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THE TABLES TURNED.

"He's a scoundrel!—a base, heartless, unprincipled scoundrel, and deserves to rot in jail. Don't talk to me about pity and mercy, when he owed me twelve hundred dollars, and hasn't been the man to pay a cent of it. Ought to pity him! Humph!"

"You do wrong, my dear husband, in speaking harshly of Mr. Milton. He is unfortunate, it is true, but honest. No man stood higher in this community than he did, two years ago. You certainly should look more leniently upon the misfortune of a kind neighbor and brother in the church."

"Yes, a great neighbor and church brother he is,—break down and cheat me out of my pay, and after waiting on him so long too. Don't talk to me about brother. I'll have him turned out, see if I don't!"

"Supposing you were to have had fortune, and became poor, would you like to be denounced as a scoundrel by your neighbor?"

"I always pay my debts. An honest man always pays his debts. Can't trust nobody in those times. I never will sign for a man again as long as I live."

It was in vain that Mrs. Wilson plead with her angry husband for the unfortunate debtor. She sadly bowed over her work, and he passed to his store.

William Milton had failed, and the little village was astir with the news of the event. Those who were before his friends now they remembered that they always saw something in the man which was not right—they had expected something of the kind before! He was certainly a dishonest man. And so his old neighbors turned in to give him a kick in his downhill course.

A more honorable, high-souled man than William Milton never lived. He was the soul of honor. His heart, hand, home and purse were always open, and many were the good deeds on record in his favor. Not had all in his neighborhood forgotten his past goodness. While business men turned to read him, there were poor people who deserted not.

Milton was a crushed man. Misfortunes had come thick upon him, and his strong spirit at last gave way. His lovely wife had died, and lay in her grave, with her youngest child upon her breast. His son, a promising child of ten summers, had died a few weeks after the mother. His shop had caught fire about the same time and burned up. Sickness came on to paralyze the strong arm, and when Milton again stood on his feet, everything was a wreck. His well-to-do neighbor sneered at him as though there were contagion in his presence, and debts came upon him to finish what sickness had so sweepingly commenced.

On the morning of the conversation at the head of this, he had asked employment as a journeyman, and had been tauntingly refused. He now sat in his house, his great heart swelling with bitterness and dark with gloom. He involuntarily cast his eyes about as if looking for a familiar counselor; his lip quivered a moment, and a tear dropped from his cheek. The wife and two loved ones had passed away, and but one of his little flock was left him. While he was sitting dreamily by his hearth, the door opened, and a ragged form half entered the room, and stood looking hesitatingly at him. And then by a sudden impulse, the boy went up to where Milton was, and put a paper in his half open palm, quickly disappearing through the door into the street. Milton opened the paper, and a half dollar dropped upon the floor. Milton read:

"You have clothed and fed the needy; you have been good to the widow and fatherless. Accept the widow's mite in the hour of your trouble."

The paper trembled in Milton's hands, and he bowed his head and wept. Then lifting his form proudly, he arose and strode restlessly backward and forward through the room. "No! thank God, they are not all against me—not all. The poor remember me." The bankrupt was happier, and had again faith in humanity.

The creditors made short work with Mil-

ton's affairs; for poverty finds little mercy, his household effects did not bear pay off the demands against him. After all had gone under the hammer, the remorseless debtor law came in and attached the body, and the high-souled Milton was taken to the debtor's cell. His daughter followed him, and as her pale and wasting features passed through the streets, the light word was hushed, and the more feeling yielded a tear for the fate of the family. It was at the instigation of Wilson that Milton had been arrested and imprisoned. When his wife told him of the pale faced daughter, and how sad she looked as she went to the cell, a sickening sensation crept into the merchant's heart. But he was too proud to acknowledge his wrong. The law was with him, and he would not relax.

Six months wore away, and the case of Milton was seldom spoken of. His daughter sickened and died in jail, and for the first time since his imprisonment, he was taken out to attend her funeral. As Wilson looked upon his old neighbor, at the grave, he half made up his mind to forgive his debt. But he feared to retrace the step he had taken. Milton had not asked any favors of him, and he had no reason to expect clemency! Had the debtor sued for clemency, the merchant would have taken great credit in opening his prison doors.

When Milton first came into the village, there was an orphan boy, wild, uncared for, and singularly vicious, the dread of all the neighborhood. For some petty act laid to him, he was sent to jail. Milton was jailor, and being a keen judge of human nature soon found that the boy had been more sinned against than sinning. Putting money into the orphan's hands, and a letter to a friend in New Orleans, Milton unlocked the jail door and bid his prisoner good bye. Fifteen years had passed since then.

Late one summer afternoon, Milton sat in his cell, his face buried in his hands, and his broken spirit wrapped in gloomy thoughts. The door was slowly opened, and a stranger stood looking upon the prisoner. The stranger was of noble form and man, his features swartly but handsome, and his apparel of the richest material. Milton stirred not, supposing the jailor stood before him.

"William Milton!"

The prisoner started at the sound of the strange voice, and looked vacantly upon the visitor.

"You have forgotten me, Milton!"

"I know you not," mechanically answered Milton.

With a quick movement, the stranger stepped forward and knelt upon the floor, and clasped the prisoner's hands, kissing them again and again.

"Don't know me! and yet for fifteen years no waking hour has passed that I have not thought of you as my earthly saviour. From this same cell you once led me forth, and gave me money and your blessing. I have come a long journey to see and bless my saviour and weep upon his neck. I am rich! William Milton—do you hear that? I am rich! As you helped the orphan, and opened his prison doors, so shall the orphan now do by you. I am 'Ugly Mark'—Mark Douglass!"

Milton's eyes were streaming with tears for such gratitude and such words had been strangers to him for many a year. Hope, faith, ambition, again sprung up in the despairing debtor's heart, and he bowed his head upon the broad shoulder of the poor orphan, and sobbed like a child. Awhile the two lingered and talked in the begrimed cell, and then passed out arm in arm.

There was astonishment in the village when they recognized the forgotten William Milton leaning upon the arm of the distinguished looking stranger. The prisoner's hair had grown gray in the last years of his imprisonment, and his manly form had lost some of its vigor and fullness.

Mark Douglass and Milton entered Wilson's store, and the former pulled his purse from his pocket, and threw the sum, as agreed upon before he entered the jail, contemptuously upon the counter. Then

bending his black eye upon the merchant he slowly said:

"You once sent an orphan to jail when he was guiltless of wrong or of crime. Again, you sent an old neighbor to jail for no crime but poverty. They both stand before you. And should misfortunes ever come upon you, James Wilson, may you find others more humane and forgiving than you have been. This is a world of changes, and disease and bad luck may waste you in such an hour as you know not."

A paleness crept over Wilson's face, and before he could reply, Douglass and Milton had passed from his store.

Ten years later, and two of the characters of our story are again brought together. A change has been wrought in the affairs of James Wilson, the rich village merchant. Disease has been in his household, and his store and dwelling have been laid in ashes. Financial reverses followed in quick succession, until all his property was swept away, and he found himself several thousand dollars in debt. Driven to desperation, and struggling to save his falling fortunes, he attempted to secrete a portion of his means by the aid of a friend. The scheme was detected, and he was arrested on charge of swindling, and sent to prison. 'Twas then the ruined man learned the bitterness of poverty and desertion. Not a friend would be his bail. The fickle populace turned against him as quickly as they had against William Milton years before. He complained of this bitterly—he could not see why his old friends should desert him because he was unfortunate—surely that was no crime. So reasoned the man who sent Milton to the debtor's cell. His integrity had not passed the ordeal as untarnished as did that of his early friend.

Dark and gloomy were the days between the arrest and the trial. Wilson had little to hope from the magnanimity of the prosecuting attorney, as that official had been rejected by one of his daughters on account of the attorney's poverty. From the prisoner's box, Wilson looked in vain for friends in the sea of faces. He had lost his property and had no friends.

To the inquiry of the Court who would defend him, Wilson answered that he had retained none, his face burning as he answered, for he had no means to employ counsel. One and another of the lawyers in the bar plead prior engagements, and begged to be excused from acting as Wilson's counsel at the request of the Court. This marked reluctance to defend him, stung the prisoner keenly, and he bit his lip until it bled. Any one of the brood, a month before, would have most eagerly performed any service for the wealthy merchant.

At this juncture, a tall and muscular gentleman strode up to the bar and tendered his service as counsel for the prisoner at the bar. The stranger's head was gray, but his presence was singularly noble and commanding, and his eye full and lustrous. The finely chiseled mouth told its own story of daring, firmness and iron will. The prosecuting attorney looked a little blank as the distinguished looking gentleman took his seat within the bar and answered for his client. The interest in the audience became intense, for they expected something from so fine a looking man. And the presence of that personage—his lofty bearing and eagle eye—was already making interest for his astonished client.

The trial proceeded. The counsel for the defence asked few questions of the witnesses, contenting himself with playing with his penknife, now and then looking upon those who swore "swift." There was a terror in his very eye, and the swift witnesses quailed as they read his scornful glance. The District Attorney indulged in frequent coarse and aggravating remarks as the testimony proceeded.

The plea of the stranger was a most finished specimen of logic, irony and pathos. The tide of feeling in the people, re-acted under his eloquence, and rushed again to the merchant. A few words, calm, but most fearfully withering, crushed the prosecuting attorney's attempt to wound the

unfortunate. The testimony was picked and torn in a thousand shreds, and strong men blushed that they had ever doubted the honesty of the prisoner.

"You are but men," said he to the jury, "with the same frail nature of him whose honor you now have in your hands. You know not your own strength. In prosperity it is no hard matter to present a clean sheet to the word. It is adversity that tests men. The strongest among you might fall, were misfortune to come upon you. Misfortune or prosperity is no virtue. Summer weather friends are they who bask in a man's favor to-day, and when a dark hour comes upon him, turn to heap opprobrium upon his name. As men need mercy at the hands of Him who wept over and forgave the sins of men, so let them remember mercy, when judging each other. Should either of you, gentlemen, by any reverse of fortune, ever become poor and a subject for the debtor's cell, and see your professed friends desert or turn against you, you will experience one of life's bitterest lessons, and learn how cruel is the hand which crushes and brands with shame, the name of the poor and unfortunate. God is the avowed friend of such, and men should be careful how they are less forgiving than our common Father."

The manner of the stranger was intensely thrilling, and carried the multitude for his client. The prosecuting attorney withered in his seat, and in his plea blundered continually. He grew feverish and annoyed under the full gaze of his powerful antagonist.

The jury returned a verdict of "not guilty" without leaving their seats, and the sheriff was ordered to release the prisoner from custody. And what a change in the manner of the people! All were eager to take him by the hand and to congratulate him upon his acquittal. They were friends again! And yet Wilson could not shut out the reflection that, had he been convicted, the same men would as heartily have approved the verdict as now.

With a heart too full for utterance, Wilson attempted to thank his stranger friend. While he held that individual's hand, pouring out his broken thanks, the sheriff again arrested him for debt. The District Attorney had been foiled on the criminal suit, and now determined to have revenge at last.

"Hold a moment, said the stranger counsel. "How much is claimed of my client?"

"Some three thousand dollars," sneeringly answered the attorney.

"Make out your papers, sir, and you can have your money."

The abashed officer proceeded to do so, while the crowd gathered and looked on. The stranger, from a heavy purse, counted out the amount in bills and gold, and then handed the receipts to the bewildered Wilson; afterwards lifting his hat politely to the people and passing away.

But the overpowered Wilson could not be left thus. He followed his deliverer and persisted in knowing who to bless.

"James Wilson!" replied the stranger, in a sad but thrilling tone. "you have fallen as others have fallen. This is a world of changes. While visiting the graves where my loved ones are, I learned of your reverses and the charge against you. Fifteen years ago there was another poor debtor sent to jail for no crime, and his child died there. You sent him there. He was poor and you oppressed him. He was sick and in prison and you visited him not. Never again, Mr. Wilson, forget the "golden rule" of the Master you serve, or oppress the poor and unfortunate. The poor debtor of fifteen years ago, owed you. You now owe him. William Milton has returned good for evil. You will not hate him as you once did, will you, Mr. Wilson? and a sweet smile shone through the tears on the stranger's face.

"William Milton! God forgive me. And you are him?"

"Yes, the once poor debtor, but now rich man, is before you. Go home to your family, Mr. Wilson, and be kind to all. We all need kindness and forgiveness."