The all sorts of stories book

Lang Andrew
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D'ARTAGNAN WILL NOT HAVE HIS HORSE LAUGHED AT
PREFACE

(N.B.—There are stories in this Preface)

This new Story Book is of a new sort, for the tales are of many different kinds; some are true, like the history of the man who met in America the other man whom he had been hanged for murdering in England. This may to any unthinking person seem all very natural, but if you think hard you will wonder how the first man got to America after being hanged in England, and how the second man, after being murdered in England, arrived in America. Neither event seems possible, yet both actually occurred. But this happened a hundred and fifty years ago, and could not happen now, when people do not hang a person for murder before they are quite certain that somebody has been murdered—that the man said to have been slain is really dead. Again, the man who was hanged would, in our time, have been buried as soon as he was believed to be dead; but in times not so very far from ours a murderer, when once thought dead, was suspended in iron chains in a conspicuous place, so that his crime and punishment might not be forgotten.

If you read The Fairchild Family, by Mrs. Sherwood, who wrote about eighty years ago, you will find that good Mr. Fairchild took his naughty children to see a body of a murderer hanging in irons, so that they might know what to expect if they let their angry passions rise. This was what people call an ‘object lesson,’ but your dear papa cannot give you this kind of lesson now,
because in our fields there are now no such disgusting objects.

Come, now, I will tell another true story about a man who was hanged, but escaped. It was in the year 1429, when the English were fighting in France, and the Scots were on the French side. The English were strong in Brittany, and a Scot named Michael Hamilton, from Bothwell in Lanarkshire, went with other Scots and French to burn and plunder in Brittany. Near a place called Clisson they found an empty tower, and there they dwelt and did all sorts of mischief. They caught, one day, a Breton who was spying on them and tortured him cruelly till he told them about the intentions of the English soldiers. They learned that a great company of the English were going to attack their tower on that very night. So they determined to mount and ride; but Michael Hamilton went for his horse later than the others because he could not deny himself the pleasure of hanging the prisoner from the bough of a tree. Just as he had finished he saw the English coming up; they were between him and the stables; he could not reach his horse and was obliged to run away. But he was in full armour, and nobody can run fast when he is wearing things like steel cricket-pads on his legs. The country people who were with the English wore no armour; they ran after Michael and threw the noose of a rope over his neck. At that moment Michael prayed a prayer to the holy Saint Catherine, the patron of his village church at home. He vowed that if she would help him now he would make a pilgrimage to her chapel at Fierbois, in France. In spite of his prayer he was hanged by the son of the man whom he had hanged himself, and now you might think that all was over with Michael. However, he lived and made his pilgrimage to Fierbois, and told his story to the priest of the chapel, who wrote it down in a book, which you may read in printed English.
Michael's story was this. On the night of his hanging, the night of Maundy Thursday, the priest of Clisson was going to bed, when he heard a clear voice in his room saying, 'Go and cut down the Scottish soldier who was hanged, for he is still alive.'

The priest thought he was dreaming or that someone was playing a trick on him. The voice kept on speaking, and the priest looked into his cupboard, and up the chimney, and under the bed, and everywhere, but he could find no speaker. So the holy man went to bed, and slept soundly, and next day did his services for Good Friday. Then about noon he told the sexton to go and look at the Scot, and find out whether he were alive or dead. The sexton walked away whistling for joy at the death of a Scot, but he came back running with a very white face.

He could scarcely speak for fear, but his story was that he had found the Scot, and, to try whether he were alive or not, had taken out his knife and sliced one of his toes. The blood came, and the foot kicked!

The priest therefore, with other people, went to the wood and cut Michael down, and poured wine into his mouth, till he sat up and swore just like himself. The son of the man whom Michael had hanged was looking on; he drew his sword and dealt a blow at Michael's head, cutting off one of his ears. This is quite true, for when Michael came to Fierbois he had only one ear, also a great scar on his toe where the sexton sliced it.

The priest and the others rushed on the man with the sword, disarmed him, and drove him out of the house.

Michael was then taken to a kind Abbess, who nursed him till he was well; but he was in no hurry to fulfill his vow and make his pilgrimage. On the other hand, he went into barracks with other soldiers, and misbehaved as usual. But one night, as he lay in bed in a
room where other soldiers lay, he received a sounding slap in the face, though he could see nobody near him, and heard a voice say, ‘Wilt thou never remember thy pilgrimage?’

On this Michael borrowed or stole a horse, and rode to Fierbois, where he told his story, and it was written down in the book of the chapel.

Thus we see that very strange things may happen. Can you imagine anything more strange than the story called ‘What became of Old Mr. Harrison’? In this tale two people were hanged for the murder of a man who was alive and well, and one of them confessed his guilt. This proves once more that it is a mistake to punish one man for killing another before we are quite sure that the other is dead. The law does not now allow this to be done; but in the reign of Charles II., when old Mr. Harrison ‘softly and suddenly vanished away,’ the law was not so particular, at least in country places. Nobody can even guess why old Mr. Harrison vanished away, from a place close to his own house, and why he stayed away for years, and why he came back, and where he had been, and how nobody ever saw him at all, going or coming back. Lastly, nobody can believe a word of the story which he told about his adventures in foreign parts; it is like a confused dream. Yet, except Mr. Harrison’s own tremendous fibs, the rest of the story is all quite true; it was printed at the time.

Then take the tale called ‘The Vanishing of Bathurst.’ In a moment, under the eyes of several persons, as he stood (in the dusk) at the heads of the horses of his carriage, Mr. Bathurst disappeared. If you have read The Hunting of the Snark, you may think that Mr. Bathurst met a Boojum and ‘softly and suddenly vanished away.’ People at the Zoological Gardens may tell you that there are no Boojums, and certainly they have none there. But this is a foolish argument, for, while many people have seen Boojums, of course