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The Devil and Tom Walker.

By WASHINGTON IRVING. The first news his wife had to tell him was the sudden death of Absalom Crown-

inshield, the rich buccaneer. It was announced in the papers with the usual flourish that "a great man had fallen in Tom recollected the tree which his

black friend had just hewn down, and which was ready for burning. "Let the freebooter roast," said Tom; "who cares?" He now felt convinced that all he had heard and seen was no illusion.

He was not prone to let his wife into . his confidence; but as this was an uneasy secret, he willingly shared it with her. All her avarice was awakened at the mention of hidden gold, and she urged her husband to comply with the black man's terms and secure what would make them wealthy for life. However Tom might have felt disposed to sell himself to the devil, he was determined not to do so to oblige his wife; so he flatly refused out of the mere spirit of contradiction. Many and bitter were the quarrels they had on the subject, but the more she talked the more resolute was Tom not to be damned to please her. At length she determined to drive the bargain on her own account, and if she succeeded to keep all the gain to herself.

Being of the same fearless temper as her husband, she sat off for the old Indian fort towards the close of a summer's day. She was many hours absent. When she came back she was reserved and sul- went about with maps of grants and len in her replies. She spoke something townships and Eldorados lying noof a black man whom she had met about | body knew where, but which everytwilight, hewing at the root of a tall tree. He was sulky, however, and would not | word, the great speculating fever which co ne to terms; she was to go again with a propitiatory offering, but what it was she forbore to say.

the swamp, with her apron heavily laden. Tom waited and waited for her, but in dream had gone off, and the imaginary vain; midnight came, but she did not fortunes with it; the patients were left make her appearance; morning, noon, | in doleful plight, and the whole country night returned, but still she did not resounded with the consequent cry of come. Tom now grew uneasy for her | "hard times." safety, especially as he found she had carried off in her apron the silver teapot | tress did Tom Walker set up as a usurer and spoons and every portable article of [in Boston. His door was some throughd value. Another night elapsed, another by customers. The needy and the admorning came; but no wife. In a word, | venturous, the gambling speculator, the she was never heard of more.

that have become confounded by sacrifice; hurried to Tom Walls r. a variety of historians. Some asserted | Thus Tom was the univer If gi nd of that she lost her way among the tangled | the needy, and he acted like a "friend in I mazes of the swamp and sunk into some | need;" that is to say, he alway revacted pit or slough; others, more uncharitable, good pay and good security. In proporhinted that she had eloped with the | tion to the distress of the applicant was household booty and made off to some the hardness of his terms. He accumuother province, while others asserted that | dated bonds and mortgages, gradually the tempter had decoyed her into a dis- squeezed his customers closer and closer, mal quagmire, on top of which her hat and sent them at length dry as a sponge was found lying. In confirmation of this it was said a great black man with an ax on his shoulder was seen late that very evening coming out of the swamp, carrying a bundle tied in a check apron, with an air of surly triumph.

The most current and probable story, however, observes that Tom Walker grew so anxious about the fate of his wife and his property that he sat out at length to seek them both at the Indian fort. Dur- | which drew it; and as the ungreased ing a long summer's afternoon he wheels groaned and screeched on the searched about the gloomy place, but no axletrees you would have thought you wife was to be seen. He called her name re- heard the souls of the poor debiors he peatedly, but she was nowhere to be heard. | was squeezing. The bittern alone responded to his voice, as he flew screaming by, or the bullfrog | thoughtful. Having secured the good croaked dolefully from a neighboring things of this world, he began to feel pool. At length, it is said, just in the anxious about those of the next. He brown hour of twilight, when the owls | thought with regret on the bargain he began to hoot and the bats to flit about, | had made with his black friend, and set his attention was attracted by the clamor | his wits to work to cheat him out of the of carrion crows that were hovering conditions. He became, therefore, all about a cypress tree. He looked and be- of a sudden, a violent church goer. He held a bundle tied in a check apron and prayed loudly and strenuously, as if hanging in the branches of a tree; with a | heaven were to be taken by force of great vulture perched hard by, as if lungs. Indeed, one might always tell keeping watch upon it. He leaped with | when he had sinned most during the week | joy, for he recognized his wife's apron, valuables.

"Let us get hold of the property," said he consolingly to himself, "and we will endeavor to do without the woman." As he scrambled up the tree the vul-

ture spread its wide wings and sailed off screaming into the deep shadows of the stern supervisor and censurer of his forest. Tom seized the check apron, neighbors, and seemed to think every sin but, woful sight! found nothing but a | entered up to their account became a heart and liver tied up in it.

tempted to deal with the black man as | notorious as his riches. she had been accustomed to deal with Still, in spite of all this strenuous ather husband; but though a female scold | tention to forms, Tom had a lucking | is generally considered a match for the | dread that the devil, after all, would devil, yet in this instance she appears to have his due. That he might not be have had the worst of it. She must have I taken unawares, therefore, it is said he died game, however, from the part that always carried a small Bible in his coat remained unconquered. Indeed, it is pocket. He had also a great telio Bible said Tom noticed many prints of cloven on his counting house desk, and would feet deeply stamped about the tree, and | frequently be found reading it when peoseveral handfuls of hair that looked ple called on business; on such occasions as if they had been plucked from he would lay lris green spectacles on the the coarse black shock of the book, to mark the place, while he turned woodsman. Tom knew his wife's prowess | round to drive some usurious bargain. tough time of it!"

his property by the loss of his wife; for he was a little of a philosopher. He even felt something like gratitude towards the black woodsman, who he considered had done him a kindness. He sought, therefore, to cultivate a farther acquaintance with him, but for some time without success; the old black legs played shy, for, whatever people may think, he is not always to be had for calling for; he knows how to play his cards when pretty sure of

his game. At length, it is said, when delay had whetted Tom's cagerness to the quick and prepared him to agree to anything rather than not gain the promised treasure, he met the black man one evening in his usual woodman dress, with his ax on his shoulder, sauntering along the edge of the swamp and humming a tune. He affected to receive Tom's advance with great indifference, made brief re-

plies and went on humming his tune. By degrees, however, Tom brought him to business, and they began to haggle about the terms on which the former was to have the pirate's treasure. There was one condition which need not be mentioned, being generally understood in all cases where the devil grants favors; but there were others about which, though of less importance, he was inflexibly obstinate. He insisted that the money found through his means should be employed in his service. He proposed, therefore, that Tom should employ it in the black traffic; that is to say, that he should fit out a slave ship. This, however, Tom resolutely refused; he was bad enough, in all conscience;

but the devil himself could not tempt him to turn slave dealer.

posed instead that he should turn usurer; the devil being extremely anxious for the increase of usurers, looking upon them as his peculiar people.

To this no objections were made, for it was just to Tom's taste. "You-shall open a broker's shop in Boston next month," said the black man.

"I'll do it to-morrow if you wish," said Tom Walker. You shall lend money at 2 per cent. a

"Egad, I'll charge 4!" replied Tom Walker. "You shall extort bonds, foreclose

mortgages, drive the merchant to bank ruptcy"___ "I'll drive him to the d-l," cried Tom Walker, eagerly.

"You are the usurer for my money!" said the black legs, with delight. "When will you want the rhino?" "This very night."

"Done!" said the devil. "Done!" said Tom Walker. So they

shook hands and struck a bargain. A few days' time saw Tom Walker seated behind his desk in a counting house in Beston. His reputation for a ready moneyed man, who would lend money out for a good consideration, soon spread abroad. Everybody remembers the days of Governor Belcher, when money was particularly scarce. It was a time of paper credit. The country had been deliged with government bills; the famous Land bank had been established; there shad been a rage for speculating; the people had run mad with schemes for new settlements; for building cities in the wilderness; land jobbers body was ready to purchase. In a breaks out every now and then in the country had raged to an alarming degree, and everybody was alreaming of The next evening she sat off again for | making sudden fortunes from nothing. As usual, the fever had subsided; the

At this propitions time of public disdreaming hand jobber, the thuitless What was her real fate nobody knows, I tradesman, the merchant with cracked in consequence of so many pretend- credit, in short, every one driven to raise ing to know. It is one of those facts | money by desperate means are lelesperate

from his door.

In this way he made money hand over hand, became a rich and mighty man, and exalted his cocked hat upon change? He built himself, as usual, a vast house out of ostentation, but left the greater part of it untinished and unfurnished out of parsimony. He even set up a Carriage in the fullness of his vainglory, though he nearly starved the horses

As Tom waxed old, however, he grew by the clamor of his Sunday devotion. and supposed it to contain the household | The quiet Christians who had been modestly and steadfastly traveling Zionward were struck with self reproach at seeing themselves so suddenly outstripped in their career by this new made convert. Tom was as rigid in religious as in money matters; he was a credit on his own side of the page. He Such, according to the most authentic | even talked of the expediency of reviving | old story, was all that was to be found | the persecution of Quakers and Analapof Tom's wife. She had probably at tists. In a word, Tom's zea! became as

by experience. He shrugged his shoul- Some say that Tom grew a little crack ders as he looked at the signs of a fierce | brained in his old days, and that laneying clapper clawing. "Egad," said he to his end approaching, he had his horse himself, "Old Scratch must have had a | new shod, saddled and bridled, and buried | with his feet uppermost, because he sup-Tom consoled himself for the loss of posed that at the last day the world would be turned upside down, in which case he should find his horse standing ready for mounting, and he was determined at the worst to give his old friend a run for it. This, however, is probably a mere old wives' fable. If he really did take such a precaution it was totally superfluous; at least so says the authentic old legend, which closes his story in the following

On one hot afternoon in the dog days, just as a terrible black thunder gust was coming up, Tom sat in his counting house in his white linen cap and India silk morning gown. He was on the point of foreclosing a mortgage, by which he would complete the ruin of an unlucky land speculator for whom he had professed the greatest friendship. The poor land jobber begged him to grant a few few months' indulgence. Tom had grown testy and irritated and refused another day.

upon the parish," said the land jobber. "Charity begins at home," replied Tom, must take care of myself in these hard times."

"You have made so much meney out of me," said the speculator. Tom lost his patience and his piety-"The devil take me," said he, "if I have

made a farthing!" Just then there were three loud knocks at the street door. He stepped out to see who was there. A black man was

holding a black horse which neighed and stamped with impatience. "Tom, you're come for!" said the black fellow, gruffly, Tom shrunk back, but too late. He had left his little Bible at the bottom of his coat pocket, Finding Tom so squeamish on this and his big Bible on the desk buried point, he did not insist upon it, but pro- | under the mortgage he was about to

foreclose; never was sinner taken more unawares. The black man whisked him like a child astride the horse and away he galloped in the midst of a thunder storm. The elerks stuck their pens behind their ears and stared after him from the windows. Away went Tom Walker, dashing down the street; his white cap bobting up and down, his morning gown fluttering in the wind, and his steed striking fire out of the pavement at every bound. When the clerks turned to look for the black man he had disappeared.

Tom Walker never returned to foreclose the mortgage. A countryman who lived on the borders of the swamp reported that in the height of the thunder gust he had heard a great clattering of hoofs and a howling along the road, and that when he ran to the window he just caught sight of a figure, such as I have described, on a horse that galloped like mad across the fields, over the hills and down into the black hemlock swamp towards the old Indian fort, and that shortly after a thunderbolt fell in that direction which seemed to set the whole forest in a blaze.

The good people of Boston shook their heads and shrugged their shoulders, but had been so much accustomed to witches and goblins and tricks of the devil in all kinds of shapes from the first settlement of the colony, that they were not so much horror struck as might have been expected. Trustees were appointed to take charge of Tom's effects. There was nothing, however, to administer upon. On searching his coffers all his bonds and mortgages were found reduced to cinders. In place of gold and silver, his iron chest was filled with chips and shavings; two skeletons lay in his stable instead of his half starved horses, and the very next day his great house took fire and was burned to the ground.

Such was the end of Tom Walker and his ill gotten wealth. Let all griping money brokers lay this story to heart. The truth of it is not to be doubted. The very hole under the oak trees, from whence he dug Kidd's money, is to be seen to this day; and the neighboring swamp and old Indian fort, is often haunted in stormy nights by a figure on horseback, in a morning gown and white cap, which is doubtless the troubled spirit of the usurer. In fact, the story has resolved itself into a proverb, and is I the origin of that popular saying prevalent throughout New England of "The Devil and Tom Wallter."

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