

CHAPTER XV

OLD JENKINS

A TALE OF THE HAMPSHIRE RIOTS

THE incidents narrated in the following story, occurred not in the forest, but on its borders, in a scene truly beautiful and forest-like. During the summer months few travellers pass by it without halting to admire its genuine English features and it was on a fair evening in the early summer that a rider checked his steed, in order to indulge in a long and loving contemplation of its charms.

In what may perhaps be called the foreground of the scene stood a farmhouse with the customary "appurtenances thereunto belonging." A little farther on and the eye was cheered by the fresh verdure of an extensive green, on which a party of young men and boys were engaged in the manly game of cricket. On the opposite side and separated by the high-road might be seen, could not indeed but be seen, one of those old-fashioned yet comfortable roadside inns, at which our immediate ancestors were wont to "break" their journeyings, finding an excuse for stopping there in all seasons, in summer-heat and winter-cold, and little thinking that such "loiterings of travel" would soon be over-ruled by the flying steam-engine, which has no care for pleasant gossip, nor compunction for the wayside houses whose life it withers up.

Yes, there on the scene before us, stood the picturesque establishment known for many miles round as "The Bat and Ball" and though I may chance to differ with Mrs. Latterlammas, (the bustling better half of the tipling carrier on that route) I say the Bat and Ball is a place to fall in love with and I decidedly disagree with her in wishing that it were "swaller'd up", although I fear that its interests are suffering that way, from the locomotive monster that runs up and down by the Bat and Ball continually and throws off its offensive breath against the windows as it passes, irritating, as may be supposed, the worthy landlord, who looks upon it as insult heaped on injury. There stood the pleasant hostelry on that tranquil summer's eve, the white-washed surface of its walls just peeping here and there through the thick green foliage in which its porch was enveloped, while clusters of roses and honeysuckles gracefully contrasted with the darker myrtle-boughs. On either side of the tempting entrance was a large bow window, at which in quiet enjoyment sat a group of elderly men, who had once been players at cricket but from "rheumatiz" and other drawbacks had retired from action, yet still loved nothing better than to sit and watch the game. On a grass plot fronting the house stood, what in days of yore had been a maypole, now it served to support a board which indicated the title of the inn and that it was kept by Roger Goodman, who, besides being licensed to sell beer and spirits, had obtained the sanction of the excise to retail "tobacco, coffee, tea, and snuff."

In the porch before-mentioned two old men were seated and engaged in conversation. The stranger, having resigned his horse to the ostler, felt desirous to join this select party, who were perfectly willing to admit him to their company. A few commonplace remarks touching the weather and harvest prospects soon brought them into something like familiarity and good fellowship.

There was a marked difference in the physiognomy and general external aspect of the two elders who had thus been joined by the traveller. One's face, "like to a tittle-leaf," told plainly of querulousness and habitual discontent; neither the pipe's fragrance nor the pleasant scene could remove the visible impress which permanent disquietude of mind had left upon his countenance. His garb, too, was the reverse of conciliatory and set off his unattractive features to the worst advantage. In a place eminently rural, it had nothing in it that was rustic but might rank among raiments with the class called "shabbily genteel" and when seen in villages, where its rareness renders it conspicuous, I know of no other attire which so much offends the eye. Thus apparelled sat "Old Jenkins." His vis-à-vis was of another mould. Here was a genuine sample of the humble English yeoman of the old school - a race of men which it does the heart good to get fancy or imagination to

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re-produce for the sake of admiring their jolly, round proportions and of loving for their kindness and good humour. Farmer Bell, who is regaling himself with a pipe in company with old Jenkins, is of the right sort and your first impulse on seeing him is to shake him by the hand and wish him good crops and everlasting prosperity. Speaking of his structure we may describe him as a short and solid column, surmounted by an exceedingly round and rubicund capital.

Jenkins, with sharp and wizen features and a snuff besmeared visage, is a politician and his mettle is constantly "up" because there are rich and poor in the land because tailors (he being one) must occasionally *work* if they wish occasionally to smoke their pipe in the porch of the Bat and Ball. Consequently, till a vital change takes place in this respect and Jenkins can live comfortably without labour, he is at daggers-drawn with Government and would pledge himself any day to realise his darling projects if the strong voice of the country would but waft him to the seat of power.

Red-fronted farmer Bell is not a politician but is content to work and often fires off at Jenkins the plain but wholesome dogma, that "they as wunt work doant deserve to ate." Friend Bell is more corpulent than affluent, for his heart is a better soil than his farm and contentment is a quality that fattens most constitutions, seeing that its possessors have "a continual feast." Although he had been many years the tenant of his land, he had not advanced his worldly interest to any great extent, nor would he have done so perhaps had he lived to the age of Methuselah. Still he had the highest opinion of farmers (himself included) as being an independent sort of body that the country couldn't do without and it is amusing to think what convulsions of scornful laughter would have heaved the vast rotundity of his stomach at any grave assertion that Agriculture had grown old and perilous tottery, and must needs have SCIENCE for an handmaid and that in order any more to flourish, Old England must see - O wonderful! O unexpected sight! The whole cycle of "chemical affinities" take possession of her book-despising farmers!

After a brief general discussion among the three persons in the porch, Old Jenkins broached the political question, "What were ministers doing?" And as Jenkins foreknew that quiet farmer Bell "did'n know and did'n care," he directed his interrogatory in an emphatic manner to the stranger. It may have been that the visitor thus addressed discriminated the character of his questioner and had little care to foster the uneasy fervour of a village politician. Or it may have been that he and Jenkins had no sympathy as to the interest involved in the question for the new-comer passed it by courteously, telling Jenkins that what he desired to know was a species of lore so tremendously hard to be got at, that he had never yet found the man who could instruct him in it and that finding it impossible to be attained, he had given up the pursuit of such knowledge long ago.

This reply, while it dissatisfied the politician, pleased the farmer, who effectively closed up the general question as to the difficulty of finding out what ministers were doing by remarking, "that some things as took a plaguey while to hunt arter, was'n wuth the time; and that some volk as might be happy enough if they'd only mind their own concerns, was always a-vretting themselves to viddle-strings about other people's. Now what 'ould neighbour Jenkins be the better, 'sposen as he did know what ministers was doing, which in course he could'nt, because, as the gen'lman had truly said, nobody never did know yet, and to his way of thinkin', what nobody never did know yet, 'twas'n likely that anybody was a-goin' to vind out herearter."

Jenkins was not a native of the locality in which he had for some time resided, but was of London origin and had acquired a stock of pernicious political learning there - learning of which, when drawn from poisonous sources, "a little is a dangerous thing" and deep draughts not to be recommended. How he came to be an oracle located near the Bat and Ball upon the borders of the New Forest, affords another instance of the power of Cupid over the heart of man and in his impotency over man's *head*.

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The political school of labour-haters, to which Jenkins was attached, had determined to appropriate a portion of their weekly earnings to the publishing of certain inflammatory papers, showing to the discontented and the indolent that it was a sin and a shame that squire Littlehale should have a holiday all the week, the best of victuals every day and as much brandy-and-water as he might choose to drink, while Zachary Jenkins and Simon Waxend were obliged, the one to ply his needle on the board and the other at his last, during at least three days in the week in order to support themselves during the remainder four and could only safely reckon on one decided festival or holiday per week, that is to say St. Monday? Why should free-born Britons any longer suffer these social inequalities? Why not at once come forward every one of them as a man and a brother and level these abominable ups-and-downs in station and so forth? Give Littlehale, the squire as people called him, half of Waxend's work to do and let Simon come in of course for half of Littlehale's spare-time and brandy-and-water!

This was the only correct and tolerable state of things. This was what Nature said plainly enough she meant to be the law concerning Man, only a certain set had contrived to monopolise wealth, and thereby power, and had made laws hateful to Nature and tyrannous to man, whereby if worthy Simon Waxend were to walk into Littlehale's house and demand, as his rightful claim, the moiety of Littlehale's cash, and if upon his refusal to hand it over, Waxend should proceed to help himself to what Nature intended he should have, why the odds were ninety-nine to one that a minion of the detestable government would interfere and that Simon the bold would find himself in *quod* in less than no time!

There were in Zachary Jenkins such earnestness of purpose, such discreet enthusiasm and such incessant fretting at the curb of established law, that when, at a period of general discontent and turbulence, it was determined by the seditious clubs in large towns to send out delegates armed with insurrectionary papers and tongues to help on the movement, Jenkins was chosen as the emissary of his clique, to disseminate their principles and stir up rebellion. On this interesting mission he one day walked into the Bat and Ball, at that time made particularly agreeable by a comely waitress, who was also sister of mine host. And strange to say, Zachary found favour in the eyes of the rosy damsel, and he on his part felt their fascination and became subservient to a law against which his club I dare say thought him to be proof. Apart from his character as the propagator of disloyal and dangerous doctrines, the demeanour of Jenkins was inoffensive enough. Although the inhabitant of an alehouse, he was temperate in his habits and in the process of indoctrinating his rustic auditors with seditious sentiments, he did not risk incurring their suspicion as a dangerous companion by any violent declamation against authority, or any direct appeal to them to rise and with a strong hand overthrow it. He contented himself rather by general faultfinding, and read his pamphlets and confided a copy where he fancied he might gain a proselyte and in this manner he let the pernicious leaven work. Rachel Goodman out of her charitable eyes could see nothing in Zachary's papers to induce her to dread him and so she set-to, as I just now said, and loved him right heartily and when, preparatory to settling, the tailor went with Rachel into the question of ways and means, and it was made apparent that a decent livelihood might be secured in that neighbourhood by patient exercise of the mysteries of his craft, he resigned his lodging in London, took a cottage which Rachel had a fancy for, and thereupon "they twain were made one flesh."

Several years had Jenkins and his helpmeet been linked in wedlock, and one only child, a daughter, the juvenile counterpart of her mother, had been the issue of their marriage. Jenkins had retained all his antipathy to constituted government and the powers that be and to the secret and expressed grief of his wife, he held the faith of a free-thinker and would never enter a place of worship.

Rachel's brother at the Bat and Ball, entertaining grave objections to his never attending church, took his sister's child at an early age, to remove her from the sphere of her father's moral influence and she had

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grown up with him and was as a loving child of his own. Moreover George, the son of farmer Bell, had "felt a flame" in respect to Nelly Jenkins and had avowed it about three months before the opening of this tale. The maiden had lent a favourable ear to his plea, and had responded in broken syllables and sighs to such effect as to satisfy him of her disposition to unite "fates" as soon as such a step might prudently be taken.

Now George Bell was a youth of a ruddy countenance and well-favoured as to features, was one of the best mates in "the eleven" at cricket and of equal renown in other field sports; but he was somewhat hot and choleric, in temper hasty, impetuous and impatient. Made up his mind for this or that thing and must forthwith have it, or be peevish or sullen. Regarding Zachary Jenkins's daughter with passionate affection and accepted as her favoured suitor, he must needs be thinking of matrimony, forsooth! And as his father was in no condition to relinquish his farm, nor to encounter the responsibility of another holding for his son, while Zachary had all his lifetime done no more than just make "both ends meet," the fretful lover thought his case peculiarly hard and seeing no present prospect of being made happy, he brooded over his lot as a wretch to misery doomed and resolutely refused to be comforted.

In this state of mind the only society to which he felt reconciled was that of discontented Zachary Jenkins and Jenkins finding in George, not only a prospective son-in-law, but as it were a malcontent in the bud, kept up his rebel language to a lively heat, with the view of bringing into full bloom a fellow-worker on the side of Treason. Unhappily, at this period of his career a renewed agitation in the labouring rural population took place and a crusade against machinery commenced and mad incendiaries did all they could to destroy in property what the people would require as food. Here was incipient rebellion all around him "mobbing", mooted even in the peaceful village where stood the Bat and Ball! Here too, was the hour of Zachary's triumph come at last, the hour which promised to destroy everything destructible, subvert everything capable of subversion and produce - what? Tyrants by the name of kings would now be toppled headlong from their thrones, lords and commons routed, and their places taken by a glorious federation of snobs! Littlehale's leisure and luxury were coming to a close now, and Simon Waxend's sun was verging to its meridian! With suchlike trashy talk and mock Utopias did mischievous Old Jenkins inflame the morbid spirit of George Bell and by him was the young man incited to take part with the misguided men, who at this period went casting firebrands about in Hants and other counties and desolating others, made many of themselves and their families even more desolate.

The agitation quickens and people in rural places and in country towns feel their pulses throb with feverish anxiety and, labouring under the inability to stay within doors, gather in casual groups to repeat the terrifying facts which each has heard and what each fancies will be the course next taken by the mob. Fires are flaming by day and night in rick yards not far distant, and the Mob, as everybody says, grows daily stronger. Jenkins is in the highest state of pleasurable excitement, he exaggerates the evil and half hopes, in blind credulity, that the rumour may be true which old dame Geary is circulating among the goodwives of the village, to the intent that they do say Lunnun streets is runnin' wi' blood and if there be any truth in comets, we an't a-zin the wust as yet!"

Still more numerous and insolent are become the Mob. Half-a-dozen thrashing-machines in one day knocked into firewood and old iron and the cellars of as many farmers left in an utterly beerless condition!



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Plain-speaking mandates under the signature of "SWING," make unpopular employers quail and a threatened attack upon the mansion of a wealthy magistrate in the neighbourhood causes the ears of all who hear it to tingle. All well-disposed male adults are being sworn in as special constables for the protection of their neighbours and the timorous helpmeet damps her husband's valour, by asking him "What's his neighbour in comparison with his wife and this poor helpless baby?" Influential squires will certainly re-organise the yeomanry cavalry, let but this outbreak once be over and rallying their tenants and the



townsmen, they muster a goodly force and go forth boldly, resolved to check the havoc of the mob!

Three or four fearless hearts among the leaders of the lawful side spread courage through the ranks, like a contagion and when they encountered the rioters they acted steadily and bravely and made several captures. Among those thus apprehended was, I grieve to say, George Bell! Weak-minded, and his judgment cruelly perverted by his evil genius, Old Jenkins, he had joined the rabble when their fiery star seemed in the ascendant and as a

farmer's son he was welcomed loudly by the mob as an ally and thrust into prominency in all their proceedings. His poor old father braved the night and the danger when he heard of his son's insanity and went in the track of the rick burners to find him if possible and allure him back but he doggedly refused to come. Great was the old man's agony of mind but not far off its respite; for a chill, super-adding bodily inflammation to intense mental excitement, carried him off with alarming rapidity and the father died without another interview with his son.

In the common jail of the nearest town George Bell is detained for a day or two, awaiting a military escort to Winchester for himself and fellows. Much talk is made of an intended rescue of the prisoners and all the lower order in the town, although they are not rioters, have been prowling in and out of public houses, till they too are waxing tumultuous and would aid in the rescue if it was but begun well and there was a fair chance of success. Jenkins is shuffling about in the utmost perturbation, saying that the iron must be struck while it is hot and that the crisis, at which every freeborn Briton will be sure to act, is arrived. Twelve o'clock sounds and the streets are thronged with the baser sort in a disloyal mood and temper. Presently five-and-twenty, red-coated "minions of the detestable government" ride in with provoking coolness, their carbines close at hand, and ready, if need be, to speak for themselves at a moment's notice. On through the parting crowd of freeborn Britons moves the insignificant phalanx, before which three hundred revolting Britons shift their ground with alacrity, each Briton feeling conscious that if he does not "move off" it will be much the worse for his toes! Now they return again with six prisoners in a van each securely ironed. "And now," says Jenkins, to those who are gaping near him, "now the rescue will commence!" But the soldiers still go on uninterruptedly and as unconcerned as if it was a daily business.

The threatened rescue fails therefore for want of bold beginners but three hundred native Britons, with hearts like that of valiant Zachary Jenkins, are not going to be altogether quelled by a handful of red-coats. No, no indeed! Something very different from that, too! So, the backs of the said jackets being first clearly developed, three hundred British voices yell at which heroic display the five-and-twenty minions smile and being once without the town, they put their horses to the trot and in a few hours surrender their charge to the

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keeper of the county jail. A special assize has been summoned and the rioters have had no reason to murmur at "the law's delay," however they may have complained of its severity. Transportation was the common lot of all such convicted offenders and among this unfortunate company was George Bell. With his eyes now opened to the madness of his past proceedings and with his bosom rent with grief at his father's death occasioned, there could be little doubt by himself, heavy were his self-accusations, keen was his remorse. Now he remembered the gentle pleadings of his beloved Ellen. How she besought him in his angry discontent to have patience, to take heart and not be downcast. Now too he remembered that, but for the hateful arguments of her father, he had often been minded to follow her good advice. Now, however, repentance was of no avail. Unprovoked by poverty, unable to plead ignorance, convinced that as far as he was concerned his recent outrages were most wanton, he could hope for no mitigation of the sentence which had been passed on him. And in not hoping he was saved from disappointment.

The government felt that these daring malcontents must be dealt with summarily and judicial sentences were forthwith ratified in the royal councils and promptly executed and penitent George Bell was speedily on his passage towards one of our penal settlements.

Old Zachary Jenkins was ever afterwards looked upon as the author of George's ruin and while the young convict was suffering from sea and heart sickness, the villagers he had left took pleasure in recounting his merits and made no mention of his faults. Nobody cared to say anything to Jenkins, after George Bell's sentence was known nor of him, except that if everybody had his desserts, the tailor would now be on the high seas and George at home. So, miserable in himself and shunned by others, existed Zachary Jenkins. His old patrons employed him solely for his pitied wife's sake, who now had no joy left in life, for her only child was gone from her. At last the old man "shuffled off this mortal coil" and I am told that, after Rachel had (as the neighbours thought) over-duly mourned his loss, she got the better of her bereavement and in the last report I received from that quarter it is stated that the widow Jenkins is "looking-up again."

And what of innocent and broken-hearted Nelly? Concurring in her conscience with the common belief that her own father had been greatly instrumental in bringing this weight of misery upon her lover, and overhearing (which she could not help) her father spoken of continually in terms of reproach, the anguish of her mind may be in some degree imagined. So, finding George's heart unchanged, she resolved that the sea should not part them and set sail to rejoin him.

Ever since his arrival, George had conducted himself in a most exemplary manner and had so won the confidence of his superiors, that when Ellen reached her destination he was enduring but little restraint. The last account of them which reached old Roger Goodman, spake of two little Bells, begotten lawfully and of George and Ellen's hope to return ere long to him and dear old England. Whereupon old Roger wept for very joy and immediately made over all his goods and chattels in their favour and will forgive the railway all the wrongs it has inflicted on him, from the day it brings him George and Ellen Bell, to bless his longing eyes and to succeed him at the Bat and Ball!