

**A CORNISH
DROLL: A NOVEL**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649202133

A Cornish droll: a novel by Eden Phillpotts

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
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EDEN PHILLPOTTS

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DROLL: A NOVEL**

A CORNISH DROLL

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A Novel

by

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

Author of

"The Gray Room", "George Westover", "Peacock House", etc.

NEW YORK:
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

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A CORNISH DROLL

I

My darter's youngest darter be set to mind me nowadays, because I'm a terrible old man and I might die any minute. A very clever girl, and being at her wits' end to find me something to do a bit ago, she hit on the witty thought that I should write down the things that have happened to me in my early life.

"You've got your eyes and you've got your memory, gran'father," she says, "and you're a fine penman for your age also, so why for shouldn't you tell your story? Then you wouldn't need to talk so much, and be so busy, and it would pass a bit of the time for you and spare your game leg."

Well, I saw through it, of course, because the girl was wonderful fond of her books, and

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no doubt listening to me chattering often worried her sore and kept her from the printed page.

"I might do it, Maggie," I said, "but who the mischief would read it after 'twas writ?"

"Why, all the village," she told me; "and you'd surprise a good few people who've almost forgot you're still alive nowadays."

I thought over what the child said, and one wet day when I couldn't sit in the garden I took my pen and my glasses, and a few sheets of paper from Maggie's desk, and began putting down things that happened to me seventy years ago, when I was ten year old.

'Twas rather a mournful tale on the whole, but I hung on to it, being a very determined old man; and there's no doubt, in a manner of speaking, 'tis a very moral tale and shows the ways of God with His creatures, for I was a right down bad lot for the first five and twenty years of my life. There's no doubt, in fact, that I was so wicked as I could be with my scanty gifts; but if I'd been cleverer and richer, then for certain I should have been a lot wickeder also. The spirit was

willing, but the pocket was empty and the brains was weak; and as it had pleased God to call me to the humble station of a labouring man, down nigh the Land's End of Cornwall, I was mercifully prevented from any far-reaching sins. Even them I did commit for the most part came to nought; and that was God's will also. In due course He brought me to see that honesty was the best policy if you're a fool by nature; and once I got hold of that great truth there never was a honestest man than me.

'Twas a case of "go and sin no more" after I got up five and twenty year old; and though I ban't going to say I've never done wrong from that time till the present, being a matter of more than half a century, and me only a weak, human creature, still the balance have been on the side of righteousness, and when my white hairs go to the grave, there'll be two generations of my family to respect my name.

If I'd been good always it might have been a thought tame to tell about. For take the Holy Bible's self, as Jimmy Lanine said to

me. Knock out all the scamps and where are you? Without a doubt they be there to make the saints shine brighter by contrast and keep the Good Book going; and if the things I set down be more about bad folk than good, yet there's some very nice, high-minded people I've met in my life and, no doubt, they'd never have shone as they did but for the fine contrast the other sort offered.

As a retired policeman, old Jimmy Lanine was bound to stick up for wickedness, because his bread hung upon it, in a manner of speaking; but I said then, and I say again, that I shall prefer to see the next world without it—tame or otherwise.

Me and Lanine have very curious conversations on that subject, because I argue that when it comes to Heaven, his occupation will be gone; but he says that human nature's human nature, and if we be still going to be ourselves, there's bound to come a bit of work for the sake of law and order—wheresoever we are. They had to turn Old Nick out of Heaven for that reason, and the same thing might happen again. Lanine does love his