

JAMES ALLEN

FLUTE AND VIOLIN AND
OTHER KENTUCKY TALES
AND ROMANCES

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Flute and Violin and other Kentucky Tales and Romances

PREFACE

The opening tale of this collection is taken from Harper's Monthly; the others, from the *Century Magazine*. By leave of these periodicals they are now published, and of the kindness thus shown the author makes grateful acknowledgment.

While the tales and sketches have been appearing, the authorship of them has now and then been charged to Mr. James Lane Allen, of Chicago, Illinois – pardonably to his discomfiture.

A sense of fitness forbade that the author should send along with each, as it came out, a claim that it was not another's; but he now gladly asks that the responsibility of all his work be placed where it solely belongs.

FLUTE AND VIOLIN

THE PARSON'S MAGIC FLUTE

On one of the dim walls of Christ Church, in Lexington, Kentucky, there hangs, framed in thin black wood, an old rectangular slab of marble. A legend sets forth that the tablet is in memory of the Reverend James Moore, first minister of Christ Church and President of Transylvania University, who departed this life in the year 1814, at the age of forty-nine. Just beneath runs the record that he was learned, liberal, amiable, and pious.

Save this concise but not unsatisfactory summary, little is now known touching the reverend gentleman. A search through other sources of information does, indeed, result in reclaiming certain facts. Thus, it appears that he was a Virginian, and that he came to Lexington in the year 1792 – when Kentucky ceased to be a county of Virginia, and became a State. At first he was a candidate for the ministry of the Presbyterian Church; but the Transylvania Presbytery having reproved him for the liberality of his sermons, James kicked against such rigor in his brethren, and turned for refuge to the bosom of the Episcopal Communion. But this body did not offer much of a bosom to take refuge in.

Virginia Episcopalians there were in and around the little wooden town; but so rampant was the spirit of the French Revolution and the influence of French infidelity that a celebrated local historian, who knew thoroughly the society of the place, though writing of it long afterwards, declared that about the last thing it would have been thought possible to establish there was an Episcopal church.

"Not so," thought James. He beat the canebrakes and scoured the buffalo trails for his Virginia Episcopalians, huddled them into a dilapidated little frame house on the site of the present building, and there fired so deadly a volley of sermons at the sinners free of charge that they all became living Christians. Indeed, he fired so long and so well that, several years later – under favor of Heaven and through the success of a lottery with a one-thousand-dollar prize and nine hundred and seventy-four blanks – there was built and furnished a small brick church, over which he was regularly called to officiate twice a month, at a salary of two hundred dollars a year.

Here authentic history ends, except for the additional fact that in the university he sat in the chair of logic, metaphysics, moral philosophy, and belles-lettres – a large chair to sit in with ill-matched legs and most uncertain bottom. Another authority is careful to state that he had a singularly sweet breath and beautiful manners. Thus it has been well with the parson as respects his posthumous fame; for how many of our fellow-creatures are learned without being amiable, amiable without being pious, and pious without having beautiful manners!

And yet the best that may be related of him is not told in the books; and it is only when we have allowed the dust to settle once more upon the histories, and have peered deep into the mists of oral tradition, that the parson is discovered standing there in spirit and the flesh, but muffled and ghost-like, as a figure seen through a dense fog.

A tall, thinnish man, with silky pale-brown hair, worn long and put back behind his ears, the high tops of which bent forward a little under the weight, and thus took on the most remarkable air of paying incessant attention to everybody and everything; set far out in front of these ears, as though it did not wish to be disturbed by what was heard, a white, wind-splitting face, calm, beardless, and seeming never to have been cold, or to have dropped the kindly dew of perspiration; under the serene peak of this forehead a pair of large gray eyes, patient and dreamy, being habitually turned inward upon a mind toiling with hard abstractions; having within him a conscience burning always like a planet; a bachelor – being a logician; therefore sweet-tempered, never having sipped the sour cup of experience; gazing covertly at womankind from behind the delicate veil of unfamiliarity that lends

enchantment; being a bachelor and a bookworm, therefore already old at forty, and a little run down in his toiles, a little frayed out at the elbows and the knees, a little seamy along the back, a little deficient at the heels; in pocket poor always, and always the poorer because of a spendthrift habit in the matter of secret chanties; kneeling down by his small hard bed every morning and praying that during the day his logical faculty might discharge its function morally, and that his moral faculty might discharge its function logically, and that over all the operations of all his other faculties he might find heavenly grace to exercise both a logical and a moral control; at night kneeling down again to ask forgiveness that, despite his prayer of the morning, one or more of these same faculties – he knew and called them all familiarly by name, being a metaphysician – had gone wrong in a manner the most abnormal, shameless, and unforeseen; thus, on the whole, a man shy and dry; gentle, lovable; timid, resolute; forgetful, remorseful; eccentric, impulsive, thinking too well of every human creature but himself; an illogical logician, an erring moralist, a wool-gathered philosopher, but, humanly speaking, almost a perfect man.

But the magic flute? Ah, yes! The magic flute!

Well, the parson had a flute – a little one – and the older he grew, and the more patient and dreamy his gray eyes, always the more and more devotedly he blew this little friend. How the fond soul must have loved it! They say that during his last days as he lay propped high on white pillows, once, in a moment of wandering consciousness, he stretched forth his hand and in fancy lifting it from the white counterpane, carried it gently to his lips. Then, as his long, delicate fingers traced out the spirit ditties of no tone and his mouth pursed itself in the fashion of one who is softly blowing, his whole face was overspread with a halo of ecstatic peace.

And yet, for all the love he bore it, the parson was never known to blow his flute between the hours of sunrise and sunset – that is, never but once. Alas, that memorable day! But when the night fell and he came home – home to the two-story log-house of the widow Spurlock; when the widow had given him his supper of coffee sweetened with brown sugar, hot johnny-cake, with perhaps a cold joint of venison and cabbage pickle; when he had taken from the supper table, by her permission, the solitary tallow dip in its little brass candlestick, and climbed the rude steep stairs to his room above; when he had pulled the leathern string that lifted the latch, entered, shut the door behind him on the world, placed the candle on a little deal table covered with text-books and sermons, and seated himself beside it in a rush-bottomed chair – then – He began to play? No; then there was dead silence.

For about half an hour this silence continued. The widow Spurlock used to say that the parson was giving his supper time to settle; but, alas! it must have settled almost immediately, so heavy was the johnny-cake. Howbeit, at the close of such an interval, any one standing at the foot of the steps below, or listening beneath the window on the street outside, would have heard the silence broken.

At first the parson blew low, peculiar notes, such as a kind and faithful shepherd might blow at nightfall as an invitation for his scattered wandering sheep to gather home about him. Perhaps it was a way he had of calling in the disordered flock of his faculties – some weary, some wounded, some torn by thorns, some with their fleeces, which had been washed white in the morning prayer, now bearing many a stain. But when they had all answered, as it were, to this musical roll-call, and had taken their due places within the fold of his brain, obedient, attentive, however weary, however suffering, then the flute was laid aside, and once more there fell upon the room intense stillness; the poor student had entered upon his long nightly labors.

Hours passed. Not a sound was to be heard but the rustle of book leaves, now rapidly, now slowly turned, or the stewing of sap in the end of a log on the hearth, or the faint drumming of fingers on the table – those long fingers, the tips of which seemed not so full of particles of blood as of notes of music, circulating impatiently back and forth from his heart. At length, as midnight drew near, and the candle began to sputter in the socket, the parson closed the last book with a decisive snap, drew a deep breath, buried his face in his hands for a moment, as if asking a silent blessing on the

day's work, and then, reaching for his flute, squared himself before the dying embers, and began in truth to play. This was the one brief, pure pleasure he allowed himself.

It was not a musical roll-call that he now blew, but a dismissal for the night. One might say that he was playing the cradle song of his mind. And what a cradle song it was! A succession of undertone, silver-clear, simple melodies; apparently one for each faculty, as though he was having something kind to say to them all; thanking some for the manner in which they had served him during the day, the music here being brave and spirited; sympathizing with others that had been unjustly or too rudely put upon, the music here being plaintive and soothing; and finally granting his pardon to any such as had not used him quite fairly, the music here having a searching, troubled quality, though ending in the faintest breath of love and peace.

It was not known whence the parson had these melodies; but come whence they might, they were airs of heavenly sweetness, and as he played them, one by one his faculties seemed to fall asleep like quieted children. His long, out-stretched legs relaxed their tension, his feet fell over sidewise on the hearth-stone, his eyes closed, his head sank towards his shoulder. Still, he managed to hold on to his flute, faintly puffing a few notes at greater intervals, until at last, by the dropping of the flute from his hands or the sudden rolling of his big head backward, he would awaken with a violent jerk. The next minute he would be asleep in bed, with one ear out on guard, listening for the first sound that should awake him in the morning.

Such having been the parson's fixed habit as long as any one had known him, it is hard to believe that five years before his death he abruptly ceased to play his flute and never touched it again. But from this point the narrative becomes so mysterious that it were better to have the testimony of witnesses.

II

Every bachelor in this world is secretly watched by some woman. The parson was watched by several, but most closely by two. One of these was the widow Spurlock, a personage of savory countenance and wholesome figure – who was accused by the widow Babcock, living at the other end of the town, of having robust intentions towards her lodger. This piece of slander had no connection with the fact that she had used the point of her carving knife to enlarge in the door of his room the hole through which the latch-string passed, in order that she might increase the ventilation. The aperture for ventilation thus formed was exactly the size of one of her innocent black eyes.

The other woman was an infirm, ill-favored beldam by the name of Arsena Furnace, who lived alone just across the street, and whose bedroom was on the second floor, on a level with the parson's. Being on terms of great intimacy with the widow Spurlock, she persuaded the latter that the parson's room was poorly lighted for one who used his eyes so much, and that the window-curtain of red calico should be taken down. On the same principle of requiring less sun because having less use for her eyes, she hung before her own window a faded curtain, transparent only from within. Thus these two devoted, conscientious souls conspired to provide the parson unawares with a sufficiency of air and light.

On Friday night, then, of August 31, 1809 – for this was the exact date – the parson played his flute as usual, because the two women were sitting together below and distinctly heard him. It was unusual for them to be up at such an hour, but on that day the drawing of the lottery had come off, and they had held tickets, and were discussing their disappointment in having drawn blanks. Towards midnight the exquisite notes of the flute floated down to them from the parson's room.

"I suppose he'll keep on playing those same old tunes as long as there is a thimbleful of wind in him: *I wish he'd learn some new ones,*" said the hag, taking her cold pipe from her cold lips, and turning her eyes towards her companion with a look of some impatience.

"He might be better employed at such an hour than playing on the flute," replied the widow, sighing audibly and smoothing a crease out of her apron.

As by-and-by the notes of the flute became intermittent, showing that the parson was beginning to fall asleep, Arsena said good-night, and crossing the street to her house, mounted to the front window. Yes, there he was; the long legs stretched out towards the hearth, head sunk sidewise on his shoulder, flute still at his lips, the sputtering candle throwing its shadowy light over his white weary face, now wearing a smile. Without doubt he played his flute that night as usual; and Arsena, tired of the sight, turned away and went to bed.

A few minutes later the widow Spurlock placed an eye at the aperture of ventilation, wishing to see whether the logs on the fire were in danger of rolling out and setting fire to the parson's bed; but suddenly remembering that it was August, and that there was no fire, she glanced around to see whether his candle needed snuffing. Happening, however, to discover the parson in the act of shedding his coat, she withdrew her eye, and hastened precipitately down-stairs, but sighing so loud that he surely must have heard her had not his faculty of external perception been already fast asleep.

At about three o'clock on the afternoon of the next day, as Arsena was sweeping the floor of her kitchen, there reached her ears a sound which caused her to listen for a moment, broom in air. It was the parson playing – playing at three o'clock in the afternoon! – and playing – she strained her ears again and again to make sure – playing a Virginia reel. Still, not believing her ears, she hastened aloft to the front window and looked across the street. At the same instant the widow Spurlock, in a state of equal excitement, hurried to the front door of her house, and threw a quick glance up at Arsena's window. The hag thrust a skinny hand through a slit in the curtain and beckoned energetically, and a moment later the two women stood with their heads close together watching the strange performance.

Some mysterious change had come over the parson and over the spirit of his musical faculty. He sat upright in his chair, looking ten years younger, his whole figure animated, his foot beating time so audibly that it could be heard across the street, a vivid bloom on his lifeless cheeks, his head rocking to and fro like a ship in a storm, and his usually dreamy, patient gray eyes now rolled up towards the ceiling in sentimental perturbation. And how he played that Virginia reel! Not once, but over and over, and faster and faster, until the notes seemed to get into the particles of his blood and set them to dancing. And when he had finished that, he snatched his handkerchief from his pocket, dashed it across his lips, blew his nose with a resounding snort, and settling his figure into a more determined attitude, began another. And the way he went at that! And when he finished that, the way he went at another! Two negro boys, passing along the street with a spinning-wheel, put it down and paused to listen; then, catching the infection of the music, they began to dance. And then the widow Spurlock, catching the infection also, began to dance, and bouncing into the middle of the room, there actually did dance until her tucking-comb rolled out, and – ahem! – one of her stockings slipped down. Then the parson struck up the "Fisher's Hornpipe," and the widow, still in sympathy, against her will, sang the words:

"Did you ever see the Devil
With his wood and iron shovel,
A-hoeing up coal
For to burn your soul?"

"He's bewitched," said old Arsena, trembling and sick with terror.

"By *whom*?" cried the widow Spurlock, indignantly, laying a heavy hand on Arsena's shoulder.

"By his flute," replied Arsena, more fearfully.

At length the parson, as if in for it, and possessed to go all lengths, jumped from his chair, laid the flute on the table, and disappeared in a hidden corner of the room. Here he kept closely locked a large brass-nailed hair trunk, over which hung a looking-glass. For ten minutes the two women waited

for him to reappear, and then he did reappear, not in the same clothes, but wearing the ball dress of a Virginia gentleman of an older time, perhaps his grandfather's – knee-breeches, silk stockings, silver buckles, low shoes, laces at his wrists, laces at his throat and down his bosom. And to make the dress complete he had actually tied a blue ribbon around his long silky hair. Stepping airily and gallantly to the table, he seized the flute, and with a little wave of it through the air he began to play, and to tread the mazes of the minuet, about the room, this way and that, winding and bowing, turning and gliding, but all the time fingering and blowing for dear life.

"Who would have thought it was in him?" said Arsena, her fear changed to admiration.

"I would!" said the widow.

While he was in the midst of this performance the two women had their attention withdrawn from him in a rather singular way. A poor lad hobbling on a crutch made his appearance in the street below, and rapidly but timidly swung himself along to the widow Spurlock's door. There he paused a moment, as if overcome by mortification, but finally knocked. His summons not being answered, he presently knocked more loudly.

"Hist!" said the widow to him, in a half-tone, opening a narrow slit in the curtain. "What do you want, David?"

The boy wheeled and looked up, his face at once crimson with shame. "I want to see the parson," he said, in a voice scarcely audible.

"The parson's not at home," replied the widow, sharply. "He's out; studying up a sermon." And she closed the curtain.

An expression of despair came into the boy's face, and for a moment in physical weakness he sat down on the door-step. He heard the notes of the flute in the room above; he knew that the parson *was* at home; but presently he got up and moved away.

The women did not glance after his retreating figure, being reabsorbed by the movements of the parson. Whence had he that air of grace and high-born courtesy? that vivacity of youth?

"He must be in love," said Arsena. "He must be in love with the widow Babcock."

"He's no more in love with her than *I* am," replied her companion, with a toss of her head.

A few moments later the parson, whose motions had been gradually growing less animated, ceased dancing, and disappeared once more in the corner of the room, soon emerging therefrom dressed in his own clothes, but still wearing on his hair the blue ribbon, which he had forgotten to untie. Seating himself in his chair by the table, he thrust his hands into his pockets, and with his eyes on the floor seemed to pass into a trance of rather demure and dissatisfying reflections.

When he came down to supper that night he still wore his hair in the forgotten queue, and it may have been this that gave him such an air of lamb-like meekness. The widow durst ask him no questions, for there was that in him which held familiarity at a distance; but although he ate with unusual heartiness, perhaps on account of such unusual exercise, he did not lift his eyes from his plate, and thanked her for all her civilities with a gratitude that was singularly plaintive.

That night he did not play his flute. The next day being Sunday, and the new church not yet being opened, he kept his room. Early in the afternoon a messenger handed to the widow a note for him, which, being sealed, she promptly delivered. On reading it he uttered a quick, smothered cry of grief and alarm, seized his hat, and hurried from the house. The afternoon passed and he did not return. Darkness fell, supper hour came and went, the widow put a candle in his room, and then went across to commune with Arsena on these unusual proceedings.

Not long afterwards they saw him enter his room carrying under his arm a violin case. This he deposited on the table, and sitting down beside it, lifted out a boy's violin.

"A *boy's* violin!" muttered Arsena.

"A *boy's* violin!" muttered the widow; and the two women looked significantly into each other's eyes.

"Humph!"

"Humph!"

By-and-by the parson replaced the violin in the box and sat motionless beside it, one of his arms hanging listlessly at his side, the other lying on the table. The candle shone full in his face, and a storm of emotions passed over it. At length they saw him take up the violin again, go to the opposite wall of the room, mount a chair, knot the loose strings together, and hang the violin on a nail above his meagre shelf of books. Upon it he hung the bow. Then they saw him drive a nail in the wall close to the other, take his flute from the table, tie around it a piece of blue ribbon he had picked up off the floor, and hang it also on the wall. After this he went back to the table, threw himself in his chair, buried his head in his arms, and remained motionless until the candle burned out.

"What's the meaning of all this?" said one of the two women, as they separated below.

"I'll find out if it's the last act of my life," said the other.

But find out she never did. For question the parson directly she dared not; and neither to her nor any one else did he ever vouchsafe an explanation. Whenever, in the thousand ways a woman can, she would hint her desire to fathom the mystery, he would baffle her by assuming an air of complete unconsciousness, or repel her by a look of warning so cold that she hurriedly changed the subject.

As time passed on it became evident that some grave occurrence indeed had befallen him. Thenceforth, and during the five remaining years of his life, he was never quite the same. For months his faculties, long used to being soothed at midnight by the music of the flute, were like children put to bed hungry and refused to be quieted, so that sleep came to him only after hours of waiting and tossing, and his health suffered in consequence. And then in all things he lived like one who was watching himself closely as a person not to be trusted.

Certainly he was a sadder man. Often the two women would see him lift his eyes from his books at night, and turn them long and wistfully towards the wall of the room where, gathering cobwebs and dust, hung the flute and the violin.

If any one should feel interested in having this whole mystery cleared up, he may read the following tale of a boy's violin.

III

A BOY'S VIOLIN

On Friday, the 31st of August, 1809 – that being the day of the drawing of the lottery for finishing and furnishing the new Episcopal church – at about ten o'clock in the morning, there might have been seen hobbling slowly along the streets, in the direction of the public square, a little lad by the name of David. He was idle and lonesome, not wholly through his fault. If there had been white bootblacks in those days, he might now have been busy around a tavern door polishing the noble toes of some old Revolutionary soldier; or if there had been newsboys, he might have been selling the *Gazette* or the *Reporter*– the two papers which the town afforded at that time. But there were enough negro slaves to polish all the boots in the town for nothing when the boots got polished at all, as was often not the case; and if people wanted to buy a newspaper, they went to the office of the editor and publisher, laid the silver down on the counter, and received a copy from the hands of that great man himself.

The lad was not even out on a joyous summer vacation, for as yet there was not a public school in the town, and his mother was too poor to send him to a private one, teaching him as best she could at home. This home was one of the rudest of the log-cabins of the town, built by his father, who had been killed a few years before in a tavern brawl. His mother earned a scant livelihood, sometimes by taking in coarse sewing for the hands of the hemp factory, sometimes by her loom, on which with rare skill she wove the finest fabrics of the time.

As he hobbled on towards the public square, he came to an elm-tree which cast a thick cooling shade on the sidewalk, and sitting down, he laid his rickety crutch beside him, and drew out of the pocket of his home-made tow breeches a tangled mass of articles – pieces of violin strings, all of which had plainly seen service under the bow at many a dance; three old screws, belonging in their times to different violin heads; two lumps of resin, one a rather large lump of dark color and common quality, the other a small lump of transparent amber wrapped sacredly to itself in a little brown paper bag labelled "Cucumber Seed;" a pair of epaulets, the brass fringes of which were tarnished and torn; and further miscellany.

These treasures he laid out one by one, first brushing the dirt off the sidewalk with the palm of one dirty hand, and then putting his mouth close down to blow away any loose particles that might remain to soil them; and when they were all displayed, he propped himself on one elbow, and stretched his figure caressingly beside them.

A pretty picture the lad made as he lay there dreaming over his earthly possessions – a pretty picture in the shade of the great elm, that sultry morning of August, three-quarters of a century ago! The presence of the crutch showed there was something sad about it; and so there was; for if you had glanced at the little bare brown foot, set toes upward on the curb-stone, you would have discovered that the fellow to it was missing – cut off about two inches above the ankle. And if this had caused you to throw a look of sympathy at his face, something yet sadder must long have held your attention. Set jauntily on the back of his head was a weather-beaten dark blue cloth cap, the patent-leather frontlet of which was gone; and beneath the ragged edge of this there fell down over his forehead and temples and ears a tangled mass of soft yellow hair, slightly curling. His eyes were large, and of a blue to match the depths of the calm sky above the tree-tops; the long lashes which curtained them were brown; his lips were red, his nose delicate and fine, and his cheeks tanned to the color of ripe peaches. It was a singularly winning face, intelligent, frank, not describable. On it now rested a smile, half joyous, half sad, as though his mind was full of bright hopes, the realization of which was far away. From his neck fell the wide collar of a white cotton shirt, clean but frayed at the elbows, and open and buttonless down his bosom. Over this he wore an old-fashioned satin waistcoat of a man, also frayed and buttonless. His dress was completed by a pair of baggy tow breeches, held up by a single tow suspender fastened to big brown horn buttons.

After a while he sat up, letting his foot hang down over the curb-stone, and uncoiling the longest of the treble strings, he put one end between his shining teeth, and stretched it tight by holding the other end off between his thumb and forefinger. Then, waving in the air in his other hand an imaginary bow, with his head resting a little on one side, his eyelids drooping, his mind in a state of dreamy delight, the little musician began to play – began to play the violin that he had long been working for, and hoped would some day become his own.

It was nothing to him now that his whole performance consisted of one broken string. It was nothing to him, as his body rocked gently to and fro, that he could not hear the music which ravished his soul. So real was that music to him that at intervals, with a little frown of vexation as though things were not going perfectly, he would stop, take up the small lump of costly resin, and pretend to rub it vigorously on the hair of the fancied bow. Then he would awake that delicious music again, playing more ecstatically, more passionately than before.

At that moment there appeared in the street, about a hundred yards off, the Reverend James Moore, who was also moving in the direction of the public square, his face more cool and white than usual, although the morning was never more sultry.

He had arisen with an all but overwhelming sense of the importance of that day. Fifteen years are an immense period in a brief human life, especially fifteen years of spiritual toil, hardships, and discouragements, rebuffs, weaknesses, and burdens, and for fifteen such years he had spent himself for his Episcopalians, some of whom read too freely Tom Paine and Rousseau, some loved too well the taverns of the town, some wrangled too fiercely over their land suits. What wonder if this day,

which, despite all drawbacks, was to witness the raising of money for equipping the first brick church, was a proud and happy one to his meek but victorious spirit! What wonder if, as he had gotten out of bed that morning, he had prayed with unusual fervor that for this day in especial his faculties, from the least to the greatest, and from the weakest to the strongest, might discharge their functions perfectly, and that the drawing of the lottery might come off decently and in good order; and that – yes, this too was in the parson's prayer – that if it were the will of Heaven and just to the other holders of tickets, the right one of the vestry-men might draw the thousand-dollar prize; for he felt very sure that otherwise there would be little peace in the church for many a day to come, and that for him personally the path-way of life would be more slippery and thorny.

So that now as he hurried down the street he was happy; but he was anxious; and being excited for both reasons, the way was already prepared for him to lose that many-handed self-control which he had prayed so hard to retain.

He passed within the shade of the great elm, and then suddenly came to a full stop. A few yards in front of him the boy was performing his imaginary violin solo on a broken string, and the sight went straight to the heart of that musical faculty whose shy divinity was the flute. For a few moments he stood looking on in silence, with all the sympathy of a musician for a comrade in poverty and distress.

Other ties also bound him to the boy. If the divine voice had said to the Reverend James Moore: "Among all the people of this town, it will be allowed you to save but one soul. Choose you which that shall be," he would have replied: "Lord, this is a hard saying, for I wish to save them all. But if I must choose, let it be the soul of this lad."

The boy's father and he had been boyhood friends in Virginia, room-mates and classmates in college, and together they had come to Kentucky. Summoned to the tavern on the night of the fatal brawl, he had reached the scene only in time to lay his old playfellow's head on his bosom, and hear his last words:

"Be kind to my boy!.. Be a better father to him than I have been!.. Watch over him and help him!.. Guard him from temptation!.. Be kind to him in his little weaknesses!.. Win his heart, and you can do everything with him!.. Promise me this!"

"So help me Heaven, all that I can do for him I will do!"

From that moment he had taken upon his conscience, already toiling beneath its load of cares, the burden of this sacred responsibility. During the three years of his guardianship that had elapsed, this burden had not grown lighter; for apparently he had failed to acquire any influence over the lad, or to establish the least friendship with him. It was a difficult nature that had been bequeathed him to master – sensitive, emotional, delicate, wayward, gay, rebellious of restraint, loving freedom like the poet and the artist. The Reverend James Moore, sitting in the chair of logic, moral philosophy, metaphysics, and belles-lettres; lecturing daily to young men on all the powers and operations of the human mind, taking it to pieces and putting it together and understanding it so perfectly, knowing by name every possible form of fallacy and root of evil – the Reverend James Moore, when he came to study the living mind of this boy, confessed to himself that he was as great a dunce as the greatest in his classes. But he loved the boy, nevertheless, with the lonely resources of his nature, and he never lost hope that he would turn to him in the end.

How long he might have stood now looking on and absorbed with the scene, it is impossible to say; for the lad, happening to look up and see him, instantly, with a sidelong scoop of his hand, the treasures on the sidewalk disappeared in a cavernous pocket, and the next moment he had seized his crutch, and was busy fumbling at a loosened nail.

"Why, good-morning, David," cried the parson, cheerily, but with some embarrassment, stepping briskly forward, and looking down upon the little figure now hanging its head with guilt. "You've got the coolest seat in town," he continued, "and I wish I had time to sit down and enjoy it with you; but the drawing comes off at the lottery this morning, and I must hurry down to see who gets the capital prize." A shade of anxiety settled on his face as he said this. "But here's the morning

paper," he added, drawing out of his coat-pocket the coveted sheet of the weekly *Reporter*, which he was in the habit of sending to the lad's mother, knowing that her silver was picked up with the point of her needle. "Take it to your mother, and tell her she must be sure to go to see the wax figures." What a persuasive smile overspread his face as he said this! "And *you* must be certain to go too! They'll be fine. Good-bye."

He let one hand rest gently on the lad's blue cloth cap, and looked down into the upturned face with an expression that could scarcely have been more tender.

"He looks feverish," he said to himself as he walked away, and then his thoughts turned to the lottery.

"Good-bye," replied the boy, in a low voice, lifting his dark blue eyes slowly to the patient gray ones. "I'm glad he's gone!" he added to himself; but he nevertheless gazed after the disappearing figure with shy fondness. Then he also began to think of the lottery.

If Mr. Leuba should draw the prize, he might give Tom Leuba a new violin; and if he gave Tom a new violin, then he had promised to give him Tom's old one. It had been nearly a year since Mr. Leuba had said to him, laughing, in his dry, hard little fashion:

"Now, David, you must be smart and run my errands while Tom's at school of mornings; and some of these days, when I get rich enough, I'll give Tom a new violin and I'll give you his old one."

"Oh, Mr. Leuba!" David had cried, his voice quivering with excitement, and his whole countenance beaming with delight, "I'll wait on you forever, if you'll give me Tom's old violin."

Yes, nearly a whole year had passed since then – a lifetime of waiting and disappointment. Many an errand he had run for Mr. Leuba. Many a bit of a thing Mr. Leuba had given him: pieces of violin strings, odd worn-out screws, bits of resin, old epaulets, and a few fourpences; but the day had never come when he had given him Tom's violin.

Now if Mr. Leuba would only draw the prize! As he lay on his back on the sidewalk, with the footless stump of a leg crossed over the other, he held the newspaper between his eyes and the green limbs of the elm overhead, and eagerly read for the last time the advertisement of the lottery. Then, as he finished reading it, his eyes were suddenly riveted upon a remarkable notice printed just beneath.

This notice stated that Messrs. Ollendorf and Mason respectfully acquainted the ladies and gentlemen of Lexington that they had opened at the Kentucky Hotel a new and elegant collection of wax figures, judged by connoisseurs to be equal, if not superior, to any exhibited in America. Among which are the following characters: An excellent representation of General George Washington giving orders to the Marquis de la Fayette, his aid. In another scene the General is represented as a fallen victim to death, and the tears of America, represented by a beautiful female weeping over him – which makes it a most interesting scene. His Excellency Thomas Jefferson. General Buonaparte in marshal action. General Hamilton and Colonel Burr. In this interesting scene the Colonel is represented in the attitude of firing, while the General stands at his distance waiting the result of the first fire: both accurate likenesses. The death of General Braddock, who fell in Braddock's Defeat. An Indian is represented as scalping the General, while one of his men, in an attempt to rescue him out of the hands of the Indians, was overtaken by another Indian, who is ready to split him with his tomahawk. Mrs. Jerome Buonaparte, formerly Miss Patterson. The Sleeping Beauty. Eliza Wharton, or the American coquette, with her favorite gallant and her intimate friend Miss Julia Granby. The Museum will be open from ten o'clock in the morning 'til nine in the evening. Admittance fifty cents for grown persons; children half price. Profiles taken with accuracy at the Museum.

The greatest attraction of the whole Museum will be a large magnificent painting of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane.

All this for a quarter! The newspaper suddenly dropped from his hands into the dirt of the street – he had no quarter! For a moment he sat as immovable as if the thought had turned him into stone; but the next moment he had sprung from the sidewalk and was speeding home to his mother. Never before had the stub of the little crutch been plied so nimbly among the stones of the rough

sidewalk. Never before had he made a prettier picture, with the blue cap pushed far back from his forehead, his yellow hair blowing about his face, the old black satin waistcoat flopping like a pair of disjointed wings against his sides, the open newspaper streaming backward from his hand, and his face alive with hope.

IV

Two hours later he issued from the house, and set his face in the direction of the museum – a face full of excitement still, but full also of pain, because he had no money, and saw no chance of getting any. It was a dull time of the year for his mother's work. Only the day before she had been paid a month's earnings, and already the money had been laid out for the frugal expenses of the household. It would be a long time before any more would come in, and in the mean time the exhibition of wax figures would have been moved to some other town. When he had told her that the parson had said that she must go to see them, she had smiled fondly at him from beside her loom, and quietly shaken her head with inward resignation; but when he told her the parson had said *he* must be sure to go too, the smile had faded into an expression of fixed sadness.

On his way down town he passed the little music store of Mr. Leuba, which was one block this side of the Kentucky Hotel. He was all eagerness to reach the museum, but his ear caught the sounds of the violin, and he forgot everything else in his desire to go in and speak with Tom, for Tom was his lord and master.

"Tom, are you going to see the wax figures?" he cried, with trembling haste, curling himself on top of the keg of nails in his accustomed corner of the little lumber-room. But Tom paid no attention to the question or the questioner, being absorbed in executing an intricate passage of "O Thou Fount of every Blessing!" For the moment David forgot his question himself, absorbed likewise in witnessing this envied performance.

When Tom had finished, he laid the violin across his knees and wiped his brow with his shirt-sleeves. "Don't you know that you oughtn't to talk to me when I'm performing?" he said, loftily, still not deigning to look at his offending auditor. "Don't you know that it disturbs a fiddler to be spoken to when he's performing?"

Tom was an overgrown, rawboned lad of some fifteen years, with stubby red hair, no eyebrows, large watery blue eyes, and a long neck with a big Adam's apple.

"I didn't mean to interrupt you, Tom," said David, in a tone of the deepest penitence. "You know that I'd rather hear you play than anything."

"Father got the thousand-dollar prize," said Tom coldly, accepting the apology for the sake of the compliment.

"Oh, Tom! I'm so glad! *Hurrah!*" shouted David, waving his old blue cap around his head, his face transfigured with joy, his heart leaping with a sudden hope, and now at last he would get the violin.

"What are *you* glad for?" said Tom, with dreadful severity. "He's *my* father; he's not *your* father;" and for the first time he bestowed a glance upon the little figure curled up on the nail keg, and bending eagerly towards him with clasped hands.

"I *know* he's *your* father, Tom, but – "

"Well, then, what are you *glad* for?" insisted Tom. "You're not going to get any of the money."

"I know *that*, Tom," said David, coloring deeply, "but – "

"Well, then, what *are* you glad for?"

"I don't think I'm so *very* glad, Tom," replied David, sorrowfully.

But Tom had taken up the bow and was rubbing the resin on it. He used a great deal of resin in his playing, and would often proudly call David's attention to how much of it would settle as a white

dust under the bridge. David was too well used to Tom's rebuffs to mind them long, and as he now looked on at this resining process, the sunlight came back into his face.

"Please let me try it once, Tom – just *once*." Experience had long ago taught him that this was asking too much of Tom; but with the new hope that the violin might now soon become his, his desire to handle it was ungovernable.

"Now look here, David," replied Tom, with a great show of kindness in his manner, "I'd let you try it once, but you'd spoil the tone. It's taken me a long time to get a good tone into this fiddle, and you'd take it all out the very first whack. As soon as you learn to get a good tone out of it, I'll let you play on it. Don't you *know* you'd spoil it, if I was to let you try it *now*?" he added, suddenly wheeling with tremendous energy upon his timid petitioner.

"I'm afraid I would, Tom," replied David, with a voice full of anguish.

"But just listen to me," said Tom; and taking up the violin, he rendered the opening passage of "O Thou Fount of every Blessing!" Scarcely had he finished when a customer entered the shop, and he hurried to the front, leaving the violin and the bow on the chair that he had quitted.

No sooner was he gone than the little figure slipped noiselessly from its perch, and hobbling quickly to the chair on which the violin lay, stood beside it in silent love. Touch it he durst not; but his sensitive, delicate hands passed tremblingly over it, and his eyes dwelt upon it with unspeakable longing. Then, with a sigh, he turned away, and hastened to the front of the shop. Tom had already dismissed his customer, and was standing in the door, looking down the street in the direction of the Kentucky Hotel, where a small crowd had collected around the entrance of the museum.

As David stepped out upon the sidewalk, it was the sight of this crowd that recalled him to a new sorrow.

"Tom," he cried, with longing, "are you going to see the wax figures?"

"Of course I'm going," he replied, carelessly. "We're all going."

"When, Tom?" asked David, with breathless interest.

"Whenever we want to, of course," replied Tom. "I'm not going just once; I'm going as often as I like."

"Why don't you go now, Tom? It's so hot – they might melt."

This startling view of the case was not without its effect on Tom, although a suggestion from such a source was not to be respected. He merely threw his eyes up towards the heavens and said, sturdily: "You ninny! they'll not melt. Don't you see it's going to rain and turn cooler?"

"I'll bet you *I'd* not wait for it to turn cooler. I'll bet you *I'd* be in there before you could say Jack Roberson, if *I* had a quarter," said David, with resolution.

V

All that long afternoon he hung in feverish excitement around the door of the museum. There was scarce a travelling show in Kentucky in those days. It was not strange if to this idler of the streets, in whom imagination was all-powerful, and in whose heart quivered ungovernable yearnings for the heroic, the poetic, and the beautiful, this day of the first exhibition of wax figures was the most memorable of his life.

It was so easy for everybody to go in who wished; so impossible for him. Groups of gay ladies slipped their silver half-dollars through the variegated meshes of their silken purses. The men came in jolly twos and threes, and would sometimes draw out great rolls of bills. Now a kind-faced farmer passed in, dropping into the hands of the door-keeper a half-dollar for himself, and three quarters for three sleek negroes that followed at his heels; and now a manufacturer with a couple of apprentices – lads of David's age and friends of his. Poor little fellow! at many a shop of the town he had begged to be taken as an apprentice himself, but no one would have him because he was lame.

And now the people were beginning to pour out, and he hovered about them, hoping in this way to get some idea of what was going on inside. Once, with the courage of despair, he seized the arm of a lad as he came out.

"Oh, Bobby, *tell* me all about it!"

But Bobby shook him off, and skipped away to tell somebody else who didn't want to hear.

After a while two sweet-faced ladies dressed in mourning appeared. As they passed down the street he was standing on the sidewalk, and there must have been something in his face to attract the attention of one of them, for she paused, and in the gentlest manner said:

"My little man, how did you like the wax figures and the picture?"

"Oh, madam," he replied, his eyes filling, "I have not seen them!"

"But you will see them, I hope," she said, moving away, but bestowing on him the lingering smile of bereft motherhood.

The twilight fell, and still he lingered, until, with a sudden remorseful thought of his mother, he turned away and passed up the dark street. His tongue was parched, there was a lump in his throat, and a numb pain about his heart. Far up the street he paused and looked back. A lantern had been swung out over the entrance of the museum, and the people were still passing in.

VI

A happy man was the Reverend James Moore the next morning. The lottery had been a complete success, and he would henceforth have a comfortable church, in which the better to save the souls of his fellow-creatures. The leading vestry-man had drawn the capital prize, and while the other members who had drawn blanks were not exactly satisfied, on the whole the result seemed as good as providential. As he walked down town at an early hour, he was conscious of suffering from a dangerous elation of spirit; and more than once his silent prayer had been: "Lord, let me not be puffed up this day! Let me not be blinded with happiness! Keep the eyes of my soul clear, that I overlook no duty! What have I, unworthy servant, done that I should be so fortunate?"

Now and then, as he passed along, a church member would wring his hand and offer congratulations. After about fifteen years of a more or less stranded condition a magnificent incoming tide of prosperity now seemed to lift him off his very feet.

From wandering rather blindly about the streets for a while, he started for the new church, remembering that he had an engagement with a committee of ladies, who had taken in charge the furnishing of it. But when he reached there, no one had arrived but the widow Babcock. She was very beautiful; and looking at womankind from behind his veil of unfamiliarity, the parson, despite his logic, had always felt a desire to lift that veil when standing in her presence. The intoxication of his mood was not now lessened by coming upon her so unexpectedly alone.

"My dear Mrs. Babcock," he said, offering her his hand in his beautiful manner, "it seems peculiarly fitting that you should be the first of the ladies to reach the spot; for it would have pained me to think you less zealous than the others. The vestry needs not only your taste in furniture, but the influence of your presence."

The widow dropped her eyes, the gallantry of the speech being so unusual. "I came early on purpose," she replied, in a voice singularly low and tremulous. "I wanted to see you alone. Oh, Mr. Moore, the ladies of this town owe you such a debt of gratitude! You have been such a comfort to those who are sad, such a support to those who needed strengthening! And who has needed these things as much as I?"

As she spoke, the parson, with a slight look of apprehension, had put his back against the wall, as was apt to be his way when talking with ladies.

"Who has needed these things as I have?" continued the widow, taking a step forward, and with increasing agitation. "Oh, Mr. Moore, I should be an ungrateful woman if I did not mingle my

congratulations with the others. And I want to do this now with my whole soul. May God bless you, and crown the labors of your life with every desire of your heart!" And saying this, the widow laid the soft tips of one hand on one of the parson's shoulders, and raising herself slightly on tiptoe, kissed him.

"Oh, Mrs. Babcock!" cried the dismayed logician, "what have you done?" But the next moment, the logician giving place to the man, he grasped one of her hands, and murmuring, "May God bless you for *that!*" seized his hat, and hurried out into the street.

The most careless observer might have been interested in watching his movements as he walked away.

He carried his hat in his hand, forgetting to put it on. Several persons spoke to him on the street, but he did not hear them. He strode a block or two in one direction, and then a block or two in another.

"If she does it again," he muttered to himself – "if she does it again, I'll marry her!.. Old?.. I could run a mile in a minute!"

As he was passing the music-store, the dealer called out to him:

"Come in, parson. I've got a present for you."

"A – present – for —*me?*" repeated the parson, blank with amazement. In his life the little music-dealer had never made him a present.

"Yes, a present," repeated the fortunate vestry-man, whose dry heart, like a small seed-pod, the wind of good-fortune had opened, so that a few rattling germs of generosity dropped out. Opening a drawer behind his counter, he now took out a roll of music. "Here's some new music for your flute," he said. "Accept it with my compliments."

New music for his flute! The parson turned it over dreamily, and it seemed that the last element of disorder had come to derange his faculties.

"And Mrs. Leuba sends her compliments, and would like to have you to dinner," added the shopkeeper, looking across the counter with some amusement at the expression of the parson, who now appeared as much shocked as though his whole nervous system had been suddenly put in connection with a galvanic battery of politeness.

It was a very gay dinner, having been gotten up to celebrate the drawing of the prize. The entire company were to go in the afternoon to see the waxworks, and some of the ladies wore especial toilets, with a view to having their profiles taken.

"Have you been to see the waxworks, Mr. Moore?" inquired a spinster roguishly, wiping a drop of soup from her underlip.

The unusual dinner, the merriment, the sense of many ladies present, mellowed the parson like old wine.

"No, madam," he replied, giddily; "but I shall go this very afternoon. I find it impossible any longer to deny myself the pleasure of beholding the great American Coquette and the Sleeping Beauty. I must take my black sheep," he continued, with expanding warmth. "I must drive my entire flock of soiled lambs into the favored and refining presence of Miss Julia Granby."

Keeping to this resolution, as soon as dinner was over he made his excuses to the company, and set off to collect a certain class of boys which he had scraped together by hook and crook from the by-ways of the town, and about an hour later he might have been seen driving them before him towards the entrance of the museum. There he shouldered his way cheerfully up to the door, and shoved each of the lads good-naturedly in, finally passing in himself, with a general glance at the bystanders, as if to say, "Was there ever another man as happy in this world?"

But he soon came out, leaving his wild lambs to browse at will in those fresh pastures, and took his way up street homeward. He seemed to be under some necessity of shaking them off in order to enjoy the solitude of his thoughts.

"If she does it again!.. If she does it again!.. *Whee! whee! whee! – whee! whee! whee!*" and he began to whistle for his flute with a nameless longing.

It was soon after this that the two women heard him playing the reel, and watched him perform certain later incredible evolutions. For whether one event, or all events combined, had betrayed him into this outbreak, henceforth he was quite beside himself.

Is it possible that on this day the Reverend James Moore had driven the ancient, rusty, creaky chariot of his faculties too near the sun of love?

VII

A sad day it had been meantime for the poor lad.

He had gotten up in the morning listless and dull and sick at the sight of his breakfast. But he had feigned to be quite well that he might have permission to set off down-town. There was no chance of his being able to get into the museum, but he was drawn irresistibly thither for the mere pleasure of standing around and watching the people, and hoping that something —*something* would turn up. He was still there when his dinner-hour came, but he never thought of this. Once, when the door-keeper was at leisure, he had hobbled up and said to him, with a desperate effort to smile, "Sir, if I were rich, I'd live in your museum for about five years."

But the door-keeper had pushed him rudely back, telling him to be off and not obstruct the sidewalk.

He was still standing near the entrance when the parson came down the street driving his flock of boys. Ah, if he had only joined that class, as time after time he had been asked to do! All at once his face lit up with a fortunate inspiration, and pushing his way to the very side of the door-keeper, he placed himself there that the parson might see him and take him with the others; for had he not said that *he* must be sure to go? But when the parson came up, this purpose had failed him, and he had apparently shrunk to half his size behind the bulk of the door-keeper, fearing most of all things that the parson would discover him and know why he was there.

He was still lingering outside when the parson reappeared and started homeward; and he sat down and watched him out of sight. He seemed cruelly hurt, and his eyes filled with tears.

"*I'd* have taken *him* in the very first one," he said, choking down a sob; and then, as if he felt this to be unjust, he murmured over and over: "Maybe he forgot me; maybe he didn't mean it; maybe he forgot me."

Perhaps an hour later, slowly and with many pauses, he drew near the door of the parson's home. There he lifted his hand three times before he could knock.

"The parson's not at home," the widow Spurlock had called sharply down to him.

With this the last hope had died out of his bosom; for having dwelt long on the parson's kindness to him – upon all the parson's tireless efforts to befriend him – he had summoned the courage at last to go and ask him to lend him a quarter.

With little thought of whither he went, he now turned back down-town, but some time later he was still standing at the entrance of the museum.

He looked up the street again. All the Leubas were coming, Tom walking, with a very haughty air, a few feet ahead.

"Why don't you go in?" he said, loudly, walking up to David and jingling the silver in his pockets. "What are you standing out here for? If you *want* to go in, why don't you *go* in?"

"Oh, Tom!" cried David, in a whisper of eager confidence, his utterance choked with a sob, "I haven't got any money."

"I'd hate to be as poor as *you* are," said Tom, contemptuously. "I'm going this evening, and to-night, and as often as I want," and he turned gayly away to join the others.

He was left alone again, and his cup of bitterness, which had been filling drop by drop, now ran over.

Several groups came up just at that moment. There was a pressure and a jostling of the throng. As Mr. Leuba, who had made his way up to the door-keeper, drew a handful of silver from his pocket, some one accidentally struck his elbow, and several pieces fell to the pavement. Then there was laughter and a scrambling as these were picked up and returned. But out through the legs of the crowd one bright silver quarter rolled unseen down the sloping sidewalk towards the spot where David was standing.

It was all done in an instant. He saw it coming; the little crutch was set forward a pace, the little body was swung silently forward, and as the quarter fell over on its shining side, the dirty sole of a brown foot covered it.

The next minute, with a sense of triumph and bounding joy, the poverty-tortured, friendless little thief had crossed the threshold of the museum, and stood face to face with the Redeemer of the world; for the picture was so hung as to catch the eye upon entering, and it arrested his quick, roving glance and held it in awe-stricken fascination. Unconscious of his own movements, he drew nearer and nearer, until he stood a few feet in front of the arc of spectators, with his breathing all but suspended, and one hand crushing the old blue cloth cap against his naked bosom.

It was a strange meeting. The large rude painting possessed no claim to art. But to him it was an overwhelming revelation, for he had never seen any pictures, and he was gifted with an untutored love of painting. Over him, therefore, it exercised an intrinsically influence, and it was as though he stood in the visible presence of One whom he knew that the parson preached of and his mother worshipped.

Forgetful of his surroundings, long he stood and gazed. Whether it may have been the thought of the stolen quarter that brought him to himself, at length he drew a deep breath, and looked quickly around with a frightened air. From across the room he saw Mr. Leuba watching him gravely, as it seemed to his guilty conscience, with fearful sternness. A burning flush dyed his face, and he shrank back, concealing himself among the crowd. The next moment, without ever having seen or so much as thought of anything else in the museum, he slipped out into the street.

There the eyes of everybody seemed turned upon him. Where should he go? Not home. Not to Mr. Leuba's music-store. No; he could never look into Mr. Leuba's face again. And Tom? He could hear Tom crying out, wherever he should meet him, "You stole a quarter from father."

In utter terror and shame, he hurried away out to the southern end of the town, where there was an abandoned rope-walk.

It was a neglected place, damp and unhealthy. In the farthest corner of it he lay down and hid himself in a clump of iron-weeds. Slowly the moments dragged themselves along. Of what was he thinking? Of his mother? Of the parson? Of the violin that would now never be his? Of that wonderful sorrowful face which he had seen in the painting? The few noises of the little town grew very faint, the droning of the bumblebee on the purple tufts of the weed overhead very loud, and louder still the beating of his heart against the green grass as he lay on his side, with his head on his blue cap and his cheek in his hand. And then he fell asleep.

When he awoke he started up bewildered. The sun had set, and the heavy dews of twilight were falling. A chill ran through him; and then the recollection of what had happened came over him with a feeling of desolation. When it was quite dark he left his hiding-place and started back up-town.

He could reach home in several ways, but a certain fear drew him into the street which led past the music-store. If he could only see Mr. Leuba, he felt sure that he could tell by the expression of his face whether he had missed the quarter. At some distance off he saw by the light of the windows Mr. Leuba standing in front of his shop talking to a group of men. Noiselessly he drew near, noiselessly he was passing without the courage to look up.

"Stop, David. Come in here a moment. I want to talk to you."

As Mr. Leuba spoke, he apologized to the gentlemen for leaving, and turned back into the rear of the shop. Faint, and trembling so that he could scarcely stand, his face of a deadly whiteness, the boy followed.

"David," said Mr. Leuba – in his whole life he had never spoken so kindly; perhaps his heart had been touched by some belated feeling, as he had studied the boy's face before the picture in the museum, and certainly it had been singularly opened by his good-fortune – "David," he said, "I promised when I got rich enough I'd give Tom a new violin, and give you his old one. Well, I gave him a new one to-day; so here's yours," and going to a corner of the room, he took up the box, brought it back, and would have laid it on the boy's arm, only there was no arm extended to receive it.

"Take it! It's yours!"

"Oh, Mr. Leuba!"

It was all he could say. He had expected to be charged with stealing the quarter, and instead there was held out to him the one treasure in the world – the violin of which he had dreamed so long, for which he had served so faithfully.

"Oh, Mr. Leuba!"

There was a pitiful note in the cry, but the dealer was not the man to hear it, or to notice the look of angelic contrition on the upturned face. He merely took the lad's arm, bent it around the violin, patted the ragged cap, and said, a little impatiently:

"Come, come! they're waiting for me at the door. To-morrow you can come down and run some more errands for me," and he led the way to the front of the shop and resumed his conversation.

Slowly along the dark street the lad toiled homeward with his treasure. At any other time he would have sat down on the first curb-stone, opened the box, and in ecstatic joy have lifted out that peerless instrument; or he would have sped home with it to his mother, flying along on his one crutch as if on the winds of heaven. But now he could not look at it, and something clogged his gait so that he loitered and faltered and sometimes stood still irresolute.

But at last he approached the log-cabin which was his home. A rude fence enclosed the yard, and inside this fence there grew a hedge of lilacs. When he was within a few feet of the gate he paused, and did what he had never done before – he put his face close to the panels of the fence, and with a look of guilt and sorrow peeped through the lilacs at the face of his mother, who was sitting in the light of the open door-way.

She was thinking of him. He knew that by the patient sweetness of her smile. All the heart went out of him at the sight, and hurrying forward, he put the violin down at her feet, and threw his arms around her neck, and buried his head on her bosom.

VIII

After he had made his confession, a restless and feverish night he had of it, often springing up from his troubled dreams and calling to her in the darkness. But the next morning he insisted upon getting up for a while.

Towards the afternoon he grew worse again, and took to his bed, the yellow head tossing to and fro, the eyes bright and restless, and his face burning. At length he looked up and said to his mother, in the manner of one who forms a difficult resolution: "Send for the parson. Tell him I am sick and want to see him."

It was this summons that the widow Spurlock had delivered on the Sunday afternoon when the parson had quitted the house with such a cry of distress. He had not so much as thought of the boy since the Friday morning previous.

"How is it possible," he exclaimed, as he hurried on – "how is it *possible* that I *could* have forgotten *him*?"

The boy's mother met him outside the house and drew him into an adjoining room, silently, for her tears were falling. He sank into the first chair.

"Is he so ill?" he asked, under his trembling breath.

"I'm afraid he's going to be very ill. And to see him in so much trouble – "

"What is the matter? In God's name, has anything happened to him?"

She turned her face away to hide her grief. "He said he would tell you himself. Oh, if I've been too hard with him! But I did it for the best. I didn't know until the doctor came that he was going to be ill, or I would have waited. Do anything you can to quiet him – anything he should ask you to do," she implored, and pointed towards the door of the room in which the boy lay.

Conscience-stricken and speechless, the parson opened it and entered.

The small white bed stood against the wall beneath an open window, and one bright-headed sunflower, growing against the house outside, leaned in and fixed its kind face anxiously upon the sufferer's.

The figure of the boy was stretched along the edge of the bed, his cheek on one hand and his eyes turned steadfastly towards the middle of the room, where, on a table, the violin lay exposed to view.

He looked quickly towards the door as the parson entered, and an expression of relief passed over his face.

"Why, David," said the parson, chidingly, and crossing to the bed with a bright smile. "Sick? This will never do;" and he sat down, imprisoning one of the burning palms in his own.

The boy said nothing, but looked at him searchingly, as though needing to lay aside masks and disguises and penetrate at once to the bottom truth. Then he asked, "Are you mad at me?"

"My poor boy!" said the parson, his lips trembling a little as he tightened his pressure – "my poor boy! why should *I* be mad at *you*?"

"You never could do anything with me."

"Never mind that now," said the parson, soothingly, but adding, with bitterness, "it was all my fault – all my fault."

"It wasn't your fault," said the boy. "It was mine."

A change had come over him in his treatment of the parson. Shyness had disappeared, as is apt to be the case with the sick.

"I want to ask you something," he added, confidentially.

"Anything – anything! Ask me anything!"

"Do you remember the wax figures?"

"Oh yes, I remember them very well," said the parson, quickly, uneasily.

"I wanted to see 'em, and I didn't have any money, and I stole a quarter from Mr. Leuba."

Despite himself a cry escaped the parson's lips, and dropping the boy's hand, he started from his chair and walked rapidly to and fro across the room, with the fangs of remorse fixed deep in his conscience.

"Why didn't you come to me?" he asked at length, in a tone of helpless entreaty. "Why didn't you come to me? Oh, if you had only come to me!"

"I did come to you," replied the boy.

"When?" asked the parson, coming back to the bedside.

"About three o'clock yesterday."

About three o'clock yesterday! And what was he doing at that time? He bent his head over to his very knees, hiding his face in his hands.

"But why didn't you let me know it? Why didn't you come in?"

"Mrs. Spurlock told me you were at work on a sermon."

"God forgive me!" murmured the parson, with a groan.

"I thought you'd lend me a quarter," said the boy, simply. "You took the other boys, and you told me *I* must be certain to go. I thought you'd lend me a quarter till I could pay you back."

"Oh, David!" cried the parson, getting down on his knees by the bedside, and putting his arms around the boy's neck, "I would have lent you – I would have given you – anything I have in this poor world!"

The boy threw his arms around the parson's neck and clasped him close. "Forgive me!"

"Oh, boy! boy! can you forgive *me*?" Sobs stifled the parson's utterance, and he went to a window on the opposite side of the room.

When he turned his face inward again, he saw the boy's gaze fixed once more intently upon the violin.

"There's something I want you to do for me," he said. "Mr. Leuba gave me a violin last night, and mamma says I ought to sell it and pay him back. Mamma says it will be a good lesson for me." The words seemed wrung from his heart's core. "I thought I'd ask *you* to sell it for me. The doctor says I may be sick a long time, and it worries me." He began to grow excited, and tossed from side to side.

"Don't worry," said the parson, "I'll sell it for you."

The boy looked at the violin again. To him it was priceless, and his eyes grew heavy with love for it. Then he said, cautiously: "I thought *you'd* get a good price for it. I don't think I could take less than a hundred dollars. It's worth more than that, but if I have to sell it, I don't think I *could* take less than a hundred dollars," and he fixed his burning eyes on the parson's.

"Don't worry! I'll sell it for you. Oh yes, you can easily get a hundred dollars for it. I'll bring you a hundred dollars for it by to-morrow morning."

As the parson was on the point of leaving the room, with the violin under his arm, he paused with his hand on the latch, an anxious look gathering in his face. Then he came back, laid the violin on the table, and going to the bedside, took the boy's hands in both of his own.

"David," said the moral philosopher, wrestling in his consciousness with the problem of evil – "David, was it the face of the Saviour that you wished to see? Was it *this* that tempted you to – " and he bent over the boy breathless.

"I wanted to see the Sleeping Beauty."

The parson turned away with a sigh of acute disappointment.

It was on this night that he was seen to enter his room with a boy's violin under his arm, and later to hang it, and hang his beloved flute, tied with a blue ribbon, above the meagre top shelf of books – Fuller's *Gospel*, Petrarch, Volney's *Ruins*, Zollicoffer's *Sermons*, and the *Horrors of San Domingo*. After that he remained motionless at his table, with his head bowed on his folded arms, until the candle went out, leaving him in inner and outer darkness. Moralist, logician, philosopher, he studied the transgression, laying it at last solely to his own charge.

At daybreak he stood outside the house with the physician who had been with the boy during the night. "Will he die?" he asked.

The physician tapped his forehead with his forefinger. "The chances are against him. The case has peculiar complications. All night it has been nothing but the wax figures and the stolen quarter and the violin. His mother has tried to persuade him not to sell it. But he won't bear the sight of it now, although he is wild at the thought of selling it."

"David," said the parson, kneeling by the bedside, and speaking in a tone pitiful enough to have recalled a soul from the other world – "David, here's the money for the violin; here's the hundred dollars," and he pressed it into one of the boy's palms. The hand closed upon it, but there was no recognition. It was half a year's salary.

The first sermon that the parson preached in the new church was on the Sunday after the boy's death. It was expected that he would rise to the occasion and surpass himself, which, indeed, he did, drawing tears even from the eyes of those who knew not that they could shed them, and all through making the greatest effort to keep back his own. The subject of the sermon was "The Temptations of the Poor." The sermon of the following fortnight was on the "Besetting Sin," the drift of it going to show that the besetting sin may be the one pure and exquisite pleasure of life, involving only the exercise of the loftiest faculty. And this was followed by a third sermon on "The Kiss that Betrayeth," in which the parson ransacked history for illustrations to show that every species of man – ancient, mediæval, and modern – had been betrayed in this way. During the delivery of this sermon the parson

looked so cold and even severe that it was not understood why the emotions of any one should have been touched, or why the widow Babcock should have lowered her veil and wept bitterly.

And thus being ever the more loved and revered as he grew ever the more lovable and saint-like, he passed onward to the close. But not until the end came did he once stretch forth a hand to touch his flute; and it was only in imagination then that he grasped it, to sound the final roll-call of his wandering faculties, and to blow a last good-night to his tired spirit.

KING SOLOMON OF KENTUCKY

I

It had been a year of strange disturbances – a desolating drought, a hurly-burly of destructive tempests, killing frosts in the tender valleys, mortal fevers in the tender homes. Now came tidings that all day the wail of myriads of locusts was heard in the green woods of Virginia and Tennessee; now that Lake Erie was blocked with ice on the very verge of summer, so that in the Niagara new rocks and islands showed their startling faces. In the Blue-grass Region of Kentucky countless caterpillars were crawling over the ripening apple orchards and leaving the trees as stark as when tossed in the thin air of bitter February days.

Then, flying low and heavily through drought and tempest and frost and plague, like the royal presence of disaster, that had been but heralded by its mournful train, came nearer and nearer the dark angel of the pestilence.

M. Xaupi had given a great ball only the night before in the dancing-rooms over the confectionery of M. Giron – that M. Giron who made the tall pyramids of meringues and macaroons for wedding-suppers, and spun around them a cloud of candied webbing as white and misty as the veil of the bride. It was the opening cotillon party of the summer. The men came in blue cloth coats with brass buttons, buff waistcoats, and laced and ruffled shirts; the ladies came in white satins with ethereal silk overdresses, embroidered in the figure of a gold beetle or an oak leaf of green. The walls of the ball-room were painted to represent landscapes of blooming orange-trees, set here and there in clustering tubs; and the chandeliers and sconces were lighted with innumerable wax-candles, yellow and green and rose.

Only the day before, also, Clatterbuck had opened for the summer a new villa-house, six miles out in the country, with a dancing-pavilion in a grove of maples and oaks, a pleasure-boat on a sheet of crystal water, and a cellar stocked with old sherry, Sauterne, and Château Margaux wines, with anisette, "Perfect Love," and Guigiolet cordials.

Down on Water Street, near where now stands a railway station, Hugh Lonney, urging that the fear of cholera was not the only incentive to cleanliness, had just fitted up a sumptuous bath-house, where cold and shower baths might be had at twelve and a half cents each, or hot ones at three for half a dollar.

Yes, the summer of 1833 was at hand, and there must be new pleasures, new luxuries; for Lexington was the Athens of the West and the Kentucky Birmingham.

Old Peter Leuba felt the truth of this, as he stepped smiling out of his little music-store on Main Street, and, rubbing his hands briskly together, surveyed once more his newly-arranged windows, in which were displayed gold and silver epaulets, bottles of Jamaica rum, garden seeds from Philadelphia, drums and guitars and harps. Dewees & Grant felt it in their drug-store on Cheapside, as they sent off a large order for calomel and superior Maccoboy, rappee, and Lancaster snuff. Bluff little Daukins Tegway felt it, as he hurried on the morning of that day to the office of the *Observer and Reporter*, and advertised that he would willingly exchange his beautiful assortment of painted muslins and Dunstable bonnets for flax and feathers. On the threshold he met a florid farmer, who had just offered ten dollars' reward for a likely runaway boy with a long fresh scar across his face; and to-morrow the paper would contain one more of those tragical little cuts, representing an African slave scampering away at the top of his speed, with a stick swung across his shoulder and a bundle dangling down his back. In front of Postlethwaite's Tavern, where now stands the Phoenix Hotel, a company of idlers, leaning back in Windsor chairs and planting their feet against the opposite wall

on a level with their heads, smoked and chewed and yawned, as they discussed the administration of Jackson and arranged for the coming of Daniel Webster in June, when they would give him a great barbecue, and roast in his honor a buffalo bull taken from the herd emparked near Ashland. They hailed a passing merchant, who, however, would hear nothing of the bull, but fell to praising his Rocky Mountain beaver and Goose Creek salt; and another, who turned a deaf ear to Daniel Webster, and invited them to drop in and examine his choice essences of peppermint, bergamot, and lavender.

But of all the scenes that might have been observed in Lexington on that day, the most remarkable occurred in front of the old court-house at the hour of high noon. On the mellow stroke of the clock in the steeple above the sheriff stepped briskly forth, closely followed by a man of powerful frame, whom he commanded to station himself on the pavement several feet off. A crowd of men and boys had already collected in anticipation, and others came quickly up as the clear voice of the sheriff was heard across the open public square and old market-place.

He stood on the topmost of the court-house steps, and for a moment looked down on the crowd with the usual air of official severity.

"Gentlemen," he then cried out sharply, "by an ordah of the cou't I now offah this man at public sale to the highest biddah. He is able-bodied but lazy, without visible property or means of support, an' of dissolute habits. He is therefore adjudged guilty of high misdemeanors, an' is to be sold into labor for a twelvemonth. How much, then, am I offered for the vagrant? How much am I offered for ole King Sol'mon?"

Nothing was offered for old King Solomon. The spectators formed themselves into a ring around the big vagrant and settled down to enjoy the performance.

"Stah't 'im, somebody."

Somebody started a laugh, which rippled around the circle.

The sheriff looked on with an expression of unrelaxed severity, but catching the eye of an acquaintance on the outskirts, he exchanged a lightning wink of secret appreciation. Then he lifted off his tight beaver hat, wiped out of his eyes a little shower of perspiration which rolled suddenly down from above, and warmed a degree to his theme.

"Come, gentlemen," he said, more suavely, "it's too hot to stan' heah all day. Make me an offer! You all know ole King Sol'mon; don't wait to be interduced. How much, then, to stah't 'im? Say fifty dollahs! Twenty-five! Fifteen! Ten! Why, gentlemen! Not *ten* dollahs? Remembah this is the Blue-grass Region of Kentucky – the land of Boone an' Kenton, the home of Henry Clay!" he added, in an oratorical *crescendo*.

"He ain't wuth his victuals," said an oily little tavern-keeper, folding his arms restfully over his own stomach and cocking up one piggish eye into his neighbor's face. "He ain't wuth his 'taters."

"Buy 'im for 'is rags!" cried a young law-student, with a Blackstone under his arm, to the town rag-picker opposite, who was unconsciously ogling the vagrant's apparel.

"I *might* buy 'im for 'is *scalp*," drawled a farmer, who had taken part in all kinds of scalp contests and was now known to be busily engaged in collecting crow scalps for a match soon to come off between two rival counties.

"I think I'll buy 'im for a hat-sign," said a manufacturer of ten-dollar Castor and Rhorum hats. This sally drew merry attention to the vagrant's hat, and the merchant felt rewarded.

"You'd better say the town ought to buy 'im an' put 'im up on top of the cou't-house as a scarecrow for the cholera," said some one else.

"What news of the cholera did the stage-coach bring this mornin'?" quickly inquired his neighbor in his ear; and the two immediately fell into low, grave talk, forgot the auction, and turned away.

"Stop, gentlemen, stop!" cried the sheriff, who had watched the rising tide of good-humor, and now saw his chance to float in on it with spreading sails. "You're runnin' the price in the wrong direction – down, not up. The law requires that he be sold to the highest bidder, not the lowest. As

loyal citizens, uphold the constitution of the commonwealth of Kentucky an' make me an offah; the man is really a great bargain. In the first place, he would cos' his ownah little or nothin', because, as you see, he keeps himself in cigahs an' clo'es; then, his main article of diet is whiskey – a supply of which he always has on han'. He don't even need a bed, foh you know he sleeps jus' as well on any doohstep; noh a chair, foh he prefers to sit roun' on the curb-stones. Remembah, too, gentlemen, that ole King Sol'mon is a Virginian – from the same neighthood as Mr. Clay. Remembah that he is well educated, that he is an *awful* Whig, an' that he has smoked mo' of the stumps of Mr. Clay's cigahs than any other man in existence. If you don't b'lieve *me*, gentlemen, yondah goes Mr. Clay now; call *him* ovah an' ask 'im foh yo'se'ves."

He paused, and pointed with his right forefinger towards Main street, along which the spectators, with a sudden craning of necks, beheld the familiar figure of the passing statesman.

"But you don't need *anybody* to tell you these fac's, gentlemen," he continued. "You merely need to be reminded that ole King Sol'mon is no ohdinary man. Mo'ovah he has a kine heaht, he nevah spoke a rough wohd to anybody in this worl', an' he is as proud as Tecumseh of his good name an' charactah. An', gentlemen," he added, bridling with an air of mock gallantry and laying a hand on his heart, "if anythin' fu'thah is required in the way of a puffect encomium, we all know that there isn't anothah man among us who cuts as wide a swath among the ladies. The'foh, if you have any appreciation of virtue, any magnanimity of heaht; if you set a propah valuation upon the descendants of Virginia, that mothah of Presidents; if you believe in the pure laws of Kentucky as the pioneer bride of the Union; if you love America an' love the worl' – make me a gen'rous, high-toned offah foh ole King Sol'mon!"

He ended his peroration amid a shout of laughter and applause, and, feeling satisfied that it was a good time for returning to a more practical treatment of his subject, proceeded in a sincere tone:

"He can easily earn from one to two dollahs a day, an' from three to six hundred a yeah. There's not anothah white man in town capable of doin' as much work. There's not a niggah han' in the hemp factories with such muscles an' such a chest. *Look* at 'em! An', if you don't b'lieve me, step fo'wahd and *feel* 'em. How much, then, is bid foh 'im?"

"One dollah!" said the owner of a hemp factory, who had walked forward and felt the vagrant's arm, laughing, but coloring up also as the eyes of all were quickly turned upon him. In those days it was not an unheard-of thing for the muscles of a human being to be thus examined when being sold into servitude to a new master.

"Thank you!" cried the sheriff, cheerily. "One precinc' heard from! One dollah! I am offahed one dollah foh ole King Sol'mon. One dollah foh the king! Make it a half. One dollah an' a half. Make it a half. One dol-dol-dol-dollah!"

Two medical students, returning from lectures at the old Medical Hall, now joined the group, and the sheriff explained:

"One dollah is bid foh the vagrant ole King Sol'mon, who is to be sole into labah foh a twelvemonth. Is there any othah bid? Are you all done? One dollah, once – "

"Dollah and a half," said one of the students, and remarked half jestingly under his breath to his companion, "I'll buy him on the chance of his dying. We'll dissect him."

"Would you own his body if he *should* die?"

"If he dies while bound to me, I'll arrange *that*."

"One dollah an' a half," resumed the sheriff; and falling into the tone of a facile auctioneer he rattled on:

"One dollah an' a half foh ole Sol'mon – sol, sol, sol, – do, re, mi, fa, sol – do, re, mi, fa, sol! Why, gentlemen, you can set the king to music!"

All this time the vagrant had stood in the centre of that close ring of jeering and humorous bystanders – a baffling text from which to have preached a sermon on the infirmities of our imperfect humanity. Some years before, perhaps as a master-stroke of derision, there had been given to him

that title which could but heighten the contrast of his personality and estate with every suggestion of the ancient sacred magnificence; and never had the mockery seemed so fine as at this moment, when he was led forth into the streets to receive the lowest sentence of the law upon his poverty and dissolute idleness. He was apparently in the very prime of life – a striking figure, for nature at least had truly done some royal work on him. Over six feet in height, erect, with limbs well shaped and sinewy, with chest and neck full of the lines of great power, a large head thickly covered with long reddish hair, eyes blue, face beardless, complexion fair but discolored by low passions and excesses – such was old King Solomon. He wore a stiff, high, black Castor hat of the period, with the crown smashed in and the torn rim hanging down over one ear; a black cloth coat in the old style, ragged and buttonless; a white cotton shirt, with the broad collar crumpled, wide open at the neck and down his sunburnt bosom; blue jeans pantaloons, patched at the seat and the knees; and ragged cotton socks that fell down over the tops of his dusty shoes, which were open at the heels.

In one corner of his sensual mouth rested the stump of a cigar. Once during the proceedings he had produced another, lighted it, and continued quietly smoking. If he took to himself any shame as the central figure of this ignoble performance, no one knew it. There was something almost royal in his unconcern. The humor, the badinage, the open contempt, of which he was the public target, fell thick and fast upon him, but as harmlessly as would balls of pith upon a coat of mail. In truth, there was that in his great, lazy, gentle, good-humored bulk and bearing which made the gibes seem all but despicable. He shuffled from one foot to the other as though he found it a trial to stand up so long, but all the while looking the spectators full in the eyes without the least impatience. He suffered the man of the factory to walk round him and push and pinch his muscles as calmly as though he had been the show bull at a country fair. Once only, when the sheriff had pointed across the street at the figure of Mr. Clay, he had looked quickly in that direction with a kindling light in his eye and a passing flush on his face. For the rest, he seemed like a man who has drained his cup of human life and has nothing left him but to fill again and drink without the least surprise or eagerness.

The bidding between the man of the factory and the student had gone slowly on. The price had reached ten dollars. The heat was intense, the sheriff tired. Then something occurred to revivify the scene. Across the market-place and towards the steps of the court-house there suddenly came trundling along in breathless haste a huge old negress, carrying on one arm a large shallow basket containing apple crab-lanterns and fresh gingerbread. With a series of half-articulate grunts and snorts she approached the edge of the crowd and tried to force her way through. She coaxed, she begged, she elbowed and pushed and scolded, now laughing, and now with the passion of tears in her thick, excited voice. All at once, catching sight of the sheriff, she lifted one ponderous brown arm, naked to the elbow, and waved her hand to him above the heads of those in front.

"Hole on, marseter! Hole on!" she cried, in a tone of humorous entreaty. "Don' knock 'im off till I come! Gim *me* a bid at 'im!"

The sheriff paused and smiled. The crowd made way tumultuously, with broad laughter and comment.

"Stan' aside theah an' let Aun' Charlotte in!"

"Now you'll see biddin'!"

"Get out of the way foh Aun' Charlotte!"

"Up, my free niggah! Hurrah foh Kentucky!"

A moment more and she stood inside the ring of spectators, her basket on the pavement at her feet, her hands plumped akimbo into her fathomless sides, her head up, and her soft, motherly eyes turned eagerly upon the sheriff. Of the crowd she seemed unconscious, and on the vagrant before her she had not cast a single glance.

She was dressed with perfect neatness. A red and yellow Madras kerchief was bound about her head in a high coil, and another was crossed over the bosom of her stiffly starched and smoothly ironed blue cottonade dress. Rivulets of perspiration ran down over her nose, her temples, and around

her ears, and disappeared mysteriously in the creases of her brown neck. A single drop accidentally hung glistening like a diamond on the circlet of one of her large brass ear-rings.

The sheriff looked at her a moment, smiling, but a little disconcerted. The spectacle was unprecedented.

"What do you want heah, Aun' Charlotte?" he asked, kindly. "You can't sell yo' pies an' gingerbread heah."

"I don' *wan'* sell no pies en gingerbread," she replied, contemptuously. "I wan' bid on *him*," and she nodded sidewise at the vagrant.

"White folks allers sellin' niggahs to wuk fuh *dem*; I gwine buy a white man to wuk fuh *me*. En he gwine t' git a mighty hard mistiss, you heah *me*!"

The eyes of the sheriff twinkled with delight.

"Ten dollahs is offahed foh ole King Sol'mon. Is theah any othah bid? Are you all done?"

"Leben," she said.

Two young ragamuffins crawled among the legs of the crowd up to her basket and filched pies and cake beneath her very nose.

"Twelve!" cried the student, laughing.

"Thirteen!" she laughed too, but her eyes flashed.

"*You are bidding against a niggah*," whispered the student's companion in his ear.

"So I am; let's be off," answered the other, with a hot flush on his proud face.

Thus the sale was ended, and the crowd variously dispersed. In a distant corner of the court-yard the ragged urchins were devouring their unexpected booty. The old negress drew a red handkerchief out of her bosom, untied a knot in a corner of it, and counted out the money to the sheriff. Only she and the vagrant were now left on the spot.

"You have bought me. What do you want me to do?" he asked quietly.

"Lohd, honey!" she answered, in a low tone of affectionate chiding, "I don' wan' you to do *nothin'*! I wuzn' gwine t' 'low dem white folks to buy you. Dey'd wuk you till you dropped dead. You go 'long en do ez you please."

She gave a cunning chuckle of triumph in thus setting at naught the ends of justice, and, in a voice rich and musical with affection, she said, as she gave him a little push:

"You bettah be gittin' out o' dis blazin' sun. G' on home! I be 'long by-en-by."

He turned and moved slowly away in the direction of Water Street, where she lived; and she, taking up her basket, shuffled across the market-place towards Cheapside, muttering to herself the while:

"I come mighty nigh gittin' dah too late, foolin' 'long wid dese pies. Sellin' *him* 'ca'se he don' wuk! Umph! If all de men in dis town dat don' wuk wuz to be tuk up en sole, d' wouldn' be 'nough money in de town to buy 'em! Don' I see 'em settin' 'roun' dese taverns f'om mohnin' till night?"

She snorted out her indignation and disgust, and sitting down on the sidewalk, under a Lombardy poplar, uncovered her wares and kept the flies away with a locust bough, not discovering, in her alternating good and ill humor, that half of them had been filched by her old tormentors.

This was the memorable scene enacted in Lexington on that memorable day of the year 1833 – a day that passed so briskly. For whoever met and spoke together asked the one question: Will the cholera come to Lexington? And the answer always gave a nervous haste to business – a keener thrill to pleasure. It was of the cholera that the negro woman heard two sweet passing ladies speak as she spread her wares on the sidewalk. They were on their way to a little picture-gallery just opened opposite M. Giron's ball-room, and in one breath she heard them discussing their toilets for the evening and in the next several portraits by Jouett.

So the day passed, the night came on, and M. Xaupi gave his brilliant ball. Poor old Xaupi – poor little Frenchman! whirled as a gamin of Paris through the mazes of the Revolution, and lately come all the way to Lexington to teach the people how to dance. Hop about blithely on thy dry legs,

basking this night in the waxen radiance of manners and melodies and graces! Where will be thy tunes and airs to-morrow? Ay, smile and prompt away! On and on! Swing corners, ladies and gentlemen! Form the basket! Hands all around!

While the bows were still darting across the strings, out of the low, red east there shot a long, tremulous bow of light up towards the zenith. And then, could human sight have beheld the invisible, it might have seen hovering over the town, over the ball-room, over M. Xaupi, the awful presence of the plague.

But knowing nothing of this, the heated revellers went merrily home in the chill air of the red and saffron dawn. And knowing nothing of it also, a man awakened on the door-step of a house opposite the ball-room, where he had long since fallen asleep. His limbs were cramped and a shiver ran through his frame. Staggering to his feet, he made his way down to the house of Free Charlotte, mounted to his room by means of a stair-way opening on the street, threw off his outer garments, kicked off his shoes, and taking a bottle from a closet pressed it several times to his lips with long outward breaths of satisfaction. Then, casting his great white bulk upon the bed, in a minute more he had sunk into a heavy sleep – the usual drunken sleep of old King Solomon.

He, too, had attended M. Xaupi's ball, in his own way and in his proper character, being drawn to the place for the pleasure of seeing the fine ladies arrive and float in, like large white moths of the summer night; of looking in through the open windows at the many-colored waxen lights and the snowy arms and shoulders, of having blown out to him the perfume and the music; not worthy to go in, being the lowest of the low, but attending from a door-step of the street opposite – with a certain rich passion in his nature for splendor and revelry and sensuous beauty.

II

About 10 o'clock the sunlight entered through the shutters and awoke him. He threw one arm up over his eyes to intercept the burning rays. As he lay out-stretched and stripped of grotesque rags, it could be better seen in what a mould nature had cast his figure. His breast, bare and tanned, was barred by full, arching ribs and knotted by crossing muscles; and his shirt-sleeve, falling away to the shoulder from his bent arm, revealed its crowded muscles in the high relief of heroic bronze. For, although he had been sold as a vagrant, old King Solomon had in earlier years followed the trade of a digger of cellars, and the strenuous use of mattock and spade had developed every sinew to the utmost. His whole person, now half naked and in repose, was full of the suggestions of unspent power. Only his face, swollen and red, only his eyes, bloodshot and dull, bore the impress of wasted vitality. There, all too plainly stamped, were the passions long since raging and still on fire.

The sunlight had stirred him to but a low degree of consciousness, and some minutes passed before he realized that a stifling, resinous fume impregnated the air. He sniffed it quickly; through the window seemed to come the smell of burning tar. He sat up on the edge of the bed and vainly tried to clear his thoughts.

The room was a clean but poor habitation – uncarpeted, whitewashed, with a piece or two of the cheapest furniture, and a row of pegs on one wall, where usually hung those tattered coats and pantaloons, miscellaneously collected, that were his purple and fine linen. He turned his eyes in this direction now and noticed that his clothes were missing. The old shoes had disappeared from their corner; the cigar stumps, picked up here and there in the streets according to his wont, were gone from the mantel-piece. Near the door was a large bundle tied up in a sheet. In a state of bewilderment, he asked himself what it all meant. Then a sense of the silence in the street below possessed him. At this hour he was used to hear noises enough – from Hugh Lonney's new bath-house on one side, from Harry Sikes's barber-shop on the other.

A mysterious feeling of terror crept over and helped to sober him. How long had he lain asleep? By degrees he seemed to remember that two or three times he had awakened far enough to drink from

the bottle under his pillow, only to sink again into heavier stupefaction. By degrees, too, he seemed to remember that other things had happened – a driving of vehicles this way and that, a hurrying of people along the street. He had thought it the breaking-up of M. Xaupi's ball. More than once had not some one shaken and tried to arouse him? Through the wall of Harry Sikes's barber-shop had he not heard cries of pain – sobs of distress?

He staggered to the window, threw open the shutters, and, kneeling at the sill, looked out. The street was deserted. The houses opposite were closed. Cats were sleeping in the silent door-ways. But as he looked up and down he caught sight of people hurrying along cross-streets. From a distant lumber-yard came the muffled sound of rapid hammerings. On the air was the faint roll of vehicles – the hush and the vague noises of a general terrifying commotion.

In the middle of the street below him a keg was burning, and, as he looked, the hoops gave way, the tar spread out like a stream of black lava, and a cloud of inky smoke and deep-red furious flame burst upward through the sagging air. Just beneath the window a common cart had been backed close up to the door of the house. In it had been thrown a few small articles of furniture, and on the bottom bedclothes had been spread out as if for a pallet. While he looked old Charlotte hurried out with a pillow.

He called down to her in a strange, unsteady voice:

"What is the matter? What are you doing, Aunt Charlotte?"

She uttered a cry, dropped the pillow, and stared up at him. Her face looked dry and wrinkled.

"My God! De chol'ra's in town! I'm waitin' on you! Dress, en come down en fetch de bun'le by de dooh." And she hurried back into the house.

But he continued leaning on his folded arms, his brain stunned by the shock of the intelligence. Suddenly he leaned far out and looked down at the closed shutters of the barber-shop. Old Charlotte reappeared.

"Where is Harry Sikes?" he asked.

"Dead en buried."

"When did he die?"

"Yestidd'y evenin'."

"What day is this?"

"Sadd'y."

M. Xaupi's ball had been on Thursday evening. That night the cholera had broken out. He had lain in his drunken stupor ever since. Their talk had lasted but a minute, but she looked up anxiously and urged him.

"D' ain' no time to was'e, honey! D' ain' no time to was'e. I done got dis cyart to tek you 'way in, en I be ready to start in a minute. Put yo' clo'es on en bring de bun'le wid all yo' yudder things in it."

With incredible activity she climbed into the cart and began to roll up the bedclothes. In reality she had made up her mind to put him into the cart, and the pallet had been made for him to lie and finish his drunken sleep on, while she drove him away to a place of safety.

Still he did not move from the window-sill. He was thinking of Harry Sikes, who had shaved him many a time for nothing. Then he suddenly called down to her:

"Have many died of the cholera? Are there many cases in town?"

She went on with her preparations and took no notice of him. He repeated the question. She got down quickly from the cart and began to mount the staircase. He went back to bed, pulled the sheet up over him, and propped himself up among the pillows. Her soft, heavy footsteps slurred on the stair-way as though her strength were failing, and as soon as she entered the room she sank into a chair, overcome with terror. He looked at her with a sudden sense of pity.

"Don't be frightened," he said, kindly. "It might only make it the worse for you."

"I can' he'p it, honey," she answered, wringing her hands and rocking herself to and fro; "de ole niggah can' he'p it. If de Lohd jes spah me to git out'n dis town wid you! Honey, ain' you able to put on yo' clo'es?"

"You've tied them all up in the sheet."

"De Lohd he'p de crazy ole niggah!"

She started up and tugged at the bundle, and laid out a suit of his clothes, if things so incongruous could be called a suit.

"Have many people died of the cholera?"

"Dey been dyin' like sheep ev' since yestidd'y mohnin' – all day, en all las' night, en dis mohnin'! De man he done lock up de huss, en dey been buryin' 'em in cyarts. En de grave-diggah he done run away, en hit look like d' ain' nobody to dig de graves."

She bent over the bundle, tying again the four corners of the sheet. Through the window came the sound of the quick hammers driving nails. She threw up her arms into the air, and then seizing the bundle dragged it rapidly to the door.

"You heah dat? Dey nailin' up cawfins in de lumbah-yahd! Put on yo' clo'es, honey, en come on."

A resolution had suddenly taken shape in his mind.

"Go on away and save your life. Don't wait for me; I'm not going. And good-bye, Aunt Charlotte, in case I don't see you any more. You've been very kind to me – kinder than I deserved. Where have you put my mattock and spade?"

He said this very quietly, and sat up on the edge of the bed, his feet hanging down, and his hand stretched out towards her.

"Honey," she explained, coaxingly, from where she stood, "can't you sobah up a little en put on yo' clo'es? I gwine to tek you 'way to de country. You don' wan' no tools. You can' dig no cellahs now. De chol'ra's in town en de people's dyin' like sheep."

"I expect they will need me," he answered.

She perceived now that he was sober. For an instant her own fear was forgotten in an outburst of resentment and indignation.

"Dig graves fuh 'em, when dey put you up on de block en sell you same ez you wuz a niggah! Dig graves fuh 'em, when dey allers callin' you names on de street en makin' fun o' you!"

"They are not to blame. I have brought it on myself."

"But we can' stay heah en die o' de chol'ra!"

"You mustn't stay. You must go away at once."

"But if I go, who gwine tek cyah o' *you*?"

"Nobody."

She came quickly across the room to the bed, fell on her knees, clasped his feet to her breast, and looked up into his face with an expression of imploring tenderness. Then, with incoherent cries and with sobs and tears, she pleaded with him – pleaded for dear life; his and her own.

It was a strange scene. What historian of the heart will ever be able to do justice to those peculiar ties which bound the heart of the negro in years gone by to a race of not always worthy masters? This old Virginia nurse had known King Solomon when he was a boy playing with her young master, till that young master died on the way to Kentucky.

At the death of her mistress she had become free with a little property. By thrift and industry she had greatly enlarged this. Years passed and she became the only surviving member of the Virginian household, which had emigrated early in the century to the Blue-grass Region. The same wave of emigration had brought in old King Solomon from the same neighborhood. As she had risen in life, he had sunk. She sat on the sidewalks selling her fruits and cakes; he sat on the sidewalks more idle, more ragged and dissolute. On no other basis than these facts she began to assume a sort of maternal pitying care of him, patching his rags, letting him have money for his vices, and when, a year or two

before, he had ceased working almost entirely, giving him a room in her house and taking in payment what he chose to pay.

He brushed his hand quickly across his eyes as she knelt before him now, clasping his feet to her bosom. From coaxing him as an intractable child she had, in the old servile fashion, fallen to imploring him, with touching forgetfulness of their real relations:

"O my marseter! O my marseter Solomon! Go 'way en save yo' life, en tek yo' po' ole niggah wid you!"

But his resolution was formed, and he refused to go. A hurried footstep paused beneath the window and a loud voice called up. The old nurse got up and went to the window. A man was standing by the cart at her door.

"For God's sake let me have this cart to take my wife and little children away to the country! There is not a vehicle to be had in town. I will pay you – " He stopped, seeing the distress on her face.

"Is he dead?" he asked, for he knew of her care of old King Solomon.

"He *will* die!" she sobbed. "Tilt de t'ings out on de pavement. I gwine t' stay wid 'im en tek cyah o' 'im."

III

A little later, dressed once more in grotesque rags and carrying on his shoulder a rusty mattock and a rusty spade, old King Solomon appeared in the street below and stood looking up and down it with an air of anxious indecision. Then shuffling along rapidly to the corner of Mill Street, he turned up towards Main.

Here a full sense of the terror came to him. A man, hurrying along with his head down, ran full against him and cursed him for the delay:

"Get out of my way, you old beast!" he cried. "If the cholera would carry you off it would be a blessing to the town."

Two or three little children, already orphaned and hungry, wandered past, crying and wringing their hands. A crowd of negro men with the muscles of athletes, some with naked arms, some naked to the waist, their eyes dilated, their mouths hanging open, sped along in tumultuous disorder. The plague had broken out in the hemp factory and scattered them beyond control.

He grew suddenly faint and sick. His senses swam, his heart seemed to cease beating, his tongue burned, his throat was dry, his spine like ice. For a moment the contagion of deadly fear overcame him, and, unable to stand, he reeled to the edge of the sidewalk and sat down.

Before him along the street passed the flying people – men on horseback with their wives behind and children in front, families in carts and wagons, merchants in two-wheeled gigs and sulkies. A huge red and yellow stage-coach rolled ponderously by, filled within, on top, in front, and behind with a company of riotous students of law and of medicine. A rapid chorus of voices shouted to him as they passed:

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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