

***WASHINGTON  
IRVING***

***BRACEBRIDGE  
HALL***

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**Washington Irving**

# **Bracebridge Hall**

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THE STUDENT OF SALAMANCA  
ANNETTE DELARBRE  
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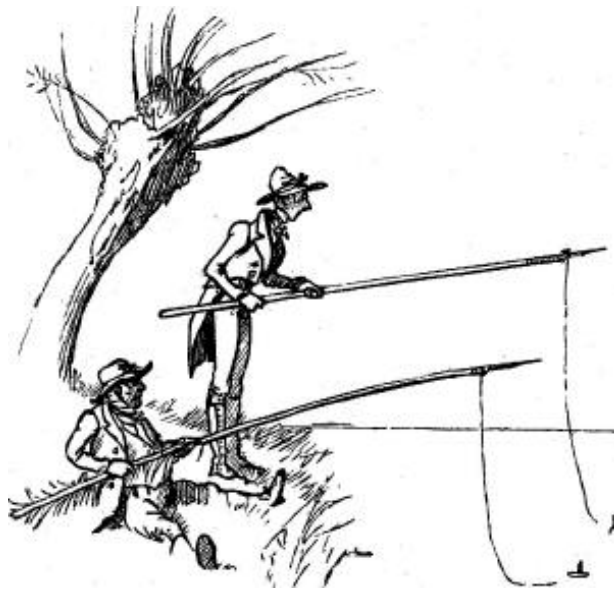


"The chivalry of the Hall prepared to take the Field."—  
*Frontispiece.*

## PREFACE

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The success of "OLD CHRISTMAS" has suggested the republication of its sequel "BRACEBRIDGE HALL," illustrated by the same able pencil, but condensed so as to bring it within reasonable size and price.





## THE HALL.

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The ancientest house, and the best for housekeeping in this county or the next, and though the master of it write but squire, I know no lord like him.

MERRY BEGGARS.

The reader, if he has perused the volumes of the Sketch Book, will probably recollect something of the Bracebridge family, with which I once passed a Christmas. I am now on another visit at the Hall, having been invited to a wedding which is shortly to take place. The squire's second son, Guy, a fine, spirited young captain in the army, is about to be married to his father's ward, the fair Julia Templeton. A gathering of relations and friends has already commenced, to celebrate the joyful occasion; for the old gentleman is an enemy to quiet, private weddings. "There is nothing," he says, "like launching a young couple gaily, and cheering them from the shore; a good outset is half the voyage."

Before proceeding any farther, I would beg that the squire might not be confounded with that class of hard-riding, fox-hunting gentlemen so often described, and, in fact, so nearly extinct in England. I use this rural title, partly because it is his universal appellation throughout the



neighbourhood, and partly because it saves me the frequent repetition of his name, which is one of those rough old English names at which Frenchmen exclaim in despair.

The squire is, in fact, a lingering specimen of the old English country gentleman; rusticated a little by living almost entirely on his estate, and something of a humourist, as Englishmen are apt to become when they have an opportunity of living in their own way. I like his hobby passing well, however, which is, a bigoted devotion to old English manners and customs; it jumps a little with my own humour, having as yet a lively and unsated curiosity about the ancient and genuine characteristics of my "fatherland."

There are some traits about the squire's family also, which appear to me to be national. It is one of those old aristocratical families, which, I believe, are peculiar to England, and scarcely understood in other countries; that is to say, families of the ancient gentry, who, though destitute of titled rank, maintain a high ancestral pride; who look down upon all nobility of recent creation, and would consider it a sacrifice of dignity to merge the venerable name of their house in a modern title.

This feeling is very much fostered by the importance which they enjoy on their hereditary domains. The family mansion is an old manor-house, standing in a retired and beautiful part of Yorkshire. Its inhabitants have been always regarded through the surrounding country as "the great ones of the earth;" and the little village near the hall looks up to the squire with almost feudal homage. An old manor-house, and an old family of this kind, are rarely to be met with at the present day; and it is probably the peculiar humour of the squire that has retained this secluded specimen of English housekeeping in something like the genuine old style.

I am again quartered in the panelled chamber, in the antique wing of the house. The prospect from my window, however, has quite a different aspect from that which it

wore on my winter visit. Though early in the month of April, yet a few warm, sunshiny days have drawn forth the beauties of the spring, which, I think, are always most captivating on their first opening. The parterres of the old-fashioned garden are gay with flowers; and the gardener has brought out his exotics, and placed them along the stone balustrades. The trees are clothed with green buds and tender leaves; when I throw open my jingling casement I smell the odour of mignonette, and hear the hum of the bees from the flowers against the sunny wall, with the varied song of the throstle, and the cheerful notes of the tuneful little wren.



While sojourning in this stronghold of old fashions, it is my intention to make occasional sketches of the scenes and characters before me. I would have it understood, however, that I am not writing a novel, and have nothing of intricate plot, or marvellous adventure, to promise the reader. The Hall of which I treat has, for aught I know, neither trap-door, nor sliding-panel, nor donjon-keep: and indeed appears to have no mystery about it. The family is a worthy, well-meaning family, that, in all probability, will eat and drink,

and go to bed, and get up regularly, from one end of my work to the other; and the squire is so kindhearted an old gentleman, that I see no likelihood of his throwing any kind of distress in the way of the approaching nuptials. In a word, I cannot foresee a single extraordinary event that is likely to occur in the whole term of my sojourn at the Hall.



I tell this honestly to the reader, lest when he find me dallying along, through everyday English scenes, he may hurry ahead, in hopes of meeting with some marvellous adventure farther on. I invite him, on the contrary, to ramble gently on with me, as he would saunter out into the fields, stopping occasionally to gather a flower, or listen to a bird, or admire a prospect, without any anxiety to arrive at the end of his career. Should I, however, in the course of my loiterings about this old mansion, see or hear anything curious, that might serve to vary the monotony of this everyday life, I shall not fail to report it for the reader's entertainment.

For freshest wits I know will soon be wearie  
Of any book, how grave so e'er it be,

Except it have odd matter, strange and merrie,  
Well sauc'd with lies and glared all with glee.<sup>1</sup>



## **THE BUSY MAN.**

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A decayed gentleman, who lives most upon his own mirth and my master's means, and much good do him with it. He does hold my master up with his stones, and songs, and catches, and such tricks, and jigs you would admire — he is with him now.

JOVIAL CREW.

By no one has my return to the Hall been more heartily greeted than by Mr. Simon Bracebridge, or Master Simon, as the squire most commonly calls him. I encountered him just as I entered the park, where he was breaking a pointer, and he received me with all the hospitable cordiality with which a man welcomes a friend to another one's house. I have already introduced him to the reader as a brisk old bachelor-looking little man; the wit and superannuated beau of a large family connection, and the squire's factotum. I found him, as usual, full of bustle; with a thousand petty things to do, and persons to attend to, and in chirping good-humour;

for there are few happier beings than a busy idler; that is to say, a man who is eternally busy about nothing.

I visited him, the morning after my arrival, in his chamber, which is in a remote corner of the mansion, as he says he likes to be to himself, and out of the way. He has fitted it up in his own taste, so that it is a perfect epitome of an old bachelor's notions of convenience and arrangement. The furniture is made up of odd pieces from all parts of the house, chosen on account of their suiting his notions, or fitting some corner of his apartment; and he is very eloquent in praise of an ancient elbow-chair, from which he takes occasion to digress into a censure on modern chairs, as having degenerated from the dignity and comfort of high-backed antiquity.

Adjoining to his room is a small cabinet, which he calls his study. Here are some hanging shelves, of his own construction, on which are several old works on hawking, hunting, and farriery, and a collection or two of poems and songs of the reign of Elizabeth, which he studies out of compliment to the squire; together with the Novelists' Magazine, the Sporting Magazine, the Racing Calendar, a volume or two of the Newgate Calendar, a book of peerage, and another of heraldry.

His sporting dresses hang on pegs in a small closet; and about the walls of his apartment are hooks to hold his fishing-tackle, whips, spurs, and a favourite fowling-piece, curiously wrought and inlaid, which he inherits from his grandfather. He has also a couple of old single-keyed flutes, and a fiddle, which he has repeatedly patched and mended himself, affirming it to be a veritable Cremona: though I have never heard him extract a single note from it that was not enough to make one's blood run cold.

From this little nest his fiddle will often be heard, in the stillness of mid-day, drowsily sawing some long-forgotten tune; for he prides himself on having a choice collection of good old English music, and will scarcely have anything to

do with modern composers. The time, however, at which his musical powers are of most use is now and then of an evening, when he plays for the children to dance in the hall, and he passes among them and the servants for a perfect Orpheus.

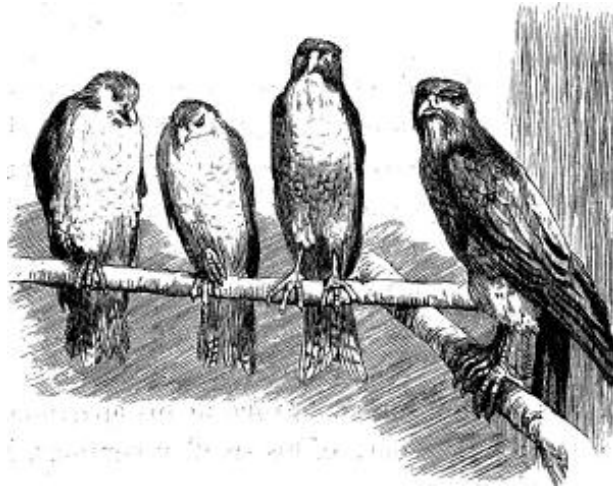


His chamber also bears evidence of his various avocations; there are half copied sheets of music; designs for needlework; sketches of landscapes, very indifferently executed; a camera lucida; a magic lantern, for which he is endeavouring to paint glasses; in a word, it is the cabinet of a man of many accomplishments, who knows a little of everything, and does nothing well.

After I had spent some time in his apartment admiring the ingenuity of his small inventions, he took me about the establishment, to visit the stables, dog-kennel, and other dependencies, in which he appeared like a general visiting the different quarters of his camp; as the squire leaves the control of all these matters to him, when he is at the Hall. He inquired into the state of the horses; examined their feet; prescribed a drench for one, and bleeding for another; and then took me to look at his own horse, on the merits of which he dwelt with great prolixity, and which, I noticed, had the best stall in the stable.

After this I was taken to a new toy of his and the squire's, which he termed the falconry, where there were several unhappy birds in durance, completing their education. Among the number was a fine falcon, which Master Simon

had in especial training, and he told me that he would show me, in a few days, some rare sport of the good old-fashioned kind. In the course of our round, I noticed that the grooms, gamekeeper, whippers-in, and other retainers, seemed all to be on somewhat of a familiar footing with Master Simon, and fond of having a joke with him, though it was evident they had great deference for his opinion in matters relating to their functions.



There was one exception, however, in a testy old huntsman, as hot as a peppercorn; a meagre, wiry old fellow, in a threadbare velvet jockey-cap, and a pair of leather breeches, that, from much wear, shone as though they had been japanned. He was very contradictory and pragmatical, and apt, as I thought, to differ from Master Simon now and then out of mere captiousness. This was particularly the case with respect to the treatment of the hawk, which the old man seemed to have under his peculiar care, and, according to Master Simon, was in a fair way to ruin; the latter had a vast deal to say about *casting*, and *imping*, and *gleaming*, and *enseaming*, and giving the hawk the *rangle*, which I saw was all heathen Greek to old Christy; but he maintained his point notwithstanding, and seemed to hold all his technical lore in utter disrespect.





I was surprised at the good humour with which Master Simon bore his contradictions, till he explained the matter to me afterwards. Old Christy is the most ancient servant in the place, having lived among dogs and horses the greater part of a century, and been in the service of Mr. Bracebridge's father. He knows the pedigree of every horse on the place, and has bestrid the great-great-grandfathers of most of them. He can give a circumstantial detail of every fox-hunt for the last sixty or seventy years, and has a

history of every stag's head about the house, and every hunting trophy nailed to the door of the dog-kennel.

All the present race have grown up under his eye, and humour him in his old age. He once attended the squire to Oxford when he was a student there, and enlightened the whole university with his hunting lore. All this is enough to make the old man opinionated, since he finds, on all these matters of first-rate importance, he knows more than the rest of the world. Indeed, Master Simon had been his pupil, and acknowledges that he derived his first knowledge in hunting from the instructions of Christy; and I much question whether the old man does not still look upon him as rather a greenhorn.

On our return homewards, as we were crossing the lawn in front of the house, we heard the porter's bell ring at the lodge, and shortly afterwards, a kind of cavalcade advanced slowly up the avenue. At sight of it my companion paused, considered for a moment, and then, making a sudden exclamation, hurried away to meet it. As it approached I discovered a fair, fresh-looking elderly lady, dressed in an old-fashioned riding-habit, with a broad-brimmed white beaver hat, such as may be seen in Sir Joshua Reynolds' paintings. She rode a sleek white pony, and was followed by a footman in rich livery, mounted on an overfed hunter. At a little distance in the rear came an ancient cumbrous chariot, drawn by two very corpulent horses, driven by as corpulent a coachman, beside whom sat a page dressed in a fanciful green livery. Inside of the chariot was a starched prim personage, with a look somewhat between a lady's companion and a lady's maid; and two pampered curs that showed their ugly faces and barked out of each window.



There was a general turning out of the garrison to receive this new comer. The squire assisted her to alight, and saluted her affectionately; the fair Julia flew into her arms, and they embraced with the romantic fervour of boarding-school friends. She was escorted into the house by Julia's lover, towards whom she showed distinguished favour; and a line of the old servants, who had collected in the hall, bowed most profoundly as she passed.

I observed that Master Simon was most assiduous and devout in his attentions upon this old lady. He walked by the side of her pony up the avenue; and while she was receiving the salutations of the rest of the family, he took occasion to notice the fat coachman, to pat the sleek carriage-horses, and, above all, to say a civil word to my lady's gentlewoman, the prim, sour-looking vestal in the chariot.



I had no more of his company for the rest of the morning. He was swept off in the vortex that followed in the wake of this lady. Once indeed he paused for a moment, as he was hurrying on some errand of the good lady's, to let me know that this was Lady Lillycraft, a sister of the squire's, of large fortune, which the captain would inherit, and that her estate lay in one of the best sporting counties in all England.



## **FAMILY SERVANTS.**

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Verily old servants are the vouchers of worthy housekeeping. They are like rats in a mansion, or mites in a cheese, bespeaking the antiquity and fatness of their abode.

In my casual anecdotes of the Hall, I may often be tempted to dwell on circumstances of a trite and ordinary nature, from their appearing to me illustrative of genuine national character. It seems to be the study of the squire to adhere, as much as possible, to what he considers the old landmarks of English manners. His servants all understand his ways, and, for the most part, have been accustomed to them from infancy; so that, upon the whole, his household presents one of the few tolerable specimens that can now be met with, of the establishment of an English country gentleman of the old school. By the by, the servants are not the least characteristic part of the household; the housekeeper, for instance, has been born and brought up at the Hall, and has never been twenty miles from it; yet she has a stately air that would not disgrace a lady that had figured at the court of Queen Elizabeth.

I am half-inclined to think that she has caught it from living so much among the old family pictures. It may, however, be owing to a consciousness of her importance in

the sphere in which she has always moved; for she is greatly respected in the neighbouring village, and among the farmers' wives, and has high authority in the household, ruling over the servants with quiet but undisputed sway.

She is a thin old lady, with blue eyes, and pointed nose and chin. Her dress is always the same as to fashion. She wears a small, well-starched ruff, a laced stomacher, full petticoats, and a gown festooned and open in front, which, on particular occasions, is of ancient silk, the legacy of some former dame of the family, or an inheritance from her mother, who was housekeeper before her. I have a reverence for these old garments, as I make no doubt they have figured about these apartments in days long past, when they have set off the charms of some peerless family beauty; and I have sometimes looked from the old housekeeper to the neighbouring portraits, to see whether I could not recognise her antiquated brocade in the dress of some one of those long-waisted dames that smile on me from the walls.



Her hair, which is quite white, is frizzed out in front, and she wears over it a small cap, nicely plaited, and brought down under the chin. Her manners are simple and primitive, heightened a little by a proper dignity of station.

The Hall is her world, and the history of the family the only history she knows, excepting that which she has read in the Bible. She can give a biography of every portrait in the picture gallery, and is a complete family chronicle.

She is treated with great consideration by the squire. Indeed, Master Simon tells me that there is a traditional anecdote current among the servants, of the squire's having been seen kissing her in the picture gallery, when they were both young. As, however, nothing further was ever noticed between them, the circumstance caused no great scandal; only she was observed to take to reading Pamela shortly

afterwards, and refused the hand of the village innkeeper, whom she had previously smiled on.

The old butler, who was formerly footman, and a rejected admirer of hers, used to tell the anecdote now and then, at those little cabals that will occasionally take place among the most orderly servants, arising from the common propensity of the governed to talk against administration; but he has left it off, of late years, since he has risen into place, and shakes his head rebukingly when it is mentioned.

It is certain that the old lady will, to this day, dwell on the looks of the squire when he was a young man at college; and she maintains that none of his sons can compare with their father when he was of their age, and was dressed out in his full suit of scarlet, with his hair craped and powdered, and his three-cornered hat.

She has an orphan niece, a pretty, soft-hearted baggage, named Phoebe Wilkins, who has been transplanted to the Hall within a year or two, and been nearly spoiled for any condition of life. She is a kind of attendant and companion of the fair Julia's; and from loitering about the young lady's apartments, reading scraps of novels, and inheriting secondhand finery, has become something between a waiting-maid and a slipshod fine lady.





She is considered a kind of heiress among the servants, as she will inherit all her aunt's property; which, if report be true, must be a round sum of good golden guineas, the accumulated wealth of two housekeepers' savings; not to mention the hereditary wardrobe, and the many little valuables and knick-knacks treasured up in the housekeeper's room. Indeed the old housekeeper has the reputation among the servants and the villagers of being passing rich; and there is a japanned chest of drawers and a large iron-bound coffer in her room, which are supposed by the housemaids to hold treasures of wealth.

The old lady is a great friend of Master Simon, who, indeed, pays a little court to her, as to a person high in authority: and they have many discussions on points of family history, in which, notwithstanding his extensive information, and pride of knowledge, he commonly admits her superior accuracy. He seldom returns to the Hall, after one of his visits to the other branches of the family, without

bringing Mrs. Wilkins some remembrance from the ladies of the house where he has been staying.

Indeed all the children in the house look up to the old lady with habitual respect and attachment, and she seems almost to consider them as her own, from their having grown up under her eye. The Oxonian, however, is her favourite, probably from being the youngest, though he is the most mischievous, and has been apt to play tricks upon her from boyhood.

I cannot help mentioning one little ceremony which, I believe, is peculiar to the Hall. After the cloth is removed at dinner, the old housekeeper sails into the room and stands behind the squire's chair, when he fills her a glass of wine with his own hands, in which she drinks the health of the company in a truly respectful yet dignified manner, and then retires. The squire received the custom from his father, and has always continued it.



There is a peculiar character about the servants of old English families that reside principally in the country. They have a quiet, orderly, respectful mode of doing their duties. They are always neat in their persons, and appropriately, and, if I may use the phrase, technically dressed; they move about the house without hurry or noise; there is nothing of the bustle of employment, or the voice of command;

nothing of that obtrusive housewifery that amounts to a torment. You are not persecuted by the process of making you comfortable; yet everything is done, and is done well. The work of the house is performed as if by magic, but it is the magic of system. Nothing is done by fits and starts, nor at awkward seasons; the whole goes on like well-oiled clockwork, where there is no noise nor jarring in its operations.

English servants, in general, are not treated with great indulgence, nor rewarded by many commendations; for the English are laconic and reserved towards their domestics; but an approving nod and kind word from master or mistress, goes as far here, as an excess of praise or indulgence elsewhere. Neither do servants exhibit any animated marks of affection to their employers; yet, though quiet, they are strong in their attachments; and the reciprocal regard of masters or servants, though not ardently expressed, is powerful and lasting in old English families.

The title of “an old family servant” carries with it a thousand kind associations in all parts of the world; and there is no claim upon the homebred charities of the heart more irresistible than that of having been “born in the house.” It is common to see grey-headed domestics of this kind attached to an English family of the “old school,” who continue in it to the day of their death in the enjoyment of steady unaffected kindness, and the performance of faithful unofficious duty. I think such instances of attachment speak well for master and servant, and the frequency of them speaks well for national character.

These observations, however, hold good only with families of the description I have mentioned, and with such as are somewhat retired, and pass the greater part of their time in the country. As to the powdered menials that throng the walls of fashionable town residences, they equally reflect the character of the establishments to which they

belong; and I know no more complete epitomes of dissolute heartlessness and pampered inutility.

But the good “old family servant!” — The one who has always been linked, in idea, with the home of our heart; who has led us to school in the days of prattling childhood; who has been the confidant of our boyish cares, and schemes, and enterprises; who has hailed us as we came home at vacations, and been the promoter of all our holiday sports; who, when we, in wandering manhood, have left the paternal roof, and only return thither at intervals, will welcome us with a joy inferior only to that of our parents; who, now grown grey and infirm with age, still totters about the house of our fathers in fond and faithful servitude; who claims us, in a manner, as his own; and hastens with querulous eagerness to anticipate his fellow-domestics in waiting upon us at table; and who, when we retire at night to the chamber that still goes by our name, will linger about the room to have one more kind look, and one more pleasant word about times that are past — who does not experience towards such a being a feeling of almost filial affection?

I have met with several instances of epitaphs on the gravestones of such valuable domestics, recorded with the simple truth of natural feeling. I have two before me at this moment; one copied from a tombstone of a churchyard in Warwickshire:

“Here lieth the body of Joseph Batte, confidential servant to George Birch, Esq. of Hampstead Hall. His grateful friend and master caused this inscription to be written in memory of his discretion, fidelity, diligence, and continence. He died (a bachelor) aged 84, having lived 44 years in the same family.”

The other was taken from a tombstone in Eltham churchyard:

“Here lie the remains of Mr. James Tappy, who departed this life on the 8th of September 1818, aged 84, after a

faithful service of 60 years in one family; by each individual of which he lived respected, and died lamented by the sole survivor.”

Few monuments, even of the illustrious, have given me the glow about the heart that I felt while copying this honest epitaph in the churchyard of Eltham. I sympathised with this “sole survivor” of a family, mourning over the grave of the faithful follower of his race, who had been, no doubt, a living memento of times and friends that had passed away; and in considering this record of long and devoted services, I called to mind the touching speech of Old Adam in “As You Like It,” when tottering after the youthful son of his ancient master:

“Master, go on, and I will follow thee  
To the last gasp, with love and loyalty!”

**NOTE.** — I cannot but mention a tablet which I have seen somewhere in the chapel of Windsor Castle, put up by the late King to the memory of a family servant who had been a faithful attendant of his lamented daughter, the Princess Amelia. George III. possessed much of the strong domestic feeling of the old English country gentleman; and it is an incident curious in monumental history, and creditable to the human heart, — a monarch erecting a monument in honour of the humble virtues of a menial.





## **THE WIDOW.**

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She was so charitable and pitious  
She would weep if that she saw a mouse  
Caught in a trap, if it were dead or bled;  
Of small hounds had she, that she fed  
With rost flesh, milke, and wastel bread;  
But sore wept she if any of them were dead,  
Or if man smote them with a yard smart.