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FROM THE BROAD ACRES

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FROM
THE BROAD ACRES

STORIES ILLUSTRATIVE OF
RURAL LIFE IN YORKSHIRE

BY

J. S. FLETCHER

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TO
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IN MEMORY OF VARIOUS HAPPENINGS

May 1899

Presented by Miss Mary Augusta
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THE ADVENT OF JULIA ANN

WITHOUT the lonely farmstead by the way-side a November storm of wind and rain was howling over leafless coppice and dank meadow land, and the very sound of it made the light and warmth of the cheery fire more welcome to James and John stretching their long legs towards it across the hearthrug. Each had spent the day in the open air—one in a long ride to Cornchester market and home again, the other in a turnip-field, where the sheep were plastered half-way up their sides with sticky clay. Since morning the wind had blown and the rain had fallen, and all the land was a waste of wintry weather. But now the day was over, and James and John had performed their duties like the

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stolid Englishmen they were, and had supped together in brotherly love that had long continued, and their damp clothes had been exchanged for dry; and there was naught to do but sit, each in his own easy-chair, staring at the grateful glow of the fire. It was eight o'clock, and the brothers were sleepy; but bedtime was yet an hour and a half away, and the hour and a half must be spent in nodding at each other across the hearth. James opened his half-closed eyes and looked about him. He saw the firelight gleaming on the ancient appointments of the kitchen—on the great brass warming-pan, the clock-face, the tall candlesticks on the mantelpiece, the old blunderbuss which hung on the wall. He had seen it gleam like that a thousand times—and he yawned sleepily at the sight. The yawn was audible; it roused John from his light slumbers. He looked at James and blinked his eyes. Then he glanced at the clock.

“I think we might as well hev' an odd

glass," said John apologetically. "It's not quite the usual time, but——"

"I think we might," said James. "It's been a coddish day—I feel a bit chilly i' mi bones, like."

John rose lazily and went over to a cupboard which stood in the recess behind his brother's chair. He produced therefrom a bottle of whisky, a sugar-bowl, and a lemon, and placed them on the table. James watched this proceeding with apathetic eyes, which gradually lightened as John placed the kettle on the fire and set out two glasses with spoons in them. He yawned again when the kettle poured forth a hissing cloud of steam, but when John deftly mixed two glasses of toddy and handed one of them over to him he woke up and began to take a new interest in his surroundings.

"Good health," said James.

"Good health," said John.

Then they set their glasses side by side on the hob and folded their hands over their waistcoats in peace and contentment.

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The rain dashed furiously against the windows, and a few stray drops came down the wide chimney and hissed in the red fire.

“Nice sort o’ night to be out in,” said James, laconically.

“Ay, it is so,” replied John. “It’s——

At that moment a sharp knock came at the door—a knock which was evidently intended to inform those within that the person without was in something of a hurry. James and John looked at each other wonderingly. The knock sounded again before John slowly rose to his feet and went across to the door. James’s head turned in the direction whence the sound came and his mouth slightly opened with surprise.

John opened the door with obvious reluctance. The wind dashed itself and a storm of rain in his face, causing the flame of the table-lamp to leap violently in the glass. He peered into the blackness. There, on the step, vainly trying to protect herself with an umbrella, stood a woman,

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whose rain-soaked garments were wrapped about her figure by the wind.

“Please let me come in and shelter awhile,” said the stranger, advancing on John without waiting for his permission. “I’m just about done up—I can’t go any farther till the rain’s stopped a bit.”

She was in the house by that time, and John made haste to close the door. He turned, to find James risen from his chair and staring at this strange visitor. Then John stared in his turn, for the woman had put down her umbrella and was shaking the rain from her cloak, and he saw that she was young and of an exceeding prettiness. Wet and bedraggled as she was, there was no mistaking the graciousness of her plump figure, the attraction of her frank brown eyes, the witchery of her full lips and white teeth. John and James stared hard, and John’s fingers went instinctively to his head and scratched a certain bump of which he invariably sought counsel when in doubt or perplexity.

The young woman looked up and glanced

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from one man to the other, and burst into a merry laugh.

"Well, if it isn't a wet one!" she said. "I've walked all the way from Sicaster Station, but I've had enough. And it's such a lonely road. I haven't seen a light for I don't know how long till I saw yours."

"Ay, it's a bit lonely like," said James.

"A bit lonely like," said John.

Then they looked at each other, and each man scratched his head. A brilliant idea was much needed; it came to James first.

"Come near the fire," he said suddenly. "It's a main good 'un; it'll dry your clothes like."

John felt somewhat aggrieved; he had wished to be first with a suggestion. His eyes wandered about the room, and suddenly fell on the whisky-bottle; he was conscious on the instant of another and happier thought than James's.

"An' tak' a sup o' whisky wi' hot water and sugar," said he hospitably. "It's a rare good thing for keepin' t' cold out."

The young woman laughed, and drew

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nearer the fire, looking at the entertainment set forth on the table with not unfriendly eyes.

"You're very kind," she said. "I don't mind if I do, as the sayin' goes. Not too much of the spirit, please, and two lumps o' sugar. Thank you. Here's my best respects, and I'm much obliged."

"Don't mention it," said James. He shook his head, remembering his own dreary ride from Cornchester. "It's a poor night for travellers," he added.

"Ay," said the young woman. "How far might it be yet for King's Painton?"

"Matter o' nigh on to three miles," answered James.

"An' a bit over," said John.

"Well, a goodish three," said James.

"Dear, dear!" sighed the stranger. "That's a long way off in such a downpour as this. An' I've walked all the way from Sicaster already."

"That's near five mile," said John.

Then there was silence. The young woman sat near the stove and occasionally

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sipped at the contents of her glass; James and John watched her furtively, and now and then tipped their noses in their own glasses.

"Yes, I'm going to see a relative o' mine," said the stranger at last. "Name o' Ann Hepburn—widow woman, living at King's Painton. Happen you'll know her?"

James looked at John; John looked at James; James took down a churchwarden pipe from the mantelpiece, and filled it with grave solemnity.

"Near relation o' yours?" he said, questioningly, between the first puffs of smoke.

"Why, not so near—sort of first cousin to my father, or summat o' that."

"Humph!" said James. "But she's dead."

"Nay, not dead, surely?"

"Dead—died t' last Easter," answered James.

"Ay—she's dead," added John.

The young woman seemed in no wise surprised. She looked from one brother

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to the other, and then took another sip at the whisky-and-water.

"Well," she said, "it is a lick'er how awk'ard some things does turn out! Here I've travelled right away out o' t' East Riding to see her, and I'd aimed at stoppin' a bit wi' her, an' all. However, if she's dead, why, she's dead, an' there's an end on't."

"Ay, for sure," said James.

"But it's awk'ard, for all that," said the young woman. "I'd no idea she was dead, or else I shouldn't ha' come. You see, my father's married again, and me and my step-mother doesn't hit it off very well, and so I thought I'd come away from home a bit, like, and so I naturally thought o' Ann Hepburn. I shall be in rather a fix for a night's lodgin' too," she added.

John took down another pipe, and joined James in worshipping the blessed Saint. The situation was rapidly becoming embarrassing, and the brothers recognised it vaguely.

"I've money to pay for a lodging," said

the girl, looking round her with eyes that seemed to see nothing. "Happen——"

"I'm afeard there's nowt no nearer than Darthington," said James, hastily.

"No, nowt nearer nor that," said John, with equal haste.

The girl stared.

"Why, that's the village I came through on the way from Sicaster," she said.

"Ay, it is," replied James.

"And it's a good mile back on the road," she continued, with a certain amount of ruefulness.

Neither James nor John made answer to this remark, and a period of silence ensued, which was finally broken by the young woman remarking :

"My name's Julia Ann Twibey. John Twibey, my father, used to work about these parts at one time."

"I recollect him," said James, nodding his head gravely. "'A wor shepherd to owd George Robey at one time, as you say."

"I thought somebody 'ud remember

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him," said Julia Ann, with a palpable thankfulness. "It's a poor job to be wi'out a night's lodgings in such weather as this. So happen——"

James leaned forward and knocked the ashes out of his pipe. He turned slowly towards John, and an appealing look passed between them. Then John spoke—diffidently, but with an unmistakable firmness :

"We'm lone men," said John. "We've no *women* folk about t' place. Ther's just me an' James there—ever sin' mi mother died we've never had a woman to *live* i' t' house : we hev' one 'at comes to clean up for us, like, every day. And so we're all alone, an'——"

"Mercy on us!" said Julia Ann. "I thowt 'at happen your mother, or your sister, or your wife wor in t' back kitchen. Eh, dear—an' I've made myself soä free!"

"Now, there's no harm done," said James. "But there it is—we hev'n't a woman about t' place. Or else we'd ha'

offered hospitality, as they call it—what, John?”

“Ay, for sure!” said John, heartily; “we wo’d.”

After a short silence, bursting with embarrassment, Julia Ann said :

“Well, I must away back to t’ public-house at Darthington and see if I can’t get lodgings for t’ night.”

“I’ll go wi’ you,” said James. “It’s noan fit for a woman to be out at this time o’ night by herself.”

“Oh, I couldn’t think of it,” said Julia Ann. “It seems such a shame to drag you out when you’re so comfortable by the fire.”

“Nowt o’ t’ sort—nowt o’ t’ sort,” declared James.

“And you’ll have to come back all that way alone,” said Julia Ann.

“Why, I wor just thinkin’ I’d go an’ all,” said John, sheepishly. “It *is* lonely along t’ road at nights.”

James and Julia Ann received this offer in silence; it seemed to John that neither

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of them was impressed by his generosity. "I don't know 'at there's any 'casion for both on us to go out," said James. "You'd best stay at home and keep t' fire in."

"I'll bank it up," answered John. "It'll keep in for an hour or two," and he put a shovelful of slack coal on the glowing embers. This proceeding determined the next event, and both brothers attired themselves in great coats and prepared to escort Julia Ann Twibey to the shelter of the inn at Darthington.

"Eh, but it does seem a shame to take two gentlemen out at this time o' night!" said Julia Ann. "I feel right concerned about it. If you should happen to catch cold and die!"

James and John sighed in company. The prospect was not cheerful, but they plodded bravely forward along the sloppy roads until they saw the lights of the inn. Then they shook hands awkwardly with Julia Ann and returned homeward.

"She wor a fine-looking lass, yon," said

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James, after John had mixed a second glass of toddy.

"Ay, she wor," said John, thoughtfully. "A rare fine 'un. I don't know 'at I ever seed a finer," he added.

After that the brothers retired to bed, and for some days neither of them mentioned Julia Ann. But on the fourth day it chanced that John was busied with his sheep in a turnip-field adjacent to the village, and it suddenly occurred to him that he might walk up to the King George and make furtive inquiry as to the stranger. Thither, then, he bent his steps, and as he came abreast of the open door he saw James descending the hill from Sicaster, and evidently bent on calling at the inn. John paused, and the brothers met in the middle of the cross-roads.

"Now, then?" said John.

"Now, then?" said James.

"What art doin' here, like?" inquired John, curiously.

"Nay," answered James, with a certain amount of apology, "I wor comin' this

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way fro' t' auction, an' I thowt 'at I'd just call in at t' King George and hev' a glass, like. What art *thou* doin' here?"

"I wor i' t' turnip-field, and I thowt I'd hev' a glass an' all," replied John. "It's rather a drouthy sort o' day. Well, we mun as well go in an' hev' a glass together. What?"

James got down from his horse, and tied the reins to the ring in the wall with much deliberation. He turned to his brother, and John perceived much gravity in the look thus bestowed upon him.

"I could like to hev' a word i' private wi' you," said James. "Let's walk up t' road a piece."

The two brothers walked away from the inn together, but it was not until they had reached the end of the apple orchard bordering the road that James spoke. He stared hard at the bare trees, and it seemed to John that speech came difficult to him.

"I've been thinkin'," said James, "'at it's time I wor wed."

"I've been thinkin' t' same thing," said John. Then he added hastily—"I mean 'at I wor gettin' wed."

Then there was a dead silence, which continued for some minutes. At last—

"Hev' you—hev' you gotten any partic'lar female i' yo'r mind?" inquired John, with a great effort.

"I hev'," answered James. "Hev' you?"

"I hev'," said John, after which there was a still longer silence. Then—

"And who might you be thinkin' on?" inquired James.

"I wor thinkin'," answered John, very solemnly; "I wor thinkin' o' Julia Ann Twibey. Who might you hev' i' *your* mind?"

"Julia Ann Twibey," said James.

They now paused, and stood in the middle of the road staring at each other. Here was, indeed, such a deadlock as they had never imagined.

"What mun we do?" said James. "Both on us can't wed her."

"I'm t' owdest," said John.

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"That's nowt," said James. "I'm t' biggest."

"I spok' to her t' first," said John.

"Shoo shak'd hands wi' me t' last," said James.

A longer silence followed upon this. Both men breathed hard; the eyes of each sought anything rather than the other's face.

"I don't want to have no unpleasantness," said James; "but I aim at weddin' wi' Julia Ann. I'm bahn to t' inn to fin' out her direction, and then I shall go see her."

"That's what I come for, too," said John. "I've as much reight as thee! An it wor me 'at opened t' door to her, an' all."

"Shoo consaited herself wi' me t' best," affirmed James. "I'm a head and shoulders bigger nor thee, and t' wimmen likes a proper man."

"Niver thee mind," said John. "I can stan' up to thee onny time, and I'll feight thee for Julia Ann just now if thou likes! Shoo wodn't niver ha' cum into t' house if I hedn't opened t' door!"

B

James stared hard at his brother.

"I'm noan fain' o' feighting thi," he said. "I wodn't like to hurt thee, John, but if thou hits me I shall knock t' stuffin' out on thi—so theer!"

"Well, thee hit me!" said John, invitingly. He began to dance round his brother in irregular circles. "Thee hit me! Hit me! Hit me!"

"Nay, thee hit me!" said James. "Now, hit me—nobbut hit me!"

At that moment Robert the Mouldy-warp Catcher came out of the inn and walked along the road. John and James caught sight of him and behaved themselves. Robert was laughing heartily. When he came up to them he leaned against the fence and chuckled until his fat sides shook.

"Eh, dear, eh, dear!" he said. "There's no foil like an' owd foil! Ye know owd Dick 'at keeps t' King George? He's sixty year owd at t' least, an' he's been a widdy'er this ten year—shoo wor a decent owd lass wor his missis—shoo's gi'en me

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many a pint o' ale —an' what do ye think t' owd foil's bahn to dew? Theer wor a lass come there for lodgin's t' other neet, and owd Dick wor ta'en by her good looks, and he axed her to stop on for t' barmaid, and shoo'd nowt to do, so shoo did. An' now—eh, dear!—he's axed her to wed him, an' they're bahn to be married as sooin as t' parson can get 'em axed to 't church. Jewlia Ann they call her—eh, dear, dear!”

John and James walked slowly down the road to the inn. James untied his horse and rode homeward. When John arrived there the dinner was all ready, and two foaming pints of ale stood by each cover. They sat down and fell to.

“I've no opinion o' wimmen,” said James, with a mouth full of boiled beef and carrots.

“Nor me, ayther,” said John. He took a deep pull at his pint. “But shoo's a rare fine made un, is Julia Ann,” he added, somewhat regretfully.

THE MAN FROM BALLYKIPPAS

TERENCE SWEENEY walked along the plain monotony of the English highway with a fine scorn of the dust that had gathered on the cart track in its middle and on the broad stretches of turf at the sides. It was a blazing hot July afternoon, and he had tasted nothing but water since morning; for what is there in the way of entertainment for either man or beast between Cornchester and Sicaster save the Fox and Hounds, which stands too far from the former and too near the latter? And Terry was still miles from the Fox and Hounds, and within his ken there was neither village nor farmstead to be seen. It seemed to him that he had come into as strange a land as ever man heard of, for

he had now walked what he vainly imagined to be several miles, and had seen no more sign of human habitation than an occasional farmstead or cottage by the wayside. Had he but known it, there were villages and hamlets all along the way, concealed from him by thick belts of trees, where he might have assuaged his thirst and inquired for the work which he was truly desirous of finding. But Terry was a stranger in the land of the Saxon, and knew naught of this particular district, and so he trudged on, kicking up the white dust, and now and then changing his bundle and the cudgel which supported it from the left shoulder to the right, just by way of relief.

“Faith!” said Terry to himself for the hundredth time, “’tis a strange counthry this where a man may walk six mile on end and niver wet his lips! Av it was the wildest bog land in Galway it couldn’t be lonelier thravellin’.”

But there the road took a sharp turn and a sudden dip, and he found himself

gazing on a tiny hamlet, where the houses clustered about a little bridge which spanned a narrow brown-hued stream. Terry stood and looked, and counted two farmsteads, a dozen cottages, a blacksmith's shop, and a general repository of sweetstuff and small groceries. But he sought in vain for any sign of a public-house ; and at that he scratched his head, and turned with a sigh to the nearest of the two farmsteads, a great, rambling house whose gable overhung the highway. There was a little door in the ivy-covered wall. He pushed it open, and thrust an inquisitive head into the garden.

It was a rare picture that Terence Sweeny thus set eyes on. In the middle of as quaint a garden as a man might find in a long day's march sat a girl, whose light dress made a show of bright colour against the glossy green of the trees and shrubs. She was half curled up on a rustic seat at the foot of an ancient yew, and by her side stood a basket in which she had evidently carried vegetables from the

kitchen garden. Just then, however, she had forgotten the vegetables and their destiny, for she was so deep in a book that she paid no attention to the sound of the latch falling behind the Irishman's entrance. Terry stood wide-mouthed, gazing at her. There was a glint of red gold in her hair, the lashes of her downcast eyes were thick and silky, a delicately-rounded chin was half sunk in the billowy muslin that draped her ripe bosom. One hand, shapely and strong, hung over the arm of the rustic seat.

Terry ventured on an apologetic cough, and scraped one dusty foot on the gravel of the side-walk. The girl looked up—oh! but her eyes were blue as the lift of heaven itself! The old, ineradicable Celtic admiration leaped fierce and strong in the harvester's breast, and he pulled off his ragged cap like the gentleman he was. The girl stared at the action and rose instinctively to her feet. Terry uttered the customary formula.

"God save ye kindly, miss," said he.

"Is the masher wantin' any hands for the harvestin', plase?"

For a moment she looked at this intrusive figure with a vague sense of inquisitive wonder. The man was in rags—picturesque rags, no doubt, but rags for all that. He was stained with dust, and he looked as if he had slept under a haystack or in the hedge-bottom all night. But he was a beautiful man: he stood straight and strong, and his eyes had a gleam of honest fun in them, and the brown gold of his moustache and beard was soft and silky as the curls on a baby's head. And he had taken off his cap—his ridiculous old cap—just as a nobleman would, she thought; and because of all these things she looked at him again, and again, and then again.

"I don't know," she said at last. "But I'll ask him." She went across the garden and disappeared within the low hall of the house. As her light feet tapped on the stone flags a voice came shrilly from some farther region:

"Kitty! Kitty! Don't you know we're waiting for those vegetable? Be quick!"

"Oh, bother—in a minute!" cried Kitty. She burst into a little parlour and discovered old Dick Joyce reading the newspaper over his tankard of ale. Old Dick looked up. The girl seized him by the lapels of his coat and shook him playfully.

"Dad! There's the most lovely Irishman in the garden—all rags and dust and things—'wantin' worruk,' as they call it—and you've got to come out and hire him just now! Come!"

"Don't want any Irishmen," growled old Dick. "Tell him to go away at once."

"Now, dad, and you said at breakfast that you wanted another hand!"

"I've hired Tom Beckett since then, lass."

Kitty frowned.

"I don't care," she said. "You've got to hire this man—he's a beauty. Come along, father!"

"Humph!" said old Dick. "I don't want him."

"But, father, he's walked ever so far——"

"Let 'un walk farther."

"Father! And he's thirsty——"

"Gi' 'un a pint o' beer, then."

"Now, father, come out and hire him; and then I'll give you a kiss. Father—father!"

"Lor' bless the gel!" said old Dick, lifting himself out of the chair. "But what mun I do wi' him?" he asked, in ludicrous doubt.

"Oh—tell him to look round him; he can do something or other," said Kitty, and drew him, grumbling and groaning, to the garden door. "See, there he is, dad. Look at his golden hair sticking out of the holes in his cap!"

Old Dick looked and frowned.

"Now, my lad," he said. "Wantin' a job, eh?"

"Av ye plase, sor," answered Terry.

"Humph!" said old Dick. "We'm pretty full-handed, but——"

So old Dick got his promised kiss, and Terry Sweeny went round to the farm buildings to take up his quarters in the hayloft and start on his labours for the harvest month. That evening he borrowed needle and thread from the dairymaid, and occupied himself until dusk in mending his rags and tatters. Kitty saw him thus engaged and talked to the dairymaid about it. There was something in Terry's picturesqueness that appealed to her: she was not sure that she did not like him best in his rags.

Terry, on his part, duly questioned the dairymaid as to the young missis. Thus he discovered that she was the only child and that everybody worshipped and gave way to her, and he joined the devotees and prepared to exceed them in fervour and worship. And indeed, there was good reason why he should be thus converted, for Kitty Joyce was undoubtedly the finest girl in the wapentake, and went about her small world with a gracious ease and abandon that would have melted the heart of an