



General Moulton and the Devil

Charles Skinner
North American

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Jonathan Moulton, of Hampton, was a general of consequence in the colonial wars, but a man not always trusted in other than military matters. It was even hinted that his first wife died before her time, for he quickly found consolation in his bereavement by marrying her companion. In the middle of the night the bride was awakened with a start, for she felt a cold hand plucking at the wedding-ring that had belonged to the buried Mrs. Moulton, and a voice whispered in her ear, "Give the dead her own." With a scream of terror she leaped out of bed, awaking her husband and causing candles to be brought. The ring was gone.

It was long after this occurrence that the general sat musing at his fireside on the hardness of life in new countries and the difficulty of getting wealth, for old Jonathan was fond of money, and the lack of it distressed him worse than a conscience. "If only I could have gold enough," he muttered, "I'd sell my soul for it." Whiz! came something down the chimney. The general was dazzled by a burst of sparks, from which stepped forth a lank personage in black velvet with clean ruffles and brave jewels. "Talk quick, general," said the unknown, "for in fifteen minutes I must be fifteen miles away, in Portsmouth." And picking up a live coal in his fingers he looked at his watch by its light. "Come. You know me. Is it a bargain?"

The general was a little slow to recover his wits, but the word "bargain" put him on his mettle, and he began to

think of advantageous terms. "What proof may there be that you can do your part in the compact?" he inquired. The unknown ran his fingers through his hair and a shower of guineas jingled on the floor. They were pretty warm, but Moulton, in his eagerness, fell on hands and knees and gathered them to his breast.

"Give me some liquor," then demanded Satan, for of course he was no other, and filling a tankard with rum he lighted it with the candle, remarked, affably, "To our better acquaintance," and tossed off the blazing dram at a gulp. "I will make you," said he, "the richest man in the province. Sign this paper and on the first day of every month I will fill your boots with gold; but if you try any tricks with me you will repent it. For I know you, Jonathan. Sign."

Moulton hesitated. "Humph!" sneered his majesty. "You have put me to all this trouble for nothing." And he began to gather up the guineas that Moulton had placed on the table. This was more than the victim of his wiles could stand. He swallowed a mouthful of rum, seized a pen that was held out to him, and trembled violently as a paper was placed before him; but when he found that his name was to appear with some of the most distinguished in the province his nerves grew steadier and he placed his autograph among those of the eminent company, with a few crooked embellishments and all the t's crossed. "Good!" exclaimed the devil, and wrapping his cloak about him he stepped into the fire and was up the chimney in a twinkling.

Shrewd Jonathan went out the next day and bought the biggest pair of jack-boots he could find in Hampton. He hung them on the crane on the last night of that and all the succeeding months so long as he lived, and on the next morning they brimmed with coins. Moulton rolled in wealth. The neighbors regarded his sudden prosperity with amazement, then with envy, but afterward with suspicion. All the same, Jonathan was not getting rich fast enough to suit himself.

When the devil came to make a certain of his periodical payments he poured guineas down the chimney for half an hour without seeming to fill the boots. Bushel after bushel of gold he emptied into those spacious money-bags without causing an overflow, and he finally descended to the fireplace to see why. Moulton had cut the soles from the boots and the floor was knee-deep in money. With a grin at the general's smartness the devil disappeared, but in a few minutes a smell of sulphur pervaded the premises and the house burst into flames. Moulton escaped in his shirt, and tore his hair as he saw the fire crawl, serpent-like, over the beams, and fantastic smoke-forms dance in the windows. Then a thought crossed his mind and he grew calm: his gold, that was hidden in wainscot, cupboard, floor, and chest, would only melt and could be quarried out by the hundred weight, so that he could be well-to-do again. Before the ruins were cool he was delving amid the

rubbish, but not an ounce of gold could he discover. Every bit of his wealth had disappeared. It was not long after that the general died, and to quiet some rumors of disturbance in the graveyard his coffin was dug up. It was empty.

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