

OVER THE BORDER.

By WALTER BESANT.

"As thick as my thumb," he said, "and as heavy as his cane. Blow for blow, Cousin Mathew. This will curl round his shoulders and leave its mark upon his legs."

Morwick Mill stands upon the River Coquet, about two miles from Warkworth. You can easily get to it by following the banks of the river, which is perhaps the best way, though sometimes you must off shoes and stockings and wade across knee deep to the other side.

The mill consists of a square house upon the edge of the river, with a great wheel on one side, and almost all of the water of the river is here diverted so as to form a sufficient power for the mill wheel. At the back of the mill, which is also a substantial dwelling house, is a great careless garden, with pigsties and linnies for cattle, and vegetables and fruit trees, and at the side are two or three cottages, where live the people employed at the mill. All the fields which lie sloping up from the river side belong, as well, to the owner of the mill. The owner at this present moment was no other than the scapegrace Ralph, and his cousin, Mathew Humble, was his guardian, who had nothing at all in the world of his own but a little farm of thirty acres. The thought of this great inheritance compared with his own meager holding, filled the good guardian's heart with bitterness, and his arm, when it came to correction, with a superhuman strength. He would be guardian for four years more, then he would have to give a strict account of his guardianship, and the burden of this obligation, though he had only held the post for two years, filled him with such wrath and anxiety that he was fain, when he did think upon it, which was often, to pull the cork out of a certain stone jar and allay his anxieties with a dram of strong waters. He was very anxious, because already the accounts were confused, the stone jar was always handy, therefore, he had become swollen about the neck and coarse of nose, which was a full and prominent feature, and flabby, as well as fiery, about the cheeks. In these times of much drinking many men become pendulous of cheek and ruddy of nose at 40 or so, but few at 26. Mathew was not at this time much more than 26, say ten years older than Ralph.

The kitchen, dining room and sitting room of Morwick Mill was a large, low room, with one long window. At the sides of the room and between the great joists were hanging sides of bacon and hams, besides pewter pots and pewter dishes, brightly polished wooden platters, china cups, brass vessels, whips, bridles, a loaded blunderbuss, cudgels, strings of onions, dried herbs of every kind, and all the thousand things wanted for the conduct of a household. At one end was a noble fire of logs burning in an ample chimney, and before the fire a great piece of beef roasting, and now, to outward scrutiny and sense of smell, ready to be dished. A middle aged woman, full, comely and good natured of aspect, was engaged in preparation for that critical operation. This was Prudence, who had lived at the mill all her life.

She looked up as Ralph appeared in the doorway and shook her head, more in pity than in reproach. And she looked side ways, by way of friendly warning, in the direction of the table, at which sat an other woman of different appearance. She was perhaps, five or six and thirty with thin features and sour expression, not improved by a cast in her eye. This was Barbara sister of Mathew Humble and now acting in the capacity of mistress of Morwick Mill for her brother was not married. She had on before her the Bible, and she had found a most beautiful collection of texts appropriate to the case of fools in the book of Proverbs. The table was laid for dinner, with pewter plates and black handled knives and steel forks. The beer had been drawn, and stood in a great brown jug, foaming with a venerable silver head. Ralph observed without astonishment that the plate set for him contained a piece of dry bread, ostentatiously displayed. It was to be his dinner.

This pleasing maiden, Barbara, who regarded the boy with an affection almost as great as her brother's, that is to say, with a malignity quite uncommon, first pointed with her lean and skinny forefinger to the page before her, and read aloud, shaking her head reproachfully.

"As a man who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death, so is the man that deceiveth his neighbor, and saith, Am I not in sport?"

Solomon must surely have had Ralph in his mind.

Then she pointed with the same finger to a door opposite, and said, a smile of satisfaction stealing over her countenance.

"Go to your guardian. Go to receive the wages of sin."

"Those," said Ralph, with a light laugh, feeling confidence in his alder branch, "are not a flogging on this occasion, but a fight."

Before she heard his words, or had begun to ask herself what they might mean, because she was so full of satisfaction with her texts, he had flung his hat upon a chair and gone to the next room. If Barbara had been observant, she might have remarked, beside these extraordinary words, a certain brightness of the eyes and setting of the mouth which betokened the spirit of resistance.

The inner room was one occupied and used by Mathew alone. It contained all

the papers, account books and documents connected with the property and business of the mill. Here, too, was the stone jar already referred to. The decks had been, so to speak, cleared for action, that is to say the table was thrust into the corner, and upon it lay the sacred instrument with which Mathew loved to correct his ward. This promoter of virtue, or dispenser of consequences, was a strong and supple cane, than which few instruments are more highly gifted with the power of inflicting torture. Ralph knew it well, and had experienced on many occasions the full force of this wholesome quality. He saw it lying ready for use, and he reflected cheerfully that the alder branch partly up his left sleeve and partly in his coat pocket would be more supple, equally heavy and perhaps more efficacious, regarded simply as a pain producer.

When the boy appeared, Mathew rose and removed his wig and coat, because the work before him was likely to make him warm. He then assumed the rod, and ordered Ralph to take off his coat and waistcoat.

"This day," he said, "you have disgraced your family. I design that you shall have such a flogging as you will not readily forget." He then remembered that he would be more free for action without his waistcoat. A man can throw more heart into his work. "Such a flogging," he repeated as he removed it, "as you will remember all your life."

"Well, cousin," said Ralph, "Mr. Carnaby said that the penance was the punishment. I have done the penance."

"Silence, sir! Do you dare to argue with your guardian?" He now began to roll up his shirt sleeves so as to have his arms quite bare, which is an additional advantage when one wants to put out all one's strength. "I shall dog the flesh off your bones, you young villain!"

But he paused, and for a moment his jaws stuck, and he was speechless, for his cousin, instead of meekly placing himself in position to receive the stupendous flogging, ended for him, was facing him, resolution in his eyes, and a weapon in his hands.

"Flogging for flogging, Cousin Mathew," said Ralph, "flesh for flesh. Strip my bones, I strip yours."

Mathew now observed for the first time—it was a most unfortunate moment for making the discovery—that Ralph was a good two inches taller than himself, that his arm was as stout, and that his weapon was of a thickness, length, and pliability which might make the stoutest quail, also he remarked that his shoulders were surprisingly broad, and his legs of length and size quite out of the common. And it even occurred to him that he might have to endure hardness.

"Flesh for flesh," said Ralph, poisoning the alder branch.

"Villain! Would you break the Fifth commandment?"

Ralph shook his weapon, making it sing merrily and even thirstily through the air, but made no reply.

"Lay down the switch."

Ralph raised it above his head as one who is preparing to strike.

"Down on your knees, viper, and beg for pardon."

"Flesh for flesh, Mathew," said Ralph. "You will have it then, young devil. I will kill you!"

Mathew rushed upon his cousin, raining blows as thick as hail upon him. For the moment his weight told and the boy was beaten back. Swish—"Viper!" Swish—swish—was a terrible cane. "I will teach you to rebel!" Swish—swish—was a cane of a suppleness beyond nature. "I will give you a lesson!" Swish—swish. "I will break every bone in your body!" Swish—the end of the cane found out every soft place—there were not many upon Ralph's body.

But then the tables were turned, for the boy, recovering from the first confusion, leaped suddenly aside, and with a dexterous movement of the left foot caused his cousin to stumble and fall heavily. He struggled, struck, kicked and lashed out—but he did not get up again. A very important element in the fight was strangely overlooked by Mathew before he began the attack. It was this that whereas he was himself out of condition, the boy was in splendid fettle, sound of wind as well as limb. So furious was Mathew's first assault that, brief as was its duration, no sooner was he tripped up than he perceived that his wind was gone and though he could kick and struggle, yet if he half got up he was quickly knocked down again. And while he kicked and struggled, this young



But then the tables were turned, viper, this monster of ingratitude, was administering such a punishment as even he, Mathew, had never contemplated for Ralph.

"Have you had enough?" cried the boy at last, out of breath.

"I will murder you, I will—Oh,

Lord!" For the punishment began again. "Stripping of flesh," said Ralph. "This you will remember, cousin all your life."

The alder branch was like a ball in the air, the rapidity, the precision, the delicate perception of tender places took away the sufferer's breath. There was no sound place left in the whole of Mathew's body.

"Have you had enough?" cried Ralph.

"I will say you have for this—I will Oh, ah, I have had enough."

"Then," said Ralph with one final effort the effect of which would be, by itself, felt for a week and more, "get up."

Mathew rose groaning.

"We have had the last of punishment," said the boy. "I will fight you any day you please, but I will take no more punishments from you."

He threw down his stick and put on his coat and waistcoat, with some tenderness, however, for the first part of the battle had left its marks.

New outside the two women were listening one with complacency and the other with pity. And the first was ready with the Bible still open at the Book of Proverbs, which contains quite an armory of texts good to hurl at a young transgressor. The second with one ear turned to the door of Mathew's room, went on dishing the beef, which she presently placed upon the table.

There was unusual delay in the sound which generally followed Ralph's visits to that room. No doubt Mathew was commencing with a short Commination Service. Presently, however, there was a great trampling of feet with the swish, swish of the cane—Mathew's first charge.

"Lord ha mercy!" cried Prudence.

"The rod and reproof give wisdom," read her mistress from the book.

Then they heard a heavy fall, followed by a heavier faster more determined swishing hissing and whistling of the instrument, till the air was resonant with its music, and it was as if all the boys in Northumberland were being caned at once.

"Lord ha mercy!" repeated Prudence.

"Hell murder the boy!"

A reproof, read the other from her place, "entereth more into a wise man than a hundred stripes into a fool."

There was a pause, and then a sound of voices, and then another terrific hailstorm of blows.

Both women looked aghast. Was the punishment never to end?

"Mistress," she cried, "you may look on while the boy is cut to pieces—I can't and won't."

She opened the door. Heavens! what a sight was that which met her astonished eyes. The boy cut and bruised about the face was standing in the middle of the room smiling. The man was on his hands and knees slowly rising his shirt was torn off his back, his shoulders were cut to pieces, he was covered with weals and bruises, his face, scarred and seamed with Ralph's cruel alder branch, was dreadful to look upon. He seemed to see nothing, he groaned as he lifted himself up, he staggered where he stood.

Presently he put on his coat, with many groans and muttered curses, and Prudence observed that all the while he regarded the lad with looks of the most extreme terror and rage. Presently she began to understand the situation.

"Are you hurt, Master Ralph?" she asked.

"No, but Mathew is," said Ralph.

"Mathew," cried his sister, as the victim of rebellion staggered into the room, "what is this?"

He sank into his arm chair with a long, deep groan, and made no reply.

"Why what in the world, Master Ralph?" asked the servant.

But the lad had gone. He went up stairs to his own room, made up a little bundle of things which he wrapped in a handkerchief, picked out the thickest and heaviest of his cudgels, and then returned to the kitchen.

"Give me my dinner," he said.

Barbara had brought out her brother's wig and put it on now, but he still sat silent and motionless. He was in such an agony of pain all over, and his nervous system had sustained so terrible a shock that he could not speak.

"Give me my dinner," Ralph repeated.

Barbara pointed to the crust of bread. She was appalled by this mutiny, but she preserved some presence of mind, and she remembered the bread. Then she sat down again before the Bible and began to read, like a clergyman while the plate goes round.

"It is as sport to the fool to do mischief."

Prudence, the beef being already served, laid a knife and fork for each.

"A fool's mouth," Barbara said, as if he was quoting Solomon, "calleth for kicked beef and a stalled ox. Bread and water until submission and repentance."

The young mutineer made no verbal reply. But he dragged the dish before his own plate, and began to carve for himself, largely and generously.

"Mathew!" cried Barbara, springing to her feet.

"Let it be—let it be," said Mathew. "let the young devil alone. I will be even with him somehow. Let be."

"Not the old way, cousin," replied Ralph with a nod. He then helped himself to about a pint or so of the good old October, and began, his appetite sharpened by exercise, to make the beef disappear in large quantities. Mathew looked on, saying nothing. The silence terrified his sister. What did it mean? And she perceived, for the first time, that their ward had ceased to be a boy and must henceforth be treated as a man. It was a fearful thought. She shut her Bible and sat back with folded hands, waiting the issue.

In course of time even a hungry boy of

17 has had enough. Ralph lifted his head at last, took another prolonged pull at the beer and told Barbara, politely, that he had enjoyed a good dinner.

Then he turned to his cousin and addressed him with a certain solemnity.

"Cousin," he said, "you have always hated me, because my uncle left the mill to me instead of to yourself. Yet you knew from the beginning that his design was for me to have it. I have done you no wrong. You have never lost any opportunity of abusing me before my face and behind my back. You became, unhappily for me, my guardian. You have never neglected any chance of flogging and beating me, if you could find a cause. As regards the ghost business, I was wrong. I deserved punishment, but was it the province of a cousin and a guardian to go and lay information before the justice of the peace? I shall be 17 come next month. In four years this mill and the farm will be mine own. But if I remain with you here I can expect nothing but hatred and ill treatment as far as you dare. You have given me plowboy's work without a plowboy's wage, and often without a plowboy's food. As for flogging, that is finished, because I think you have no more stomach for another fight."

Mathew made no reply whatever, but sat with his head upon his hands, breathing heavily.

"I am tired of ill treatment," Ralph went on, "and I shall go away."

"Whither, boy?" asked Barbara.

"I know not yet. I go to seek my fortune."

"Go, if you will," said Mathew, "go, in the devil's name, go, whither you are bound to go, long before four years are over you will be hanging in chains."

Ralph laughed and took up his bundle. "Farewell, Prudence," he said, "thou wast ever kind to me."

The woman threw her arms about his neck and kissed him with tears, and prayed that the Lord might bless him. And as he walked forth from the house the voice of Barbara followed him, saying:

"A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back."

The fugleman was sitting in the sun before his door in the castle, smoking a pipe and inclined to be drowsy when Ralph appeared with his startling news.

As regards the flogging the old soldier made light of it. Nothing can be done in the army without the cat. Had not he himself once received 300 all by a mistake because they were meant for another man who escaped? Did he therefore bear malice against his commanding officer? No. But the villainy of Mathew, first to lay information and then to make an excuse for a flogging, just for pleasure and to gratify his own selfish desire to be continually flogging, why that justified the mutiny. As for the details of the fight, he blamed severely the inexperience in strategy shown by first knocking down the enemy. He should have expected better things of Ralph, whose true policy would have been to harass and annoy his adversary by feints, dodges and unexpected skirmishes. This would not only have fatigued him but, considering his shortness of breath, would have worn him out, so that he would in the end have fallen an easy prey and been cudgelled without resistance till there was not a sound place left. Beside, it would have made the fight more interesting, considered as a work of art.

However, doubtless the next time—but then he remembered that the boy was going away.

"To seek my fortune, fugleman," Ralph said gayly. "Look after Drusus for me, while I am away."

"Ay—ay," the fugleman replied, "he shall come to no harm. And as for money, Master Ralph?"

"I've got a guinea," he replied, "which my uncle gave me three years ago."

"A guinea won't go far. Stay, Master Ralph." He went into his room and came back with a stocking in his hand. "Here is all I've got, boy. It is twenty guineas. Take it all. I shall do very well. Lord! what with the rabbits and the pheasants!"

"Nay," said Ralph, "I will not take your savings neither."

But, presently being pressed, he consented to take ten guineas on the understanding that when he came back (his fortune made) the fugleman was to receive twenty. And then they parted with a mighty hand shake.

Half way down the street Ralph passed Sailor Nan who was sitting on a great stone bench, her door, smoking her short black pipe.

"Whither bound, my lad?" she asked.

"I am bound to London," he replied. "I am off to seek my fortune."

"Come here, I will read thy fortune," like most old women, Nan could read a lad's fortune in the lines of his hand, or by the cards, or by the peeling of an apple.

"A good cruise," she said, "with fair wind aft and good weather for the most part. But storms belike on leaving port. There's a villain, and fighting, and foreign parts, and gold, and a good wife. Go thy ways, lad. Art no poor puss faced swab to fear fair fighting. Go thy ways. Take and give. Trust not too many. And stand by all old shipmates. Go thy ways."

He laughed and left her. Yet he was cheered by her kindly prophecy.

He crossed the old bridge and presently found himself outside the green palings of Dame Hetherington's house. The girl who had joined him in church was in the garden. He whistled and she came running.

"I am come to say good by, Drusus," he said. "I am running away."

"Oh, Ralph, whither? And you have a cruel blow upon your face?"

"I have fought Mathew," he said, "and have beaten him. The scar upon my

face is nothing compared with the scars over his. I believe he is one large bruise. But I can no longer endure his ill treatment and Barbara's continual reproaches. Therefore I am resolved to remain no longer but shall go to London there to seek my fortune as thy father did, Drusus."

They talked for half an hour, she trying to persuade him to stay and he resolved to go. Then he went with her into the house where he must needs tell all the story to Dame Hetherington, who scolded him and made him get home again and make submission, but he would not.

Then Drusus remembered that her father would gladly aid any lad from Northumberland and set down and wrote a letter very quickly being dexterous with her pen and gave it to Ralph to carry.

"You will find him," she said, "at the sign of the Leg and Star in Cheapside. Forget not that address. Stay. I will write it outside the letter. Give it him with my respect and obedience. Oh, Ralph, shall you be long before you have found your fortune and are back to us?"

Nay, said Ralph. "I know not what may be my fortune. I go to find it, like many a lad of old."

Then, after many fond farewells, Ralph kissed her and trudged away manfully while Drusus leaned her head over the garden gate and wept and sobbed, and could not be consoled.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

The name Jebel Nagous is given by the Bedouins to a mountain nearly three miles long and about 1,200 feet high, composed of white sandstone bearing quartz pebbles and quartz veins. Resting on the northern and western sides are several large banks of blown sand inclined at right angles. The sand of one of these at the north-western end has the property of yielding a deep note when it slides down the incline either from the force of the wind or by the action of man. This bank of sand I distinguished from the others by calling it the "Bell slope." It is triangular in shape and measures 260 feet across the base, five to eight feet across the top, and is 391 feet long (high). It has the high inclination of 31 degrees quite uniformly. It is bounded by vertical cliffs of sandstone and is broken toward the base by projecting rocks of the same material. The sand is yellowish white, very fine, and possesses at this inclination a curious mobility which causes it to flow down the slope, when disturbed, like molasses or soft pitch, the depression being filled in from above and advancing upward at the same time. The sand has none of the characteristics of musical sand found on so-called "musical beaches." When pulled downward by the hands or pushed by the feet a strong vibration is felt and a low note is plainly heard resembling the deep bass of an organ pipe. The loudness and continuity of the note are related to the mass of sand moved, but I think that those who compare it to distant thunder exaggerate. The bordering rocky walls give a marked echo which may have the effect of magnifying and prolonging the sound, but which I afterward demonstrated not to be essential. There are no cavities for the sand to fall in, erroneously reported. The peak of Jebel Nagous rises above the Bell slope to the height of 995 feet above the sea level, as determined by a sensitive aneroid.

Our route was the first to the monastery of Mount Sinai, by the route believed to have been followed by Moses and the Israelites. With Bibles in our hands we followed every step of the way, "Marah," "Elmi," "Rephidim," and the "Mountain of the Lord," became perfectly familiar to us. Mounted on a camel one can read and write notes; they walk steadily at two and a half miles an hour, and the usual day's work is eight or nine hours. Thus a given locality, especially a mountain peak, is in sight for many hours, sometimes for days. We examined the rock which, according to tradition, Moses struck and from which water flowed out for the thirsty Israelites. We stood on the hill where Moses stood during the battle with the Amalekites, and his hands were supported by his friends. We crawled into a cave on the top of Jebel Monsa, in which, according to tradition, he wrote the ten commandments, though this is not according to Scripture teaching.

The great scarcity of water, the utter desolation of the wilderness, and eventual grandeur of the granite range of Mount Sinai impressed us greatly. Between Suez and Mount Sinai there is only one place, the oasis of Feiran, where palatable drinking water can be obtained, and the journey requires eight days. We took with us, of course, two barrels of good water. Water for camels and for washing purposes were had at two places, but even then some days apart. We spent one night at the "encampment by the sea," and enjoyed salt baths. At the monastery of St. Catherine we pitched our tents in the garden under cypress, almond and apricot trees. Here we made the ascent of the highest peak of Mount Sinai, about 7,400 feet, and spent a whole day examining Elijah's chapel, Jethro's well and other sacred places.—Cor. Hartford Courier.