

Literature, &c.

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THE WAGS.

THEIR subsequent task was to take counsel together; but that was a work requiring more of calmness than they possessed for the first few days. However, by degrees, as time rolled on, the industrious couple made their arrangements, and at the end of six months, Mr Wag had so increased his business, that it became advisable for him to have recourse to his London bankers. In the meanwhile, he had sent his son Tom and the three eldest girls to school, agreeable to the intimation of his unknown friend, which he considered as a command that he was in duty bound to comply with. Still it appeared very extraordinary that the little elderly gentleman neither communicated with nor came to see them; but, as the whole affair was out of the common way, Jeremiah resolved industriously to avail himself of the advantages of his new position, as the best means of testifying his gratitude, during his benefactor's absence.

Much marvelling, there was of course, in town and neighbourhood at the steady increase in Mr Wag's 'concern,' in spite of his very plain statement that a kind friend had advanced him a considerable sum.

'Who could that friend be?' was the puzzling question which no one could answer; but his unremitting attention to business, the punctuality of his payments, and other evidences of his prosperity, sufficed to ensure him general respect, though certain envious bodies would venture now and then to hint significantly that 'all is not gold that glitters.'

So matters went on pleasantly with the Wags till winter, when Tom and his three sisters came home for the holidays, and the latter assisted their mother in preparing for the festivities of the season.

It was Christmas eve, and the whole of the family were congregated in the little back parlor, when young Jerry started up at the well-known sound of a customer at the shop door, at which he arrived with a hop, step, and jump; and, jerking it open, beheld a little old gentleman wrapped in a large cloak.

'Please to walk in, sir,' said Jerry Wag.

'Hush!' whispered the stranger, placing his fore finger on his mouth, 'I want to surprise them. You're all together to-night, I suppose?'

'Yes, sir,' replied Jerry, smiling, for he thought he knew to whom he was speaking.

'That's right,' said the odd elderly gentleman, advancing cautiously toward the darkest part of the shop, and throwing off his cloak. 'Now for a Christmas frolic! Come here, you rogue. Why, you've grown taller than me. That's right, a thriving Wag! Now, mind you go back as if nothing had happened, and give me hold of your coat tail, so that I can't be seen. That'll do. No laughing, young monkey. There, step along.'

Jerry did as he was bid, save that, though he bit his lips unmercifully, his risible muscles would not remain inactive, and thus the oddly joined pair made their way into the family apartment just as the eldest daughter had exclaimed, 'Now, mamma, it's your turn to wish!'

They were sitting in a semicircle before the fire, and the stranger and his shield, of course, stood behind them.

'Heigho!' said Mrs Wag, 'there's only one thing I wish for to-night, and that is the addition of one more to our party.'

'Name, name. You must name your wish,' cried three or four juvenile voices in full glee.

'I wish I could tell you his name,' said Mrs Wag, 'but your father knows who I mean. Don't you, my dear?'

'I can't mistake you, my love,' replied Jeremiah, affectionately, 'and I wish he could see how happy we are. It would do his heart good, I really think.'

'Who can he be?' exclaimed the eldest daughter.

'Perhaps it's somebody like me,' cried the little odd gentleman, stepping briskly forward.

'It is, it is,' shrieked mamma, and up jumped the whole party, and down went Mrs. Wag upon her knees, while, utterly unconscious of what she did, her arms were clasped round the neck of her benefactor, whose bodily frame, being unable to sustain her matronly weight, gave way, and so they rolled together on the floor.

'Ha, ha, ha!' laughed the eccentric elderly gentleman, as soon as he recover-

ed breath, but without attempting to rise. 'This is a Christmas gambol, eh! Master Wag? Eh, my merry little Wags? Needn't ask you all how you are.'

'My dear sir,' exclaimed Jeremiah, 'allow me to assist you. I hope you are not hurt.'

'Hurt!' cried the little gentleman, jumping up and offering his hand to Mrs Wag. 'Hurt. Why, I feel myself twenty years younger than I did five minutes ago. Never mind, ma'am. Like Christmas gambols. Always did. Happen to have such a thing as a bunch of misletoe, eh?'

'I am sure, sir,' whimpered Mrs Wag. 'I am sure I shall never forgive myself. To think of taking such a liberty; I—I—can't conceive how I could!'

'As often as ever you please, my good lady,' said the eccentric, handing her to a chair; 'but sit down and compose yourself, while I shake hands all round;' and, turning toward Jeremiah, he commenced the ceremony, which he went through with from the eldest to the youngest, calling them all by their names, as correctly as though he were a constant visitor.

A right merry Christmas eve was that. The young Wags were ever and anon, obliged to hold their sides, as they laughed and screamed with delight at the funny stories told by the little old gentleman, who romped and played with them with as much glee as though he had been the youngest of the party. So the hours passed quickly away until the unwelcome sound of 'bed time' was whispered among the little circle; and then one after another departed, until Mr and Mrs Wag were left alone with their honoured guest.

The hearts of both were full, and they began to endeavour to express their feelings; but the singular old gentleman stopped them by saying—'Needn't tell me. Know it all. Shall run away if you go on so. Remember, I told you I had more of the 'ready' than I knew what to do with. Couldn't have done better with it, eh? Out at interest now. Best sort of interest, too. More pleasure this evening than receiving dividends, eh? Never was happier. So come, let us wind up for the night. I've a memorandum or two for you in my pocket book, and he placed it on the table, and began to turn over divers papers, as he continued—'Hem, ha, yes. Those two. You had better take them, my good sir. They'll admit William and Stephen to Christ Church—what they call blue coat school—Capital school eh?'

'My dear sir,' exclaimed Jeremiah.

'Don't interrupt me, that's a good fellow,' said the little old gentleman.

'Hem. Do you ever smoke a pipe?'

'Very rarely,' replied the wondering Mr Wag.

'Well,' continued his guest, 'take that paper to light your next with. Put it in your pocket, and don't look at it till I'm gone. Hem, Tom's master says he will make a good scholar; if so, if you have no objection, I was thinking he might as well go to college in a year or two. Not in your way, perhaps. Never mind. I know some of the big wigs. See all right, and enter his name. Should have one parson in a large family eh?'

Here Mrs Wag could no longer refrain from giving vent to her overcharged feelings by certain incoherent ejaculations, which terminated in a flood of tears.

'Humph,' said the old gentleman, 'my spectacles want wiping; and he took the opportunity of wiping them and blowing his nose, while Jeremiah was comforting the wife of his bosom, and telling her not to be so foolish, although he could hardly avoid snivelling himself.

'Hem, ahem,' resumed their guest, 'think I've got some of the mince pie sticking in my throat. Stupid old fellow to eat so much, eh?'

'Better take another glass of wine, sir,' said Jeremiah. 'Give me leave, sir, to pour it out.'

'No, no,' exclaimed Mrs Wag, starting up and smiling, through her tears, 'let me. Nobody else. God bless you, sir.'

'And you, too!' ejaculated the old gentleman, gayly; 'come, that's a challenge! Glasses round! Glasses round! and then we must say, good night. Don't let us make a dull end of a merry evening.'

Warm benedictions were forthwith uttered, and the 'compliments of the season' were wished, with more than common sincerity, by all three, as their glasses met jingling together. Then the whimsical guest tossed off his wine, jumped up, shook his hosts heartily by the hand, wished them good-night, and sallied into the shop to find his cloak.

Mr and Mrs Wag followed, and expressed a hope that he would honor their Christmas dinner by his presence on the following day; but all they could draw from him was—'Can't promise. Ate and drank a little too much to-night, perhaps. Getting shockingly old. See how I am in the morning. Enjoyed myself this evening. A jolly set of Wags altogether! Merry Wags all, eh? Young and old. Well, well, wag along happily, my dear Mr and Mrs Wag. Good-night!' and after once more shaking hands with them, he nimbly whisked himself out at the shop-door, and trotted across to the King's Arms.

No sooner were the worthy couple alone, than curiosity led them to examine the piece of paper which their benefactor had presented to Jeremiah for the purpose of lighting his pipe; and it proved to be the promissory note which the latter had signed for the first thousand pounds. The donor's intention was plain enough, as it was regularly cancelled, so Mrs Wag was obliged to use her pocket handkerchief once more, and her spouse, after striding rapidly three or four times across the room, felt himself under the necessity of taking out his, and blowing his nose with unusual vehemence. They then congratulated and comforted each other, and said their prayers, and offered up their thanksgivings with a fervour and sincerity that proved they were not unworthy of their good fortune. They then retired to rest, though not immediately to sleep, for they were each beset with strange waking dreams, and beheld in their minds' eye a black clerical Wag, two long coated little blue Wags, with yellow nether vestments, and other Wags of sorted sizes, but all very happy.

On the following morning, being Christmas day, our fortunate shopkeeper equipped himself in his best apparel, and before breakfast, stepped across the road and found Mr Titus Twist rubbing his eyes in his own gateway. Mutual salutations, and compliments of the season, were exchanged in good neighbourly style, and then mine host exclaimed, 'There's a box here for you Master Wag, left by that queer little old gentleman. I'm sure he's cracked, in he comes here yesterday, just after dark, posting in his own carriage. Well, he orders up any thing as we happen to have ready, and I sets him down to as good a dinner as ever any gentleman need sit down to, because I say it, though you see, our larder is pretty well stocked at this season. So down he sits, rubbing his hands, and seeming as pleased as Punch, and orders a bottle of wine, but before he'd been ten minutes at table, up he jumps, claps on his hat and cloak, and runs smack out of the house, and never comes back again till past eleven at night, when he pays his bill, and orders horses for six o'clock this morning.'

'Is he gone, then?' exclaimed Jeremiah.

'Off, sure enough,' replied Titus; 'but he's left a great box for you, which I was just going to send over. So, I suppose, you and he have some dealings together.'

'Yes,' said Mr Wag, 'I shall have cause to bless and thank him the latest day I have to live; but I wish he had stopped here to-day. Well, God bless him, wherever he is gone. Hark ye neighbor—you have often heard me speak of having a friend—well, that's him. I don't know why, but he's taken a fancy to me and my wife and family, and has done for us more than you'd believe, if I was to tell you. However, we can chat that over another day, as I can't stop now, as Mrs. Wag and children are waiting breakfast. But, where's the box? I'll take it with me, if you please.'

'If two of the strongest fellows in my yard can take it over, it's as much as they can,' replied Titus. 'However, they shall try; and I hope you'll come over this afternoon and crack a bottle of my best to drink the little queer old gentleman's health. But mind me, he's cracked to a certainty, and you'll find it out some of these days.'

The box was accordingly delivered, and, on being opened, was found to contain twelve separate packages, each directed for one member of the Wag family the largest for Jeremiah, the father, and the smallest for little Philip, a 'rising three' year old Wag. Their contents were far too various for precise specification, but could not have been more judiciously appropriated nor more gratefully received, so that Christmas day was a day of rejoicing; and the only regret felt by one and all the Wags was, that their very kind friend had not stayed to spend it with them.

When the festive season was over, matters went on as usual with Jeremiah, save that perhaps there was more of cheerfulness in his manner while pursu-

ing his course of steady industry. The fact was, that he was now never perplexed about money affairs, which were wont formerly to occupy much of his time by day, and cause him many sleepless hours by night. Those who called for payment, were as welcome as those who called to pay, and consequently his credit stood high; and the travellers and London houses strove, by tempting bargains and peculiar attention in selecting the best articles, to complete his kind orders, to keep his name upon their books. So he went on and prospered in all his undertakings, and in the course thereof visited the metropolis to make purchases, and when there, called upon Mr Goodfellow, who gave him a hearty welcome, but could not be persuaded to reveal the name of his eccentric client, though he scrupled not to say he was in good health, adding, with a smile, 'and in perfect possession of his intellects.'

Jeremiah next endeavoured to work the secret from his bankers, but with no better success. The partner who received him, assured him that the steady increase and respectability of his accounts had wrought such an impression in a quarter which he was not permitted to name, that their house would feel much pleasure in making advances, whenever any thing advantageous offered itself for purchase.

'It is wonderful,' exclaimed Jeremiah.

'A good character, my dear sir,' observed the banker, 'is everything in trade. We are dealers in money; and nothing pleases us more than placing it where it is safe, and have every reason to suppose it may be useful.'

'But,' observed Jeremiah, 'you know nothing about me.'

'I beg your pardon, Mr. Wag,' said the banker; 'you are what we call a good man, and have got a back.'

'A back!' exclaimed the bewildered shopkeeper.

'Yes,' said the banker, smiling, 'that is a good friend to your back; and though he choose to keep himself in the background, depend upon it he'll not forsake you so long as you go on as you have done. Therefore, buy away for ready cash as largely as you please, and we'll honor your drafts.'

On this hint Jeremiah subsequently acted, by making purchases which enabled him to serve his customers on terms that defied all competition. Therefore, and by dint of strict attention and civility, his trade continued to increase, till he was obliged to add warehouses to his shop, and employ a regular clerk and collector, besides shopmen, porters, and waggoner.

In the meanwhile young Tom studied Latin and Greek with a neighbouring curate; William and Stephen were, of due course, admitted into the Blue-coat School, and the education of the other children went on precisely as had been recommended by their eccentric benefactor, whose advice Mr and Mrs Wag considered equivalent to commands.

Still they were often uneasy about him, and more particularly after another Christmas eve had passed without his appearance. Poor Mrs Wag was sure he was ill, and would occasionally charge him with unkindness for not letting her know, that she might go and nurse him. But again months and months rolled away, and at last autumn arrived, and with it brought the grand denouement of the mystery, as sudden and unexpectedly as their former good luck.

All the Wags who were at home were sitting round a tea table, in the little parlor at the back of the house, and Mr Wag was sedately filling their cups, when one of the younger children exclaimed—

'Who's that?'

Jeremiah looked round to where the child was gazing, and beheld his benefactor stealthily approaching from the back door, with an arch smile on his countenance as though wishing to take them by surprise; but perceiving that he was discovered, he stepped nimbly forward, according to his usual custom, holding out his hand, said, 'Well, my dear Wag, how are you? How are you, my dear Mrs Wag? and how are you, young Jerry Wag, Mary Wag, Sarah Wag, Henry Wag, and Philip Wag?'

All expressed their delight at his appearance, according to their different ages and abilities, but all were evidently delighted, and none more than the strange little gentleman himself, whose eyes sparkled with gratification as he took his seat, looked round at the joyous group, and begged to join their family party. Mrs Wag felt somewhat treacherous at first, and doubtless her visitors perceived it, as he turned his attention to the little Wags till she had finished her table arrangements and presented him with a cup of tea.