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# BARRACLOUGH'S

By S. R. CROCKETT

**U**NDoubtedly Anne Barracough had her griefs. She lived in a hovel which no other in Creelport would condescend to inhabit. It was set far back against the cliff, a dry and crumbly limestone, with cracks in it which opened mysteriously at night and shut during the day equally without reason.

But Anne Barracough had other sorrows—a son and a husband. Sam, the son, had early despised authority, run with the wild lads from the mills, played tricks with his master's till, narrowly escaped the jail, and, as the saying went, would have broken his mother's heart, but for the trifling circumstance that that had been broken before—by her husband, Bob Barracough—poacher, pugilist, breeder of bull pups, pigeon flier and fencer, and, in fact, everything except what he had been brought up to be, the sober, hard-working mason his father had been before him.

Nevertheless Robert Barracough was still a landlord. His property was, however, confined to the small ex-stable, which a misdirected indignity had converted into a shebeen and unlicensed lodging-house for tramps and other free-living gentlemen of undefined professions who objected to being looked up at four in the morning by the police in the regular lodgings of Creelport.

Anne Barracough was a hard-featured, wizened woman with a head that seemed always drawn a little back as if to escape a blow. And indeed Bob, her husband, let her know, so he said, "what was the law of England in the matter of wives," when he came home after being turned out of the "Blue Posts" or the "Anchor" for quarrelsomeness in his cups.

He beat her if he found guests drinking with Anne in their slovenly barrack. Why should she be sitting there and enjoying life while he had been turned out of two public-houses into the raw night air—and him with such a delicate chest. He beat her equally if there were no guests in the shebeen, and, by consequence, no money to furnish him out with on the following morning. Anne was idle, good-for-nothing, lazy, untruthful, and, worse than all, she had money on the quiet, which she was keeping from her lawful husband. She was making a purse for herself. For all which reasons, Anne Barracough must be corrected. And when Bob Barracough was incapacitated for the performance of the duty, his son Sam kindly undertook it for him.

Yes, her own son. And him she feared most. For he was more often sober. He was the more cruel, and Anne went in terror lest she should one day reveal her secret hiding-place.

Yes, it was all true. Anne Barracough at fifty was deceitful, idle, hopeless for herself, and also—she had money, which, with a great unfeigning, she was keeping away from her loving relatives—from Bob, her husband, who beat her, and from Sam, her son, who aided and abetted his father so to do.

Anne Barracough did not drink. She could not afford it. She would have liked dearly to drown her sorrows, and she had many bottles of a certain cheap Water of Lethe, miscalled "whisky," stored away at the back of the old stable under the crumbly limestone. But all that was to sell, drop by drop, glass by glass, counted and reckoned—so many pieces of brown money, so many small silver bits—some to be beaten out of her by Bob, some to be yielded to Sam to keep him quiet and decently incapable of observation. But most—especially the silver ones—little and white and jingly, were to be hid away in another place—for another purpose.

What purpose? Ah, but that was Anne Barracough's secret. Nearly all the world—that is to say all Creelport—looked askance on Anne. The Barracoughs were the worst people in its worst district.

"Down in Little Dublin," was the standing direction to their neighbourhood, "as far down as you can, and the

farther down the street you go the tougher it gets. The Barracoughs live in the last house."

After it happened all Creelport remarked that they had always known it of Anne Barracough.

"She has the look of a murderess!" they said, as usual, exceeding wise after the event.

"She looks secret!" the jurymen whispered in the court when they condemned her, and old Bowfly, of the "Blue Posts," who had lost a steady customer in the deceased, voted steadily against any recommendation to mercy.

But this was going too fast. It was the revealing of Anne Barracough's secret which led to the tragedy, and so that must come first.

Yet it was no dark and deadly secret after all. Only that, long before the day of Bob Barracough, Anne, his wife, had once been young and happy. He had loved her—he had told her how much along by the harbour wall, at the place where there are the fewest lights, and after they were married he had taken her to live away in the great seaport to which from the deserted pier of Creelport, they could see the vessels passing up channel in a long procession.

Then he had died—died far away from her, and when his mate called in to tell her of it, and asked if she wanted his chest sent—there was a little baby girl asleep in a borrowed cradle.

These things Bob Barracough never knew, and Anne, his wife, was afraid that he would find out. That was her secret.

But up yonder in Doggermouth there was a slim girlish pupil-teacher who was to enter the Normal College in November, and people wondered how a mere suburban lodging-house keeper, depending on the poorer class of summer visitors, could afford such an extravagance.

"It was a folly of Mrs. Smith's," the neighbours said over their neighbourly tea. But then Widow Smith had always been foolish about that girl. They hoped that the money was honestly come by, that was all.

And Lily Smith going to and fro every day—morning at nine, afternoon at ten minutes past four—to the Doggermouth Public School—also thought it was very kind of Aunt Smith, the only relative she had ever known. So, indeed it was, for though Anne Barracough's secret was safe behind Widow Smith's mended spectacles that good old woman added many little luxuries according to her means, and perhaps a little beyond—to the monthly remittance which came so regularly from the Creelport post-office.

Now Lily Smith was not by any means an ordinary sweet, pretty young woman. She had a mind of her own, as her father had when he took to running arms and ammunition to the Revolutionists in Cuba and died of it with his back to a wall. Just a little brown-skin red thing, with a capable mouth, a firm chin, and dark grey eyes which glittered quietly under long lashes whenever the Head Mistress, Miss Priscilla Fisher, rebuked her for what was noways her fault.

Having once or twice encountered this stately and most arresting look, certain young men pupil-teachers, arrogant and over well-informed young men, to whom all knowledge was an open book, very discreetly left her alone.

"That Lily Smith," said Ernest Towers, savagely, as he experimented gingerly with his first cigar, "has no more feeling than a cat!"

He was wrong, but it was as well for him that he did not perceive so as to find out. But all that the world saw of Miss Lily Smith was only a trim, grey-gowned, brown-checked maiden,—(gripping like a mouse daintily along the doubtful cleanliness of the Doggermouth pavements, half-a-dozen pupils of doubtful cleanliness tagging about her skirts.

Only a Science Master, recently appointed to the new secondary school over the way, took very much notice of her, and he merely from a window. She had a sweet smile and he liked the

quick way she had of smacking the little urethras when they muddled her dove-grey dress. This always made him laugh, and as there was not much to laugh at in Doggermouth, Mr Henry Hurst, B.Sc., was grateful, and at ten minutes to nine and ten minutes after four each day, he was sure to be at his window, carefully examining a test tube.

Curiously enough, in order rightly to manipulate a test tube, it is necessary to arrange one's hair before a mirror, and to make certain of a cunning little upward crook of the moustache upon which Mr Henry Hurst prided himself as upon a scientific discovery. The left side pleased him best, and so he always held the test tube sideways to the light, as he examined it carefully, in approved laboratory fashion.

He thought that little brown Miss Lily was quite unconscious of all this, and so most people would have thought too. Yet she noticed him the very first time, remarked the device of the test tube the second, and the third she kept her head down and muttered "impudence," as she walked a little more smartly past.

On this occasion she gave dirty Johnny Sams an extra shake for pulling at her portfolio, and perhaps in part he served as whipping boy to the intrusive Science Master across the way. But still, being a woman (or on her way thither) in a week or two it began to warm her heart to remember that her passing made a difference to somebody. In a month she would bitterly have resented his absence, and one day when she missed seeing him by the least fraction of a second, her temper was the object of comment to entire division of the infant class.

However, the Prize Distribution would take place that day week, and (first) Miss Lily Smith, and (second) Mr Henry Hurst, B.Sc., reflected that on that day they would be certain to meet face to face.

The great day of the prize-giving, as usual, stirred all Doggermouth, and happened also as usual on the day before Christmas. For the first time since Lily Smith was a little girl, the Creelport registered letter for Aunt Smith failed to arrive at the cottage.

"Something's wrong at the office," said the widow, grumblingly, "them young maids there be surely more concerned with their beaux, than to serve Thomas out his letters to fetch, as is their duty!"

But the reason for the non-arrival of the registered letter was other than the beaux of the girl-clerks of Doggermouth. It concerned the Barracoughs, of Creelport, and in especial Anne, wife of Bob and mother of Sam—mother, too, of Widow Smith's Lily.

Barracough's shebeen, down at the tough fag-end of Little Dublin, had been in the way of luck—that is, of such luck as came its way. There had been a strike, and the dock labourers thrown out of employment spent largely upon the fiery fuel-oil and raw spirit concealed at the back among the crumbling limestone. The liquor seemed, indeed, more than ordinarily potent. Headaches were more rapidly produced, and even strong men, in that close dry-smelling atmosphere, experienced strange swimings in the head. There was no doubt about the strength of Bob Barracough's whisky.

Yet Anne Barracough hardly did herself justice, for a reason. It was not the responsibility of so much money in her deep under-pocket, which she carried half-full of saw-dust to keep the coins from jingling. It was that she had a little paragraph in her breast, cut from a Doggermouth paper, left by a transient customer on the previous evening.

"Doggermouth Public Schools.—The annual Christmas Prize giving, inaugurated several years ago by our local school board, and which has in the past owed so much to the liberality of its generous chairman, Mr Trophimus Gane, will take place in the large hall of the Technical School on Friday, December 24th, at three o'clock. Mr Trophimus Gane, J.P., in the chair."

"In addition to the interest usual on such an occasion, parents and friends will be treated to the performances of a choir, selected from all the infant schools, trained and conducted by Miss Lily Smith, who has recently so highly distinguished herself at the entrance examination of the Metropolitan Normal College, where she took a first place. Mrs Gane will preside at the harmonium, the gift of her husband, Mr Trophimus Gane, J.P., chairman of the board."

The last noisy guests had departed from Barracough's on the evening of a time of profit, and Anne had a goodly sum to put away. She lingered, however, over the contents of an old pocket-book which she kept (as least likely to be disturbed) within the rough covers of the Barracough's family Bible. She knew that for the present Bob, her husband, was harmless. She could see him extended, toes pointing to the ceil-

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