

*The Remains  
of the Day*

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*Darlington Hall*



It seems increasingly likely that I really will undertake the expedition that has been preoccupying my imagination now for some days. An expedition, I should say, which I will undertake alone, in the comfort of Mr Farraday's Ford; an expedition which, as I foresee it, will take me through much of the finest countryside of England to the West Country, and may keep me away from Darlington Hall for as much as five or six days. The idea of such a journey came about, I should point out, from a most kind suggestion put to me by Mr Farraday himself one afternoon almost a fortnight ago, when I had been dusting the portraits in the library. In fact, as I recall, I was up on the step-ladder dusting the portrait of Viscount Wetherby when my employer had entered carrying a few volumes which he presumably wished returned to the shelves. On seeing my person, he took the opportunity to inform me that he had just that moment finalized plans to return to the United States for a period of five weeks between August and September. Having made this announcement, my employer put his volumes down on a table, seated himself on the *chaise-longue*, and stretched out his legs. It was then, gazing up at me, that he said:

'You realize, Stevens, I don't expect you to be locked up here in this house all the time I'm away. Why don't you take the car and drive off somewhere for a few days? You look like you could make good use of a break.'

Coming out of the blue as it did, I did not quite know how to reply to such a suggestion. I recall thanking him for his

consideration, but quite probably I said nothing very definite, for my employer went on:

'I'm serious, Stevens. I really think you should take a break. I'll foot the bill for the gas. You fellows, you're always locked up in these big houses helping out, how do you ever get to see around this beautiful country of yours?'

This was not the first time my employer had raised such a question; indeed, it seems to be something which genuinely troubles him. On this occasion, in fact, a reply of sorts did occur to me as I stood up there on the ladder; a reply to the effect that those of our profession, although we did not see a great deal of the country in the sense of touring the countryside and visiting picturesque sites, did actually 'see' more of England than most, placed as we were in houses where the greatest ladies and gentlemen of the land gathered. Of course, I could not have expressed this view to Mr Farraday without embarking upon what might have seemed a presumptuous speech. I thus contented myself by saying simply:

'It has been my privilege to see the best of England over the years, sir, within these very walls.'

Mr Farraday did not seem to understand this statement, for he merely went on: 'I mean it, Stevens. It's wrong that a man can't get to see around his own country. Take my advice, get out of the house for a few days.'

As you might expect, I did not take Mr Farraday's suggestion at all seriously that afternoon, regarding it as just another instance of an American gentleman's unfamiliarity with what was and what was not commonly done in England. The fact that my attitude to this same suggestion underwent a change over the following days – indeed, that the notion of a trip to the West Country took an ever-increasing hold on my thoughts – is no doubt substantially attributable to – and why should I hide it? – the arrival of Miss Kenton's letter, her first in almost seven years if one

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discounts the Christmas cards. But let me make it immediately clear what I mean by this; what I mean to say is that Miss Kenton's letter set off a certain chain of ideas to do with professional matters here at Darlington Hall, and I would underline that it was a preoccupation with these very same professional matters that led me to consider anew my employer's kindly meant suggestion. But let me explain further.

The fact is, over the past few months, I have been responsible for a series of small errors in the carrying out of my duties. I should say that these errors have all been without exception quite trivial in themselves. Nevertheless, I think you will understand that to one not accustomed to committing such errors, this development was rather disturbing, and I did in fact begin to entertain all sorts of alarmist theories as to their cause. As so often occurs in these situations, I had become blind to the obvious – that is, until my pondering over the implications of Miss Kenton's letter finally opened my eyes to the simple truth: that these small errors of recent months have derived from nothing more sinister than a faulty staff plan.

It is, of course, the responsibility of every butler to devote his utmost care in the devising of a staff plan. Who knows how many quarrels, false accusations, unnecessary dismissals, how many promising careers cut short can be attributed to a butler's slovenliness at the stage of drawing up the staff plan? Indeed, I can say I am in agreement with those who say that the ability to draw up a good staff plan is the cornerstone of any decent butler's skills. I have myself devised many staff plans over the years, and I do not believe I am being unduly boastful if I say that very few ever needed amendment. And if in the present case the staff plan is at fault, blame can be laid at no one's door but my own. At the same time, it is only fair to point out that my task in this instance had been of an unusually difficult order.



What had occurred was this. Once the transactions were over – transactions which had taken this house out of the hands of the Darlington family after two centuries – Mr Farraday let it be known that he would not be taking up immediate residence here, but would spend a further four months concluding matters in the United States. In the meantime, however, he was most keen that the staff of his predecessor – a staff of which he had heard high praise – be retained at Darlington Hall. This ‘staff’ he referred to was, of course, nothing more than the skeleton team of six kept on by Lord Darlington’s relatives to administer to the house up to and throughout the transactions; and I regret to report that once the purchase had been completed, there was little I could do for Mr Farraday to prevent all but Mrs Clements leaving for other employment. When I wrote to my new employer conveying my regrets at the situation, I received by reply from America instructions to recruit a new staff ‘worthy of a grand old English house’. I immediately set about trying to fulfil Mr Farraday’s wishes, but as you know, finding recruits of a satisfactory standard is no easy task nowadays, and although I was pleased to hire Rosemary and Agnes on Mrs Clements’s recommendation, I had got no further by the time I came to have my first business meeting with Mr Farraday during the short preliminary visit he made to our shores in the spring of last year. It was on that occasion – in the strangely bare study of Darlington Hall – that Mr Farraday shook my hand for the first time, but by then we were hardly strangers to each other; quite aside from the matter of the staff, my new employer in several other instances had had occasion to call upon such qualities as it may be my good fortune to possess and found them to be, I would venture, dependable. So it was, I assume, that he felt immediately able to talk to me in a businesslike and trusting way, and by the end of our meeting, he had left me with the administration of a not inconsiderable sum to meet the costs of a wide range of

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preparations for his coming residency. In any case, my point is that it was during the course of this interview, when I raised the question of the difficulty of recruiting suitable staff in these times, that Mr Farraday, after a moment's reflection, made his request of me; that I do my best to draw up a staff plan – 'some sort of servants' rota' as he put it – by which this house might be run on the present staff of four – that is to say, Mrs Clements, the two young girls, and myself. This might, he appreciated, mean putting sections of the house 'under wraps', but would I bring all my experience and expertise to bear to ensure such losses were kept to a minimum? Recalling a time when I had had a staff of seventeen under me, and knowing how not so long ago a staff of twenty-eight had been employed here at Darlington Hall, the idea of devising a staff plan by which the same house would be run on a staff of four seemed, to say the least, daunting. Although I did my best not to, something of my scepticism must have betrayed itself, for Mr Farraday then added, as though for reassurance, that were it to prove necessary, then an additional member of staff could be hired. But he would be much obliged, he repeated, if I could 'give it a go with four'.

Now naturally, like many of us, I have a reluctance to change too much of the old ways. But there is no virtue at all in clinging as some do to tradition merely for its own sake. In this age of electricity and modern heating systems, there is no need at all to employ the sorts of numbers necessary even a generation ago. Indeed, it has actually been an idea of mine for some time that the retaining of unnecessary numbers simply for tradition's sake – resulting in employees having an unhealthy amount of time on their hands – has been an important factor in the sharp decline in professional standards. Furthermore, Mr Farraday had made it clear that he planned to hold only very rarely the sort of large social occasions Darlington Hall had seen frequently in the past. I did then go about the task Mr

Farraday had set me with some dedication; I spent many hours working on the staff plan, and at least as many hours again thinking about it as I went about other duties or as I lay awake after retiring. Whenever I believed I had come up with something, I probed it for every sort of oversight, tested it through from all angles. Finally, I came up with a plan which, while perhaps not exactly as Mr Farraday had requested, was the best, I felt sure, that was humanly possible. Almost all the attractive parts of the house could remain operative: the extensive servants' quarters – including the back corridor, the two still rooms and the old laundry – and the guest corridor up on the second floor would be dust-sheeted, leaving all the main ground-floor rooms and a generous number of guest rooms. Admittedly, our present team of four would manage this programme only with reinforcement from some daily workers; my staff plan therefore took in the services of a gardener, to visit once a week, twice in the summer, and two cleaners, each to visit twice a week. The staff plan would, furthermore, for each of the four resident employees mean a radical altering of our respective customary duties. The two young girls, I predicted, would not find such changes so difficult to accommodate, but I did all I could to see that Mrs Clements suffered the least adjustments, to the extent that I undertook for myself a number of duties which you may consider most broad-minded of a butler to do.

Even now, I would not go so far as to say it is a bad staff plan; after all, it enables a staff of four to cover an unexpected amount of ground. But you will no doubt agree that the very best staff plans are those which give clear margins of error to allow for those days when an employee is ill or for one reason or another below par. In this particular case, of course, I had been set a slightly extraordinary task, but I had nevertheless not been neglectful to incorporate 'margins' wherever possible. I was especially conscious that any resistance there may be on the part of

Mrs Clements, or the two girls, to the taking on of duties beyond their traditional boundaries would be compounded by any notion that their workloads had greatly increased. I had then, over those days of struggling with the staff plan, expended a significant amount of thought to ensuring that Mrs Clements and the girls, once they had got over their aversion to adopting these more 'eclectic' roles, would find the division of duties stimulating and unburdensome.

I fear, however, that in my anxiety to win the support of Mrs Clements and the girls, I did not perhaps assess quite as stringently my own limitations; and although my experience and customary caution in such matters prevented my giving myself more than I could actually carry out, I was perhaps negligent over this question of allowing myself a margin. It is not surprising then, if over several months, this oversight should reveal itself in these small but telling ways. In the end, I believe the matter to be no more complicated than this: I had given myself too much to do.

You may be amazed that such an obvious shortcoming to a staff plan should have continued to escape my notice, but then you will agree that such is often the way with matters one has given abiding thought to over a period of time; one is not struck by the truth until prompted quite accidentally by some external event. So it was in this instance; that is to say, my receiving the letter from Miss Kenton, containing as it did, along with its long, rather unrevealing passages, an unmistakable nostalgia for Darlington Hall, and – I am quite sure of this – distinct hints of her desire to return here, obliged me to see my staff plan afresh. Only then did it strike me that there was indeed a role that a further staff member could crucially play here; that it was, in fact, this very shortage that had been at the heart of all my recent troubles. And the more I considered it, the more obvious it became that Miss Kenton, with her great affection for this house, with her exemplary professionalism – the sort almost impossible to find nowadays – was just the factor

needed to enable me to complete a fully satisfactory staff plan for Darlington Hall.

Having made such an analysis of the situation, it was not long before I found myself reconsidering Mr Farraday's kind suggestion of some days ago. For it had occurred to me that the proposed trip in the car could be put to good professional use; that is to say, I could drive to the West Country and call on Miss Kenton in passing, thus exploring at first hand the substance of her wish to return to employment here at Darlington Hall. I have, I should make clear, reread Miss Kenton's recent letter several times, and there is no possibility I am merely imagining the presence of these hints on her part.

For all that, I could not for some days quite bring myself to raise the matter again with Mr Farraday. There were, in any case, various aspects to the matter I felt I needed to clarify to myself before proceeding further. There was, for instance, the question of cost. For even taking into account my employer's generous offer to 'foot the bill for the gas', the costs of such a trip might still come to a surprising amount considering such matters as accommodation, meals, and any small snacks I might partake of on my way. Then there was the question of what sorts of costume were appropriate on such a journey, and whether or not it was worth my while to invest in a new set of clothes. I am in the possession of a number of splendid suits, kindly passed on to me over the years by Lord Darlington himself, and by various guests who have stayed in this house and had reason to be pleased with the standard of service here. Many of these suits are, perhaps, too formal for the purposes of the proposed trip, or else rather old-fashioned these days. But then there is one lounge suit, passed on to me in 1931 or 1932 by Sir Edward Blair - practically brand new at the time and almost a perfect fit - which might well be appropriate for evenings in the lounge or dining room of any guest houses where I might lodge. What I do not

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possess, however, is any suitable travelling clothes – that is to say, clothes in which I might be seen driving the car – unless I were to don the suit passed on by the young Lord Chalmers during the war, which despite being clearly too small for me, might be considered ideal in terms of tone. I calculated finally that my savings would be able to meet all the costs I might incur, and in addition, might stretch to the purchase of a new costume. I hope you do not think me unduly vain with regard to this last matter; it is just that one never knows when one might be obliged to give out that one is from Darlington Hall, and it is important that one be attired at such times in a manner worthy of one's position.

During this time, I also spent many minutes examining the road atlas, and perusing also the relevant volumes of Mrs Jane Symons's *The Wonder of England*. If you are not familiar with Mrs Symons's books – a series running to seven volumes, each one concentrating on one region of the British Isles – I heartily recommend them. They were written during the thirties, but much of it would still be up to date – after all, I do not imagine German bombs have altered our countryside so significantly. Mrs Symons was, as a matter of fact, a frequent visitor to this house before the war; indeed, she was among the most popular as far as the staff were concerned due to the kind appreciation she never shied from showing. It was in those days, then, prompted by my natural admiration for the lady, that I had first taken to perusing her volumes in the library whenever I had an odd moment. Indeed, I recall that shortly after Miss Kenton's departure to Cornwall in 1936, myself never having been to that part of the country, I would often glance through Volume III of Mrs Symons's work, the volume which describes to readers the delights of Devon and Cornwall, complete with photographs and – to my mind even more evocative – a variety of artists' sketches of that region. It was thus that I had been able to gain some sense of the sort of place Miss Kenton had gone to live her

married life. But this was, as I say, back in the thirties, when as I understand, Mrs Symons's books were being admired in houses up and down the country. I had not looked through those volumes for many years, until these recent developments led me to get down from the shelf the Devon and Cornwall volume once more. I studied all over again those marvellous descriptions and illustrations, and you can perhaps understand my growing excitement at the notion that I might now actually undertake a motoring trip myself around that same part of the country.

It seemed in the end there was little else to do but actually to raise the matter again with Mr Farraday. There was always the possibility, of course, that his suggestion of a fortnight ago may have been a whim of the moment, and he would no longer be approving of the idea. But from my observation of Mr Farraday over these months, he is not one of those gentlemen prone to that most irritating of traits in an employer – inconsistency. There was no reason to believe he would not be as enthusiastic as before about my proposed motoring trip – indeed, that he would not repeat his most kind offer to 'foot the bill for the gas'. Nevertheless, I considered most carefully what might be the most opportune occasion to bring the matter up with him; for although I would not for one moment, as I say, suspect Mr Farraday of inconsistency, it nevertheless made sense not to broach the topic when he was preoccupied or distracted. A refusal in such circumstances may well not reflect my employer's true feelings on the matter, but once having sustained such a dismissal, I could not easily bring it up again. It was clear, then, that I had to choose my moment wisely.

In the end, I decided the most prudent moment in the day would be as I served afternoon tea in the drawing room. Mr Farraday will usually have just returned from his short walk on the downs at that point, so he is rarely engrossed in his reading or writing as he tends to be in the

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evenings. In fact, when I bring in the afternoon tea, Mr Farraday is inclined to close any book or periodical he has been reading, rise and stretch out his arms in front of the windows, as though in anticipation of conversation with me.

As it was, I believe my judgement proved quite sound on the question of timing; the fact that things turned out as they did is entirely attributable to an error of judgement in another direction altogether. That is to say, I did not take sufficient account of the fact that at that time of the day, what Mr Farraday enjoys is a conversation of a light-hearted, humorous sort. Knowing this to be his likely mood when I brought in the tea yesterday afternoon, and being aware of his general propensity to talk with me in a bantering tone at such moments, it would certainly have been wiser not to have mentioned Miss Kenton at all. But you will perhaps understand that there was a natural tendency on my part, in asking what was after all a generous favour from my employer, to hint that there was a good professional motive behind my request. So it was that in indicating my reasons for preferring the West Country for my motoring, instead of leaving it at mentioning several of the alluring details as conveyed by Mrs Symons's volume, I made the error of declaring that a former housekeeper of Darlington Hall was resident in that region. I suppose I must have been intending to explain to Mr Farraday how I would thus be able to explore an option which might prove the ideal solution to our present small problems here in this house. It was only after I had mentioned Miss Kenton that I suddenly realized how entirely inappropriate it would be for me to continue. Not only was I unable to be certain of Miss Kenton's desire to rejoin the staff here, I had not, of course, even discussed the question of additional staff with Mr Farraday since that first preliminary meeting over a year ago. To have con-



tinued pronouncing aloud my thoughts on the future of Darlington Hall would have been, to say the very least, presumptuous. I suspect, then, that I paused rather abruptly and looked a little awkward. In any case, Mr Farraday seized the opportunity to grin broadly at me and say with some deliberation:

'My, my, Stevens. A lady-friend. And at your age.'

This was a most embarrassing situation, one in which Lord Darlington would never have placed an employee. But then I do not mean to imply anything derogatory about Mr Farraday; he is, after all, an American gentleman and his ways are often very different. There is no question at all that he meant any harm; but you will no doubt appreciate how uncomfortable a situation this was for me.

'I'd never have figured you for such a lady's man, Stevens,' he went on. 'Keeps the spirit young, I guess. But then I really don't know it's right for me to be helping you with such dubious assignations.'

Naturally, I felt the temptation to deny immediately and unambiguously such motivations as my employer was imputing to me, but saw in time that to do so would be to rise to Mr Farraday's bait, and the situation would only become increasingly embarrassing. I therefore continued to stand there awkwardly, waiting for my employer to give me permission to undertake the motoring trip.

Embarrassing as those moments were for me, I would not wish to imply that I in any way blame Mr Farraday, who is in no sense an unkind person; he was, I am sure, merely enjoying the sort of bantering which in the United States, no doubt, is a sign of a good, friendly understanding between employer and employee, indulged in as a kind of affectionate sport. Indeed, to put things into a proper perspective, I should point out that just such bantering on my new employer's part has characterized much of our relationship over these months – though I must confess, I remain rather unsure as to how I should respond. In fact,