

BAGARROW

Frankly, I detest this Bagarrow. Yet it is quite generally conceded that Bagarrow is a very well-meaning fellow. But the trouble is to understand him. To do that I have been at some pains, and yet I am still a mere theorist. An anthropometric estimate of the man fails to reveal any reason for the distinction of my aversion. He is of passable height, breadth, and density, and, save for a certain complacency of expression, I find no salient objection in his face. He has bluish eyes and a whitish skin, and average-coloured hair--none of them distinctly indictable possessions. It is something in his interior and unseen mechanism, I think, that must be wrong; some internal lesion that finds expression in his acts.

His mental operations, indeed, were at first as inconceivable to me as a crab's or a cockchafer's. That is where all the trouble came in. For that reason alone they fascinated me and aggrieved me. From the conditions of our acquaintance--we were colleagues--I had to study him with some thoroughness, observing him under these circumstances and those. I have, by the bye, sometimes wondered idly how he would react to alcohol--a fluid he avoids. It would, I am sure, be an entirely novel and remarkable kind of Drunk, and I am also certain it would be an offensive one. But I can't imagine it; I have no data. I could as soon evolve from my inner consciousness an intoxicated giraffe. But, as I say, this interesting experience has hitherto been denied me.

Now my theory of Bagarrow is this, that he has a kind of disease in his ideals, some interruption of nutrition that has left them small and emaculate. He aims, it appears, at a state called "Really Nice" or the "True Gentleman," the outward and visible signs of which are a conspicuous quietness of costume, gloves in all weathers, and a tightly-rolled umbrella. But coupled in some way with this is a queer smack of the propagandist, a kind of dwarfed prophetic passion. That is the particular oddness of him. He displays a timid yet persistent desire to foist this True Gentleman of his upon an unwilling world, to make you Really Nice after his own pattern. I always suspect him of trying to convert me by stealth when I am not looking.

So far as I can see, Bagarrow's conception of this True Gentleman of his is at best a compromise, mainly holiness, but a tinted kind of holiness--goodness in clean cuffs and with something neat in ties. He renounces the flesh and the devil willingly enough, but he wants to keep up a decent appearance. Now a stark saint I can find sympathy for. I respect your prophet unkempt and in a hair shirt denouncing Sin--and mundane affairs in general--with hoarse passion and a fiery hate. I would not go for my holidays with nor make a domestic pet of such a man, but I respect him. But Bagarrow's pose is different. Bagarrow would call that carrying things to extremes. His is an unobtrusive virtue, a compromising dissent, inaggressive aggressions on sin. So I take it. And at times he puts it to you in a drawling argument, a stream of Bagarrowisms, until you have to hurt his feelings--happily he is always

getting his feelings hurt--just to stop the flow of him.

"Life," said Bagarrow, in a moment of expansiveness, "is scarcely worth living unless you are doing good to someone." That I take to be the keystone of him. "I want to be a Good Influence upon all the people I meet." I do not think it has ever dawned upon him that he himself is any way short of perfection; and, so far as I can see, the triumph and end of his good influence is cleanliness of cuff, compactness of umbrella, and general assimilation to the Bagarrow ideal.

Hear him upon one's social duties--this living soul in this world of wonders! "In moderation," said Bagarrow, opening out to questions on that matter, "social relaxation is desirable, and I will even go so far as to admit that I think it well to have at hand some pleasant expedient for entertaining people and passing the time. A humorous song or a recitation--provided it is in really good taste--is harmless enough, and sometimes it may even be turned to good account. And everyone should try to master some instrument or other. The flute, perhaps, is as convenient as any; for the fiddle and piano, you know, are difficult and expensive to learn, and require constant practice. A little legerdemain is also a great acquisition for a man. Some may differ from me in that," continued Bagarrow, "but I see no harm in it. There are hundreds of perfectly proper and innocent tricks with coins and bits of paper, and pieces of string, that will make an evening pass most delightfully. One may get quite a little reputation as an entertainer with these things."

"And it is," pursued Bagarrow, quite glowing with liberality, "just a little pharisaical to object to card tricks. There are quantities of really quite clever and mathematical things that one may do with a chosen card, dealing the pack into heaps and counting slowly. Of course it is not for mere pleasuring that I learn these things. It gives anyone with a little tact an opportunity for stopping card-playing. When the pack is brought in, and all the party are intent upon gaming, you may seize your opportunity and take the cards, saying, 'Let me show you a little trick,' or, 'Have you seen Maskelyne's new trick with the cards?' Before anyone can object you are displaying your skill to their astonished eyes, and in their wonder at your cleverness the objectionable game may be indefinitely postponed."

"Yet so set at times is your gambler upon his abominable pursuit," says Bagarrow, "that in practice even this ingenious expedient has been known to fail." He tried it once, it seems, in a race train to Kempton Park, and afterwards he had to buy a new hat. That incident, indeed, gives you the very essence of Bagarrow in his insidious attacks on evil. I remember that on another occasion he went out of his way to promise a partially intoxicated man a drink; and taking him into a public-house ordered two lemon squashes! Drinks! He liked lemon squash himself and he did not like beer, and he thought he had only to introduce the poor fallen creature to the delights of temperance to ensure his conversion there and then. I think he expected the man to fall upon him, crying "My benefactor!" But he did not say "My benefactor," at anyrate, though he fell upon him, cheerfully enough.

To avoid the appearance of priggishness, which he dreads with some reason, he even went so far as to procure a herb tobacco, which he smokes with the help of frequent sulphur matches. This he recommends to us strongly. "Won't you try it?" he says, with a winning smile. "Just once." And he is the only man I ever met who drinks that facetious fluid, non-alcoholic beer. Once he proposed to wean me upon that from my distinctive vice, which led indeed to our first rupture. "I find it delicious," he said in pathetic surprise.

It is one of his most inveterate habits to tell you quietly what he does, or would do under the circumstances. Seeing you at Kipling, he will propound the proposition that "all true literature has a distinct aim." His test of literary merit is "What good does it do you?" He is a great lender of books, especially of Carlyle and Ruskin, which authors for some absolutely inscrutable reason he considers provocative of Bagarrowism, and he goes to the County Council lectures on dairy-work, because it encourages others to improve themselves. But I have said enough to display him, and of Bagarrow at least--as I can well testify--it is easy to have more than enough. Indeed, after whole days with him I have gone home to dream of the realisation of his ideals, a sort of Bagarrow millennium, a world of Bagarrows. All kinds of men--Falstaffs, Don Quixotes, Alan Stewarts, John the Baptists, John Knoxes, Quilps, and Benvenuto Cellinis--all, so to speak, Bagarrowed, all with clean cuffs, tight umbrellas, and temperate ways, passing to and fro in a regenerate earth.

And so he goes on his way through this wonderful universe with his eyes fixed upon two or three secondary things, without the lust or pride of life, without curiosity or adventure, a mere timid missionary of a religion of "Nicer Ways," a quiet setter of a good example. I can assure you this is no exaggeration, but a portrait. It seems to me that the thing must be pathological, that he and this goodness of his have exactly the same claim upon Lombroso, let us say, as the born criminal. He is born good, a congenital good example, a sufferer from atrophy of his original sin. The only hope I can see for Bagarrow, short of murder, is forcible trepanning. He ought to have the seat of his ideals lanced, and all this wash about doing good to people by stealth taken away. It may be he might prove a very decent fellow then--if there was anything left of him, that is.