

The Divided Blanket

translated by Isabel Butler

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In goodly words and speech, it behooves every man, as best he may, to show and relate and tell clearly in the common tongue the adventures that befall in this world.

For as a man goeth to and fro he heareth many a thing told that is good to tell again; and those who know and may venture the emprise, should give to it all care and heed and study, even as did those who came before us, the good masters of old time; for they who would live hereafter must be no wise idle. But in these present days, which are evil, men grow slothful, wherefore now the gentle minstrels will venture little; for know ye of a sooth it is no light thing to tell a goodly tale.

Now will I show you an adventure that befell some seventeen years ago, or twenty mayhap. A rich man of Abbeville, well garnished with goods and gold, departed out of his town, both he and his wife and his son, because he had come into dispute with folk that were greater and stronger than he, and much he feared and dreaded to abide among his enemies. So from Abbeville he came unto Paris. There he lived peacefully, and did homage to the king and became his liegeman and burgess. Now inasmuch as the good man was discreet and courteous, and his dame of good disport, and the lad showed himself no wise foolish or discourteous or ill-taught, the neighbors in the street wherein they came to dwell were full glad of them, and often visited them and did them much honour. So many a one with no great endeavour on his part may make himself well loved, and by mere fair and pleasant speech win much praise of all; for whoso speaketh fair, getteth a fair answer, and whoso speaketh ill or doth ill, must perforce win evil for himself again; even so is it oftentimes seen and known, and the proverb saith, "Ye shall know the master by his works."

So for seven years and more the good man lived at Paris, and bought and sold such goods as came in his way; and he so bartered here and there that always he saved what he had, and added somewhat more thereto. So he traded prosperously and lived plenteously until he lost his companion, whenas God wrought his will in the wife who had been his fellow for thirty years. No other child had they save the youth of whom I have told you, who now at his father's side was all woful and discomfited; often he swooned for grief and wept, and sorely he lamented the mother who had reared him full softly. But his father comforted him, saying: "Fair son, now thy mother is dead, let us pray God that he grant her pardon. Wipe thine eyes and dry thy face for nought will tears avail thee; know of a sooth we must needs all die, all must pass by the same road; none can thwart death, and from death there is no return. Yet is there comfort for thee, fair son, for thou art growing a comely youth, and art near of an age to marry; whereas I am waxing old. If I can compass for thee a union with persons of high estate, I will part with good share of my havings; for thy friends are afar off and no wise speedily couldst thou come by them at need, none hast thou in this land and if thou dost not win them by thine own might. Now if I may but find a dame well born and rich in kindred and friends, who hath brethren and uncles and aunts and cousins germain, of good lineage and of good estate, I would help thee to win that which would profit thee, nor would I forbear on the score of my moneys."

Now, lordings, the story telleth us there were in that same land three knights who were brethren. On both father's

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side and mother's side they came of high parentage, and they were of much worship and honour in arms, but all their inheritance had been put in pawn, lands and forests and holdings, that they might follow tourneys; three thousand pounds at usury had they borrowed on their inheritance, whereby they were sore tormented. Now the eldest had a daughter born of his wife who was no longer living, and from her mother the damsel held a goodly house in Paris, face to face with the dwelling of the burges of whom I have told you. This house did not pertain to the father, and the friends of the mother took good heed that he put it not in pawn, inasmuch as the rent thereof was reckoned at forty pounds of Paris, nor had he ever been at any pain or trouble for the ingathering of this sum.

Now because this damsel, by reason of her kin, had friends and power, the good man sought her in marriage of her father and friends.

The knights questioned him of his goods and havings, how great they might be, and readily he answered them: "What in chatel and what in moneys I have of pounds one thousand and five hundred; I were but a liar and if I boasted me of more, and at the most I would add thereto one hundred pounds of Paris; honourably have I come by my fortune, and the half thereof am I ready to give over to my son." But the knights made answer: "This we may not agree to, fair sir; for if you were to become a templar or a white monk or a black monk, anon you would leave all your havings to the temple or the monastery; wherefore no such covenant will we make with you; no, sir, no, in faith, fair sir." "What other covenant then, tell me now I pray You." "Right gladly, fair, dear sir," quoth they. "Whatsoever ye can render, we would that you should give your son outright, that you should make over all to him, and that he should be so invested therein that neither you, nor any other, may in any manner dispute it with him. And if ye will agree to this, the marriage shall be made, but other wise we would not that your son should have our daughter and niece." The good man bethought him for a space, and looked at his son; still he pondered, but little good did his thought bring him, for soon he answered them, saying: "Sirs, whatsoever ye demand even that will I fulfil, but it shall be on this covenant: let my son take your daughter to wife, and I will give to him all that is mine, and since ye will so have it that I withhold nothing, let him receive all and take it for his own, for with it I endow and invest him." So the good man stripped himself bare, and before all the folk there gathered, disinvested and disinherited himself of all that he had in the world; so was he left bare as a peeled wand, for, and if his son did not give it him, he had neither chatel nor denier with which to buy his bread. All he gave him and declared him free of all; and when the word was spoken, the knight straightway took his daughter by the hand and gave her to the young man, who forthwith espoused her.

So for two years thereafter they lived content and at peace as husband and wife, at which time, meseemeth, the lady bore a fair son to the young master; heedfully was he reared and cherished, and the lady likewise was dearly cared for, and often went to the bath and enjoyed much ease. And still the good man abode with them, but he had done himself a mortal hurt when he stripped himself bare of all that he had to live at another's mercy. Yet for twelve years and over he dwelt in that house, until such time as the child was well grown and of wit to see what passed about him. Often he heard told what his grandfather had done for his father who thereby had espoused the dame his wife, and ever the child kept it in his memory.

Meantime the good man had waxed in years, and age had so weakened him that now he must needs support himself with a staff; and right liefly would his son have bought his winding sheet, for it seemed to him the old man had tarried over late above ground, and his long life was grievous to him. And the wife, who was full of pride and disdain, could not let be, but held the good man always in despite, and bore him such malice that she could not withhold her from saying to her lord: "Sir, for love's sake I pray you send hence your father, for by the faith I owe my mother's soul, so long as I know him to be in this house, no morsel shall pass my lips, for full fain am I that ye drive him hence." "Dame,"

said he in answer, "even so will I do."

So, for that he feared and doubted his wife, he went to his father and said to him forthright: "Father, father, now get thee gone, for I tell thee here is nought to make or mend with thee or with thy lodging; for these twelve years

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and over hath meat been given thee here in this hostel, but now rise up and that speedily; go seek other lodging, wheresoever else ye may find it, for so it must needs be." At these words the father wept full sorely, and often he cursed the day and the hour in that, he had lived so long in the world. "Ah, fair, sweet son, what sayest thou? For God's sake do me so much honour that ye suffer me to abide within thy gates; no great place do I need for my bed, nor will I crave of thee fire or carpet or rich coverlet, but let there be spread for me a few handfuls of straw beneath the pent-house without there. Never cast me out from thy house for reason that I eat of thy bread; that my bed be made without yonder irketh me not, if ye do but grant me my victual, but nowise should ye deny me wherewithal to live; and soothly, if thou shouldst wear the hair, thou shalt not so well expiate thy sins as if thou dost some comfort to me." "Fair father," quoth the young man, "sermon me no sermons, but make haste and get thee gone, lest my wife goeth out of her wit." "Where would ye that I should turn, fair son, I that have not so much as a farthing in the world?" "Go ye out into the city wherein there are a good ten thousand that seek and find whereby to live; each one there abideth his adventure; great mischance it were and if you likewise did not find sustenance; and many a one that hath acquaintance with you will lend you hostel." "Lend me, son? Will chance folk so do, when thou thyself deniest me thine house? Since thou wilt give me no comfort, how should those that are nought to me grant me anything ungrudgingly, when thou that art my son, failest me?" "Father," quoth he, "no more can I do herein, and I take upon me all the burden; know ye that this is my will."

Thereat was his father so in dole that his heart was near to bursting, and weak as he was, he riseth and goeth out of the house, weeping.

"Son," said he, "I commend thee to God. But since ye are fain of my going, in God's name, give me a fragment of a strip of thy coverlet no very precious thing is that for in truth I am so scantily clad I may not endure the cold, and it is from this I most suffer; wherefore I ask of thee wherewith to cover me withal." But his son, who ever shrank from giving, made answer: "Father, I have none; this is not the season of gifts, and none shall ye get at this time, and if I am not robbed and pillaged."

"But fair, sweet son, all my body is a-tremble and greatly do I doubt the cold; do but give me such a covering as thou usest for thy horse, that the frost may do me no hurt." And the young man who was fain of his departure, saw that he could not be quit of him and if he did not grant him somewhat; so, for that he desired to be rid of him, he bade his son give the old man what he asked.

The child sprang up when he was called, "And what is your will, sir?"

asked he. "Fair son," quoth the young master, "I would that if ye find the stable door open, ye give my father the blanket that is upon my black horse; give him the best, and if it be his will, he may make of it a covering or cloak or capuchon." "Fair grandfather, now come with me,"

said the child who was ready of wit. So the good man all in anger and sorrow departed with him. The child found the covering, and he took the newest and the best, the biggest and the widest, and folded it adown the middle, and as fair and even as he might, cut it atwain with his knife, and gave the half thereof to his grandfather. "Fair boy," quoth the old man, "what would ye? Thy father hath given the cloak to me, wherefore then hast thou cut it atwain? Herein hast thou done a great wrong, for thy father had commanded that I should have it whole and undivided, so now will I go my ways back to him again." "Go wheresoever it pleaseth you, for no more shall you get of me," saith the boy.

So the good man issued out of the stable. "Son," quoth he, "all thy sayings and doings are as nought. Why dost thou not chastise thy son that he may hold thee in fear and dread? See ye not, he hath kept back one half of the blanket?" "Foul fall thee, boy," saith the young master, "now give him the whole thereof." "Certes, that will I not," quoth the child, "for then how would you be paid? This half will I lay by for you, and no more shall ye get from me. And when I come to the mastery here, I will turn you out, even as you now turn him. And as he gave you all he had, so I would fain have all, and you shall take from me only just so much as you now give him. And

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if it so be that ye let him die in want, even so will I let you, and if I live." The young man heareth him, and deeply he sigheth, and bethinketh and questioneth himself; great heed he gave to the words of the child. Then he turneth his eyes to his father, and saith: "Father, come hither again; it was sin and the devil that laid an ambush for me, but please God, this shall not be; rather I will make you from this day forth lord and master in my house. And if my wife will not keep peace, and if she will not suffer you, ye shall be served elsewhere.

Hereafter, pillow and rich coverlet shall be given you for your case, and I pledge you by Saint Martin, that I will never drink wine nor eat a rich morsel, but you shall have a better; and you shall dwell in a ceiled chamber, and keep a good fire in the chimney place; and garments shall ye have, like unto mine. For ye dealt fairly by me, sweet father, and if I am now rich and puissant, it is by reason of thy silver."

This tale showeth clear and beareth witness how the child turned his father from his ill intent. And moreover all they who have marriageable children should give heed to it. Do not after the manner of the good man, and when you are foremost, yield not up your place; give not so much to your son but that ye may recover somewhat again; set not your trust in him, for children are without pity, and speedily they weary of the father that waxeth helpless; and whoso falleth into the power of another in this world liveth in great torment. And he who liveth at the mercy of another, and looketh to another for his very sustenance, should be to you as a warning.

Bernier told this ensample that teacheth so goodly matter, and of it he made what he might.