

How Deacon Tubman and Parson Whitney Kept New Year's eBook

How Deacon Tubman and Parson Whitney Kept New Year's by William Hutchinson Murray

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Page 1

HOW DEACON TUBMAN AND PARSON WHITNEY KEPT NEW YEAR'S

(Illustrated by *Thomas worth*)

Vignette Initial—"New Year's, eh?"

"What's the matter with the pesky thing?"

"Miranda belonged to that sisterhood commonly known as spinsters"

Miranda's chirography—"A Happy New Year"

"Ha, none of that, you woolly-coated rogue, you"

"I want to talk with you about the church"

"Tell the folks that you won't be back till night"

"It was found that the parson could steer a sled"

"Little Alice Dorchester begged him to stay"

"Old Jack was a horse of a great deal of character"

"Hillo, Deacon, ain't you going to shake out old shamble-heels to-day?"

"Jack was going nigh to a thirty clip"

"Go it, old boy!"

Tail piece

II

THE OLD BEGGAR'S DOG

(Illustrated by A.B. *Shute*)

Vignette Initial—"Trusty"

"The old man and his dog were constant companions"

"He was teaching the dog a new trick"



“It was to the honor of the crowd that they hooted the officer roundly”

Tail piece

III

THE BALL

(Illustrated by A.B. *Shute*)

Vignette Initial—“It was evening”

“The Lad began to play”

“The God of Music was there”

“Even the waiters caught the infection”

“The music stopped with a snap”

Tail piece

IV

WHO WAS HE?

(Illustrated by J.H. *Snow*)

Vignette Initial—“John Norton watched the approaching fire”

“A deer suddenly sprang from the bank”

“Past mossy banks where the great eddies whirled”

“Come ashore—you and your companion”

“The four sat in silence by the fire”

Tail piece

How Deacon Tubman and Parson Whitney Kept New Year's

I

[Illustration: Vignette Initial N]

“New Year’s, eh?” exclaimed Deacon Tubman, as he lifted himself to his elbow and peered through the frosty window pane toward the east, where the colorless morning was creeping shiveringly into sight.

“New Year’s, eh?” he repeated, as he hitched himself into an upright position and straightened his night-cap, that had somehow gone askew in his slumber. “Bless my soul, how the years fly! But that’s all right; yes, that’s all right. No one can expect them to stay, and why should we? there’s better fish in the net than we’ve taken out yet,” and with this consolatory observation, the deacon rubbed his head energetically, while the bright, happy look of his face grew brighter and happier as the process proceeded. “Yes, there’s better fish in the net than we’ve taken out,” he added, gayly, “and if there isn’t, there’s no use of crying about it.” With this philosophical observation, he bounced merrily out of bed and into his trousers.



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I say Deacon Tubman bounced into his trousers, but, to be exact, I should say that he bounced into half of them; and, with the other half trailing behind him, he skipped to the window and, putting his little, plump, round face almost against the pane, gazed out upon the world. Everything was bright, sparkling and cold, for the earth was covered with snow and the clear gray of the early morning spread its rayless illumination over the great dome, in the fading blue of which a few starry points still gleamed.

“Bless me, what a morning!” he exclaimed. “Beautiful! beautiful!” he repeated, as he stood with his eyes fastened upon the east and, balancing himself on one foot, felt around with the other for that half of the trousers not yet appropriated. “Bless me, what a day,” he ejaculated, as he saved himself by a quick, upward wrench, from falling from a trip he had inadvertently given himself in an abortive effort to insert his foot into the unfilled leg of his pantaloons. “Ha, ha, that’s a good un,” he exclaimed; “trip yourself up in getting into your own trousers, will you, Deacon Tubman?” and he laughed long and merrily to himself over his little joke.

“A happy New Year to everybody,” cried the deacon, as he thrust his foot into his stocking, for the floor of the good man’s chamber was carpetless and so cleanly white that its cleanliness itself was enough to freeze one. “Yes, a happy New Year to everybody, high, low, rich, poor, south, north, east and west, where’er they are, the world over, at home and abroad—Amen!” And the deacon, partly at the sweeping character of his benediction and partly because he was feeling so jolly inside he couldn’t help it, laughed merrily, as he seized a boot and thrust his foot vigorously into it.

“What’s this? what’s this?” cried the deacon, as he tugged away at the straps until he was red in the face. “This boot never went on hard before. What’s the matter with the pesky thing?” And he arose from his chair, and, standing on one foot, turned and twisted about, tugging all the while at the straps.

“Bless my soul!” exclaimed the deacon, disgusted with its strange behavior, “what is the matter with the pesky boot?”

[Illustration: “*What’s the matter with the pesky thing?*”]

Then he sat down upon the chair again, wrenched his foot out of the offending article and held it up between both hands in front of him and shook it violently, when, with a bump and a bound, out rattled a package upon the floor and rolled half way across the room. The deacon was after it in a jiffy and, seizing it in his little fat hands, held it up before his eyes and read: “A New Year’s gift from Miranda.”



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Now Miranda was the deacon's housekeeper,—Mrs. Tubman having peacefully departed this life some years before,—and, speaking appreciatively of the sex, a more prim, prudent, particular member of it never existed. She had been initiated, some ten years before, into that amiable sisterhood commonly known as spinsters, and was, it might be added, a typical representative. Industrious? You may well say so. Her floors, stoves, dishes, linen,— well, if they weren't clean, nowhere on earth might you find clean ones. She hated dirt as she did original sin, and I've no doubt but that in her own mind considered its existence in the world as the one certain, damning and conclusive evidence of the Fall. It was really an entertainment to see her looking about the house for a speck of dirt; and the cold-blooded manner in which she would seize upon it, bear it away in the dust pan, and, removing the lid of the stove, consign it to the flames, was—well,—what should I say,—yes, that's it—was most edifying.

Amiable! Yes,—after her way. And a very noiseless sort of way it was, too. For, though she had lived with the deacon for nearly a dozen years, he had never known her to so far forget her propriety as to indulge in anything more hearty and hilarious than the most decorous of smiles, which smile was such a kind of illumination to her face as a star of inconceivably small magnitude makes to the sky in trailing across it.

[Illustration: "*Miranda belonged to that sisterhood commonly known as spinsters.*"]

Of her personal appearance I will say—nothing. Sacred let it be to memory! If you ever saw her, or one like her, whether full front or profile, whether sideways or edgewise, the vision, I am ready to swear, remains with you vividly still. Let it suffice, then, when I observe that Miss Miranda was not physically stout, and that the deacon's standing joke was by no means a bad one when he described her as "not actually burdened with fat." Yes, she was a very cleanly, very thin, very prudent, very particular person, that never joined in any sports or amusements; never joked or participated in any happy events in a happy, joyous fashion, but lived unobtrusively, and, I may say, coldly, in her own prim, cold, bloodless, little world.

"Gracious me!" exclaimed the deacon, as he looked at the package. "Gracious me! what has got into Mirandy?" And he looked scrutinizingly at the little, fine, thin, faintly-traced inscription on the package, as if the writer had begrudged the ink that must be expended on the letters, or from a subtle and mystic self-sympathy had made the chirography faint, delicate, and attenuated as her own self.



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“Gracious me!” reiterated Deacon Tubman, as he proceeded to untie the knot in the pale blue ribbon smoothly bound around the package. “Who ever knew Mirandy to make a present before?” and the deacon was so surprised at what had taken place that, for a moment, he doubted the evidence of his own senses. “And put it in my boot, too, ha, ha!” And the deacon stopped undoing the parcel, and, lying back in the chair, roared at the thought of the prim, modest, particular Miranda perpetrating such a joke. And when the wrapping of the package was at last undone, for every corner and crease of it was as carefully turned and as sharply edged as if the smoothing iron had passed over them,—will wonders ever cease in this startling world of ours?—out dropped a night-cap! Yes, a night-cap, delicately and deftly crocheted in warm, woolen stuff of a rich cardinal color.

“Ha, ha,” laughed the deacon, as he held the cap between his thumb and forefinger of one hand up before his eyes, while he rubbed his bald crown with the other. “Good for Mirandy.” And then, as a small slip of white paper fluttered to the floor, he seized it, and read:

[Handwritten: A happy New Year
to Deacon Tubman
from Miranda.]

“A good girl, a good girl,” said the deacon, “not overburdened with fat, but a good girl!” and with this rather equivocal compliment to the donor, with his boot in one hand and the cap in the other, he rushed impulsively to the stairway and shouted:

“A happy New Year to you, Mirandy. God bless you; God bless you,” and he swung the boot, instead of the cap, vigorously over his head, while his round, rosy face beamed down the stairway into the cold hall below, like a warm harvest moon over the autumnal stubble.

In response to the deacon’s hearty, and, I may say, somewhat uproarious greeting, the kitchen door timidly opened, and Miranda, who had been astir for nearly an hour and had the table already laid for breakfast, stepped into view, and, with a smile on her face that actually broadened its thinness dangerously near to the proportions of a genial and happy reciprocation of the jovial greeting, dropped a courtesy, and said:

“Thank you, Deacon Tubman, I hope you may have many happy returns.”

“A thousand to you, Mirandy,” shouted the deacon in response, “a thousand to you and your—children!” and the little man swung his boot vehemently over his head and laughed like a boy at his own joke, while poor, frightened, scandalized Miranda turned and scudded, like a patch of thin vapor blown by an unexpected gust of wind, through the door into the kitchen, with a face colored scarlet from an actual, unmistakable blush,



though whence the blood came that reddened the clean cold-white of her thin face is a physiological mystery.

In a moment the deacon was fully dressed and he scuttled as merrily and noisily down the resounding stairway as a gust of autumn wind running through a patch of russet leaves. Through the hall and kitchen he bustled and out into the woodshed, where he ran against old Towser, the big Newfoundland watch-dog, who stood in the passage expectantly watching his coming.



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[Illustration: *“Ha, none of that, you woolly-coated rogue, you.”*]

“A happy New Year to you, Towser, old boy,” he cried, and, seizing the huge dog by his shaggy coat, he wrestled with him like a merry-hearted boy. “A happy New Year to you, old fellow,” he repeated, as the dog broke into a series of joyful barks; “speak it right out, Towser. God made you as full of fun as he has the rest of us, and a good deal fuller than many of your kind, and mine, too,” and with this backhanded hit at the vinegar-visaged and acidulous-hearted of his own species, the deacon shuffled along the crisp, icy path toward the barn, while Towser gamboled through the deep snow and plunged into the huge, fleecy drifts in as merry a mood as his merry master.

“A happy New Year to you, old Jack,” he called out to his horse, as he entered the barn, and Jack neighed a happy return, more expectant, perhaps, of his breakfast of oats than appreciative of the greeting. “And a happy New Year to you, you youngster,” he shouted to the colt, who, being at liberty to roam at will, had already appropriated a section of the hay-mow to his own satisfaction. “Ha, none of that, you woolly-coated rogue, you,” he cried, as he jumped aside to escape a kick that the bunch of equine mischief anticly snapped at him. “None of that, you little unconverted sinner, you. I verily believe the parson is right, and that

’In Adam’s fall
We sinned all—’

men and beasts, colts and children, all in one lot.”

And so, talking to himself and his cattle, the jolly little man, whose good-heartedness represented more genuine orthodoxy than the whole Westminster catechism, bustled merrily about the barn and did his chores, while the cockerels crowed noisily from their perches overhead, the fat white pigs grunted in lazy contentment from their warm beds of straw, and the oxen, with their large, luminous eyes, gazed benevolently at him as he crammed their mangers generously full with the fragrant hay that smelled sweetly of the flowers and odorous meadow lands, where in the warm summer sunshine it had ripened for the welcome scythe.

How happy is life, in whatever part of this great fragrant world of ours it is lived, when men live it happily; and how gloomy seems its sunshine, even, when seen through the shadows and darkness of our surly moods.

What happy-hearted fairy was it that possessed the deacon’s heart and home, on this bright New Year’s morn, I wonder? Surely, some angel of fun and frolic had flown into the deacon’s house with the opening of the year and was filling it, and the hearts within it, too, with mirthful moods. For the deacon laughed and joked as he buttered his cakes and fired off his funny sayings at Miranda, as he had never joked and laughed before, until Miranda herself smiled and giggled; yes, actually giggled, behind the coffee-urn, at



his merry squibs, as if the little imp above mentioned was mischievously tickling her—yes, I will say it,—her spinster ribs.



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“Mirandy, I’m going up to see the parson,” exclaimed the deacon, when the morning devotions were over, “and see if I can thaw him out a little. I’ve heard there used to be a lot of fun in him in his younger days, but he’s sort of frozen all up latterly, and I can see that the young folks are afraid of him and the church, too, but that won’t do—no, that won’t do,” repeated the good man emphatically, “for the minister ought to be loved by young and old, rich and poor, and everybody; and a church without young folks in it is like a family with no children in it. Yes, I’ll go up and wish him a happy New Year, anyway. Perhaps I can get him out for a ride to make some calls on the people and see the young folks at their fun. It’ll do him good and them good and me good, and do everybody good.” Saying which the deacon got inside his warm fur coat and started towards the barn to harness Jack into the worn, old-fashioned sleigh; which sleigh was built high in the back and had a curved dasher of monstrous proportions, ornamented with a prancing horse in an impossible attitude, done in bright vermilion on a blue-black ground.

II

“Happy New Year to you, Parson Whitney; happy New Year to you,” cried the deacon, from his sleigh to the parson, who stood curled up and shivering in the doorway of the parsonage, “and may you live to enjoy a hundred.”

“Come in; come in,” cried Parson Whitney, in response, “I’m glad you’ve come; I’m glad you’ve come. I’ve been wanting to see you all the morning,” and in the cordiality of his greeting, he literally pulled the little man through the doorway into the hall and hurried him up the stairway to his study in the chamber overhead.

“Thinking of me! Well, now, I never,” exclaimed the deacon, as, assisted by the parson, he twisted and wriggled himself out of the coat that he a little too snugly filled for an easy exit. “Thinking of me, and among all these books, too; bibles, catechisms, tracts, theologies, sermons; well, well, that’s funny! What made you think of me?”

“Deacon Tubman,” responded the parson, as he seated himself in his arm-chair, “I want to talk with you about the church.”

[Illustration: *“I want to talk with you about the church.”*]

“The church!” ejaculated the deacon, in response, “nothing going wrong, I hope?”

“Yes, things are going wrong, deacon,” responded the parson; “the congregation is growing smaller and smaller, and yet I preach good, strong, biblical, soul-satisfying sermons, I think.”

“Good ones! good ones!” answered the deacon, promptly; “never better; never better in the world.”



“And yet the people are deserting the sanctuary,” rejoined the parson, solemnly, “and the young people won’t come to the sociables and the little children seem actually afraid of me. What shall I do, deacon?” and the good man put the question with pathetic emphasis.

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“You have hit the nail on the head, square’s a hatchet, parson,” responded the deacon. “The congregation is thinning; the young people don’t come to the meetings, and the little children are afraid of you.”

“What’s the matter, deacon?” cried the parson, in return. “What is it?” he repeated, earnestly; “speak it right out; don’t try to spare my feelings. I will listen to—I will do anything to win back my people’s love,” and the strong, old-fashioned, Calvinistic preacher said it in a voice that actually trembled.

“You can do it; you can do it in a week!” exclaimed the deacon, encouragingly. “Don’t worry about it, parson, it’ll be all right; it’ll be all right. Your books are the trouble.”

“Eh? eh? books?” ejaculated the parson. “What have they to do with it?”

“Everything,” replied the deacon, stoutly; “you pore over them day in and day out; they keep you in this room here, when you should be out among the people. Not making pastoral visits, I don’t mean that, but going around among them, chatting and joking and having a good time. They would like it, and you would like it, and as for the young folks, —how old are you, parson?”

“Sixty, next month,” answered the parson, solemnly, “sixty next month.”

“Thirty! thirty! that’s all you are, parson, or all you ought to be,” cried the deacon.

“Thirty, twenty, sixteen. Let the figures slide down and up, according to circumstances, but never let them go higher than thirty, when you are dealing with young folks. I’m sixty myself, counting years, but I’m only sixteen; sixteen this morning, that’s all, parson,” and he rubbed his little, round, plump hands together, looked at the parson and winked.

“Bless my soul, Deacon Tubman, I don’t know but that you are right!” answered the parson. “Sixty? I don’t know as I am sixty.” And he began to rub his own hands, and came within an ace of executing a wink at the deacon himself.

“Not a day over twenty, if I am any judge of age,” responded the deacon, deliberately, as he looked the white-headed old minister over with a most comic imitation of seriousness. “Not a day over twenty, on my honor,” and the deacon leaned forward toward the parson and gave him a punch with his thumb, as one boy might deliver a punch at another, and then he lay back in his chair and laughed so heartily that the parson caught the infectious mirth and roared away as heartily as the deacon.

Yes, it was impossible to sit hobnobbing with the jolly little deacon on that bright New Year’s morning and not be affected by the happiness of his mood, for he was actually bubbling over with fun and as full of frolic as if the finger on the dial had, in truth, gone back forty years and he was only sixteen. “Only sixteen, parson, on my honor.”



“But what can I do,” queried the good man, sobering down. “I make my pastoral visits”—

“Pastoral visits!” responded Deacon Tubman, “oh, yes, and they are all well enough for the old folks, but they ar’n’t the kind of biscuit the young folks like—too heavy in the centre, and over-hard in the crust, for young teeth, eh, parson?”



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“But what shall I do? what shall I do?” reiterated the parson, somewhat despondently.

“Oh, put on your hat and gloves and warmest coat and come along with me. We will see what the young folks are doing and will make a day of it. Come, come; let the old books and catechisms and sermons and tracts have a respite for once, and we’ll spend the day out of doors with the boys and girls and the people.”

“I’ll do it!” exclaimed the parson. “Deacon Tubman, you are right. I keep to my study too closely. I don’t see enough of the world and what’s going on in it. I was reading the Testament this morning and I was impressed with the Master’s manner of living and teaching. It is not certain that he ever preached more than twice in a church during all his ministry on the earth. And the children! how much he loved the children and how the little ones loved him! And why shouldn’t they love me, too? Why shouldn’t they? I’ll make them do it. The lambs of my flock shall love me.” And with these brave words, Parson Whitney bundled himself up in his warmest garment and followed the deacon down stairs.

[Illustration: *“Tell the folks that you won’t be back till night.”*]

“Tell the folks that you won’t be back till night,” called the deacon from the sleigh, “for this is New Year’s and we’re going to make a day of it.” And he laughed away as heartily as might be—so heartily, indeed, that the parson joined in the laughter himself as he came shuffling down the icy path toward him.

“Bless me, how much younger I feel already,” said the good man, as he stood up in the sleigh, and with a long, strong breath, breathed the cool, pure air into his lungs. “Bless me, how much younger I feel already,” he repeated, as he settled down into the roomy seat of the old sleigh. “Only sixteen to-day, eh, deacon,” and he nudged him with his elbow.

“That’s all; that’s all, parson,” answered the deacon, gayly, as he nudged him vigorously back, “that’s all we are, either of us,” and, laughing as merrily as boys, the two glided away in the sleigh.

[Illustration: *“It was found that the parson could steer a sled.”*]

Well, perhaps they didn’t have fun that day—those two old boys that had started out with the feeling that they were “only sixteen,” and bound to make “a day of it.” And they did make a day of it, in fact, and such a day as neither had had for forty years. For, first, they went to Bartlett’s hill, where the boys and girls were coasting, and coasted with them for a full hour; and then it was discovered by the younger portion of his flock that the parson was not an old, stiff, solemn, surly poke, as they had thought, but a pleasant, good-natured, kindly soul, who could take and give a joke and steer a sled as well as

the smartest boy in the crowd; and when it came to snow-balling, he could send a ball further than Bill Sykes himself, who could out-throw any boy in town, and roll up a



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bigger block to the new snow fort they were building than any three boys among them. And how the parson enjoyed being a boy again! How exhilarating the slide down the steep hill; how invigorating the pure, cool air; how pleasant the noise of the chatting and joking going on around him; how bright and sweet the boys and girls looked, with their rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes; how the old parson's heart thrilled as they crowded around him when he would go, and urged him to stay; and how little Alice Dorchester begged him, with her little arms around his neck, to "jes stay and gib me one more slide."

[Illustration: "*Little Alice Dorchester begged him to stay.*"]

"You never made such a pastoral call as that, parson," said the deacon, as they drove away amid the cheers of the boys and the good-byes of the girls, while the former fired off a volley of snowballs in his honor and the latter waved their muffs and handkerchiefs after them.

"God bless them! God bless them!" said the parson. "They have lifted a great load from my heart and taught me the sweetness of life, of youth and the wisdom of Him who took the little ones in His arms and blessed them. Ah, deacon," he added, "I've been a great fool, but I'll be so, thank God, no more."

III

Now, old Jack was a horse of a great deal of character, and had a great history, but of this none in that section, save the little deacon, knew a word. Dick Tubman, the deacon's youngest, wildest, and, I might add, favorite son, had purchased him of an impecunious jockey at the close of a, to him, disastrous campaign, that cleaned him completely out and left him in a strange city, a thousand miles from home, with nothing but the horse, harness and sulky, and a list of unpaid bills that must be met before he could leave the scene of his disastrous fortunes. Under such circumstances it was that Dick Tubman ran across the horse and, partly out of pity for its owner and partly out of admiration of the horse, whose failure to win at the races was due more to his lack of condition and the bad management of his jockey than lack of speed, bought him off-hand and, having no use for him himself, shipped him as a present to the deacon, with whom he had now been for four years, with no harder work than plowing out the good old man's corn in the summer, and jogging along the country roads on the deacon's errands. Having said this much of the horse, perhaps I should more particularly describe him.

[Illustration: "*Old Jack was a horse of a great deal of character.*"]

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He was, in sooth, an animal of most unique and extraordinary appearance. For, in the first place, he was quite seventeen hands in height and long in proportion. He was also the reverse of shapely in the fashion of his build, for his head was long and bony and his hip bones sharp and protuberant; his tail was what is known among horsemen as a "rat tail," being but scantily covered with hair, and his neck was even more scantily supplied with a mane; while in color he could easily have taken any premium put up for homeliness, being an ashen roan, mottled with black and patches of divers hue. But his legs were flat and corded like a racer's, his neck long and thin as a thoroughbred's, his nostrils large, his ears sharply pointed and lively, while the white rings around his eyes hinted at a cross, somewhere in his pedigree, with Arabian blood. A huge, bony, homely-looking horse he was as he drew the deacon and Miranda into the village on market days and Sundays, with a loose, shambling gait, making altogether an appearance so homely and peculiar that the smart village chaps, riding along in their jaunty turn-outs, used to chaff the good deacon on the character of the steed, and satirically challenge him to a brush. The deacon always took the badinage in good part, although he inwardly said, more than once, "If I ever get a good chance, when there ain't too many around, I'll go up to the turn of the road beyond the church and let Jack out on them;" for Dick had given him a hint of the horse's history, and told him "he could knock the spots out of thirty," and wickedly urged the deacon to take the shine out of them airy chaps some of these days.

Such was the horse, then, that the deacon had ahead of him and the old-fashioned sleigh when, with the parson alongside, he struck into the principal street of the village.

New Year's day is a lively day in many country villages, and on this bright one especially, as the sleighing was perfect, everybody was out. Indeed, it had got noised abroad that certain trotters of local fame were to be on the street that afternoon and, as the boys worded it, "There would be heaps of fun going on." So it happened that everybody in town, and many who lived out of it, were on that particular street, and just at the hour, too, when the deacon came to the foot of it, so that the walk on either side was lined darkly with lookers-on and the smooth snow path between the two lines looked like a veritable home-stretch on a race day.

[Illustration: "*Hilow, Deacon, aren't you going to shake out Old Shamble-Heels, to-day?*"]

Now, when the deacon had reached the corner of the main street and turned into it, it was at that point where the course terminated and the "brushes" were ended, and at the precise moment when the dozen or twenty horses that had come flying down were being pulled up preparatory to returning at a slow gait to the customary starting point at the head of the street a half mile away. So the old-fashioned sleigh was quickly surrounded by the light, fancy cutters of the rival racers and Old Jack was shambling along in the midst of the high-spirited and smoking nags that had just come down the stretch.



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“Hillo, deacon,” shouted one of the boys, who was driving a trim-looking bay, and who had crossed the line at the ending of the course second only to the pacer that could “speed like lightning,” as the boys said; “Hillo, deacon, ain’t you going to shake out old shamble-heels and show us fellows what speed is, to-day?” And the merry-hearted chap, son of the principal lawyer of the place, laughed heartily at his challenge, while the other drivers looked at the great angular steed that, without check, was walking carelessly along, with his head held down, ahead of the old sleigh and its churchly occupants.

“I don’t know but what I will,” answered the deacon, good-naturedly; “I don’t know but what I will, if the parson don’t object, and you won’t start off too quick to begin with; for this is New Year’s and a little extra fun won’t hurt any of us, I reckon.”

“Do it! do it! we’ll hold up for you,” answered a dozen merry voices. “Do it, deacon, it’ll do old shamble-heels good to go a ten-mile-an-hour gait for once in his life, and the parson needn’t fear of being scandalized by any speed you’ll get out of him, either,” and the merry-hearted chaps haw-hawed as men and boys will when everyone is jolly and fun flows fast.

And so, with any amount of good-natured chaffing from the drivers of the “fast uns,” and from many that lined the roads, too,—for the day gave greater liberty than usual to bantering speech,—the speedy ones paced slowly up to the head of the street with Old Jack shambling demurely in the midst of them.

But the horse was a knowing old fellow and had “scored” at too many races not to know that the “return” was to be leisurely taken; and, indeed, he was a horse of independence and of too even, perhaps of too sluggish a temperament to waste himself in needless action; but he had the right stuff in him and hadn’t forgotten his early training, either, for when he came to the “turn,” his head and tail came up, his eyes brightened, and, with a playful movement of his huge body, without the least hint from the deacon, he swung himself and the cumbrous old sleigh into line and began to straighten himself for the coming brush.

Now, Jack was, as I have said, a horse of huge proportions, and needed “steadying” at the start, but the good deacon had no experience with the “ribbons,” and was, therefore, utterly unskilled in the matter of driving. And so it came about that Old Jack was so confused at the start that he made a most awkward and wretched appearance in his effort to get off, being all “mixed up,” as the saying is, so much so that the crowd roared at his ungainly efforts and his flying rivals were twenty rods away before he had even got started. But at last he got his huge body in a straight line and, leaving his miserable shuffle, squared away to his work, and with head and tail up went off at so slashing a gait that it fairly took the deacon’s breath away and caused the crowd that had been hooting him to roar their applause, while the parson grabbed the edge of the old sleigh with one hand and the rim of his tall black hat with the other.



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What a pity, Mr. Longface, that God made horses as they are, and gave them such grandeur of appearance and action, and put such an eaglelike spirit between their ribs, so that, quitting the plodding motions of the ox, they can fly like that noble bird and come sweeping down the course as on wings of the wind.

It was not my fault, nor the deacon's, nor the parson's, either, please remember, then, that awkward, shuffling, homely-looking Old Jack was thus suddenly transformed by the royalty of blood, of pride and of speed given him by his Creator from what he ordinarily was into a magnificent spectacle of energetic velocity.

With muzzle lifted well up, tail erect, the few hairs in it streaming straight behind, one ear pricked forward and the other turned sharply back, the great horse swept grandly along at a pace that was rapidly bringing him even with the rear line of the flying group. And yet so little was the pace to him that he fairly gamboled in playfulness as he went slashing along, until the deacon verily began to fear that the honest old chap would break through all the bounds of propriety and send his heels anticly through his treasured dashboard. Indeed, the spectacle that the huge horse presented was so magnificent and his action so free, spirited and playful, as he came sweeping onward that the cheers, such as "Good heavens! see the deacon's old horse!" "Look at him! look at him!" "What a stride!" ran ahead of him; and old Bill Sykes, a trainer in his day, but now a hanger-on at the village tavern, or that section of it known as the bar, wiped his watery eyes with his tremulous fist, as he saw Jack come swinging down, and, as he swept past, with his open gait, powerful stroke and stifles playing well out, brought his hand down with a mighty slap against his thigh, and said: "I'll be blowed if he isn't a regular old timer!"

It was fortunate for the deacon and the parson that the noise and cheering of the crowd drew the attention of the drivers ahead, or there would surely have been more than one collision, for the old sleigh was of such size and strength, the good deacon so unskilled at the reins, and Jack, who was adding to his momentum with every stride, going at so determined a pace, that had he struck the rear line with no gap for him to go through, something serious would surely have happened. But as it was, the drivers saw the huge horse, with the cumbrous old sleigh behind him, bearing down on them at such a gait as made their own speed, sharp as it was, seem slow, and "pulled out" in time to save themselves; and so, without any mishap, the big horse and heavy sleigh swept through the rear row of racers like an autumn gust through a cluster of leaves.

[Illustration: "*Jack was going nigh to a thirty clip!*"]



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But by this time the deacon had become somewhat alarmed, for Old Jack was going nigh to a thirty clip—a frightful pace for an inexperienced driver to ride—and began to put a good strong pressure upon the bit, not doubting that Old Jack, ordinarily the easiest horse in the world to manage, would take the hint and immediately slow up. But though the huge horse took the hint, it was in exactly the opposite manner that the deacon intended he should, for he interpreted the little man’s steady pull as an intimation that his driver was getting over his flurry and beginning to treat him as a horse ought to be treated in a race, and that he could now, having got settled to his work, go ahead. And go ahead he did. The more the deacon pulled the more the great animal felt himself steadied and assisted. And so, the harder the good man tugged at the reins, the more powerfully the machinery of the big animal ahead of him worked, until the deacon got alarmed and began to call upon the horse to stop, crying, “Whoa, Jack, whoa, old boy, I say! whoa, will you, now? that’s a good fellow!” and many other coaxing calls, while he pulled away steadily at the reins. But the horse misunderstood the deacon’s calls as he had his pressure upon the reins, for the crowds on either side were yelling and hooting and swinging their caps so that the deacon’s voice came indistinctly to his ears at best and he interpreted his calls for him to stop as only so many encouragements and signals for him to go ahead. And so, with the memory of a hundred races stirring his blood, the crowds cheering him to the echo, the steadying pull, the encouraging cries of his driver in his ears and his only rival, the pacer, whirling along only a few rods ahead of him, the monstrous animal, with a desperate plunge that half lifted the old sleigh from the snow, let out another link, and, with such a burst of speed as was never seen in the village before, tore along after the pacer at such a terrific pace that, within the distance of a dozen lengths, he lay lapped upon him and the two were going it nose and nose.

What is that feeling in human hearts which makes us sympathetic with man or animal, who has unexpectedly developed courage and capacity when engaged in a struggle in which the odds are against him? And why do we enter so spiritedly into the contest and lose ourselves in the excitement of the moment? Is it pride? Is it the comradeship of courage? Or is it the rising of the indomitable in us that loves nothing so much as victory and hates nothing so much as defeat? Be that as it may, no sooner was Old Jack fairly lapped on the pacer, whose driver was urging him along with rein and voice alike, and the contest seemed doubtful, than the spirit of old Adam himself entered into the deacon and the parson both, so that, carried away by the excitement of the race, they fairly forgot themselves and entered as wildly into the contest as two ungodly jockeys.

[Illustration: “*Go it, old boy!*”]

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“Deacon Tubman,” said the parson, as he clutched more stoutly the rim of his tall hat, against which, as the horse tore along, the snow chips were pelting in showers,

“Deacon Tubman, do you think the pacer will beat us?”

“Not if I can help it! not if I can help it!” yelled the deacon, in reply, as, with something like a reinsman’s skill, he lifted Jack to another spurt. “Go it, old boy!” he shouted, encouragingly, “go along with you, I say!” And the parson, also, carried away by the whirl of the moment, cried, “Go along, old boy! Go along with you, I say!”

This was the very thing, and the only thing, that the huge horse, whose blood was now fairly aflame, wanted to rally him for the final effort; and, in response to the encouraging cries of the two behind him, he gathered himself together for another burst of speed and put forth his collected strength with such tremendous energy and suddenness of movement that the little deacon, who had risen and was standing erect in the sleigh, fell back into the arms of the parson, while the great horse rushed over the line amid such cheers and roars of laughter as were never heard in that village before. Nor was the horse any more the object of public interest and remark,—I may say favoring remark,—than the parson, who suddenly found himself the centre of a crowd of his own parishioners, many of whom would scarcely have been expected to participate in such a scene, but who, thawed out of their iciness by the genial temper of the day and vastly excited over Jack’s contest, thronged upon the good man, laughing as heartily as any jolly sinner in the crowd.

So everybody shook hands with the parson and wished him a happy New Year, and the parson shook hands with everybody and wished them all many happy returns; and everybody praised Old Jack and rallied the deacon on his driving, and then everybody went home good-natured and happy, laughing and talking about the wonderful race and the change that had come over Parson Whitney.

And as for Parson Whitney himself, the day and its fun had taken twenty years from his age. And nothing would answer but the deacon must go with him and help eat the New Year’s pudding at the parsonage. And he did.

At the table they laughed and talked over the funny incidents of the day and joked each other as merrily as two boys. Then Parson Whitney told some reminiscences of his college days and the scrapes he got into, and about a riot between town and gown when he carried the “Bully’s Club”; and the deacon returned by narrating his experiences with a certain Deacon Jones’s watermelon patch, when he was a boy.

And over their tales and their nuts they laughed till they cried, and roared so lustily at the remembered frolics of their youthful days that the old parsonage rang, the books on the library shelves rattled and several of the theological volumes actually gaped with horror.



But at last the stories were all told, the jokes all cracked, the laughter all laughed, and the little deacon wished the parson good-bye and jogged happily homeward. But more than once he laughed to himself and said, "Bless my soul, I didn't know the parson had so much fun in him."



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And long the parson sat by the glowing grate, after the deacon had left him, musing of other days and the happy, pleasant things that were in them, and many times he smiled, and once he laughed outright at some remembered folly, for he said: "What a wild boy I was, and yet I meant no wrong, and the dear old days were very happy."

Aye, aye, Parson Whitney, the dear old days were very happy, not only to thee, but to all of us, who, following our sun, have faced westward so long that the light of the morning shows through the dim haze of memory. But happier than even the old days will be the young ones, I ween, when, following still westward, we suddenly come to the gates of the east and the morning once more; and there, in the dawn of a day which is endless, we find our lost youth and its loves, to lose them and it no more forever, thank God.

[Illustration: Tail piece]

The Old Beggar's Dog

[Illustration: Vignette Initial H]

He was a tramp—that is all he was—at least when I knew him. What he had been before, I cannot say, as he never told me his history. Of course every tramp has a history, even as every leaf that the winds blow over the fields has its history, and my old tramp doubtless had his, and God knows it must have been sad enough, judging by his looks, for he had the saddest face I ever looked at, and I've seen a good many sad faces in my day.

No, he was nothing but a tramp, old and gray-headed, and nearly worn out with his tramping. How long he had been going the rounds I cannot say, but for nearly a dozen years, once each year, he made his appearance in the city, tarried a month, perhaps, and then quietly disappeared, and we saw him no more for a twelvemonth. Inoffensive? Decidedly—as mild-mannered a man as ever asked grace at a poorhouse table.

Indeed, the children were his best patrons, for he had a most winning way with them, and he could scarcely be seen on the street without the accompaniment of a dozen, tagging at his heels and holding on to his hands and the skirts of his long coat. There's Dick there, six feet if he's an inch and gone twenty last month. Well, many and many a time have I seen the strapping fellow when he was a little chap sitting astride the old vagabond's neck, with his little feet crooked in under his armpits, laughing and screaming uproariously as his human horse underneath him pranced and curvetted along the pavement, and charged through the flock of childish admirers around him, as if they were a hostile soldiery and Dick was a very Henry of Navarre, whose white plume must always be found in the path to glory.



God bless the youngsters! Who of us with the burden of life's toil and care weighing us down, ever saw a frolicsome group of them, happy in their freedom from trouble and care, and did not wish he might slip his shoulders from under the load of his fifty years and be a boy again? What a pity it is that we must age and die in our wrinkles, leaving nothing better to gaze upon than a shrunken face, colorless of bloom and written all over with the scraggy record of our griefs, our errors, and our pains! Why cannot death charm back the boyish vigor and girlish grace to our faces, when, with the invisible and fatal gesture, he sweeps his hand swiftly across them?



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The dog? Oh! certainly; but don't hurry me. I'm too old to tell a story in a straight line and at express speed. I will get to the dog all in good time, and, in order to feel as I do about the terrible thing that happened to him, you must know something about his master, for in an odd sort of way they supplemented each other. Indeed, they seemed to have entered into a kind of partnership to share each other's moods as they shared each other's fortune. And it was a strange, and, I may say, a very touching sight, to see two creatures, of different species, so intimately attached to each other; and often, as I have looked at the dog when he was gazing at his master, have I said to myself, "Surely, something or some one has blundered, and a human soul was put, by mistake, into that dog's body," for never—no, sir, I will not qualify it—never have I seen a greater love look from human into human eyes than I have seen gazing devotedly up into the old man's face from the eyes of that dog. How did he look? Queer enough, I assure you, for his cross, while an admirable one to yield wit and affection both, was the worst possible one for beauty, for his father was a full-blooded shepherd and his mother a Scotch terrier, without a taint in her blood.

How well I remember the dog and his peculiar looks! I remember him now as plainly as if he were lying on the rug there this very minute. He had the size of his father and the bristly coat of his mother. His ears were like a terrier's, and naturally pricked forward. His color was a dirty gray—a miserable color; his tail had been cropped and the remnant that remained—some four inches in length—stood stiffly up, with scarce a suggestion of a curve; he was homely, but not inferior looking, for his head was such an one as Landseer would have loved to have translated from time and death to the immortality of his canvas; what a matchless front, and room enough in the cranium to hold the brains of any two common dogs. But his eyes were the impressive and magnificent feature of his face—large, round and warmly hazel in color, and so liquid clear that, looking into them, you seemed to be gazing into transparent depths, not of water, but of intelligent being. What eyes they were! I remember what a young lady said once apropos to them. She was a belle herself, and nature spoke through her speech. She came into the office here one day when the dog was performing, for he was a great trick dog, and, after watching him a moment, she exclaimed, "Ah! if a woman only had those eyes, what might she not do!" More fun could look out of that dog's head than of any other I ever saw, whether of dog or man. And though you may not credit it, yet, as true as I sit here, I have seen those eyes weep as large and honest tears as ever fell in sorrow from human orbs. "Laugh, too?" You put that question incredulously, do you? Well, you needn't, for the dog could laugh. "With his tail?" No, any dog can do that, but he could laugh with his mouth. Why, sir, I have seen him sit bolt upright on his haunches there by that post, lean his back against it, and laugh so heartily that his mouth would open and shut like a man's when guffawing, and you could see every tooth in his head, and he did it intelligently, too, and laughed because he was tickled and couldn't help it.



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Alas! poor dog, he came to a sad end at last, and died in so wretched a way that the recollection of his death puts a dark eclipse upon the unhappy memory of his life.

[Illustration: *The old man and his dog were constant companions.*]

Comfort to his master? You may well say that; and no man ever loved his child more fondly than the old beggar loved his dog. And well he might, for he was his companion by day, his guard by night, and the means by which he eked out the sometime scant living that the fickle charity of the world flung to him. How often have I seen the old man take him in his arms and hug him to his breast, that had, I fancy, so many bitter memories in it; and how often have I seen the dog lap with gentle and caressing tongue the tears as they rolled down the furrowed cheeks, when the fountain of grief within was stirred by the angel of recollection. But it was from the sympathy of his faithful and loving companion, and not from the moving of the bitter waters, that his aching heart found consolation.

Tell you about the man? Why, certainly; but there isn't much to tell. You see, no one knew much of him, for he seldom if ever spoke of himself. I suppose I knew him better than anyone on his beat here, for I fell in love with his dog, and with himself, too, for that matter, for, in the first place, he was old, and whoever saw a white head and didn't love it, and whoever looked upon a wrinkled face and didn't wish to kiss it, if it was peaceful, and the old man's head was as white as snow is, and the peacefulness of a sleeping child hovered over the sadness of his face, albeit the shadow of a sorrowful past lay darkly resting upon it. But though I saw much of him as he swung around on his annual visit, and though he looked upon me as his friend—as, indeed, I was, and proved myself to be such more than once, thank God!—still he never offered to tell me his history, and I certainly never questioned him about it. For life is a secret thing, and each man holds the key to his own; and only once, if at all, may it be opened, and even then only the Father is gentle and forgiving enough to look upon the wheat and the chaff which we in our grief or joy keep closely locked from human eyes.

No, I knew little of him; but occasionally, sitting by the fire here when a storm was heavy outside, for the coming of storms was always the prelude of these moods in him, he would begin to mutter to himself, and to talk to his dog of days long gone; of men and women he had once hated or loved, or who loved or hated him—God knows which—and of deeds he had once done, but which were now deeply buried under the years.

Perhaps he did not know that he was talking. Perhaps his soul, busy with the past, forgot the motion of the lips and ceased to keep its watch over the movements of that member which, unless ceaselessly guarded, betrays us all so often. What did he mutter about? Well, the man is dead and gone, and what little there is to tell cannot pain him now. Death makes us indifferent to disclosure, and little do we care what the world says about us when we lie sleeping in the grave, I ween. Yes, the man is dead and gone this many a year; God rest his soul, and I heartily hope he has found riches and rest and his

dog ere now, as I feel certain he has, and what little I know can do no harm, if told, to any.



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Well, as I was saying, when storms were brewing in the air and the sea, the uneasiness of the elements themselves seemed to take possession of his soul and agitate it,—for his very body would rock to and fro and sway in the chair when the fit was on him, and he would talk to his dog, and to men and women, too, whom no one could see save himself, and if what he said might be taken as the words of a sane man, he certainly had been rich and powerful one day—and loved and hated, too, for that matter. For from his speech one could but learn that all that makes life worth the living was once his, and that he had lost it all—but whatever may have been his other losses, one there must have been in truth, for as to it his words were always the same: “*Gone, gone,*” he would say, “*gone*—and the winds I hear coming blow over her grave—but winds cannot reach her, for she lies warm and well covered, deep down in her grave.” And so he would sit muttering and swaying his body in the chair, as the winds blew stormily out of the east, and the boom of the waves rolled up from the bluff, as they pounded heavily against the rocks and the shore.

Why did I not make him settle down? Because he wouldn’t. I tried time and again to persuade him to it, but he never would consent. Perhaps he was right in his impulse to roam, and loved the careless freedom of it, and the solitude it gave him. For if a man would hide himself from man he must keep on the move. If he stops he becomes known. But in travel he loses his identity, and passes from place to place unknown and unnoted.

But it seemed pitiful to me that one so old and feeble should have no home, and so I persuaded him to settle down for one winter, at least, and hired him a little house in a pleasant street and started him in his housekeeping experiment. But alas! evil came of it, and I never did a deed I more profoundly regretted, for it led to the calamity I am about to tell you of, and brought upon the poor man the greatest grief that might befall him, even the death of his dog, and in a most cruel and painful fashion at that. Ah, me! could we but see the end of things from their beginning, how little of our doing would be done at times; for the benevolent blundering of our lives is as often fruitful of harm as the evil we do in our malice and passion.

It all happened in this way, and I will tell you as it was told me, partly by the old man himself, and partly by those who had knowledge of the dreadful event at the time, for I was out of the city the morning the occurrence took place, or it never would have happened. I don’t think anything of the kind ever before made so much talk, or excited so much indignation.

The legislature at its last session, not having wit or honesty enough to exercise itself over one of a dozen crying evils that were then vexing the people, got greatly excited over—*dogs!*



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Some miserable curs—many affirmed they were wolves, and no dogs at all—in a remote corner of the state, had killed a few sheep, and the farmers of that region got up a great scare, and raised a hue and cry against the whole canine family. It is incredible how much noise was made over the killing of a few half-starved sheep that were browsing on those northern mountains! You would have thought, judging by the clamor, that the fundamental interests of the commonwealth were attacked, and that the stately structure of government itself was on the point of falling to the ground.

Well, when the legislature met the excitement was at its height and the gust of popular foolishness converged all its forces at the capitol. In due time a bill was reported, and an outrageous bill it was, too, for it not only put a heavy tax upon dogs in every section of the state, city as well as country, but provided that certain officers should be appointed to enforce the law, whose duty it should be to kill every dog not duly registered on a certain date. Even this was not all; for it stimulated the enforcement of the law by enlisting the cupidity of men and boys alike, especially of the lower and hardened classes, by providing that whoever killed an unregistered dog should be paid three dollars from the state treasury.

It was a bad law, in truth, for it was the outgrowth of senseless excitement, and an attempt to tax the affections. Property, of course, can be taxed, but we all know that a dog is not property, any more than is a boy's pet rabbit, or a child, for that matter. A dog is a member of his master's family. He has connection with his heart, not with his pocket. He is a creature to love and be loved by, and not to be bought and sold like a bit of land or a yoke of oxen, and any law aimed at the affections is an offence to the holiest impulses of the bosom, and as such should be resented.

Yes, the law was a bad one. I did what I could to defeat it in its passage, and I broke it all I could after its passage, and that was some satisfaction to my feelings, which were in fact outraged by it; for I saw not only the injustice of it, as viewed in the light of correct principle, but that it would bear heavily upon the poor, and bring sorrow like the sorrow of death itself into families. I saw, moreover, that it was a cruel law in its relation to children, whose pretty and harmless pets and playmates could be murdered before their very eyes. Many a sad case did I hear of, the winter after the law was passed, but the saddest of all was that of my old friend, who was living peacefully and happily with his dog in the little house I had hired for him.

[Illustration: *He was teaching the dog a new trick.*]

He was sitting one evening in the comfortable quarters I had provided for him, playing with his companion and teaching him some new tricks to practise against my return, happy as he might be, when a loud rap was delivered upon his door, and at the same instant it was pushed rudely open, and a man walked into the room and, without pausing to give or receive a greeting, pointed to the dog, and said:



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“Is that your property, sir?”

“I never think of him in that way,” answered the old man, mildly. “He has been my companion—I may say my only companion—these many years, and I love him as property is not loved. No, sir, *Trusty* is not property—he is my companion and my friend.”

“I didn’t come here to listen to any of your crazy nonsense, but as an officer of the law, to see if you have registered your dog, and paid your tax as it commands, and, if you hadn’t, to see that the penalty was put upon you as you deserve, you old begging loafer, you.”

“I’ve broken no law that I know of,” replied the beggar, “I love my dog, that is all. I hope it breaks no law for a man to love his dog in this city, does it, friend?”

“If you don’t know what the law is, you’d better find out,” answered the fellow, roughly. “What right have you to own a dog, anyway? It strikes me that it is about enough for you to sponge your own living out of the community, without sponging another for a miserable whelp of a dog like that.”

“Trusty eats very little,” replied the old man, respectfully, “and he amuses people a great deal, especially the children; and, besides, he is a great comfort to me, and God knows that I have nothing else to comfort me in all the world—wealth, home, friends, and one dearer than all,—all lost, and thou’rt all I have left, Trusty, to comfort me,” and he looked affectionately at his companion, whose head was resting lovingly on his knee.

“Oh, I’ve heard the whining of your class before to-night,” replied the fellow, “and am not to be taken in by any of your sniffing, so you needn’t try that trick on me. Law is law, and I shall see it enforced, and on you, too, in spite of your shuffling, you miserable old sneak of a beggar, you.”

“Friend,” answered the old man with dignity, as he rose from the chair and looked the fellow calmly in the face, “better men than you or I have begged their daily bread before now, and eaten it, too, with an honest conscience and a grateful heart, and more than once when night has overtaken me, weary of journeying along inhospitable roads, and I have been compelled to make my bed on the leaves under some hedge, I’ve remembered that the Son of God when on the earth to teach us the sweet lesson of charity, ‘had not where to lay his head.’ The lesson he came to teach, you certainly have not learned, or you would never have made my poverty and my misfortunes the butt of your scoffings.”

The old man spoke with dignity, but the coarseness of the fellow’s nature and the hardening influence of the business he was engaged in prevented him from feeling either shame or sympathy, for he turned toward the door with an oath, saying: “You’ll



hear from me in the morning, old chap, but I'll tell you this to chew on over night; that if your tax money isn't ready when I come again, I'll teach you what it is to break the laws in this city, and insult the officers whose duty it is to see them enforced against just such white-headed old dead-beats as you!" and with another oath, he passed out of the door and shut it with a slam.



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I don't know how the old man passed the night. But little sleep, I warrant, came to his old eyes, for he was as timid as a child, and easily frightened, and a threat against his own life would have disturbed him less than one against the life of his dog. But whether he slept or not, the hours of the night wheeled along their dark courses without stopping, and speedily brought the dreaded morning. I know not when he died, or where, but well I know that the memory of that dreadful morning and the woe that came to him on it haunted him to the close of his life, and embittered the last hours of it.

The morning came as all mornings, whether they bring joy or grief to us, do come. The threat the fellow had uttered against his dog the evening before had naturally disturbed him and the old man was nervous and excited, but he managed to cook his frugal breakfast and eat it with his companion. I can well imagine his thoughts and his worryment. "Law! what law?" I can hear him say. "I've broken no law. I've only loved and been loved by my dog. That's not wicked, surely. He said he'd come again, and if I didn't have the money ready. Money! what money? He knows I've no money. Tax! what tax? Do they tax a man's heart in this city? Can't a man love anything here unless he's rich? Kill my dog! I don't believe it. There isn't a man on the earth wicked enough to kill an old man's dog, an old man's harmless dog; no, he didn't, he couldn't mean that! he just said it to scare me. Yes, yes, I see now; he'd been drinking and he said it just to scare me." Thus, as I fancy, the poor old man sat muttering to himself, listening with dread to every passing step, listening and muttering to himself, while his old heart, quaked in his bosom, and his soul, which had so little to cheer it, as it journeyed along its lonely path, was sorely tried and disquieted within him.

The clock in a neighboring steeple was striking the ninth hour, and the old man paused in his muttering and sat counting the strokes as the iron tongue pealed them forth; counting them in his fear as if each stroke was a knell, and so indeed to him it was, and many of the chimes we listen carelessly to, would be knells to us, if we knew what would happen twixt them and their next chiming.

The vibration of the last stroke was swelling and sinking in the air, when a heavy step sounded on the stair, and without even the ceremony of knocking, the door was pushed suddenly open, and the fellow, who had intruded upon him the evening before, entered the room. In one hand he held a rope and in the other a club.

"Well, old chap," he said, "you see I am here as I told you I would be. I've given you a whole night to study up the law."

"Law! what law?" exclaimed the old man, interrupting him, "I don't know that I broken"—

"Come, come, old shuffler, none of your blarney, if you please," broke in the fellow; "you know well enough what law I mean. I mean the dog-law."



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“Dog-law! dog-law!” answered the old man, “what law is that?”

“Oh, you don’t pull the wool over my eyes,” sneered the other; “you know what law I mean well enough, but, to jog your memory, I’ll say that the law I mean makes the owner of a dog pay a tax of three dollars, and if the tax isn’t paid”—

“Three dollars!” ejaculated the poor man. “Three dollars! when have I had so much money as that? Three dollars! you might as well have asked me to pay three thousand as three.”

“Very well, very well,” exclaimed the other; “the law covers just such cases as yours—covers them perfectly,” and he laughed a coarse, cruel laugh. “Out with the money, or I take the dog.”

“Take my dog!” screamed the old man, “take Trusty! What should you take him for? You can’t want him.”

“Oh, yes, I do, old fellow,” retorted the other; “I want him very much indeed, I know just what to do with him, I’ll see to that.”

“Do with him?” cried the other, whose mind, perhaps because paralyzed by fear, perhaps because of the enormity of the deed, would not receive the horrible suggestion, “what would you do with Trusty?”

“Kill him, damn you!” shouted the other; “kill him as I have a hundred other curs this fall and pocket the money the law gives me for doing it. Do you understand that, you old dead-beat?”

For a moment the wretched man never spoke, his lips paled to the color of ashes, and shrivelled as if suddenly parched against the teeth, and he clutched the back of a chair for support. Twice he essayed to speak, his lips moved, but his tongue in its dryness clove to the roof of his mouth. At last he gasped forth in the hoarse whisper of mortal terror:

“Kill my dog! kill Trusty!”

It was a sorry sight, truly, and might well touch the hardest heart. But the officer of the law—God save the mark!—remained unmoved. What was one dog more or less to him? had he not already killed hundreds, as he said? The sportsman’s favorite hunter, astray without his collar, the lady’s pet, crying pitifully in the street, unable to find its mistress’s door, the children’s playmate, waiting in front of the school house for school to close, the poor man’s help and comfort, his household’s joy, guardian and friend, caught in the street on his return from his humble master, to whom he carried his homely dinner. What was one dog more or less to him, hardened by the murderous



habit of his office and eager to earn his wretched fee,—what was one dog more or less to *him*?

“Come, come,” he cried, as he uncoiled the rope he held in his hand, “out with the money or I take the dog.”



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“How much is it? how much is it?” cried the old man, fumbling in his pockets and bringing forth a few small pieces of silver and some pennies. “Here take it, take it, it’s all I have—there’s a ten-cent piece, isn’t it? and there’s two fives, and here, yes, God be praised, here’s a quarter of a dollar; Trusty earned that yesterday. Let’s see, twenty-five, that’s the quarter, and ten is thirty-five, and two fives, that makes forty-five, and eight pennies, that makes fifty-three cents; won’t that do? It’s every cent I have, as God is my witness—it will do, won’t it?” And the old man seized one of the hands of the fellow, and strove to put his little hoarding into it.

But the hard-hearted wretch drew his hand back with a jerk, and, seizing the dog by the neck, slipped the rope over his head and saying, “The law allows me four times that for killing him,” opened the door and pulled the poor dog out after him into the street.

“God of heaven!” screamed the poor old man, as he rushed, bareheaded as he was, out of the door, and hurried in pursuit of the man, who was pulling the dog along and walking as fast as he could, while Trusty struggled and cried and did all he could to get rid of the rope. “Where is thy justice or thy mercy? Oh, sir; oh, sir;” he shouted, running after the man, “give me back my dog; oh, give him back to me, good people;” he cried, for his own cries and those of the dog, too, had already drawn a crowd to the scene, “good people, tell him not to kill my dog.”

[Illustration: *“It was to the honor of the crowd that they hooted the officer roundly.”*]

It was to the honor of the crowd that they hooted the officer roundly, and called on him and shouted, “Give the old man back his dog,” and greater honor yet to them that some of the boys pelted him with snowballs and junks of ice as he hurried on, and one brawny chap, sitting on the seat of his cart, struck him a stinging blow with his black whip as he scuttled past, with, “Damn you, take that, for killing *my* dog.” The officer shook his club at the honest fellow and said, “I’ll pay you for that, see if I don’t,” but he dared not stop to make the arrest, for the crowd was thickening and the air getting fuller of missiles, and every door and window was hooting him as he passed them, with the poor dog crying and moaning pitifully at his heels. Even the women, God bless them (for the feeling against the law ran high in the city), opened the doors and lifted the windows of their houses, the ladies crying, “Shame on you, shame on you!” and the cooks and chamber maids from the nadir and zenith of their household worlds, with homelier and more piquant phrase and saucier tongues, scoffed him for the miserable work he was doing; but in spite of the popular uprising, now almost swelled to the dimensions of a mob, and the verbal uproar, through the hoarse murmur of which the boy’s gibe, the woman’s taunt and the strong man’s curse,



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came and smote upon him in volleys, still he clutched the rope and rushed along, threatening the crowd that was closing in ahead of him with his club, and so making headway on his dreadful errand, while the poor old man, unable to keep up with him, was filling the air with his cries, and, without knowing what he was saying, perhaps, kept calling on the people, saying, "Oh, good people, good people, don't let him kill my dog."

Indeed, his grief was piteous to see, for he was half distraught with fear, and like as a mother whose child had been snatched from her and was being hurried to death, so he, with tears, sobs and screams, kept entreating one moment the crowd and the next beseeching heaven, saying, "Don't let him kill my dog," and being an old man and white-headed, and as his countenance and gestures were eloquent with the eloquence of true grief, the people were filled with pity for him and their hearts melted with sympathy at the piteous spectacle they beheld.

Then up spake the honest carter, saying, "Friends, let's give the old man a lift, for it's a shame that one so old should lose his dog. How much is it you lack of the tax?" he asked of the poor old gentleman as he came panting up. But he was so confused and tremulous with terror that he could not answer, and so being unable to do more he stretched his old shaken hands in which the money was still, tightly clutched, up to him, but the old hands shook so that the carter could not count it, until he had taken it into his own steady palm.

"Here's fifty cents and a few odd pennies," he shouted, "and the law demands three dollars; two dollars and a half is wanted; who'll help make up the three dollars and save the old man's dog? Here's fifty cents," he added as he took a silver half-dollar from his pocket and dropped it into the hat, "it's half I earnt yesterday, and more than I'll earn to-day, perhaps, for times be dull, but the old man shall have it, if Mary and I go without sugar and tea for a week."

'Twas a good speech and bravely said, and the crowd responded to it as bravely, for it fairly rained dimes and quarters and pennies, not only into the carter's hat until it sagged, but into his cart, too, until the bottom of it was speckled all over with copper and silver coin, and the honest fellow held up his hands for the crowd to give no more, crying:

"Hold, hold! Here's enough, and more than enough."

But he could scarcely make himself heard, because of the cheering and the laughing and the rattling of the pieces as the crowd continued to rain them all the faster into his cart. Ah, me, what is that sweet something in human hearts, which, in its response to human want, translates us like a flash from low to highest mood; aye, which breaketh through all barriers of selfish habit, and even the adamantine of foreign tongues and

poureth out its rich largess in a common tide to meet a brother's need, where'er that brother is or whatever he may be?



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But the old man did not wait to gather up the offerings of the generous and sympathetic crowd, but snatching a handful of silver from the carter's hat pushed his way out of the jam, and, holding the hand in which he clutched the silver high above his head, hurried on after the officer, crying at the top of his voice: "Here's the money, here's the money; oh, good people," for the street was nearly blocked with those that swarmed thickly in the wake of the officer and he could make but slow progress through it, "tell him I have the money and am coming; don't let him go any farther; I shall never catch him; stop him, stop him, for the love of heaven, stop him; here's the money." And thus crying aloud and calling, with his thin, tremulous voice, upon the officer to stop, he ran frantically along the street, as fast as he could, in pursuit.

But it is certain that the old man would not have caught up with the officer had the latter been uninterrupted in his progress, for the street was filled with people and he could not push his way with much speed because of his feebleness, but fortune, or perhaps I should say misfortune, favored him, so that he shortly overtook the object of his pursuit and came up with the officer and the dog. But, alas! his old heart got little gain thereby, but a grievous loss, rather, for when he came to the spot both lay stretched senseless on the ground, the man knocked flat to the earth by the fist of an indignant citizen, and the dog lying with his skull broken in by a brutal blow from the fellow's club.

When the old man came to the spot where the dog and the officer lay, he stopped, and when he saw what had happened, the money he had brought with which to deliver his dog, fell rattling, unheeded to the ground, and then he raised his palms toward heaven, as if entreating the vengeance or the benignity of the skies, and with tears streaming down his cheeks, he lifted up his voice and wept, saying: "Oh, God, he's killed my dog!" And then he sank down all in a heap, as if he would die beside his dying dog, for the dog was not yet dead, but dying.

This his master soon perceived, and heedless of the multitude who thronged the street from side to side, he lifted the dying dog into his lap and laid his poor crushed head against his breast and mourned over him as a mother, deserted by husband and friends, might mourn for an only babe when, alone in a foreign land, it lay on her bosom dying; and the multitude, who, by this, had knowledge of the dreadful deed, stood in silence while he mourned.

"Trusty, Trusty," he said, "do you know me, Trusty?" and his tears fell fast into the dog's bristly coat. The poor creature, now far gone in that unconsciousness which deafens the ear to the voice of love itself, still faintly heard the familiar tones, for he lifted his eyes to his master's face and nestled closer into his bosom. It was a touching sight, in truth, and those who stood close enough to see the moving spectacle, wiped their own eyes, divinely moist with the mist of sympathy.



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It was evident to all, and to the old man himself, that above and around and closing in upon them was the mystery which men call death—a mystery as inscrutable as it hovers over the kennel and stable as when it enters the habitations of men—and that in a few moments the life still within the body of the poor animal, with all its powers of doing, of thinking, and of loving, would depart the structure in which it had found so pleasant an abode and so facile a medium of expression.

For a few moments nothing more was said; the old man continued to sob and the life of his companion continued to ebb away. The brutal blow that caused his death had mercifully numbed the power of feeling, so that whatever the gloomy journey he was about to take might mean to him, whether the same life he was leaving, or a larger, or none at all, he would move on through the darkness toward the one or the other at least without pain.

“You and I have fared in company for many a year,” said the old man at last, “and bread, whether scant or plenty, and bed, whether hard or soft, we have shared together. Thou hast made the days brighter, and the nights shorter, by thy presence as I suffered through them, and dark will the one be, and long the other, when I see thee no more; would to God I could die with thee, my dog, my dog!”

Did the dog indeed understand what he said or did he merely sense the sorrow in the tones and seek once more, as he had done so many times before, to comfort his disconsolate master? I know not; I only know that the poor animal, with dying strength, lifted his muzzle to his master’s face, and twice he lapped it with his tongue. Aye, lapped the salt tears tenderly from his master’s wrinkled and pallid cheeks with his tongue; only this, for no more could he do. “My dog,” cried the old man once more, amid his tears. “My dog, the God who made thee so loving and worthy to be loved, and filled thee with such sweet feeling and the wish to comfort human woe, will not surely let thee perish. In his great universe there is, there must be, room for thee. I will not mourn thee as wholly lost. I cannot do it. For amid the false thou hast been true, and surely falsehood shall not live on and sweet truth die. Tell me, my dog, give me some sign that we shall meet in the great hereafter?”

But in response to this appeal the dog gave no motion, for, indeed, his strength, like a tide ebbing in the night, was gliding silently and swiftly outward in the gloom, gliding outward and beyond all questioning and answering, but he opened wide his glorious eyes and fixed them steadily on his master’s face with such a great love in their depths that mortal might not doubt that in that love was hope and its sustaining evidence; and then the fatal dimness crept along their edges, the pure, sweet light faded away in their clear depths, and the impenetrable shadow settled forever over the lustrous orbs. The lids at last gradually closed as in sleep, and the beggar’s dog, with his head on his master’s neck and his body resting on his bosom, lay dead.



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[Illustration: Tail piece]

The Ball

[Illustration: Vignette Initial IT]

It was evening—dark, cool and starry. The earth and water lay hidden in the dusky gloom. Above, the stars were at their brightest. They gleamed and glowed, flashed and scintillated, like jewels fresh from the case. Their fires were many-colored—orange, yellow, and red; and here and there a great diamond, fastened into the zone of night, sent out its intense, colorless brilliancy. Through all the air silence reigned. The winds had died away, and the waters had settled to repose. No gurgle along the shore: no splash against the great logs that made the wharf; no bird of night calling to its mate. Outside all was still. Nature had drawn the curtains around her couch, and, screened from sight, lay in profound repose.

Within, all was light, and bustle, and gayety. From every window lights streamed and flashed. The large parlors were alive with moving forms. The piano, whose white keys were swept by whiter hands, tinkled and rang in liveliest measure. The dance was at its height; and the very floor seemed vibrant with the pressure of lively feet. The dancers advanced, retired, wheeled and swayed in easy circles, swept up and down, and across the floor in graceful lines.

Amid the happy scene the Old Trapper stood, his stalwart frame erect as in his prime; while his great, strong face fairly beamed in benediction upon the dancers. For his nature had within its depths that fine capacity which enabled it to receive the brightness of surrounding happiness and reflect it again.

It was a study to watch his face and mark the passage of changeful moods; surprise, delight, and broad, warm-hearted humor, as they came to and played across the responsive features. The man of the woods, of the lonely shore, and of silence, seemed perfectly at home amid the noise and commotion of human merry-making.

At last the music died away. The dancers checked their feet. The lady who had been playing the piano rose wearily from the instrument and joined a group of friends. The music was not adequate. The notes were too sharp; too isolate; they did not flow together. There was no sweep and swing, nor suavity of connected progress in the strains. The instrument could not lift the dancers up and swing them onward through the mazy motions.

“I tell ye, Henry,” said the Old Trapper, as he turned to Herbert who was standing by his side, “the pianner isn’t the thing to dance by, for sartin. It tinkles and chippers too much; it rattles and clicks. It don’t git hold of the feelin’s, Henry;—it don’t start the blood in yer



veins, nor set yer skin tinglin', nor make the feet dance agin yer will. It's good enough in its way, no doubt; but it sartinly isn't the thing to lift the young folks up and swing 'em round. The fiddle is the thing;—yis, the fiddle is sartinly the thing. I would give a good deal if we had a fiddle here to-night, for I see the boys and girls miss it. Lord-a-massy! how it would set 'em a-goin' if we only had a fiddle here."

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“John Norton,” said the Lad, who was sitting on a chair hidden away behind the Trapper, “John Norton,” and the Lad took hold of the sleeve of his jacket and pulled the Trapper’s head down towards him, “would you like to hear a violin to-night?”

“Like to hear a fiddle? Lord bless ye, Lad, I guess I would like to hear a fiddle. I never seed a time I wouldn’t give the best beaver hide in the lodge to hear the squeak of the bow on the strings. What’s the matter with ye, Lad?” and he drew the old man’s head still closer to him, until his ear was within a few inches of his mouth. “I love to play the violin better than I love any thing in the world, and I’ve got one of the best ones you ever heard, out there in the bow of the boat.”

“Heavens and ’arth, Lad!” ejaculated the Trapper, “Did ye say ye could play the fiddle, and that ye had a good one out there in the boat? Lord-a-massy! how the young folks will hop. Scoot out there and git it, boy, and Henry and me will let the folks know what ye’ve got and what ye can do.”

The Lad fairly flashed out of the room. He was gone in an instant; and in a few minutes he had returned, bearing in his hands a bundle which he carried as carefully as a mother would carry her babe; but brief as had been his absence it had allowed sufficient time for Herbert to communicate with the master of ceremonies and for him to announce to the company present that the great lack of the occasion had fortunately and unexpectedly been supplied; for the young man who was with Mr. Herbert and John Norton not only knew how to play the violin, but actually had one in his boat, and had gone to get it, and would be back in a moment. The announcement was received with applause. White hands clapped, and a hundred ejaculations of wonderment sounded forth the surprise and pleasure of the eager throng. And when the Lad came stealing in, bearing his precious burden, he was received with a positive ovation.

It was amusing to see the change which had come over the looks and actions of the company at the mention and appearance of the violin. The faces that had shown indifference and the look of languid weariness freshened and became tense in all their lines; and on their heads again animation sat crowned. Those who were seated jumped to their feet. The conversationalists broke their circle and swung suddenly into line. Eyes sparkled. Little happy screams and miniature war-whoops from the boisterous youngsters rang through the parlor. In eye, and look, and voice, the popular tribute spoke in honor of the popular instrument,—an instrument whose strings can sound almost every passion forth: The quip and quirk of merriment, the mourner’s wail, the measured praise of solemn psalms, the lively beat of joy, the subtle charm of indolent moods, and the sweet ecstasy of youthful pleasure, when with flying feet and in the abandon of delight she swings, circles, and floats through the measures of the voluptuous waltz.



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In one corner of the parlor there was a platform, from which charades and private theatricals had been acted on some previous evening, and to this the Lad was escorted; and strange to say his awkwardness had departed from him. His form was straight. His head was lifted. His shambling gait steadied itself with firmest confidence. His long arms sought no longer feebly to hide themselves, but held the package that he carried in fond authority of gesture, as a proud mother, whose pride had banished bashfulness, might carry a beautiful child. So the Lad went toward the dais, and, seating himself in the chair, proceeded with deliberate tenderness to uncover the instrument.

An old, dark-looking one it was. The gloom of centuries darkened it. Their dusk had penetrated the very fibre of the wood. Its look suggested ancient times; far climes; and hands long mouldering in dust. It was an instrument to quicken curiosity and elicit mental interrogation. What was its story? Where was it made? By whom, and when? The Lad did not know. It was his mother's gift, he said. And an old sea-captain had given it to his mother. The old sea-captain had found it on a wreck in the far-off Indian Ocean. He found it in a trunk—a great sea chest made of scented wood and banded with brazen ribs. And in the chest, with it, it was rumored the old mariner had found silks, and costly fabrics, and gold, and eastern gems,—gems that never had been cut, but lay in all their barbaric beauty, dull and swarth as Cleopatra's face. Thus the violin had been found on the far seas—at the end of the world, as it were, and in companionship of gems and fabrics rich and rare; and in a chest whose mouth breathed odors. This was all the Lad knew.

“Henry,” said the old Trapper, “the Lad says the fiddle is so old that no one knows how old it is; and I conceit the boy speaks the truth. It sartinly looks as old as a squaw whose teeth has dropped out and whose face is the color of tanned buckskin. I tell ye, Henry, I believe it will bust if the Lad draws the bow with any ’arnestness across it, for there never was a glue made that would hold wood together for a thousand year. And if that fiddle isn't a thousand year old, then John Norton is no jedge of appearances, and can't count the prongs on the horns of a buck.”

[Illustration: “*The Lad began to play.*”]

At this instant the Lad dropped the bow upon the strings. Strong and round, mellow and sweet, the note swelled forth. Starting with the least filament of sound, it wove itself into a compact chord of sonorous resonance; filled the great parlors; passed through the doorway into the receptive stillness outside; charged it with throbbings—thus held the air a moment; reigned in it—then, calling its powers back to itself, drew in its vibrating tones; checked its undulating force; and leaving the air by easy retirement, came back like a bird to its nest and died away within the recesses of the dark, melodious shell from whence it started.



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When the bow first began its course across the strings the old Trapper's eyes were on it; and as the note grew and swelled he seemed to grow with it. His great fingers shut into their palms as if an unseen power was pulling at the chords. His breast heaved. His mouth actually opened. It was as if the rising, swelling, pulsating sounds actually lifted him from off the floor on which he stood, and when the magnificent note ebbed and finally died away within the violin, not only he, but all the company stood breathless: charmed, surprised, astonished into silence at the wondrous note they had heard.

The old Trapper was the first to move. He brought his brawny hand down heavily upon Herbert's shoulder, and, with a face actually on fire with the fervor stirred within him, exclaimed:

"Lord-a-massy! Henry, did ye ever hear a noise like that? I say, boy, did ye ever hear a noise like that? Where on arth did it all come from? Why, boy, 'twas as long and as solemn as a funeral, as arnest as the cry of a panther, and roared like a nest of hornets when ye poke 'em with a stick. If that's a fiddle, I wonder what the other things be that I have heerd the half-breeds and the Frenchers play in the clearin's."

Well might the old Trapper be astonished. The violin of unknown age and make was one among ten thousand. It was a concert to hear the Lad tune it; which he did with a bold and skilful touch, and the exactness of an ear which nature had made exquisitely true to time and chord. His bashfulness was gone. His timidity had departed. His awkwardness, even, went out of body and arm and fingers, with the initial note. His soul had found its life with his mother's gift; and he who was so weak and hesitating in ordinary moments, found courage and strength, and the dignity of a master, when he touched the strings. At last the instrument was ready. And with a flourish bold and free he struck into the measures of a waltz that filled the parlor with circling noise, and made the air throb and beat—swing and swell, as if it were liquid, and unseen hands were moving it with measured undulations.

[Illustration: "*The God of Music was actually in the room.*"]

There was no resisting an influence so sweet, subtle, and pervasive, as flowed from that easy-going bow, as it came and went over the resounding strings. Couple after couple swung off into the open space, until the entire company were swinging and floating through the dreamy and bewitching measures. The god of music was actually in the room, and his strong, passionate touch was on the souls of those who were floated hither and thither as if blown by his invisible breath. The music took possession of the dancers. It banished the mortal heaviness from their frames, and made them buoyant, so that their feet scarce touched the floor. Up and down and across from side to side and end to end they whirled and floated. They moved as if a power which took the place of wings



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was in them. They did not seem to know that they were dancing. They did not dance; they floated, flowing like a current moved by easy undulations. Their hands were clasped. Their faces nearly touched. Their eyes were closed or glowing. And still the long bow came and went, and still the music rose and sank, swelled and ebbed, as easy waves advance, retreat and flood again, breaking in white and lazy murmurs at twilight on the dusky beach.

Herbert stood still; his eyes were lifted, the gaze in them far away, and one foot beat the measure. Beside him stood the Trapper. His arms were crossed; his eyes were on the bow that the Lad was drawing, and his body swayed, lifted and sank in perfect harmony with the motions and the accompanying sound, with a grace which nature only reaches when the will is utterly surrendered to a power that has charmed the stiffness and tension out of the frame and made it yielding and responsive.

At last the music stopped; and with it stopped each form. Each foot was arrested at the point to which the sound had carried it when it paused. Each couple stood in perfect pose. The motive power which moved them was withdrawn, and the limbs stood motionless as if the soul that gave them animation had retired. They had been lifted to another world—a world of impulse and movement more airy and spirit-like than the gross earth,—and it took a moment for them to struggle back to ordinary life. But in a moment thought recalled them to themselves, and they realized the mastery of the power that had held them at its will and the applause broke out in showers of happy tumult. They crowded around the Lad—strong men and beautiful women,—gazing at him in wonder; then broke up into knots talking and marvelling. To the old Trapper's face, as he gazed at the Lad, a strange look came,—the look of a man to whose soul has come a revelation so pure and sweet that he is unable at first to compass it with his understanding. He came close to the Lad, and, sitting down on the edge of the platform, put his hand on the knee of the youth, and said:

“I have heerd most of the sweet and terrible noises that natur' makes, boy: I have heered the thunder among the hills, when the Lord was knockin' ag'in the 'arth until it jarred; and I have heered the wind in the pines and the waves on the beaches when the darkness of night was on the woods, and Natur' was singin' her evenin' psalm; and there be no bird or beast the Lord has made whose cry, be it lively or solemn, I have not heerd; and I have said that man had never made an instrument that could make so sweet a noise as Natur' makes when the Sperit of the universe speaks through her stillness: but ye have made sounds to-night, Lad, sweeter than my ears have ever heerd on hill or lake-shore, at noon or in the night season, and I sartinly believe that the Sperit of the Lord has been with ye, boy, and gi'n ye the power to bring out sech music as the Book says the angels make in their



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happiness in the world above. I trust ye be grateful, Lad, for the gift the Lord has gi'n ye; for, though yer tongue knows leetle of speech, yit yer fingers can bring sech sounds out of that fiddle as a man might wish to have in his ears when his body lies stiffenin' in his cabin, and his sperit is standin' on the edge of the Great Clearin'. Yis, Lad, ye must sartinly play for me when my eyes grow dim, and my feet strike the trail that no man strikes but once, nor travels both ways."

At this point the announcement of supper was made; and the company streamed towards the tables. The repast was of that bounteous character customary to the houses located in the woods, in which the hearty provisions of the forest were brought into conjunction with and re-enforced by the more light and fanciful *cuisine* of the cities. Among the substantiate, fish and venison predominated. There was venison roast, and venison spitted, and venison broiled; venison steak and venison pie; trout broiled, and baked, and boiled; pancakes and rolls; ices and cream; pies and puddings; pickles and sauces of every conceivable character and make; ducks and partridges; coffee and tea whose nature, I regret to say, was discernible only to the eye of faith. In the midst of this abundance, the Old Trapper was entirely at home. He ate with the relish and heartiness of a man whose appetite was of the highest order, and whose courage mounted to the occasion.

[Illustration: "*Even the waiters, as they came and went, caught the infection.*"]

"I tell ye, Henry," said the old man, as he transferred a duck to his plate and proceeded to carve it with the aptness of one who had practical knowledge of its anatomy, "I tell ye, Henry, the birds be gittin' fat; and I sartinly hope the flight this fall will be a good un. Don't be bashful, Lad, in yer eatin'," he continued, as he transferred half of the bird to his companion's plate, "ye haven't got the size of some about the waist, but yer length is in yer favor, and if ye will only straighten up, and Henry don't gin' out, there'll be leetle left on this eend of the table when we have satisfied our hunger. I don't know when the cravin' of natur' has been stronger within me then it is this minit; and if nothin' happens, and ye stand by me, the Saranacers will remember our visit for days after we be gone. It isn't often that I feed in the settlements, or get a taste of their cookin', but the man who basted these birds knowed what he was doin', and the fire has given them jest the right tech; and the morsels actilly melt in yer mouth."

The Trapper's feelings were evidently not peculiar to himself. And the spirit of feasting was abroad. The eating was such as would astonish the dwellers in cities. Wit flashed across the table in answer to wit. Mirth rippled from end to end of the room. Laughter roared and rollicked adown the hall. Jokes were cracked. Fun exploded. Plates rattled. Cups and glasses touched and rang. Even the waiters, as they came and went in their happy service, caught the infection of the surrounding happiness, and their laughter mingled with that of the guests.



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The great pine branches and the evergreens nailed against the corner posts and wreathed into festoons along the walls shook and trembled in the uproar as to the passage of winds along their native hills. And the huge buck's heads, whose antlers were tied with rosettes and streaming ribbons, lost the staring look of their great artificial eyes and seemed as they gazed out through the interlacing boughs of cedar and balsam as if life had returned to them, and they once more were animate.

In about an hour the company streamed back into the parlor, with a mood even livelier than that which had characterized the early hours of the occasion. Their minds were in the state of highest action, and their bodies needed but the opportunity for rapid motion. Even the Lad had caught the infection of the surrounding liveliness, for his eyes and face glowed with the light of quickened animation.

"Have ye got any jigs in that fiddle, Lad?" said the Trapper; "Can ye twist any thing out of yer instrument that will set the feet travellin'? It seems to me that the young folks here want shakin' up a leetle; and a leetle of the old-fashioned dancin' will help 'em settle the vittles. Can ye liven up, Lad, and give 'em a tune that will set 'em whirlin'?"

The only reply of the Lad was a motion of the bow; but the motion was effective, for it sent a torrent of notes into the air, which thrilled through the body and tingled along the nerves like successive electric shocks. The old Trapper fairly bounded into the air; and when he struck the floor his feet were flying. Nor was he alone; the jig had started a dozen on the instant; and the floor rattled and rang with the tap of toe and heel.

"Henry," said the old Trapper, "hold on to me or I shall sartinly make a fool of myself. The Lad is ticklin' me from head to foot, and my toes are snappin' inside of the moccasins. Lord, who'd a thought that the blood in the veins of a man whose head is whitenin' could be sot leapin' as mine is doin' at this minit by the scrapin' of a fiddle!"

The Lad was a picture to see. His bow flew like lightning. His long fingers drummed and slid along the strings of the violin with bewildering swiftness. The little instrument jettied and effervesced its melody. The continuous and resounding noise poured out of it in tuneful bubbles. The air was filled with tinkling fragments of sound. The Lad's body swayed to and fro. His face glowed. His eyes flashed. The sweat stood in drops on his forehead, but still the bow snapped and crinkled, and the instrument continued to burst in musical explosions, while the floor shook, the windows rattled, and the lamps flared and fluttered, as the dancers chased the music on.

[Illustration: "*The music stopped with a snap.*"]



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“Heavens and arth!” said the Trapper. “I can’t stand this,” and breaking from the hold that Herbert had on him, whirled himself out to the centre of the floor and, with his face aflame with excitement and his white hair flying abroad, led the jig men off with a lightness of foot and quickness of stroke that forced the music by half a beat. The effect was electric. The room burst into applause, and the Lad fetched a stroke that seemed to rip the violin asunder. It was now a race between the violin and the dancers. One after another fell out of the circle as the moments passed, until the Trapper was left alone and was cutting it down in a fashion that both astonished and convulsed the company. More than one of the spectators went on to the floor in paroxysms of laughter. Herbert, bent over with his hands on his knees, was watching the Trapper with mouth stretched to its utmost and streaming eyes.

It is impossible to say which would have triumphed, had not an accident decided the contest and brought the jig to an abrupt termination. For even while the Lad was in the midst of the swiftest execution, the hind legs of the chair in which he was sitting were whipped from their fastenings, his heels went into the air, he turned half a somersault backward and the music stopped with a snap.

It was minutes before a word could be heard. Roars and shrieks and screams of irrepressible and uncontrollable merriment shook the house from foundation to garret. The Lad picked himself up and for the first time since they met Herbert saw his placid countenance wrinkled and seamed with the contortions of uproarious mirth. The sluggishness of his temperament for once was thoroughly agitated and the manhood which never before had come to the surface found in hilarity a visible and adequate expression. The Trapper had spun to his side and the two had joined their hands and, looking into each other’s faces, were laughing with a boisterousness that fairly shook their frames and exploded in resounding peals.

Gradually the uproar subsided and the company settled by easy transition to a quieter mood. The hours of the night were passing and the moment drawing nigh when those who had mingled their merriment must part. The old Trapper had regained his gravity and his countenance had settled to its customary repose. It seemed the general wish that the Lad would favor them with a farewell piece, and in compliance with the request of many, the old man turned to him and said:

“The hours be drawing on, Lad, and it’s reasonable that we should break up; but afore we go the folks wish to hear ye play a quiet sort of a piece that may be cheerful and pleasant like for them to remember ye by when we be gone. So, Lad, if ye have got anything in yer head that’s soft and teching, somethin’ that will sort o’ stay in the heart as the seasons come and go, I sartinly hope ye will play it for them. And as ye say ye was born by the sea, and as ye say the instrument ye hold in yer hand was gin ye by yer mother, it may be ye can play us something out of yer memory that shall tell us of her goodness to ye. Something I mean, that shall tell us of the shore where ye was



born and the love that ye had afore ye laid her to rest and came to the woods seekin' me. Can ye play us somethin' like that, Lad?"



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"I can play you anything that has mother in it," said he, and a wistful, yearning, hungry look came into his eyes and the edges of his lips quivered.

The company seated themselves and the boy drew his bow across the instrument. The brush of a painter could not have made the picture more perfect than the vision the Lad brought forth as the bow played on the strings. The picture of a sea, sunlighted and level, stretching far out; the picture of a curved shore: the shore of a quiet bay, rimmed with its beach of shining sand and noisy with the gurgle and splash of lapsing waves; the picture of a home quiet and orderly and filled with the tenderness of a gentle spirit; and then a heavier chord told of the coming of a darker hour when the mother lay dying. The violin fairly sobbed and groaned and wailed, as if the spirit of unconsolable grief were tugging heavily at the strings. Anon, a bell tolled solemnly out of it and its heavy knell clanged through the room. And then the music rested for a minute; and in the silence it seemed as if the grave came into sight as plainly as if the eyes of all were actually looking at its open mouth. Again the music sounded, and the sods, one after another, fell on the coffin, dull and heavy, changing to a gravelly, smothered sound as the grave filled. Once more it paused, and then a clear, sweet strain arose, sad, but pure and fine and hopeful, as voice of angels could have sung it, trustful and resigned. The bow stopped again; for a moment the violin was silent. And then the Lad lifted his face and, laying the bow softly upon the strings, began to play what all instinctively felt was a hymn to the spirit of his mother. Slowly, softly, sweetly, as the strains which the dying sometimes hear, the pure, clear, smooth notes stole out into the hushed air. It was playing, not such as mortal plays to mortal, but such as spirit plays to spirit and soul to soul, to-night, across the street of heaven. The Lad still used an earthly instrument and touched its strings with mortal fingers; but never, while they live, will those who heard that hymn believe that anything less than the spirit of the boy drew from the instrument the notes that filled the room with their divine sweetness. Indeed, the Lad did not act as if he were conscious of his body or of bodily presences around him. His face was lifted and his eyes, from which the tears were streaming, were gazing upward, not as if into vacancy, but as if they saw the bright being that had passed within the veil, standing in all the beauty of her transfiguration before them. For a smile was on the boy's lips, even while the tears were rolling down his cheeks. And when, at last, the arm suspended its motion; when the sweet notes ceased to sound and the last chord had died away, the Lad still kept his uplifted posture and his features held the same rapt expression.



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The company sat motionless, their gaze fastened on the Lad. Not an eye was without its tear. The cheeks of the old Trapper were wet; and Herbert, touched by some memory or overcome by the pathos of the music, was actually sobbing. The old man, with a tread as light as a moccasined foot could make, stepped softly to the side of the Lad and taking him by the arm—while the company rose as one man—motioned to Henry with his hand, and then, without a word, the Trapper and Herbert and “The Man Who Didn’t Know Much” passed out of the room, and taking boat, shoved off and glided from sight in the blue darkness of the overhanging night, amid whose eastern gloom the great, luminous, mellow-hearted stars of the morning were already aflame.

[Illustration: Tail piece]

Who Was He?

I

[Illustration: Vignette Initial AT]

At the head of a stretch of swiftly running water the river widened into a broad and deep pool. From the western bank a huge ledge of rock sloped downward and outward into the water. On it stood the trapper, John Norton, with a look of both expectation and anxiety on his face. For a moment he lifted his troubled eyes and gazed steadily through the tree-tops; and as his eyes fell to the level of the river, while the look of anxiety deepened on his countenance, he said:

“Yis, the wind has changed and the fire be comin’ this way; and ef it gits into the balsam thickets this side of the mountain and the wind holds where it is, a buck in full jump could hardly outrun it. Yis, the smoke thickens; ef I didn’t know that the boy would act with jedgment, and that he’s onusually sarcumspect, I would sartinly feel worried about him. I hope he won’t do anything resky for the sake of the pups. Ef he can’t git ’em, he can’t; and I trust he won’t resk the life of a man for a couple of dogs.”

With these words the trapper relapsed into silence. But every minute added to his anxiety, for the smoke thickened in the air and even a few cinders began to pass him as they were blown onward with the smoke by the wind.

“The fire is comin’ down the river,” he said, “and the boy has it behind him. Lord-a-massy! hear it roar! I know the boy is comin’, for I never knowed him to do a foolish thing in the woods; and it would be downright madness for him to stay in the shanty, or even go to the shanty, ef the fire had struck the balsam thicket afore he made the landin’. Lord, ef an oar-blade should break,—but it won’t break. The Lord of marcy won’t let an oar that the boy is handlin’ break, when the fire is racin’ behind him, and



he's comin' back from an arrand of marcy. I never seed a man desarted in a time like"—

A report of a rifle rang out quick and sharp through the smoke.

"God be praised!" said the trapper, "it's the boy's own piece, and he let it off as he shot the rift the fourth bend above. Yis, the boy knows his danger and he took the vantage of the rift to signal me with his piece, for oars couldn't help him in the rift and the missin' of a single stroke wouldn't count. I trust the boy got the pups, arter all," added the old trapper, his mind instantly reverting to his loved companions the moment it was relieved from anxiety touching his comrade.



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It couldn't have been over five minutes after the report of a rifle had sounded, before a boat swept suddenly around the bend above the rock and shot like an arrow through the haze toward the trapper. Herbert was at the oars and the two hounds were sitting on their haunches at the stern. The stroke the oarsman was pulling was such as a man pulls when, in answer to some emergency, he is putting forth his whole strength. But though the stroke was an earnest one, there was no apparent hurry in it; for it was long and evenly pulled, from dip to finish, and the recovery seemed a trifle leisurely done. The face of the trapper fairly shone with delight as he saw the boat and the occupants. Indeed, his happiness was too great to be enjoyed silently, and, in accordance with his habit when greatly interested, he broke into speech.

"Look at that now!" he exclaimed, as if speaking to some one at his side; "look at that now! There's a stroke that's worth notin', and is a kind of edication in itself. Ye might almost think that there wasn't quite enough snap in it; but the boy knows that he's pullin' for his life and the life of another man somewhere below him—not to speak of the pups—and he knows it's good seven miles to the rapids, and he's pullin' every ounce that's in him to pull, and keep his stroke. Now, he's come five miles, ef he's come a rod, and I warrant he hasn't missed a stroke, save when in shootin' the rift he let off his piece. And he knows he's got seven miles more to pull and he's set himself a twelve-mile stroke; and there aint many men that could do it, with the roar of the fire a leetle way behind him. Yis, the boy has acted with judgment and is sartinly comin' along like a buck in full jump. I guess I'd better let him know where I be."

"Hillo there, boy! Hi, hi, pups! Here I be on the p'int of the rock, as fresh as a buck arter a mornin' drink. Ease away a leetle, Herbert, in yer stroke and move the pups forad a leetle and make room for a man and a paddle, for the fire is arter ye and the time has come to jine works."

The young man did as the trapper requested. He intermitted a stroke and the hounds, at a word, moved into the middle of the boat and crouched obediently in the bottom, but whimpering in their gladness at hearing their master's voice again. The boat was under good headway when it passed the point of the ledge on which the trapper was standing, but as it glanced by, the old man leaped with practised agility to his place in the stern and had given a full and strong stroke to his paddle before he had fairly settled to his seat.

"Now, Herbert," he began, "ease yerself a bit, for ye have had a tough pull and it's good seven miles to the rapids. The fire is sartinly comin' in arnest, but the river runs nigh onto straight till ye git within sight of 'em, and I think we will beat it. I didn't feel sartin that ye had got the pups, Herbert, for I could see by the signs that ye wouldn't have any time to spare. Was it a tech and a go, boy?"



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"The fire was in the pines west of the shanty when I entered it," answered the young man, "and the smoke was so thick that I couldn't see it from the river as I landed."

"I conceited as much," replied the trapper, "I conceited as much. Yis, I knowed 'twould be a close shave ef ye got 'em, and I feared ye would run a resk that ye oughtn't to run, in yer love for the dogs."

"I didn't propose to leave the dogs to die," responded the young man; "I think I should have heard their cries in my ears for a year, had they been burned to death in the shanty where we left them."

"Ye speak with right feelin', Herbert," replied the trapper. "No, a hunter has no right to desart his dog when danger be nigh; for the Creator has made 'em in their loves and their dangers, alike. Did ye save the powder and the bullits, boy?"

"I did not," responded Herbert; "the sparks were all around me and the shanty was smoking while I was feeling around for the dogs' leash. I heard the canister explode before I reached the first bend."

"'Twas a narrer rub, boy," rejoined the trapper. "Yis, I can see 'twas a narrer rub ye had of it, and the holes in yer shirt show that the sparks was fallin' pritty thick and pritty hot, too, when ye come out of the shanty. How does the stroke tell on ye, boy?" continued the old man, interrogatively. "Ye be pullin' a slashin' stroke, ye see, and there's five mile more of it, ef there's a rod."

"The stroke begins to tell on my left side," answered Herbert; "but if you were sitting where you could see what's coming down upon us as I can, you would see it wasn't any time for us to take things leisurely."

"Lord, boy," rejoined the trapper, "do ye think I haven't any ears? The fire's at the fourth bend above us and the pines on the ridge we passed five minutes ago ought to be blazin' by this time. Ah me, boy, this isn't the fust time I've run a race with a fire of the devil's own kindlin', alone and in company, both. And my ears have measured the roar and the cracklin' until I can tell to a rod, eenamost, how fur the red line be behind me."

"What do you think of our chances?" queried his companion; "shall we get over the carry in time? for I suppose we are making for the big pool, are we not?"

"Yis, we be makin' for the pool," replied the trapper, "for it's the only safe spot on the river; and as for the chances, I sartinly doubt ef we can fetch the carry in time. Ef the fire isn't there ahead of us, it will be on us afore we could git to the pool at the other eend."

"Why can't we run the rapids?" asked Herbert promptly.



“The rapids can be run, as you and me know,” responded the old man, “for we have both did it, although they be onusally swift, and there be spots where good jedgment and a quick paddle is needed.”

“Why,” exclaimed Herbert, “the last time we went down we never took in a drop of water.”



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"It's true, as ye say, boy," responded the trapper; "yis, we sartinly did as ye say, though few be the men that know the waters that would believe it."

"Why, then," exclaimed the young man, "can't we do it again?"

"The smoke, boy, the smoke," was the answer. "The smoke will be there ahead of us. And who can run a stretch of water like the one ahead yender, with his eyes blinded? No, boy, we must git there ahead of the fire, for we can't run the rapids in the smoke. Here," he added, "ye be pullin' a murderin' stroke, and it's best that I spell ye. Down with ye, pups, down with ye, and lie still as a frozen otter while the boy comes over ye."

With the celerity of long practice in boating, the two men changed places, and with such quickness was the change in position effected, that the onrushing shell scarcely lessened its headway. The trapper seized the oars on the instant, while Herbert supported him with equal swiftness with the paddle and the light craft raced along like a feather blown by the gale.

For several moments the trapper, who, by the change in his position was brought face to face with the pursuing fire, said not a word. His stroke was long and sweeping and pulled with an energy which only perfect skill and tremendous strength can put into action. He looked at the rolling flames with a face undisturbed in its calmness and with eyes that noted knowingly every sign of its progress.

"The fire is a hot un," he said at length, "and it runs three feet to our two. We may git there ahead of it, for there isn't more than a mile fuder to go; but—Lord!" exclaimed the trapper, "how it roars! and it makes its own wind as it comes on. Don't break yer paddle shaft, boy; but the shaft is a good un and ye may put all the strength into it that ye think it will stand."

The spectacle on which the trapper was gazing was, indeed, a terrible one; and the peril of the two men was getting to be extreme. The valley, through the centre of which the river ran, was perhaps a mile in width, at which distance a range of lofty hills on either side walled it in. Down this enclosed stretch the fire was being driven by a wind which sent the blazing evidences of its approach in advance of its terrible progress. The spectacle was indescribable. The dreadful line of flame moved onward like a line of battle, when it moves at a charge against a flying enemy. The hungry flames ate up the woods as a monster might eat food when starving. Grasses, shrubs, bushes, thickets of undergrowth and the great trees, which stood in groves over the level plain on either side of the stream, disappeared at its touch as if swallowed up. The evergreens crackled and flamed fiery hot. The smoke eddied up in rushing volumes. Overhead, and far in advance of the on-rolling line of fire, the air was darkened with black cinders, amid whose sombre masses fiery sparks and blazing brands shone and flashed like falling stars.



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[Illustration: "A deer suddenly sprang from the bank."]

A deer suddenly sprang from the bank into the river ahead of the boat and, frenzied with fear, swam boldly athwart its course. He was followed by another and another. Birds flew shrieking through the air. Even the river animals swam uneasily along the banks, or peered out of their holes, as if nature had communicated to them, also, the terrible alarm; while, like the roar of a cataract,—dull, heavy, portentous,—the wrath of the flames rolled ominously through the air.

Amid the sickening smoke which was already rolling in volumes over the boat and the terrible uproar and confusion of nature, Herbert and the trapper kept steadily to their task. But every moment the line of fire gained on them. The smoke was already at intervals stifling and the heat of the coming conflagration getting unbearable. Brands began to fall hissing into the water. Twice had Herbert flung a blazing fragment out of the boat. And so, in a race literally for life, with the flames chasing them and their lives in jeopardy, they turned the last bend above the carry which began at the head of the rapids. But it was too late; the fiery fragments blown ahead by the high wind had fallen in front of them, and the landing at the carry itself was actually enveloped in smoke and flame.

"The fire be ahead of us, boy!" exclaimed the trapper, "and death is sartinly comin' behind. The odds be agin us to start with, for the smoke is thick and the fire will be in the bends at least half the way down, but it's our only chance; we must run the rapids."

"What about the dogs?"

"The pups must shirk for themselves," answered the old man. "I'm sorry, but the rapids be swift and the waters shaller on the first half of the stretch. And the pups settle the boat half an inch, ef they settle it a hair. Yis, overboard with ye, pups! overboard with ye!" commanded the trapper. "Ye must use the gifts the Lord has gin ye now, or git singed. I advise ye to keep with the current and come down trailin' the boat; for man's reason is better than dogs' reason, techin' currents and eddies, not to speak of falls. But take yer own way; for yer lives be in jeopardy with yer master's, and ye ought, for sartin, to have the chance of dyin' as ye like to. But yer best chance is to foller the boat, as I jedge."

The trapper had continued to talk as if addressing members of the human and not the canine species; and long before he had finished his remarks, the hounds had taken to the water and were swimming with all their power directly in the wake of the boat, as if they had actually understood their master's injunction, and were, indeed, determined to shoot the rapids in his wake.



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The conflagration was now at its fiercest heat. The smoke whirled upward in mighty eddies or rolled along in huge convolutions. Through the fleecy rolls here and there tongues of flame shot fiercely. The river steamed. The roar of the rushing flames was deafening. The tops of the huge pines that stood along the banks would wave and toss as the fiery line reached them, and then burst into blaze, as if they were but the mighty torches that lighted the path of the passing destruction. In all his long and eventful life, passed amid peril, it is doubtful if the trapper had ever been in a wilder scene. The rapids were ahead and the fire behind and on either side. The great mass of flame had not yet rolled abreast the boat, but the blazing brands were already falling in advance. It was not a moment to hesitate; nor was he a man to falter when action was called for.

By this time the boat had come nigh the upper rift of the rapids, and the motion of the downward suction was beginning to tell on its progress. The trapper shipped his oars and, lifting his paddle, placed himself in a kneeling posture, gazing down stream. The fire was almost upon them, and the smoke too dense for sight. But pressing as was the emergency, neither man touched his paddle to the water, but let the boat go down with the quickening current to the verge of the rapids, where the sharp dip of the decline would send it flying.

“This be an onsartin ventur’, Henry,” cried the trapper, shouting to his comrade from the smoke that now made it impossible for the young man, even at only the boat’s length, to see his person. “This be an onsartin ventur’, and the Lord only knows how it will eend. Ye know the waters as well as I do; and ye know the p’int where things must be did right. We’ll beat the smoke arter we make the fust dip and git out of the thickest of it in the fust half of the distance, onless somethin’ happens. Let her go with the current, boy, ontil yer sight comes to ye, for the current knows where it’s goin’, and that’s more than a mortal can tell in this infarnal smoke. Here we go, boy!” shouted the old man, as the boat balanced in its perilous flight on the sharp edge of the uppermost rift. “Here we go, boy!” he shouted out of the smoke and the rush of waters, “it’s hotter than Tophet where we be and it matters mighty leetle what meets us below.”

II

To those who have had no experience in running rapids, no adequate conception can be given touching what can with truth be called one of the most exciting experiences that man can pass through. The very velocity with which the flight is made is enough of itself to make the sensation startling. The skill which is required on the part of the boatman is of the finest order. Eye and hand and readiest wit must work in swift connection. Some who read these lines perhaps have—shall we say—enjoyed the sensation which we have always found impossible to describe in words? These, at least, will appreciate the difficulty of our task, and also the peril which surrounded the trapper and his companion.



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The first flight down which the boat glanced was a long one. The river bed sloped away in a straight direction for nigh on to fifty rods, and at an angle so steep that the water, although the bottom was rough, fairly flattened itself as it ran; and the channel where the current was the deepest gave forth a serpentine sound as it whizzed downward. The smoke, which hung heavily over the stretch from shore to shore, was too dense for the eye to penetrate a yard. Amid the smoke sparks floated, and brands, crackling as they fell, plunged through it into the steaming water. Guidance of the frail craft was, as the trapper had predicted, out of the question; the two men could only keep their position as they went streaming downward. They kept their seats like statues, knowing well that their safety lay in allowing their light shell to follow, without the least interruption, the pressure of the swift current.

Half down the flight the volume of smoke was parted, by some freak of the wind, from shore to shore, and for a couple of rods they saw the water, the blazing banks, the fiery tree-tops and each other. The trapper turned his face, blackened and stained by the grimy cinders, toward his companion and gave one glance, in which humor and excitement were equally mingled. His mouth was open, but the words were lost in the roar of the flame and the rush of the water. He had barely time to toss a hand upward, as if by gesture he would make good the impossibility of speech, before face and hand alike faded from Herbert's eyes as the boat plunged again into the smoke.

The next instant the boat launched down the final pitch of the declivity and shot far out into the smooth water that eddied in a huge circle in the pool below. The smoke was at this point less compact, for through it the blazing pines on either flamed partially into view.

"It's the devil's own work, boy, for sartin," cried the trapper, "and the fool or the knave that started the fire oughter be toasted. I trust the pups will be reasonable and come down with the current. Has the fire touched ye anywhere?"

"Not much," answered Herbert. "A brand struck me on the shoulder and opened a hole in my shirt,—that's all. How do you feel?"

"Fried, boy; yis, actally fried. Ef this infarnal heat lasts, I'll be ready to turn afore we reach the second bend."

"How goes the stream below?" asked Herbert.

"All clear for a while," answered the trapper, "all clear for a while. Put yer strength into the paddle till we come to the varge below, for the fire be runnin' fast, and it's agin reason for a mortal to stand this heat long."

"Shall we run out of the smoke at the next flight?" asked Herbert.



“I think so, boy; I think so,” answered the trapper. “The maples grow to the bank at the foot of the next dip, and it isn’t in the natur’ of hard wood to make smoke like a balsam.”

[Illustration: “*Past mossy banks where great eddies whirled.*”]



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He would have said more, but his companion had nodded to him as he had ended the sentence, for they had come to the last flight of the rapids, and the great pool lay glimmering through the branches of the trees below.

The old man knew what was meant and said: "I know it, boy, I know it. Take the east run, for the water be deeper that way, and the boat sets deep. I won't trouble ye, for ye know the way. Lord! how the water biles! Now's yer time, boy,—to the right with ye! to the right! Sweep her round and let her go!"

Away and downward swept the boat. The strong eddies caught it, but the controlling paddle was stronger than the eddies and kept it to the line of its safest descent. Past rocks that stood in mid current, against which the swift-going water beat and dashed—past mossy banks and shadowed curves where the great eddies whirled—down over miniature falls into bubbles and froth the light craft swept, and with a final plunge and leap jumped the last cascade, and, darting out into the great basin, ran shoreward.

It touched the beach, and the trapper and Herbert rose to their feet; but for a moment neither stirred, for in front of them, not thirty feet away, at the line where the sand and the green mosses met, and looking directly at them, *stood a man and a girl!*

* * * * *

WHO WAS HE? The two men asked this question a thousand times mentally in the next two months, and once afterward they asked it aloud, as they looked into each other's eyes across a grave. But to the question, whether spoken or silent, no answer ever came.

The world has its enigmas, and he was one.

Amid the jabbering crowd we chaff and chatter with, we meet occasionally a man who never chaffs nor chatters,—a man who sees all things; perhaps because of this, suffers all things, but says nothing at all. The sphinxes are still extant. The old time ones were of stone and bronze; the modern ones are of flesh and blood; that's all the difference. Nay, not quite all; for the secrets that the ancients held smothered within the folds of their stony silence were only such as nature revealed to them from her desert posts,—the secrets of sunrises and starry nights and simoons that swept the sandy plain and of civilizations, the murmurs of whose rising and the crash of whose sudden overthrow, they needs must hear. But the secrets that men hear today, and by hearing of which are made silent, are the secrets of lives being lived, of hearts being broken, of intentions so noble and failures so bitter as to make men sceptical whether God keeps watch over the passing events on the earth.



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Was he young? No. Was he old? No, again. How old was he? Forty, perhaps; it may be fifty. The two men who stood looking at him never thought of his age, neither then nor afterward; never thought whether he was old or young. There are people who have no age to those who know them. Is it because their bodies so little represent them? A friend has been away—for years. He returns; enters your room; you shake his hand heartily in welcome. And then you stand off and look at him. You look at his hair and note the gray in it—at the wrinkles in his face—the dozen and one marks that denote change—and say, “you’ve grown old, old boy;” and so we judge most men, and so they should be judged. Why? Because they are not great and strong and soul-large enough to dwarf their bodies out of sight and dwindle them into insignificance.

But now and then you meet one whose mind represents him, whose soul is so gloriously finished that, as in the case of a great painting, you do not think of the frame around it, nor take notice of it at all. He is so strong vitally; so great in living force—in vital energies—in moving and persuading power—that he is to you like an immense, endless, all-conquering Life, wholly independent of his embodiment, who might exist in any form,—angel, archangel, spirit, winged or wingless, supernal or infernal, and still, in all forms, in all places, in all moral states would remain true to himself and be the same. There are some, I say, who are like this,—who are not of the earth, earthy, nor of the body, but of the spirit, whether good or bad, spiritual: angel or demon, always.

Do you know one such? No? Perhaps not, for they are rare, very rare. But some such there are, and if you do not know one, or one like to such a one, I ask you if you do not think of him as I have said? Body! what is body to such a man? what is a formation of clay deftly mingled in its chemistry round about such an indomitable indwelling spirit? Does the old rain-sodden nest photograph the bird, the swiftness and glory of whose wings lived in it once? What is age to such a one? What has he to do with the passing of years? Such a one is young and old both, from the beginning of his career forever onward. He has the freshness of youth, the strength of manhood, and the sagacity of age, fixed permanently in his structure, as nature fixes her colors in the fibre of the ash and the oak. Such have no age. How silly to ask how old he is. If you ask me, I should answer, *Who can tell?* Their earthly parents say they were born on such and such dates. Were they? Or had they lived as Mary’s Son had, ages before they took—for God’s wise purpose—flesh? Who can tell?

“*Heresy?*” I’m not writing a sermon, I am writing a story, and I seek to make my readers think. That would not be essential if I were sermonizing. Good people don’t want that kind of preaching.

But to return. Was he young? Was he old? Neither then nor ever after did Herbert and the trapper think of him as having age; and yet he was with them, and his body had all the marks which reveal to the noticing eye the measure of man’s days. This is the young man’s description of him:



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“Tall, straight, and well-formed; large in size, but shapely, hair brown with gray in it; in all the face a look of great power, reserved, but ready to act; eyes of changeable color, that took the shade of the emotion that chanced to come and look out of them; when unoccupied, cold, gray, and meaningless as a window-pane behind which no face is; and over all the countenance the look of great gravity, divided by but the slightest line from sadness.”

So Herbert described him; but he always used to add: “Remember, this was only his body, and *therefore no description at all.*”

The girl? Why, certainly, you shall know of her, and from the same authority:

“The girl that was with this strange man was not a girl merely, but both girl and woman; for she was at that age when the sweet simplicity of the one, and the full charm of the other, come into union, and a time, at least, stand in attractive alliance. She was of medium height, and perfectly formed. Her hair was brown, as were her eyes, that were large and mild of look; and over all her face was such an expression of gentleness and peace as I never saw on any other woman’s face, and she loved the man with so great a love that it made her life and took it both.”

* * * * *

For a moment Herbert and the trapper stood looking at the man and girl, who were standing on the edge of the beach, looking silently at them; and then the trapper said, still standing in the boat:

“We would not run agin ye so sudden-like had we seed ye, friend; and ef our company be not pleasant to ye, we will move on, and camp on some clump funder down,” and the old man placed his paddle against the beach as if he would breast the boat out into the pool.

“I beg you not to do so,” answered the man on the beach; “you have as good a right to this camp-ground as we, and I dare say a better one, as we are but strangers to the woods; while you, old man, look as if you had made them your home for years.”

“Ye speak the truth, friend,” replied the trapper. “Yis, the woods be my home; and ef livin’ in ’em gives man a right, few would gainsay my claim. Yis, it’s thirty years agone sence I hefted the fust trout from this pool, and br’iled him on the bank there,—and a toothsome supper he made for me, too. Lord-a-massy, boy,” exclaimed the old man, half turning toward his companion, “what a thing memory be! Thirty year!—and I’ve seed some wanderin’ sence then,—but I remember as though I’d eat him last night jest how that trout tasted. You’re sartin, friend, that we won’t distarb ye ef we come ashore?”



“No, no, old man,” answered the other, “come ashore, you and your companion. Our camp is the other side of the balsam thicket there, and after you have built your own, we will come down and pass an hour with you, unless we should disturb you in your occupation or your pleasure.”

[Illustration: “*Come ashore, you and your companion.*”]



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“I be a man of the woods, as ye see,” replied the trapper, “and Henry, here, be my companion; and though his home be in the city, he has consorted with me so much that he’s fallen into my habits,—though it should be said to his credit that the Lord gin him nateral gifts in that direction; and when we be roamin’, we take but leetle with us, and our camp be quickly made. No, no; we will have leetle to offer ye and the lady, but ef, when the sun darkens back of the mountain there, ye will honor an old man by yer comin’, ye shall taste some venison that’s waited three days for the mouth and is tender, as it should be. And ef the pool here will make its name good, ye shall have a trout cooked as the hunter cooks it when the fire is hot and the wet moss plenty.”

“We will certainly come,” answered the man. “I came into the woods to avoid men, not to meet them; but your face is honest and open as the day, old man; and your head is white as is the head of wisdom. I shall be glad to talk with you, and I doubt not your companion is as educated as you are knowing.”

“I’ve seed the comin’ and goin’ of seventy year sence I’ve been on the arth,” answered the trapper, stroking his head with the peculiar motion of the aged when speaking of their age reflectively; “and much have I seed of the passions of my kind, and many be the lessons that natur’ has larnt me; and ef the converse of an old man who has lived leetle in the clearin’ would be pleasant to ye, yer comin’ will be welcome.—Yis, yis, boy, I seed it. Ye had better j’int yer rod, and I will start a fire. Ye know the size ye want, and ye’ll find ’em out there where the bubbles make the letter S.”

The two strangers retired toward their own camp, and our friends set about their several tasks. Herbert proceeded to joint his rod and the trapper to make a rude fire-place from the stones that lined the bank at the water’s edge.

The preparations for the forthcoming repast went forward rapidly. The pool kept its reputation good and yielded abundantly to the solicitation of Herbert’s flies. The trout were large and in excellent condition and were quickly made ready for the trapper’s treatment. A large piece of bark, peeled from a giant spruce standing near, and laid upon the ground, served for the table,—against the dark bark of which the tin dishes freshly scoured in the sand of the beach gleamed bright. The venison and trout were cooked as only one accustomed to the woods can do it, and the trapper contemplated the work of his skill with pleased complacency. At each plate Herbert had placed a bunch of checkerberries, and a small bouquet of small but exceedingly fragrant flowers adorned the centre of the bark table.

At this moment the man and girl drew near.

“I trust,” said the man, as they approached, “that we have not kept you waiting by our tardiness?”



“Yer comin’ be true to a minit,” answered the trapper, glancing up at the western mountain, the top of whose pines the lower edge of the sun had just touched. “The meat be ready. We sartinly can’t boast of the bark or the dishes,” he continued, “but the victuals be as good as natur’ allows, and yer welcome be hearty.”



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"We could ask no more," said the man, courteously, "and one might almost think that the hand of woman had adorned the table."

"The posies be the boy's doin'," replied the trapper, glancing at Herbert; "he has a likin' for their color and smell, and I never knowed him to eat without a green sprig or a bunch of bright moss or some sech thing on the bark."

"I am sure I do not like them any better than you do," answered Herbert, smiling, and looking pleasantly into the old man's face.

"They be of the Lord's makin'," responded the trapper. "They be of the Lord's makin', and it be fit thet mortals should love 'em, as I conceit. I've lived a good deal alone," he continued, "but I've never lived in a cabin yit that didn't have a few leetle flowers, or a tuft of grass, or a speck of green somewhere about it. They sort of make company for a man in the winter evenin's, and keep his thoughts in cheerful directions."

"Your sentiments do honor to your nature," responded the other, "and I am glad to meet with one of your age, who, having lived among the beauties of Nature, has not allowed them to become commonplace and unworthy of notice. Many in the cities show less refinement."

"I conceit it is a good deal in the breedin'," answered the trapper. "There be some that don't know good from evil in natur',—leastwise, they don't seem to have any eyes to note the difference; and what isn't born in a man or a dog you can't edicate into him. The breedin' settles more p'int's that the missioners dream, as I jedge. But come, friends, the victuals be coolin', and the mouth loves a warm morsel."

"I am certain," said the man, as they were partaking of the repast, "that I never tasted a piece of venison so finely flavored before."

"I've cooked the meat for nigh on to sixty year," answered the trapper, "and have larnt not to spoil the sweetness of natur' by overdoin' it. It's a quick aim that brings the buck to the camp, and a quick fire that puts the steak on to the plate ready for the mouth.—trust, lady, that ye enjoy the victuals?"

"I do, indeed," answered the girl, "and if the cooking were less perfect, I should count this as a feast."

"Yis, yis; I understand ye," answered the old man. "The sound of the tumblin' water be pleasant, and the eye eats with the mouth," and he glanced at the green woods that stretched away, and the brightly-colored clouds that hung like fleece of gold in the western sky.

"The barbarian eats from a trough," remarked Herbert; "civilize him, and he erects a table; and as you add to his refinement, he adorns that table until the furniture of it



magnifies the feast and the guests think more of the beauty of the adornments than of the food they swallow.”

And so with pleasant converse the meal progressed. Soon the sun declined and darkness began to thicken in the pines. The table was moved to one side, the dishes cleansed and the fire lighted for the evening. With the darkness silence had fallen upon the group,—not that silence which is awkward and oppressive, or which comes from lack of thought, but that fine silence, rather, which is only the thin shadow of the reflective mood, and because the thought is inward and overfull.



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And so the four sat in silence by the fire. Above, a few great stars shone warmly. Here and there the rapids flashed white through the gloom. From a huge pine on the other side of the pool a horned owl challenged the darkness with his ponderous call.

Suddenly the man broke the silence,—broke it with a question which led to a remarkable conversation, and a tragical result. And the question was this:—

“Friend, answer me this question: *If a man take a life, should he give his own life in atonement for the dreadful deed?*”

III

“If a man take a life, should he give his own life in atonement for the dreadful deed?”

Such was the question that the man asked. He was looking at the trapper at the time, —looking at him steadily; but the sound of his voice as he put the question did not seem to give personal direction to the solemn interrogation; it seemed rather the echo of a reflection, as if his own mind in its communings had come upon the terrible question, and the words, without volition of his own, which framed it into speech, had passed out of his mouth.

He was looking at the trapper, as we said, and the trapper was looking into the fire,—the light of which, that came and went in flashes, brought distinctly out the settled gravity of the features, and the rugged but grand proportions of the head. There is no better light in which to see an old man’s face than the fitful firelight; and no better background than that which the darkness makes.

One would have thought that the interrogation was not heard, for on the trapper’s face there showed no line of change. The girl remained looking steadfastly into the face of the questioner, and Herbert made no response.

“I asked you a question, old trapper,” said the man; “a question which reaches to the depths of human responsibility, and points to the heights of human sacrifice. In the old days, the wisdom of the world was with those who lived with Nature. Your head is white, and you tell me you have lived in the woods since you were a boy. You have seen war; have stood in battle; have slain your man, and made many graves of those you have slain. Have you wisdom? Are you able to answer the question I have asked you?”

“I have, as ye say,” answered the trapper, “ben in wars. I’ve stood in battle; I’ve slain men; I’ve buried those I have slain; I know what it is to take a human creeter’s life, and I think I know where the right to do the deed stops and where it begins.”

“Where does it begin?” asked the man; “where does the right to take human life begin?”



The words came forth slowly and heavy-weighted with meaning. It was evident that the question which the man asked was not asked as one interrogates, but as one puts a question that has personal application to himself. The trapper felt this. He looked into the man's face, and studied his countenance a moment; noted the breadth of brow, the large, deep-set eyes, the fine curvature of the chin and cheek; saw the beauty and splendor of it; saw what some might not have seen,—both the beauty of its peaceful mood and the terribleness of the wrath that might surge out of it,—saw all this, and without answering the question, said simply,—



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“You have killed a man.”

The stranger looked steadily back into the trapper’s face, and answered as simply,—

“Yes, I am a murderer.”

Herbert started a trifle. The girl gave a slight exclamation and lifted her hand as if in protest. The trapper alone made reply,—

“Ye sartinly don’t look like a murderer, friend.”

“He is none! he is none!” exclaimed the girl. “He had provocation, old man! he had provocation!” and then she turned toward the man, and said: “Why will you say such things? Why will you condemn yourself wrongly? Why do you brood over a deed done in wrath, and under the strain that few might resist, as it had been done in cold blood, and with a murderer’s malice and forethought of evil?”

The man listened to her gravely, with a kind of considerate patience in the look of his face; waited a moment, when she had finished, as one might wait from the habit of politeness, and then, without answering her, said:

“You have not answered my question, old trapper.”

“I can’t answer it,—I sartinly can’t answer it, friend, onless I know the sarcumstances of the killin’; for there be killin’ that be right and there be killin’ that be wrong, and onless I know the sarcumstances of the killin’, my words would be like the words of a boy that talks in council without knowing what he is talkin’. Ef ye killed a man, how did ye kill him?”

“I killed him face to face,” answered the man. He paused a moment, and then repeated, “Face to face.”

“Why did ye kill him?” asked the trapper. “Had he done ye wrong?”

“He was my friend,” said the man, “my friend, true and tried.”

“Had he done ye a wrong?” persisted the trapper.

“What is wrong?” asked the man. “I can’t tell whether he had done me wrong or nay. I only know he had crossed my purpose,—stopped me from doing what I had set my heart on doing; and what I set my heart on doing, old man, *I do*.” And the man’s eyes darkened under the abundant brow and the face tightened and contracted, as a rope when a strain is upon it. “The man came between me and my purpose,” he added, “he stood up and faced me, and said I should not do what I proposed to do, and should not have what I had sworn to have; and I killed him where he stood.”



It was astonishing how quietly the words were said, considering the tremendous energy of will which was charged into and through their quietness.

“He had no right to do it,” said the girl; “he had no right to do it. It was none of his business, and you know it wasn’t,” And she spoke, apparently to the man, “Oh, sir, why do you not tell them that he was an intermeddler, and meddled with what was none of his business,—kindled you to rage by his meddling, and that you slew him in your rage, thoughtlessly, unintentionally? Why do you not tell them these things?”

The man listened to her again, politely. There was a look of grave courtesy in his eye as he half turned his face and looked upon her as she was speaking; but beyond this there was no recognition that he heard her. When she had finished, he turned his face again toward the trapper, and said:



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“Old trapper, you have not answered my question. Has a man a right to take life?”

“Sartinly,” answered the trapper.

“How?” asked the man.

“In war,” answered the trapper.

“In any other way?” queried the man.

“Yis,—in self-defence.”

“Any other cause?” persisted the stranger.

“Not as a rule,” answered the trapper.

After this there was a silence. The girl’s head dropped into her two palms and for an instant her frame shook, as one contesting the passage of a strong feeling that insists on expression. The three men made no motion, but sat silently gazing into the fire.

For several minutes the silence lasted. There are two living that will never forget that silence. Then the man lifted his face and said,—

“Old trapper, have you ever known remorse?”

“I can’t say I ever did,” answered the trapper; “though I’ve felt a leetle oneasy arter dealin’ with the thievin’ vagabonds whose tracks I’ve found on the line of my traps. It has seemed to me, sometimes, in the evenin’, in thinkin’ the matter over, that perhaps a leetle less bullet and a leetle more scriptur’ might have did jest as well. But a man is apt to be a leetle ha’sh in his anger; but I have an idee that the Lord makes some allowance for a man’s doin’s when he’s a good deal r’iled. That’s where the marcy comes in. Yis, that’s where the marcy comes in; isn’t it, boy?” and the old man looked at Herbert.

“There is certainly where we need the mercy to come in,” answered Herbert; “but it were better that we acted so that mercy need not be shown.”

The man listened to Herbert’s reply with an expression of strong assent on his countenance, then he turned to the trapper.

“You say, old man, that you never knew remorse. Happy has your life been because of it; and happy shall your life be to its close. I have known remorse. It is a fearful knowledge,—as fearful as the knowledge of hell. Woe to the man that does an evil deed. That instant he is doomed; doomed to anguish. His divinity punishes him. Within his bosom the great tribunal is instantly set up. The judge takes his seat. The witnesses are summoned; and the whole universe swarms to the trial. His memory is a



torment; and all the forces of his mind suddenly concentrate in memory,—the memory of one deed, or of many deeds, even as his sin has been sole or manifold. What torment, old man, is like the torment of one whose memory is confined wholly to his evil deeds!”

No one made any reply. The anguish of the man’s speech made response impossible.



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“Before I did the deed,” he continued, after a pause, “my memory took knowledge of all sweet things; of all dear faces I have ever seen; of all generous and blessed deeds I had ever done. But after that I could remember but one thing,—the murderer; only one face,—the face of him I killed, and all my life, and the glory of it, was thrown into black eclipse by that one terrible act. Before I did the deed Nature was a joy to me, but now in every star I see his countenance looking down upon me. In every flower I see his still, cold face. The winds bear to me his voice. The water of those rapids”—and the man stretched his hand out towards the flowing river—“sounds to me like the rattle in his throat as he lay dying. How shall I find release, old man? How quit myself of this terrible curse?” and the man’s words ended in a groan.

“The mercy of the Lord be great,” replied the trapper; “greater than any deed of guilt did by mortal; great enough to cover you, friend, and your misdoin’, as a mother covers the error of her child with her forgiveness.”

“I know the mercy of the Lord is great,” answered the man, “I know His forgiveness covers all; but the old law—old as the world, old as guilt and justice—the law of life for life and blood for blood,—has never been repealed. And this is the one comfort left for the noble: that however great the guilt, however wicked the deed, the atonement can be as great as the sin. He who dies pays all debts. He who has sent one to the grave and goes to the grave voluntarily, goes into the arms of mercy. I know not where else, with all his searching, man may surely find it.”

Again there was silence. Above, the stars shone warmly through the dusky gloom. The rapids roared, falling hoarsely through the darkness. A moaning ran along the pine-tops; the firelight flamed and flickered, and the flames flashed the four faces into sight that were grouped around the brands. At length the trapper said:

“What is it ye have in yer heart to do, friend?”

“I took a life,” answered the man; “I must give one in return. I took a life and my life is forfeited. This is my condemnation, and I pronounce it on myself. My judge is not above; my judge is within. In this the world finds protection, and in this the sinner finds release from sin. There is no other way; at least, no other way so perfect. One man was great enough to die for the sins of others. They who would rise to the level of his life must be great enough to lay down their life for their own sins. This is justice; and out of such true justice blooms the perfect mercy.” To this the man added thoughtfully, “There is but one objection.”

“What is the objection?” asked Herbert. “What is the objection, if one be great enough to make so great a sacrifice?”



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“The objection,” answered the man, “is found in this: it is so deep a sin to kill; it is so easy a thing to die—for what is death? The ignorant dread it because they do not analyze it; their lack of thoughtfulness makes them cowardly; for death is going out of bondage into liberty. He who passes through the dark gate finds himself, when he has passed, standing in the cloudless sunshine. In dying, the sorrowful become glad; the small become greater; and if they die rightly, the sinful become sinless. If a great motive prompts us to death, it is the perfect regeneration. Entering thus the new life, man is born anew. And so in punishment the great law of mercy stands revealed, and sin leads up to sinlessness. In such travail of soul, he who suffers through suffering is satisfied.”

“It is sublime philosophy,” exclaimed Herbert, “but few are great enough to practice it.”

“Rather, sir,” exclaimed the man, “few are knowing enough to accept it. The eyes of men, through their ignorance, are blinded by fear and they see not the delivering gates though they stand facing the open passage.”

“Life is sweet.”

The words fell from the lips of Herbert as if they spoke themselves.

“To the innocent, life is sweet,” answered the man, “but to the guilty, life is bitterness. The world was not made for the guilty. The beauties and glories of it were not for them. The universe is not sustained for them. Only for the good do things exist. The breasts of life are full; but their nourishment is not for guilty lips to draw. I have seen the time when life was sweet. I have lived to see the time when life is bitter. Through death I go out of bitterness into sweetness. This is the mercy that is unto all and which all can take—take freely. Some get it through another—all might get it through themselves.”

“It is a violent deed to kill one’s self,” said the trapper.

“You mistake,” answered the man, “there is a coarse, rude way; there is a fine and noble way. ‘I have power,’ said the Man, ‘to lay down my life and I have power to take it again.’ Do you not think, old trapper, that a man can die when he wills?”

“I don’t understand ye,” answered the trapper.

“The soul rules the body,” replied the stranger. “The soul is not bound to the body; it lives in it as a man lives in his house. My body is only my environment. I can quit it at will. I can go out of it.”

“Do you mean to say,” asked Herbert, “that we can leave our bodies through determination of purpose and mental decision?”

[Illustration: “*The four sat in silence by the fire.*”]



“There have been such cases,” answered the man, “and such cases there might be continually. If the relations between the soul and the body are recognized and the supreme authority of the one over the other allowed full action, the soul can do anything it pleases. It can come and it can go. This is my faith.”



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While the foregoing conversation was being conducted, the girl had remained silent. Herbert sat opposite to her; and as the firelight flamed her face into sight, he could not but note the expression of it. The look of her face was that of one who was listening to what she had heard before—perhaps many times before, and which, upon the hearing, she had combated and was determined to continue to combat. And at this point she suddenly spoke up.

“I think, sir,”—and she lifted her eyes to the face of the man,—“that the living should live for the living rather than die for the dead; for the dead have no wants, neither of the body nor of the heart, neither of the mind nor the soul; for, if they want, God feeds them. But the living want and crave and have deep needs and God feeds not at all, unless through us who live; and it is our duty to do, and not to die.”

The words were clearly and slowly spoken, spoken in a quiet but determined tone. The old trapper raised his face and looked at the girl, as if surprised at the wisdom of her speech. Herbert was already looking at her. The man slowly turned his face towards her, and said:

“Mary, we have argued that point before.”

The tone in which he spoke was not one of rebuke, and yet it conveyed the idea that the point was settled and was not to be reopened. The girl waited a moment respectfully, as if she felt profound deference for the other’s character and would not willingly oppose his wish, and then she said:

“I know, sir, we have discussed it before; but it is not settled, and never can be settled; for it sets in comparison the value of two lives—the one that was and the one that is; and I say that there are lives—of which yours is one—that belong to others and cannot be disposed of as if they were a selfish thing. And life is a truer atonement for sin than death. You owe more than one debt, and you have no right to pay the one, however great it is, if by the paying of that you leave the others unpaid.”

“Friend,” said the trapper, “the girl speaks wisdom; leastwise she brings matter into the council which men of gravity should not overlook. The livin’ sartinly have claims. What can you say to her speech?”

For a moment the man made no reply, and then he said:

“My philosophy is based upon a sentiment—a sentiment born of conscience, and conscience makes duty for us all. There is no reasoning against conscience. It is the voice of God—the only God we have. My conscience tells me that there is but one atonement that I can make. There is no election. I must do it.”

“What good,” said Herbert, addressing the man, “what good will you do by dying?”

“I shall satisfy myself,” said the man.



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“And what right have you to satisfy yourself in such a matter?” exclaimed the girl. “What right have any of us to satisfy ourselves? What right have we to be selfish in our death any more than in our life? Oh, sir, if you saw rightly, you would see that you had no right to satisfy yourself in this dreadful way. You should satisfy others. They need you even as the poor need the rich; as the weak need the strong; as those who are prone, because they cannot lift themselves, need one who is strong enough to lift them. It is not heroic to die unless the full object of life is met by the dying. It is heroic to live, because it is harder than dying. Even death dedicated to atonement can be a greater sin than the deed which one would atone.”

“I know not how the girl has such wisdom,” said the trapper, “for she be young, and yit she sartinly seems to me to have the right of it. I know not who ye be, nor how many look to ye for help; but ef ye be one that can help, and there be many that need yer help, I sartinly conceit that ye should live—live to help 'em.”

“You say right! You say right, old man!” exclaimed the girl. “His life is not a common life. It represents such power and faculty and opportunity, and I may say such devotion to the many, that it does not belong to him, and may not therefore be disposed of as if he owned it himself and had the right to do with it as he pleased.”

“I do not say,” answered the man, “that I own my life. I say rather that I do not own it. I owe it. There are debts you cannot pay by life. The laws of the whole world recognize this; nor do we do by living the greatest service. He who dies to uphold a righteous principle fulfils all righteousness. He who gives away a life in atonement for a life taken makes all life more sacred; and so he serves the living beyond all other service he might do. She looks at individuals; I observe principles. She contemplates only the present; I forecast the future needs of man. Moreover, the highest service one can do man is to serve himself in the highest manner. He who ministers to his own sense of justice strengthens the judicial sense of the world. Men overvalue life when they suppose that there is nothing better. To teach them that there is something better, to impress them by some signal event that there is something higher and nobler than mere living, is to fulfill all benevolence to their souls. How many the Saviour could feed and heal and bless by avoiding Calvary! And yet he did not avoid it. He showed the object of life, which is service. I trust I have not wholly failed to show men that. He then showed the highest object of dying, which is service. Why should I not imitate him? Why should I not be a law unto myself and bear the penalty voluntarily?”

The man rose to his feet as he concluded, and looking at the trapper and Herbert, said:

“Gentlemen, I thank you for your hospitality and courtesy,” and turning to the girl he said, “Mary, we will talk this matter over more fully by ourselves.”



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And then he bowed to the group and turned away.

IV

Long after the man and the girl had departed, the trapper and Herbert sat by their campfire discussing the question which their guest had propounded. Their conversation was grave and deliberate, as became the theme; and they united in the opinion that if the deed had been done in anger elicited by a provocation, the man should give himself the favor which the law even would allow under similar circumstances.

"I tell ye, Herbert," said the trapper, "the girl said the man had cause; leastwise, that the man whom he struck worried him to it and that the blow was given in anger. Now, hot blood is hot blood, and cold blood is cold blood, and ef a man kill another man in cold blood it be murder,—the law says so, and what is better, natur' says so; but ef a man kill another man in his anger, when his blood is up and he is strongly provoked to it, the law says there be a difference, and it isn't murder. And I conceit that the girl be right, and that the man has no right, in natur' or law either, to murder himself because in his anger he murdered another man. And besides," continued the old man, after a moment's pause, during which he had evidently made an effort at memory, "ef there be any wrath in the case it belongs to the Lord and not to man. Ye may recall the varse, Henry."

"*Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.*" Such was the quotation Herbert made.

"Sartinly, sartinly," answered the trapper, "that is it. Vengeance is the Lord's, and he is the only one that can handle it rightly; and the man had better leave it to the Lord."

For several moments Herbert made no reply; and then, as if speaking to himself more than his companion, he said:

"How the girl loves him!"

"Ye've hit it, Henry," answered the trapper, promptly. "Yis, ye've hit it in the centre. I noted her face, the look in her eyes and the earnestness of her voice; and there is no doubt about the matter of the lovin'. She is one of the quiet kind, boy; and she has got the faculty of listenin' a long time, which isn't nateral to a woman. But when she speaks, ye can see what she is. She has a quiet face but a detarmined sperit. I've seed several of the same sort,—seed them afore the battle and arter the battle; and I know what's in the heart of the girl. Yis, I know what's in the heart of the girl," and the old man looked at his companion across the camp fire.

The young man returned his gaze, and then said quietly:

"What is in the heart of the girl, John Norton?"



“Ef the man dies, the girl dies, too,” answered the trapper, and stooping, he pushed a brand into the centre of the fire.

“It is awful to think so,” replied the young man, “it is awful to think that one so lovely should die so miserable.”



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“She belongs to the kind that does seen things,” answered the trapper. “But whether ye can call her dyin’ miserable, I sartinly doubt; for there be some that can’t die miserable owin’ to their feelin’s. And I’ve noted that them who die feelin’ a sartin way die happy whenever they die; for death means one thing to one and another thing to another; and the heart that has lost all, is happy to go in sarch of it, even ef it be along the trail that the sun never shines on.”

And so the two men sat and talked, feeding the camp fire with sticks occasionally as they talked. They wondered who the man was and whence he came, wondered if he would change his views and if the girl could win him over to a rational way of looking at the deed that had been done and the true way to atone for it; wondered if they could not assist her in her loving task when the morning came; talked and wondered and planned, and at last, wrapping their blankets around them, they laid down to sleep. The last words spoken were by the Trapper, and were these:

“We will go over in the mornin’, Herbert, and help the girl.”

And then they slept.

* * * * *

Beyond the balsam thicket, by another camp fire, the girl and the man sat talking, talking of the deed that had been done and the atonement demanded, and of the great future beyond this present life; the future that stretches away endlessly, the future of peace to some, perhaps to all, who knows? For there be some who think that this life has in it such forces of education, such enlightenment to the understanding, such quickening to the conscience, such ripening of character; and that through its experiences, its trials, and its griefs, come such graces to the souls of those that leave it, that when they pass they leave their worse self behind them, even as the germ leaves the shuck out of which it sprouted,—leaves the dull, clamp ground forever while it groweth up into the sunlight in which it finds perfection.

“Mary,” said the man, “I have done with the past. My mind turns wholly toward the future. I see it as the shipwrecked sailor sees the land, which, if he can but reach, he will not only be beyond the storm that wrecks him, but beyond all storms forever. Companion of my joys and companion of my grief,—companion in everything but in my sin,—counsel with me, with your eyes turned ahead. You are innocent and innocence is prophetic. What lies beyond this world and the life men live in it? What of good waits for him who gives up this life bravely and penitently, and trusts himself to the decisions and the certainties of the great hereafter?”

“My master,” said the girl, “it is not for me to teach you, you who are so much greater than I, you who have been gifted with faculties and powers that have lifted you above men. What can I say to you save to repeat what you have said to me?”



“Mary,” he replied, “talk to me from out your heart and not from out your mind. The prophecies that come to men from Heaven, Heaven has communicated through the emotions of the just and the pure, and not through the perceptions. Tell me of the faith of your heart, the heart which I know has been free of guile. Tell me of the great Hereafter and what awaits me there.”



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“The Hereafter?” said the girl, and she lifted her eyes lovingly to the face of the man. “The Hereafter is the same as Here, only larger; as things grown are larger than things ungrown. The Future is to the Present what the river is to the stream, what the stream is to the fountain,—it is the flowing out and the flowing on,—the widening and the deepening of what is.”

“Is there no gap, no breakage, no chasm or gulf between the Here and the Hereafter?” asked the man.

“No,” said the girl, “there is no gap, nor chasm, nor gulf, but continuity of progress and perfect sequence. The connections between the Known and the Unknown are perfect. The one does not end and the other begin. Time is the beginning of eternity; and the brief time that men call a day is only a fraction of endlessness.”

“There is no end to life, then?” queried the man.

“End to life!” exclaimed the girl. “How can life end? Life changes its form, its embodiment, the location of its residence; but life is the breath of God and when once breathed into the universe and it has taken form and made for itself expression, who may annihilate it? Who may take it out of existence? No, master, there is no end to life.”

“It is a sublime faith,” said the man, “and I have proclaimed it unto many; but few have been great enough to receive the doctrine as a verity. In theory they have received it; but their superstition has robbed them of its mighty consolations. But if we do not die, but only pass forward as men go out of a city’s gate along a road that has no end, what fate befalls them? Does a change of nature come to them?”

“Only such as comes through growth,” answered the girl.

“Shall I be just as I am when I have passed into the great future?” he asked.

“You will be the same,” answered the girl, “only more abundantly yourself. We are all our life looking for ourselves,” continued the girl, “and few, if any, find themselves until they die.”

“I don’t understand,” said the man. “I know the Lord is speaking through you, for you are uttering truths so great that at the utterance they seem mysteries. Explain as the teacher explains to the child she is trying to teach.”

“I mean,” answered the girl, “that death is an enlightenment and a discovery. It will give us revelations of ourselves; for never do we find Him save as we find Him in His, and we are His. You will not know who and what you are until you get far enough ahead, my master, to look back upon yourself. We must go up and go on a long way before we know what we are now.”



Here the conversation paused for a while and nothing disturbed the profound silence but the roar of the rapids whose ceaseless sound swelled and sank in the silence like the waves of the sea. At length the man said, "Have you thought of the land ahead? Is it real? And where is it, and what the life lived there?"



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“Why do you ask me such questions,” answered the girl, “when you know that I have thought only as you have taught me to think, am but repeating the faith I learned from your lips? Surely, there is a land ahead, or rather many lands,—lands and seas and blessed islands in the seas where the blessed live; and loves and lovers and homes exquisitely and endlessly peaceful are there; and men who have grown nobler than they were here; and women, far sweeter than their short life here might make them, live and love in the lands ahead.”

The girl spoke low but earnestly, and her words sounded on the silent air like softly-breathed music, so much did her sweet self possess her words. And the man listened as men listen to music when it comes softly and sweetly to their ears.

“Mary,” said the man, “you make the life ahead seem so sweet that I shrink from entering it, lest by so doing I escape the punishment for my sin I would fain inflict upon myself.”

“Oh, master!” exclaimed the girl, “you do mistake; for though I do believe all I have said and would trust myself to the far future as young eagles trust themselves to the warm air when they have grown equal to the joy of flight, yet the life of this earth is sweet, so sweet when the heart is satisfied that one might fear to exchange it for another as one fears to part with what fully satisfies, even though the promise of more abundant things is sure as God. It is sweet to breathe the airs of the earth as health receives them. ’Tis sweet to live and love and serve in loving and find your happiness in giving it. ’Tis sweet to teach and guide men up and on to wider knowledge and nobler living,—to make them gentler and finer in their thoughts and happier-hearted; and oh, my master, ’tis sweet to live with one you love; be unto him a new life daily, and see him grow in your growth, matching it, and so go on in that perfect companionship that the future may give to us as the highest fortune, and, having given, has given its best and all.”

“You shall live,” answered the man, “you shall live and have as you deserve, dear girl; and if I have taught you aught which, being known, has made or shall make your life on earth sweeter, take it as my legacy to you. I had thought to leave you something more, perhaps something better, but that is past.”

“I will not take your legacy and stay,” answered the girl, “I will rather take it and go with you, that where you are I may be with you. You have promised nothing and I want no promise. I have only asked one thing and only one thing now do I ask, and that you will not hold from me, for I have earned it, earned it by patient serving and by growth that you know came from you.”

“What is it that you ask? Tell me,” replied the man, “for you shall have it if it be in the power of my giving.”



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“Companionship,” answered the girl,—“the companionship of service. My mind must serve your mind; for only so may it find its growth for which it longs. You have led me from darkness to light; and into what future light you advance I must enter too. I love you as women love men; but I love you more than that. I love you for what you are separate from what you can ever be to me. I love you as a mind; I love you as a soul; I love you as a spirit; I love you with a purity, with an ambition, with a longing that men cannot interpret and earthly relations cannot express; but which God understands and which in his Heaven I know there must be a name for, and a connection that is known through all the social life of Heaven.”

“It must not be,” answered the man. “I admit your claim; but it must not be.”

“Why must it not be?” asked the girl.

The man hesitated a moment, and then he said:

“Because my future is uncertain; I dare not say what it will be.”

“I care not what it is,” answered the girl. “Whatever it is, that I share, share because I cannot help it. It is not a question of condition, but of presence. With you I could bear all misery; yea, in the misery find happiness. Without you my heart could feel no joy throughout eternity. Master, my master, I love you so!” And as she looked into the face of the man there came to her countenance the expression of utter devotion; and in her large eyes tears gathered, and, having formed, from them slowly fell.

The man groaned aloud, and said:

“Alas! alas! My curse is doubled, being brought on thee.”

“There is no curse on thee or me,” she answered. “You were but mortal, and, being sorely tempted, did a wicked deed. But no single deed can change the nature. You are the same great man; great in your goodness as you are great in power, and my love, too, remains the same; nay, master, it is greater. You should stay and live and make atonement by living; for you cannot live and not better men. You can do deeds that would wipe out the deadliest guilt. But if you will not stay,—if to you it seems right to die, and if only—through death your sense of justice can be met and yourself find peace, then neither will I stay, but go—go where thou goest. Yea, I will sink or rise with thee; go to this world or that, I care not which or where, if only I may go with thee. And I pray thee not to think it hard for me to share thy journey. Why should I be left behind? And what might I have, thou being gone? What pleasure in all the world could I find, with thee out of it! I have no home,—thy presence is my home. I have no kindred and no loves await me anywhere. How could I have, loving thee? For in thee I have found father and mother, brother and sister and all sweet relationships. And so whither thou goest, let me go; and where thou stayest, let me stay. Do not resist me, but be



persuaded, and let me die with thee. So shall we, passing out of these mortal bodies in the self-same hour, be together still.”

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The man made no response; but sat silently gazing at her face. In a moment the girl moved softly to his side and took his hand in hers; and so they sat together while the firelight died away and the darkness enveloped them. But through the darkness the stars beamed mildly, as if they expressed the sweet mercy which the imaginations of men picture as throned above the azure in whose blue field they stand suspended.

What happened farther is known only to Him whose eyes see through all darkness and to whom the night is as the day.

During the night the trapper started suddenly from his sleep. Was it a woman's cry he heard? Was it only such a sound as comes to us at times in dreams? He listened but heard nothing save the monotonous murmur of the rapids and the equally steady movement of the night breeze stirring through the pine tops. He listened and, hearing nothing, lay down again and slept.

The morning came,—came as brightly and cheerfully as if the world knew no sorrow and the men and women in it had no griefs. The morning came; but before it came, a wing darker than the shadow of the night had passed over the world; for when the trapper and his companion visited the camp beyond the balsam thicket, they found the two lying side by side,—the girl's head on the bosom of the man and her right hand lying gently in his; no mark of violence on their bodies; no instrument of death near,—lying as if they had fallen asleep, the man's countenance in grave repose, the girl's blessedly peaceful; no name on either; no scrap of paper that might tell who they might be. Perhaps the man's faith was true. Perhaps the will has power to will itself and all of life there is in us, out of the body. Be this as it may, the trapper and his companion only saw this: the unknown man in the prime of his strength lying dead under the pines and the girl in her loveliness lying dead by his side.

[Illustration: Tail piece]