

**BLAIR ATHOL: A NOVEL.
IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. II, PP. 1-259**

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BLINKHOLIE

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BLAIR ATHOL.

VOL. II.

BLAIR ATHOL

A Novel

By "BLINKHOOLIE,"

AUTHOR OF

"THE TALE OF A HORSE," "HIDDEN TALENT," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
CHAPMAN & HALL, Limited, 11, HENRIETTA ST.
COVENT GARDEN.

1881.

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BLAIR ATHOL.

CHAPTER I.

“Heap on more wood!—the wind is chill;
But let it whistle as it will,
We’ll keep our Christmas merry still.
Each age has deemed the new-born year
The fittest time for festal cheer,
And well our Christian sires of old
Loved when the year its course had rolled,
And brought blithe Christmas back again
With all his hospitable train.”—*Scott*.

“Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,
The flying cloud, the frosty night,
The year is dying in the night;
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die.

“Ring out the old, ring in the new,
Ring, happy bells, across the snow:
The year is going, let him go;
Ring out the false, ring in the true.”—*Tennyson*.

CHRISTMAS day becomes more dismal and unreal every year. Possibly it may be that we are soured by time, and rendered more matter-of-fact by age, so that we think the day now is not what it used to be; but there surely is something more in it than that. Who of us is there that cannot and does not look back with regret to the Christmases of his youth, when the day was really merry, and there seemed nothing to darken the horizon? What man is there now who looks forward to Christmas with pleasure—the impending bills, the indigestible pudding, the compliments of the season, and the feeling that you ought to be happy whether you are or no?

Where are now the joys of our earlier days, when yule logs, yule cakes, yule candles, frumenty, holly, mistletoe, Christmas boxes, Christmas Eve supper, and Christmas Day dinner, were looked forward to with eagerness for many weeks, and were wept for when they

had gone, and the salutary medicine made its opportune appearance? Nay, even the very "waits" were by us anxiously expected; while now,—but no more of this, only when we think of those days we wish that it may indeed be ourselves and not the times that have changed, so that the younger generation may still experience the pleasures that have gone from us at any rate for ever.

Let us pass by the melancholy theme, and leave Christmas Day at Norton to the imagination of readers. It was much the same as elsewhere in the north of England, where many rites and ceremonies still linger that have been forgotten in the more advanced south. One thing, however, had happened,—Tom, whose constitution was of the very best, having quite shaken off the effects of his adventures, had become communicative as evening drew on, and finally told his whole story to his wondering parents and the girls. Every one laughed

immoderately at the recital, but Mr. Blackburn presently began to look grave, and said the position might turn out more awkward than any one thought, and that far the best thing to do was to write to Miss Whytehead without delay, thanking her for her hospitality, and disclosing delicately the mistake she had made in thinking Tom proposed to her; while a letter should also be sent to her brother Mark, explaining the whole circumstances. This Tom at once said he would do, thanking his father for the advice which all thought was excellent, though Mary Jolliffe, who knew Miss Whytehead, declared she would never let him slip in that easy manner. Tom, however, sat down and wrote as follows:—

“DEAR MISS WHYTEHEAD,

“I write to offer you my thanks for your kindness in putting me up at your house,

and my apologies for the unceremonious way in which I left.

“The fact is, I was so utterly taken aback by one event following so quickly on another, and your brother appearing on the top of it all, that I thought you would explain better to him without me, and that it would be well for me to go. I am, however, writing to him to put him right as to the circumstances under which he found me. Has anything been heard of the men ?

“Before concluding I ought to say that I am not quite clear whether you took my light and foolish remarks of the other evening in earnest or not. If you did not it's all right ; but if you did, as on reflection I think must have been the case, I am indeed sorry to have misled you. I can say no more on that subject, only I hope in any case you will forgive me.

“Yours truly,

“T. BLACKBURN.”