

Absentmindedness.

ALMOST LOST HIS SUPPER.

I know that in dreams you have no faith, but it is not much that I ask. It is only that throughout to-morrow, the longest day, you will engage in no pursuit that can be accompanied by any danger, however remote, and that at midnight, when the day ends, you will take care not to be alone, but to have with you some friend. Oh, Rupert, if this is folly, will you not forgive your Edith, or take your revenge upon her by the laughter of many a year to come? Once more, my darling, I pray you not to neglect my heart-felt prayer."

"Sweet, timorous love," thought Rupert tenderly; "but not even her sweetness must scare me from duty." He wrote a letter, long, soothing and encouraging, but never once did he contemplate the relinquishment of his visit to the Black Pit that night.

As the day advanced the gloom deepened, thick haze which no breath of wind dispersed, shut out the beams of the sun, and when Rupert started on his self-imposed quest a lantern was needed to enable him to penetrate the lurid darkness. He had waited for an hour or more in the meadow ere the lightning's first flash heralded the long delayed storm, and with the lightning there came upon him the impression of an indistinct form leaning against the Black Pit fence. He advanced with what speed he could, but when he reached the palings no figure was in sight. Yet his amazement was profound, for in the wall of wood there was a narrow gap, as if an opened door stood wide, but in his recollection no door had ever been there. It was no time to consider, he must press forward on his search. He passed through the strange entrance, and found himself at once on the very brink of the Black Pit, with its unfathomable, invisible depths. Something seemed to touch his shoulder, and there was a word in his ear, "Follow!" Next arose a sharp cry, and then the thunder began to peal, rendering other sounds inaudible; for one second of time the heavens were ablaze with a brilliance that was well nigh blinding, and after that the wind and the rain took possession of the earth. What had the lightning truly revealed? Had it shown two figures, a woman firmly grasping a man, falling swiftly into that Pit of destruction?

The events that accompanied that famous storm in June can never be certainly known. Mrs. Helmont disappeared, and in Rupert's mind there lives the abiding belief that she perished on that wild night in her resolve to protect herself. Had he really been in danger? Did that whispered "Follow" spring from lips of flesh and blood? "Yes," was his own answer, when he remembered Mrs. Helmont's saying, and imagined some despairing soul to whom death was easy, but by whom the loss of Edith might not be borne. Far different is the verdict of the country-side, and the peace of Lanfair is no longer troubled by the ghost of Sir Wilfred Oxton.

When he did not respond to the summons for dinner one day, a messenger was sent to his den to insist on his coming to the dining room where the rest were already seated. Presently the two appeared, the mind of the dramatist apparently being still on the play. However, he was seated at the table. Without uttering a word, and still rapt in thought, he finished his soup and fish; then, pushing back his chair, he rose and started from the room, muttering and gesticulating.

"You do not wish to finish dinner?" he was asked.

Seeming to come to himself, he replied, "Why, yes, if the meal is prepared. I shall be most willing to appease my appetite. I am almost famished." He was in complete ignorance that he had already partly finished his meal.

HIS MENTAL DIGESTION.

Hogarth's absent mindedness at meal-time was extreme. In the midst of dinner it was no uncommon thing for him to turn round in his chair, and sit with his back to the table, twiddling his thumbs. Then he would as suddenly rise, place his chair back in its proper position, and resume eating as if he had not interrupted himself.

NEWTON AND HIS MEALS.

This suggests the anecdote of Newton, who was so much the victim of forgetfulness and mental blindness in ordinary matters that his friends thought little of it. On visiting Sir Isaac one morning, Dr. Stukely, one of his intimates, was ushered into the parlour by a maid and informed that her master was engaged upstairs, but would be down presently.

The guest waited, and time slipped by; but Newton did not appear. The doctor became restless, and was on the point of departing, but decided to remain. After a long stay the maid appeared in the parlour with a cooked fowl, which she placed on a table in anticipation of Sir Isaac's appearance to eat his midday meal. Stukely grew more and more hungry, as the smell from the fowl was highly tempting. Finally, as his friend had not come, he could withstand temptation no longer, and, turning to the fowl, he finished it. It was sometime after that that the scientist appeared, and gazed at the remains of the meal with a perplexed expression.

"I protest I had forgotten that I had eaten my dinner," he remarked. "You see, doctor, how oblivious we philosophers are."

AT THE BALLOT BOX.

A Middletown, Connecticut, man was responsible for an amusing mistake at the polls, which was not exactly ballot box stuffing, although it savoured of it, and it was due to absent mindedness. Having carefully made out the ticket he wished to vote, he deposited in the box, not the ticket, as he imagined, but a cheque which he had in his pocket.

A FORGETFUL MAIL CLERK.

A Western mail agent, through a fit of abstraction, which seized him at a critical moment, caused the Illinois town of Leaf River to miss one mail. The train on which the agent was detailed ran through Leaf River without stopping, and it was the agent's duty to pitch the sack containing the mail on the railroad platform. Instead of throwing it out, however, one day he dumped out on the platform absent mindedly, as the train whizzed by, the satchel containing a drummer's sample cigars.

THE CHILD AND THE BOOK.

This brings to mind the incident in life of the extraordinarily forgetful Comte de Brancas, which inspired La Bruyere's "Absent Man." The Count was seated by his fireside, buried in a book, when the nurse entered with his infant daughter. The father laid down the book, took the child in his arms, and was fondling her when a visitor of note was ushered in. Associating the child with the book, he promptly tossed the infant on the table.

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