having been wooed by Mr Cramp, promised herself an enjoyment of courtship in all its dear distracting variety,—thus, till eleven o'clock they sat, unseen Cupids hovering about them snuffing the candles.

I will pass the separation of lovers, which Mr Abram vowed—and he ratified the oath with a bumper of brandy—tore the very heart out of his bosom. Then he burst into the snatch of an amorous ditty, whilst Mrs Cramp begged him to remember the neighbors. To this appeal he made answer by singing the louder and vowing if he were hanged he didn't care, he couldn't die at a happier moment. And then Mrs Cramp wondered what nonsense was in the man's head about hanging; and finally, she and Becky coaxed him to the door, and hush-hushed him into the street.

'Quite a gentleman, me'm,' said Becky left alone with her mistress, who sat silently looking at her fingers. 'You didn't see his hands, me'm; never saw veal whiter, me'm; always tell a true gentleman by his hands, me'm. Can't be a London gentleman, me'm,—has a country look. Ha! that's the place, me'm, for my money. I could live among pigs me'm; and then for poultry, for breeding goslings, me'm—I may say without presumption, me'm, I was born for it, me'm.'

Becky's avowal of her love for an Arcadian life convinced me that the parlor-door was not without a key-hole.

'Lawks!' cried Becky, getting no answer from her mistress—'here's the feather; I couldn't take it for—'

'Never mind,' said Mrs Cramp, and she took me from the mantle-piece; 'never mind; we'll talk about dyeing it another time.'

'Well, it would have been a pity and a shame, me'm; besides, you won't be in nasty black a year—I'm sure you can't, me'm.'

'I've such a headache, Becky,' sighed Mrs Cramp. 'I'll go to bed.' And the widow carrying me with her, and sighing very heavily, crept slowly up stairs to her bed-room, followed by her maid.—Laying me carefully aside, she sank into a chair. Taking out her pocket-handkerchief, she sat mutely squeezing it between her palms, and then she slightly brushed the lawn across her eyes, and then her lips moved, as with some dolorous soliloquy. At length the widow cried 'This is lonesome, Becky.'

'Might as well be buried alive, me'm. I couldn't sleep here alone, me'm, for the world, me'm. And, then, there's that picture of master, me'm,—and Becky glanced at a daub portrait of the late card-maker hanging over the chimney-piece,—'it's shamefully like him, me'm isn't it?'

'Don't talk so, Becky, you don't know how you distress me.'

'Shall I turn him to the wall, me'm?' and Becky, with the word, had mounted a chair to give a turn to the cardmaker.

'By no means,' said the widow; 'what harm can the poor man's picture do me? I don't know, me'm; but, if I was you I should think he was always looking at me, me'm; and, then, there's that big silver watch of his at the head of the bed. Well, how you can sleep with that, me'm I can't tell. I should think it was his spirit, tick, ticking away all night, and I shouldn't wink for him.'

'Silly creature!' said Mrs Cramp, with a very faint smile.

'Why do you wind it up, me'm?' cried Becky.

'Habit, Becky; I always did when the poor man was alive. But it is loud to-night, and my head is, I think, going to pieces. Put the watch under the mattress, Becky.'

'Yes, me'm,' and in a trice the cardmaker's chronometer was cramed away. 'Shall I turn the picture, too, me'm?' cried Becky.

'I'm afraid you should touch it; 'tis in such a wretched state, so worm-eaten, and I don't know what—remind me that I send it away to-morrow to be revived. And Becky, as I see, foolish girl! you are a little frightened, you shall sleep with me to-night.'

And mistress and maid slept. The widow, for she told her vision when she awoke, dreamt that she was carried to the Land's-End through the air, drawn by a team of pouter pigeons; whilst Becky, who was also favored with a vision, declared that she had hatched a couple of dozen of goose-eggs, with twin goslings in every one of them.

Days passed on and every day gave new brightness to the widow. She sang louder, laughed louder, trod her chamber with lighter step, and would lie and giggle in bed, Becky giggling in concert with her mistress. One morning, the widow observed to her confidential friend, 'This black, Becky, is sad hypocrisy.'

'To be sure, me'm, it is; but then, me'm, we can't be respectable without it.'

'And then people stare so, if they see one in weeds with a gentleman, especially if one smiles, or—'

'A wicked world, me'm; think people ought to have their spirits in mourning as well as their backs. I should like to know what mourning was made for, if it wasn't to carry it all off.'

'I'll not go out in black to-morrow,' said the widow after a pause.

'Well, me'm I honors you for the resolution,' cried Becky.

'At the same time the neighbors needn't know it,' observed Mrs Cramp.

'Why should they, me'm? Ah, them neighbors! They're the cuss of one's life, me'm. How happy all the world might be, me'm, if all the world hadn't neighbors, me'm.'

'I can wrap a cloak about me, and sneak into a coach, Becky,' said Mrs Cramp.

'And not a mouse be the wiser,' said her maid.

The morrow came: the widow flung aside her black, and burst into colors.—More; as an excellent bit beauty, she took me. I was placed in her head; and I was delighted to find, as she looked and looked in the glass, that she fully appreciated the value of my presence. 'A beautiful feather, isn't it, Becky?'

'I'll tell you the world's truth, me'm,' cried Becky, putting together her extended palms, and flinging them from her as she spoke—'I've seen the queen, me'm, and she isn't fit to see you to bed, me'm.' Thus irreverently did Becky speak of her appointed majesty, Queen Charlotte, of happy memory.

It was evening; a coach was called.—Mrs Cramp, as cautiously as a midnight cat would cross a gutter, put her foot into the street, and for an instant looked hurriedly about her; the next moment she was in the coach.

The action was so rapid, yet I thought I saw two or three figures on the opposite side of the way, watching the progress of innocent Mrs Cramp.

The coach drove on. At length it stopped at the corner of a street. 'All's right,' said a voice to the coachman, and immediately the door was opened, and 'Edward' was seated beside Mrs Cramp. 'My angel!' he cried, 'why wouldn't you let me take you up!'

'The neighbors, Edward—the neighbors,' said the widow.

'The fellow knows where to drive to,' asked the highwayman.

'I've told him—he can't mistake,' said Mrs Cramp. The coach rolled on.

'This surely can't be the way,' cried the thief.

'He can't be wrong—I was so particular, Edward,' replied the widow. 'I hope we shall be in time for the beginning.'

'Oh, I see; all right,' said Abram, glancing through the window. At this moment the coach stopped. 'This isn't Drury Lane,' cried the highwayman.

'No,' said a man, who presented himself at the coach door, and whom I instantly recognized as Hardmouth, the police-officer—'No, but it's Bow-street.'

Instantaneously the highwayman turned and grasping the widow's hand, and looking like a demon in her face, he asked—'Did you do this?'

'What, what?' cried the widow.

'Nothing, nothing, my dear,' said Abram, assured by the woman's look of innocence, 'Never mind, 'twill all be right. Hardmouth, take care of the lady,'

cried the highwayman, jumping nimbly out of the coach, and immediately disappearing amidst a crowd of constables.

'Edward, Edward!' exclaimed the widow.

'He's in a bit of trouble, mum,' said one of the officers.

'Trouble!' cried the widow, and with the word she stood on the pavement.

'Highway robbery, mum,' said the same functionary.

'A robber!' exclaimed the woman, fainting in the arms of the constable, who carried her into the office.

'It can't be his wife, Tim,' said a man, as he brought water to restore the sufferer.

'One of 'em, perhaps,' was the answer.

In a few minutes the poor soul became conscious of all about her. She was told that Clicky Abram—her Edward—was a known highwayman—that a poor girl was in Newgate upon his account—a girl sacrificed to his safety. A watch he had stolen upon the highway from a sailor had been found in her bed; what was that to him! He'd hang twenty women, and laugh at 'em afterwards.

Such were the acts, such the character, in brief, of the prisoner. The widow of course, would not believe a word of the scandal. She insisted upon seeing her Edward; and, careless of all beside, she begged, entreated, that the officers would conduct her into the office. The officers, subdued by an influence which the widow had in her pocket, granted her request. She rushed forward to seek her Edward. In her agitation, I fell from her head, and for some minutes lay in the passage. And then, a rough, coarse-looking man took me up, and twirling me over and over, and grunting a sort of approbation of my beauty, put me under his waistcoat.

CHAPTER XXII.

I AM TAKEN TO NEWGATE.—THE TURNKEY AND HIS WIFE.

I soon discovered that my new owner was a tenant of Newgate. Official business of some kind had, for a time, drawn him from his home to the police-office. I cannot clearly tell the purpose of his errand; but I believe it was to speak to new evidence which had come out against some thief committed for trial; and that duty fulfilled, my possessor had ought to do but straightway seek his home in the Old Bailey. Nevertheless, he lingered about the office, whiling away the pleasant minutes in sessional discourse, with old acquaintances. 'Hanging must be the end of this,' said he to an emissary of justice.—'Click can't get off this time?'

'Lord love you, no, Mister Trapy,' was the answer. 'He may get measured for his coffin in the first minute he has to spare.'

'He's a fine fellow, and won't disgrace Tyburn,' said my new master. 'Ha!—Tom—it's a pity for the time folks have to live, that they can't scriminate as to what belongs to 'em, and what don't.'

'I know it's all right and proper to say so: but if they did, what would become of us?'

'That's true, too. Well, it takes all sorts to make a world; and with this worn adage, my new possessor prepared himself to depart, when Clicky Abram was brought into the hall, in the custody of a couple of officers, poor Mrs Cramp, with streaming eyes and ashy face, following him; and declaring, between her sobs, that 'they should never tear him from her.'

'Tell you what it is, mum,' said Trapy, gently taking the woman aside. 'I'm turnkey in Newgate; and if you like to come there, you may be as happy as the day is long with him.'

'Heaven bless you!' cried the widow.—'Nor did the excess of her gratitude make her forgetful of the surer means of touching Mr Trapy's sympathy.'

'I can have a coach!' said the highwayman, looking about him with regal dignity.

'To be sure you can, captain,' cried Trapy, 'and more than that, I'll ride with you.'

The coach was speedily procured, and Mr Abram as quickly invited to enter it.

'We shall be happy 'yet,' cried Mrs Cramp, throwing herself into the highwayman's arms.

'We certainly shall' cried the widow a second time, again and again embracing the highwayman.

'As turtles, my darling,' said Abram; and then, in a lower voice, 'don't forget the money.'

Mrs Cramp answered hysterically 'She would die first; and then again embracing the thief, she was at length separated from him, fainting in the arms of an officer.

'All right, Newgate!' cried a linkman with a laugh, having just picked up a shilling thrown to him by the culprit, as the coach was about to drive away.

'It's not so bad, I hope, sir?' said Trapy, who had seated himself beside Abram.

'A bagatelle,' answered the thief.

'I thought so,' cried the turnkey; 'and that's not capital.'

Rapidly the moments passed and we stopped at Newgate. I shall never forget that dead halt. Ere the prison door was opened it seemed to me a pause between life and death—and then what a terrible transition! Now, and the man, albeit a prisoner, had out-door life about him; saw the worldly working of men; saw free faces; beheld the passers-by carrying on the business of life; some were going to their homes; some, as perhaps the prisoner fashioed to himself, going to merry meetings. And yet he—he—was as unthought of as unacknowledged, as though he had never been. Still he felt himself a part of it. He saw its people, and he was of them; another instant—the prison door had closed upon him, and the outward world was to him a dream! Between this and that side of a prison threshold, may there not be gray hairs?

My possessor, Mr Trapy, was a privileged man in Newgate; and, therefore, as others might say he was permitted to have his greatest comfort about him, Mrs Trapy, was permitted—if she could—to turn a gaol to Paradise by her presence. I fear, however, that the opportunity was rarely improved by the good woman, whose first principle was to teach her husband the virtue of humility, by constantly showing to her mate how very much she was above him.

It was late when I arrived at Newgate—very late. Mr Trapy, doubtless to cheat the misanthropy of prison life, had humanized himself with an extra allowance of liquor. That good intention was by no means applauded by the partner of his fate.

'Here you are again, like a beast, Mr Trapy,' cried the wife from between the bed-clothes, as the turnkey entered his den of a bedroom. 'Well! if my father the lawyer, had ever thought I should come to this!'

'Where could he think you would come to, when he brought you up. Mrs Trapy,—eh? Where, ma'am, but to Newgate?'

'You're a villain!' cried Mrs Trapy.

'That's my affair, Charlotte,' said the turnkey. 'Nevertheless, my pet lamb, look here.'

'Don't Lamb me! Ha! I wish my dear father was only here.'

More shame for you; if he was, he'd be hanged, you know, for coming back afore his time. Now, look here, Charlotte.'

'I won't look at nothing,' cried Mrs Trapy, and then added, 'What is it?'

Mr Trapy approached the bed-side, and with a candle in one hand, and me in the other, presented myself to the sparkling eyes of his placable wife.

'What a beautiful feather, Mike! Where did you get it?' cried Mrs Trapy.

'Get it? I'm always a buying something for you,' said the turnkey.

'It's a dear! But what's feathers in Newgate? sighed the wife.'

'Well, well, we shan't always be here, Charlotte. What's the news? Any thing happened since I went out?'

Mrs Trapy taking me in her hand, and carefully examining me by the candle, whilst her husband prepared himself for bed, began in a changed voice, to narrate the events passing in her husband's absence. For once, I felt I had been a peace maker between man and wife; for the late complaining, shrewish Mrs Trapy spoke in accents of connubial sweetness; 'That gentleman has been here again.'

'What, Mr Curlwell?' cried Trapy.—'Well.'

'It seems, as they say in Books, quite a passion with the man. But he says he'll give anything if we can only tell him how to get the girl off.'

'And what says Patty?' asked the turnkey, by this time in bed.

At the word I trembled; for I knew they spoke of the helpless, innocent creature, then with shame and misery upon her, a captive in Newgate.

'She says she doesn't want him to meddle or make with the business,' answered the turnkey's wife.

'What, then, she doesn't buckle to him yet?' asked Trapy.

'She quite shivers and turns white when you talk of him. And for all I had her up here to tea to-night, and tried to talk reason to her, she said she'd rather die than she'd have him.'

'Well, then, she must die,' said Trapy.

'La, Mike!' cried the woman, 'you don't mean it?'

'That is, you see, we must make her believe that Mr Curlwell can get evidence enough about her—right or wrong, no matter—to hang her, if she won't have him.'

'Well, do you know, Mike, I think she'd die first,' said Mrs Trapy.

'You're a fool, wife,' answered the turnkey, 'and know nothing of natur'.—All that we have to do is to keep from her the news that Click Abram's taken.'

'And is he taken?' asked Mrs. Trapy.

'Is he taken?—Whenever I go out of Newgate, I don't go for nothing; I think I always bring my bird home with me.—Yes, we have him. 'It's a comfort to think we have him sleeping as sweet as any baby under the same roof with us.' The capture of the highwayman was plainly too high an achievement for Trapy not to put in some claim to it. 'He's sure to be hanged,' said the turnkey, yawning.

'You don't say so?' cried the turnkey's wife, slightly yawning too. 'Well, for my part, Mike—after all, you're not so bad—that is a pretty feather you've bought me—for my part, I don't think—no, I wouldn't hang nobody.'

'You wouldn't hang nobody!—You're a fool, wife, and don't know what morals is,' cried Trapy.

'Well, and now you've brought me that feather, what's the use of it?' asked Mrs Trapy, with a quick jump from death to adornment. 'Feathers is of no use in Newgate, Mike.'

'You don't think I'm always a-going to bury myself as a turnkey, do you?' asked Trapy.

'I should think not,' said his spouse.—'Suppose, now, the governor should die—'

'And what then?' asked Trapy.

'Why, you might get his place. I say you might get his place. For you can't think what civil things Alderman Ruby says of you. Then, if you was governor, I suppose I should dress a little different to what I do now?'

'Well?' cried Trapy, in a half-snore.

'And then, I suppose, we should see and be seen?'

'Well?' said the turnkey, in a fainter voice.

'And then, I suppose, we should go and dine with the lord mayor?'

'Humph!' grunted Trapy.

'And, I suppose, if we was to ask him, the lord mayor would come and dine with us?'

The turnkey was asleep.

'I say, Mike,' and Mrs Trapy plied her elbow in her husband's side—I say, suppose the lord Mayor—Mike!—you don't hear what I say?—I say suppose—'

Trapy snored deeply—most profoundly.

Mrs Trapy having fallen into a waking dream of ambition would not dismiss it. She, therefore, again moved her connubial elbow:—'I say, Trapy—my dear Trapy!—I say, suppose—'

'The turnkey jumped up in the bed, exclaiming, with most savage emphasis—'Mrs Trapy, I have to go to Tyburn to-morrow morning; and suppose you go to sleep, that you may get up time enough to mend them holes in my stockings?'

CHAPTER XXIII.

I MEET PATTY BUTLER IN NEWGATE.—THE TURNKEY'S WIFE PLEADS FOR CURLEWELL.

At the time—the good old time—I was in Newgate, there was a finer spirit of cordiality between the keepers and the kept than at the present day, lessens the gloom of that great, yet necessary, evil. The departing spirit of romance lingered about it. Fine ladies thronged the lobby to roll their liquid eyes upon the gentle highwayman; and housebreakers, though barred from liberty, were still treated like persons of distinction, indulgence being ever vendible for ready money. In those days, Bacchus and Venus were denied by the grim turnkey; but received with a frank courtesy due to their large influence on the lives of mortals. Hence, Newgate was not the stony terror of our time. Certes, it was not so clean; but then, in all the real enjoyments of life, how much much, more comfortable!—Soap is but a poor commodity, exchanged against that agreeable license which softens captivity. True, there was then the gaol-fever, that sometimes lessened the fees of the hangman; but then there was permitted ingress to all black-bottles, with no inebriational nose of a turnkey, snuffing their contents. Even then romance gilded the prison flags, and cast a bloom, a lustre on the footpad and the burglar! Then were there popping of corks and rustling of lutestring! And now is Newgate a hard, dull, dumpish reality; dull as a play-house. As if too in mockery of the glad past, the gyves of Jack Sheppard hang, nobly idle, in Newgate lobby. The imagination may yet play around them; but, alas! they are but as a satire and reproach to the poor, weak ankles to the degenerate burglar of our time to the thieving felon of present Newgate, as the Elgin Marbles to the dwarf that gaze ontipoe under them.

That Mrs Trapy should board and bed with her husband in Newgate, was a part of the indulgence vouchsafed in the old benevolent day; turnkeys are not now so blessed. Hence, I owed my introduction to the gaol, and my early meeting