

The Story-Teller.

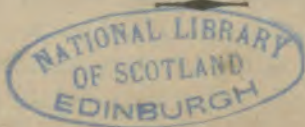
GEORGE DOBSON'S
EXPEDITION TO HELL

BY

JAMES HOGG.

THE

"ETTRICK SHEPHERD"



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THE NATIONAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL ARCHIVES

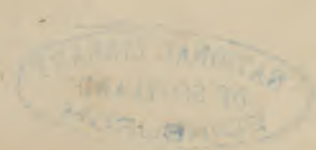
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GEORDY DOBSON.

George was part proprietor and driver of a hackney-coach in Edinburgh, when such vehicles were scarce; and one day there comes a gentleman to him whom he knew, and says;—‘George, you must drive me and my son here out to a certain place,’ that he named, somewhere in the vicinity of Edinburgh.—‘Sir,’ says George ‘I never heard tell of such a place, and I cannot drive you unless you give me very particular directions.’

‘It is false,’ returned the gentleman, ‘there is no man in Scotland who knows the road to that place better than you do. You have never driven on any other road all your life, and I insist on your taking us.’

‘Very well, Sir,’ says George, ‘I’ll drive you to hell if you have a mind, only you are to direct me on the road.’

‘Mount and drive on then,’ said the other, ‘and no fear of the road!’

George did so, and never in his life did he see his horses go at such a noble rate; they snorted, they pranced, and they flew on; and as the whole road appeared to lie down hill, he deemed that he should soon come to his journey’s end, Still he drove on at the same rate, far far down the hill,—and so fine an open road he never travelled,—till by degrees it grew so dark that he could not see to drive any farther. He called to the gentleman, inquiring what he should do; who

answered, that this was the place they were bound to, so he might draw up, dismiss them, and return. He did so, alighted from the dickie, wondered at his foaming horses, and forthwith opened the coach door, held the rim of his hat with the one hand, and with the other demanded his fare.

'You have driven us in fine style, George,' said the elder gentleman, 'and deserve to be remembered; but it is needless for us to settle just now, as you must meet us here again to-morrow precisely at twelve o'clock.'

'Very well, Sir,' says George, 'there is likewise an old account, you know, and some toll-money;' which indeed there was.

'I perceived no tolls to-day, your honour,' said George.

'But I perceived one, and not very far back neither, which I suspect you will have difficulty in repassing without a regular ticket. What a pity I have no change on me.'

'I never saw it otherwise with your honour,' said George jocularly; 'what a pity it is you should always suffer yourself to run short of change.'

'I will give you that which is as good, George,' said the gentleman; and he gave him a ticket written with red ink, which the honest coachman could not read. He, however, put it into his sleeve, and inquired of his employer where that same toll was which he had not observed, and how it was they did not ask the toll from him as he came through? The gentleman replied, by informing George that there was no road out of that domain, and whosoever entered it must either remain in it, or return by the same path; so they never asked any toll till the person's return, when they were at times a little suspicious; but that ticket would answer his turn,

And he then asked George if he did not perceive a gate, with a number of men in black standing about it.

‘Oho! is yon the spot?’ says George; Then I assure your honour, yon is no toll gate, but a private entrance into a great man’s mansion; for do not I know two or three of yon to be gentlemen of the law, whom I have driven often and often; and as good fellows they are too, as any I knew—men who never let themselves run short of change. Good day,—Twelve o’clock to-morrow?

‘Yes, twelve o’clock noon, precisely;’ and with that George’s employers vanished in the gloom, and left him to wind his way out of that dreary labyrinth the best way he could. He found it no easy matter, for his lamps were not lighted, and he could not see an ell before him—he could not even perceive his horses ears; and what was worse, there was a rushing sound, like that of a town on fire, all around him, that stunned his senses, so that he could not tell whether his horses were moving or standing still. George was in the greatest distress imaginable, and was glad when he perceived the gate before him, with his two identical friends of the law still standing. George drove boldly up, accosted them by their names, and asked what they were doing there; but they made him no answer, but pointed to the gate and the keeper. George was terrified to look at this latter personage, who now came up and seized his horses by the reins, refusing to let him pass. In order to introduce himself in some degree to this austere toll-man, George asked him, in a jocular manner, how he came to employ his two eminent friends as assistant gate-keepers?

‘Because they are among the last comers,’ replied the ruffian, churlishly. ‘You will be an assistant here to-

‘The devil I will, Sir?’

‘I’ll be damned if I do then—that I will.’

‘Yes, you’ll be damned if you do—that you will.’

‘Let my horses go in the meantime, then, Sir, that I may proceed on my journey.’

‘Nay.’

‘Nay?—Dare you say nay to me, Sir? My name is George Dobson, of the Pleasance, Edinburgh, coach driver, and coach proprietor too; and I’ll see the face of the man damned who will say nay to me, as long as I can pay my way. I have his majesty’s licence, and I’ll go and come as I choose—and that I will. Let go my horses there, and say what is your demand.’

‘Well, then, I’ll let your horses go, said the keeper; but I’ll keep yourself for a pledge.’ And with that he let go the horses, and seized honest George by the throat, who struggled in vain to disengage himself, and cursed, swore, and threatened, by his own confession, most bloodily. His horses flew off like the wind, so swift that the coach was flying in the air, and scarcely touching on the earth once in a quarter of a mile. George was in furious wrath, for he saw that his grand coach and harness would all be broken to pieces, and his gallant pair of horses maimed or destroyed; and how was his family’s bread to be won!—He struggled, swore, threatened, and prayed in vain;—the intolerable toll-man was deaf to all remonstrances. He once more appealed to his two genteel acquaintances of the law, reminding them how he had of late driven them to Roslin on a Sunday, along with two ladies, who, he supposed, were their sisters, from their familiarity, when not another coachman in the world would engage with them. But the gentlemen, very

and again he asked the hideous toll-man what right he had to detain him, and what were his charges.

‘What right have I to detain you, Sir, say you? Who are you that makes such a demand here? Do you know where you are, Sir?’

‘No, faith, I do not,’ returned George; ‘I wish I did. But I shall know, and make you repeat your insolence too. My name, I told you, is George Dobson, licensed coach-hirer in Edinburgh, Pleasance; and to get full redress of you for this unlawful interruption, I only desire to know where I am.’

‘Then, Sir, if it can give you so much satisfaction to know where you are,’ said the keeper with a malicious grin, ‘you shall know, and you may take instruments by the hands of your two friends there, instituting a legal prosecution. Your redress, you may be assured, will be most ample, when I inform you that you are in Hell, and out of this gate you return no more.’

This was rather a damper to George, and he began to perceive that nothing would be gained in such a place by the strong hand, so he addressed the inexorable toll-man, whom he now dreaded more than ever, in the following terms:—‘But I must go home, at all events, you know, Sir, to unyoke my two horses, and put them up, and to inform Chirsty Ha’liday, my wife, of my engagement. And bless me, I never recollected till this moment, that I am engaged to be back here to-morrow at twelve o’clock, and see here is a free ticket for my passage this way.’

The keeper took the ticket with one hand, but still held George with the other. ‘Oho! were you in with our honourable friend, Mr R. of L?’ said he. He has

engagement is this;—You, by this instrument, engage your soul, that you will return here by to-morrow at noon.'

'Catch me there, billy,' says George, 'I'll engage no such thing, depend on it;—that I will not.'

'Then remain where you are,' said the keeper, 'for there is no other alternative. We like best for people to come here in their own way, in the way of their business;' and with that he flung George backward, heels-over-head down hill, and closed the gate.

George, finding all remonstrance vain, and being desirous once more to see the open day, and breathe the fresh air, and likewise to see Chirsty Halliday, his wife, and set his house and stable in some order, came up again, and in utter desperation, signed the bond, and was suffered to depart. He then bounded away on the track of his horses, with more than ordinary swiftness, in hopes to overtake them; and always now and then uttered a loud wo! in hopes they might hear and obey, though he could not come in sight of them. But George's grief was but beginning, for at a well-known and dangerous spot, where there was a tan-yard on the one hand, and a quarry on the other, he came to his gallant steeds overturned, the coach smashed to pieces, Dawtie with two of her legs broken, and Duncan dead. This was more than the worthy coachman could bear, and many degrees worse than being in hell. There his pride and manly spirit bore him up against the worst of treatment; but here his heart entirely failed him, and he laid himself down, with his face on his two hands, and wept bitterly, bewailing, in the most deplorable terms his two gallant horses, Dawtie and Duncan.

While lying in this inconceivable state, behold there

well-known voice said to him, 'Geordie! what is the matter wi' ye, Geordie?' George was provoked beyond measure at the insolence of the question, for he knew the voice to be that of Chirsty Halliday, his wife, 'I think ye needna ask that, seeing what ye see,' said George. 'O my poor Dawtie, where are a' your jinkings and prancings now, your moopings and your wincings? I'll ne'er be a proud man again—bereaved o' my bonny pair.'

'Get up, George; get up, and bestir yourself,' said Chirsty Halliday, his wife. 'You are wanted directly, to bring in the Lord President to the Parliament House. It is a great storm, and he must be there by nine o'clock,—Get up—rouse yourself, and make ready—his servant is waiting for you.'

'Woman, you are demented!' cried George. 'How can I go and bring in the Lord President, when my coach is broken in pieces, my poor Dawtie lying with twa of her legs broken, and Duncan dead? And, moreover, I have a previous engagement, for I am obliged to be in in hell before twelve o'clock.'

Chirsty Halliday now laughed outright, and continued long in a fit of laughter, but George never moved his head from the pillow, but lay and groaned, for in fact, he was all the while lying snug in his bed; while the tempest without was roaring with great violence, and which circumstance may perhaps account for the rushing and deafening sound which astounded him so much in hell. But so deeply was he impressed with the realities of his dream that he would do nothing but lie and moan, persisting and believing in the truth of all he had seen. His wife now went and informed her neighbours of her husband's plight, and of his singular engagement with Mr R. of L. at twelve o'clock. She persuaded one friend to harness the horses, and go for the Lord President; but all the

rest laughed immoderately at poor coachy's predicament. It was, however, no laughing to him; he never raised his head and his wife becoming at last uneasy about his frenzied state of mind, made him repeat every circumstance of his adventure to her, (for he would never believe or admit that it was a dream,) which he did in the terms above narrated; and she perceived, or dreaded, that he was becoming feverish. She went over and told Dr. Wood of her husband's malady, and of his solemn engagement to be in hell at twelve o'clock.

'He maunna keep it, dearie. He maunna keep that engagement at no rate,' said Dr Wood. 'Set back the clock an hour or twa, to drive him past the time, and I'll ea' in the course of my round. Are you sure he hasna been drinking hard?' She assured him he had not. 'Weel, weel, ye maun tell him that he maunna keep that engagement at no rate. Set back the clock and I'll come and see him. It is a frenzy that maunna be triled with. Ye maunna laugh at it, dearie—maunna laugh at it. Maybe a nervish fever, wha kens,"

The doctor and Chirsty left the house together, and as their road lay the same way for a space, she fell a-telling him of the two young lawyers whom George saw standing at the gate of hell, and whom the porter had described as two of the last comers. When the doctor heard this, he staid his hurried stooping pace in one moment, turned full round on the woman, and fixing his eyes on her that gleamed with a deep unstable lustre, he said, 'What's that ye were saying, dearie? What's that ye were saying? Repeat it again to me every word.' She did so. On which the doctor held up his hands, as if palsied with astonishment, and uttered some fervent ejaculations. 'I'll go with you straight," said he, 'before I visit another patient. This is wonderful! It is terrible! The young gentlemen are both at rest—both lying corpses at this time!—fine young men—I attended them both—died of the same exterminating disease.—Oh this is wonderful: this is wonderful!"

The doctor kept Chirsty half running all the way down the High Street and St. Mary's Wynd, at such a pace did he walk, never lifting his eyes from the pavement, but always exclaiming now and then, 'It is wonderful! most wonderfu!' At length, prompted by woman's natural curiosity, she inquired at the doctor if he knew anything of their friend Mr R. of L.? But he shook his head, and replied, 'Na, na, dearie,—ken naething about him. He and his son are baith in London,—ken naething about him; but the tither is awfu'—it is perfectly awfu'!

When Dr Wood reached his patient, he found him very low, but only a little feverish, so he made all haste to wash his head with vinegar and cold water, and then he covered the crown with a treacle plaster, and made the same application to the soles of his feet, awaiting the issue. George revived a little, when the doctor tried to cheer him up by joking him about his dream; but on mention of that he groaned, and shook his head. 'So you are convinced, dearie, that it is nae dream?' said the doctor.

'Dear Sir, how could it be a dream?' said the patient. 'I was there in person with Mr R. and his son; and see here are the marks of the porter's fingers on my throat.' Dr Wood looked, and distinctly saw two or three red spots on one side of his throat, which confounded him not a little. 'I assure you, Sir,' continued George, 'it was no dream' which I know to my sad experience. I have lost my coach and horses, and what more have I?—signed the bond with my own hand, and in person entered into the most solemn and terrible engagement.'

'But ye're no to keep it, I tell ye,' said Dr Wood. 'Ye're to keep it at no rate. It is a sin to enter iuto a compact wi the deil, but it is a far greater ane to keep it. Sae let Mr R. and his son bide where they are yonder, for ye sanna stir a foot to bring them out to-day.'

'Oh, oh! doctor!' groaned the poor fellow, 'this is not a thing to be made a jest o'! I feel that it is an engagement I cannot break. Go I must, and that very shortly. Yes,

yes, go I must, and go I shall, though I should borrow David Barclay's pair.' With that he turned his face towards the wall, groaned deeply, and fell into a lethargy. while Dr Wood caused them to let him alone, thinking if he would sleep out the appointed time, which was at hand, he would be safe ; but all the time he kept feeling his pulse, and by degrees showed symptoms of uneasiness. The wife ran for a clergyman of famed abilities, to pray and converse with her husband, in hopes by that means to bring him to his senses ; but after his arrival, George never spoke more, save calling to his horses, as if encouraging them to run with great speed, and thus in imagination driving at full career into hell, he went off in a paroxysm after a terrible struggle, precisely within a few minutes of twelve o'clock.

What made this singular professional dream the more remarkable and unique in all its parts, was not known at the time of George's death. It was a terrible storm on the night of the dream, as has been already mentioned, and during the time of the hurricane, a London smack went down off Wearmouth about three in the morning. Among the sufferers were the Hon. Mr R. of L. and his son. George could not know aught of this at break of day, for it was not known in Scotland till the day of his interment : and as little knew he of the deaths of the two young lawyers, who both died the evening before.—ETRICK 'SHEPHERD.

