A DEAL WITH THE DEVIL

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649037391

A Deal with the Devil by Eden Phillpotts

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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By

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

AUTHOR OF

"IN SUGAR-CANE LAND;"
"THE END OF A LIFE;" "FOLLY AND FRESH AIR;"
"SOME EVERY-DAY FOLKS;"
ETC.

LONDON

BLISS, SANDS AND FOSTER

CRAVEN STREET, STRAND, W.C.

1895

CONTENTS.

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CHAPTER I.

GRANDFATHER'S BIRTHDAY.

BEFORE my grandpapa, Mr. Daniel Dolphin, comes down to breakfast on the morning of his hundredth birthday, I may tell you something about him. He has been married three times; he has buried all his wives and all his children. There were five of the latter, resulting from grandpapa's three marriages; but now I, Martha Dolphin, the only child of grandpapa's eldest son, am the sole survivor and living descendant of Daniel Dolphin.

Frankly it must be confessed that grandpapa has been an unprincipled man in his time. Among other inconveniences, resulting

from unedifying conduct, he suffered five years' imprisonment for forgery before I was born; but when he turned ninety-five I think he honestly began to realise that this world is, after all, a mere temporary place of preparation, and from that age up to the present moment (I am dealing with the morning of his hundreth birthday) he abandoned the things which once gave him pleasure, and began to look seriously towards another and a better life beyond the grave. Indeed, thanks to my ever-present warnings, and the Rev. John Murdoch's ministrations, grandpapa, from the time he was ninety-five, kept as sober, as honest, and as innocent as one could wish to see any nonagenarian. He regarded the future with quiet confidence now, feared death no longer, and alleged that his approaching end had no terrors for him. The dear old fellow was very fond of me, and he often said that, but for his patient granddaughter, he should never have turned from the broad downward road at all. I can see him now coming in to breakfast—a marvellous man for his age. Bent he was, and shrivelled as a brown pippin from last year looks in June, but

his eyes were bright, his intelligence was keen, his wit and humour ever active, his jokes most creditable for a man of such advanced age. In his antique frilled shirt, black stock, long snuff-coloured coat, and velvet cap, grandpapa looked a perfect picture. I cannot say there was anything venerable about him, but he would have made a splendid model for a miser or something of that sort.

"Many, many happy returns of the day, dear grandpapa," said I, hastening to kiss his withered cheek and to place a white rose from our little garden in his button-hole.

"Thank you, thank you, Martha. Have you got a present for the old man?" he asked, in his sharp, piping treble.

"That I have, dear grandpapa—a big packet of the real rappee you always like so much."

"Good girl. And this—Lord! Lord!—this is my hundredth birthday!"

Presently he wrestled with a poached egg and some bread-and-milk. He spoiled his beautiful frilled shirt with the egg, and used an expletive. Then he remembered a comic incident, and began to chuckle in the middle of tea-drinking, and so choked.