



Dialect Tales

Sherwood Bonner

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SARSAR! The very name of the place was sinister! Who does not remember De Quincey's "Sarsar wind of desolation," and the chill shudder that quivered through the soul as the harsh adjective came blowing like a discord into the music of that incomparable writing? Not a misgiving, however, crossed my heart when, shortly before Christmas, my father asked me if I thought myself possessed of the qualifications necessary for collecting a bad debt. "The business of collecting, father," said I, with what malicious friends called my "prize-poem manner," "is odious in some of its features to a man of spirit; but it may bring into play some of the finest faculties of the human mind." "And body," added my father, in a quiet sort of way. "If courage is needed," said I, laughing, "I am the son of my State—the State that does not know how to surrender! As for tact, civility, address, urbanity, and downright stubbornness, these desirable qualities are surely mine by right of inheritance." "Well, well," said my father, meditatively, "it is a pretty rough place, Sarsar is. The debt is one thousand dollars; and if you get this sum, or any part of it, I don't mind saying it is yours for a Christmas-box." For many reasons these were delightful words. First, while I fully intended that my life should teem with good things, at present it was as bare and empty as a sun-dried skull. My father, with the best intentions in the world, was so indifferent to the doctrines of Malthus as to become the parent of a perfect brood of young ones, each of whom had to stand on his own legs as soon as they were strong enough. I was at the beginning of my career, and made shift to get on; but such a sugar-plum as a thousand dollars had never dropped into my mouth. As befitted my slim purse, I was madly, unutterably in love—in love with Angie Bell, the prettiest girl, I would swear, among a million picked beauties. With the thousand dollars fairly mine, I should be able to offer her those delicate attentions man delights to lavish on the woman he adores—buggy drives and bonbons, new music, books, and bouquets. Thus I should weave myself, as it were, into her life, keep her little heart in a perpetual simmer of kindly feeling, and dispose her to look tenderly on my encroaching passion, nor resist when its tide should sweep her from her moorings into my arms. Unless—reflected I—it might be better to trust to winning her solely on my merits, and, the betrothal an accomplished fact, spend all the sum in the purchase of a troth gift in some degree worthy of her inspiring beauty.

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