

Literature, &c.

THE SPIRIT OF THE MAGAZINES.

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THE MISER.

By Maurice O'Quill.

When he reached his house, his uneasiness increased. The place looked like a dungeon; he could hardly remain in it. The scanty meal which he brought from a dingy cupboard was tasteless, and left half consumed. The penny-candle in the iron candlestick burnt more dimly at night; the darkness was darker than ever; the stars looked pale and cold; the wind moaned more sadly than was its wont; and the dogs bayed the ray-less moon in mournful howls he never had heard before. All was cheerless around and within. He played a little while with the key of his coffers, and then concealed it, for he found no more pleasure in touching his gold. He even went to his hard bed without the brace of pistols, which never had left his pillow for years and years together. Money had no great charms for him now. The renewed memories of past happiness, to which gold added no intensity, and which gold could not preserve, had convinced him of his worthlessness. He now looked upon it as his greatest enemy; and had his whole fortune been in bank notes, he very likely would have made a fire with them to warm his cold, shivering hands in the morning.

That night's sleep was sweet to the old man. Feeling that he could lose nothing now; indifferent as to the visit of robbers, if they would not take his life with his treasures; Jacob Ward slept like a child. His dreams were beautiful. He did not struggle all night long to wrest his money bags from house breakers; no dagger was aimed at his breast; no more wicked boys pursued him with cries and insults. No; there was none of this in the old man's dream that night. Instead, he beheld his wife again, young and blooming, loving, caressing, and happy. He held her once more in his arms, and heard her breathe his name fondly. Then his little boy came and jumped upon his knees, and patted his old cheeks with his fat little hands, and played with his long grey hair. The baby crept up to him—his little infant daughter! Anon she grew to girlhood and into beauty, and Jacob recognised his little friend Mary in her blue eyes, her golden hair, and sweet innocent face. Then he awoke, and found his pillow was moist. The old man had been weeping for joy in his sleep!

CHAPTER V.—THE LITTLE GIRL'S FIRST LESSON.

The gossip of—were a great deal puzzled to ascribe a reason for the sudden change in Old Jake Ward's feelings towards the school master. The old man's interest in little Mary was also criticised, and people for want of a better way to satisfy their sagacity, settled upon the conviction that the miser was becoming insane, and that a silly passion possessed him, and had supplanted his love of lucre. Thus did they deny the old man the merit of doing a good action of his own deliberate will; and, instead of relenting, at least as he had relented towards his victim, their execration turned into derision, and the cry of the bad boys of the village changed accordingly, and hailed him as an old idiot.

But Jacob bore this without a murmur. His eye did not kindle with rage, nor even give a sign of displeasure. On the contrary, it looked kindly upon the lads; and he paused often to watch them at their play. Once—and the youngest boy present will never forget it if he live three score years and ten,—yes, once the old man was actually seen to approach a group of children, and fling a handful of cents among them; after which, he laughed heartily at the eagerness with which they wrestled for the pieces.

Scramble away, boys—scramble away,' he muttered on this occasion. 'This is man all over; they would tear one another to pieces for the sake of a few cents.'

The bitterness of this remark was aimed more at gold itself than at the gold seekers. Jake was beginning to pity frail human nature. His eyes were opening to the temptation that beset it, and he almost wondered he had not lived a worse man than he was.—These feelings and impressions strengthened upon the miser's spirit the oftener he met Mary. He loved her as his own child, and would listen to her many an hour with the attention of a docile pupil, when she spoke of goodness and virtue; and he never left her without finding himself a better man. He was lavish of his money with her; but she accepted it reluctantly, and it was only under pain of his serious displeasure that she could be prevailed to take it. Her father, however, would not use these gifts, but directed Mary to devote them to the relief of the poor, especially those who had suffered through Jake's exactions. Among these was the family of a blind man one of Jacob Ward's tenants.—The unfortunate man's quarter of rent was due, and he dreaded the visit of his landlord, for he had no money to offer him.

'He will turn us out in the street,' said he to his wife.

At that moment the door opened, and Mary rushed in breathless.

'Have you seen Mr Ward?' she inquired immediately.

'No; but we expect him every moment,' was the woman's reply.

'I heard he was on his way here,' said the child, 'but I'm glad I've run in before him.'

Here, Mrs Jones—here is some money; pay him, but don't tell him where you got it; and she placed a half eagle in the hand of the poor woman, and rushed out again before they could express their gratitude to the 'dear angel' as they called her.

Mary had just turned the corner when old Jake appeared at the door. Mrs Jones received him very politely, and with greater assurance than usual. He wore a more pleasant countenance than was his wont also.

'Well, my good woman,' he said, taking a seat, 'I suppose you know there is a quarter's rent due.'

'Yes sir, and here's the mosey,' she replied handing him the piece Mary had given her.

'That's right,' said the old man, 'it's a good thing to be punctual in business matters; but I did not call for this; I merely wished to say you might have a little delay if you wanted it.'

The blind man could not believe his ears.

'Wife,' he asked, 'is that Mr Ward speaking?'

'Yes, and I think he's very kind,' was the woman's answer.

Jake felt proud of the compliment, but could make no reply, for he almost blushed like a timid girl at some flattery. He was turning the half eagle in his hand, when suddenly he cried—

'What is this?' and he examined the piece closely. 'Where did you get this money, Mrs Jones?'

The woman became embarrassed, and stammered some unintelligible words.

'That's a piece I've marked,' he cried, fixing one of his keen looks upon her.

'It was given to me,' she replied at last, trembling.

'Humph!' muttered the old man. 'That's singular enough—very singular. I must see into that. Good morning Mrs Jones,' he cried and left with a light step.

The thoughts of the miser—if we may call Jacob Ward miser any longer—reverted immediately to Mary; and while going home, he said to himself—

'Mary did that—just like the child! I gave her the money for herself, or for her mother, and she's been and given it away to that poor woman; what a girl, and what a heart she has! I see through it:—yes, it's as plain as daylight. She knew Jones was a tenant of mine; she heard I was hard with the people in my houses; so she thought I might turn the Jones into the streets, and gave them the money; it's all they had too! I wonder if they have any bread.'

And with this reflection, he turned back and entered the house, to Mrs Jones' consternation; for the poor woman thought he would claim the money as his—perhaps he had lost it, that is, if a miser can be guilty of such carelessness; or, again, it might have been stolen from him; but how could such a sweet looking girl as Mary Parks steal anything on earth? That at least, was impossible.

Jake took a deliberate survey around the room. He felt awkward for he was going to do something that was very unusual with him. He looked at Mrs Jones; then at her blind husband; next out of the window; again at Mr and Mrs Jones, until at last he exclaimed—

'Mrs Jones, I believe you are not very well off.'

'We are poor sir,' she replied, meekly; but its God's will, and we are contented.'

'Humph!' was the old man's exclamation.

'Well,' he said, after a minute's pause, 'some good little soul or other has been here and given you this; I can't take it.' And he handed the gold piece back to the woman, who looked incredulously at him.

'Take it, I say—take it, Mrs Jones,' he insisted.

'But sir, we have nothing else to pay rent with,' she replied.

'Never mind the rent—never mind it,' Mrs Jones, he said, almost impatiently. 'Here, here—take it—buy some bread; buy some wood, some clothes,—any thing you please; take it.—I don't want it.'

Mrs Jones could not say a word so great was her surprise.

'It would be wrong, Mr Ward,' she said sadly, as she gazed inquiringly into his face.

'Don't take it, wife,' said the blind man, who generally allowed Mrs Jones to settle all the business matters of the house.

'I can't take it, Mr Ward,' she repeated once more. 'Indeed,' she continued, 'I fear I did wrong in accepting it from the young girl—perhaps at another time, sir you might be angry at it.'

'Angry at doing good, Mrs Jones!' cried the miser, with indignation. 'But, I see it—I see it,' he pursued, more calmly, as he sighed. 'Mrs Jones, you think I am not in my right mind—you needn't be afraid to say it—speak out.'

'Well sir, stammered the poor woman, 'they say you have acted strangely for a few weeks back.'

'I knew it—I knew it,' cried Jake, with a bitter smile. 'But, don't believe it, Mrs Jones—don't believe it. I have been a fool—and a great sinner, too—but I'm getting wise, Mrs Jones, and I hope better, much better. Take this money, then; if I was making my will, I couldn't give any thing more freely, and in sounder mind,' and he again presented the piece.

The woman hesitated still; but it was no longer from the fear that her landlord was crazy; she was very much surprised, also; still she hesitated, for she had no words ready to thank the old man.

'Mrs Jones,' said he, sternly, and striking his cane to the floor, 'do you take this five dollar gold piece this moment, or as sure as

my name is Jacob Ward, I'll take the roof from over your head.'

The blind man rose, and stretching out his hands in groping his way along exclaimed, in a voice trembling with emotion—

'Mr Ward, where are you sir? give me your hand—I want to shake it!'

Jake passed the money quickly to the woman, and held out his hand.

'There—there! God bless you Mr Ward, God bless you!' Jones exclaimed, shaking the proffered hand heartily.

'Yes, God bless you!' repeated the wife.

Jake looked upon the faces of his tenants, where gratitude expressed itself more than it did in their words; and then feeling a strange emotion, something like joy for the present mingled with remorse for the past, he turned away quickly, and went out into the street muttering—

'I was a fool—yes, an old fool! Why couldn't I make people talk this way sooner?'

'They used to be frightened at me—they never thanked me—they must have cursed me!' and the old man almost shuddered at this thought; but suddenly another reflection came to console him. Said he, stopping all at once, and looking intently upon the ground—

'I wonder if the Joneses will pray for me to night.'

Then he went on at a quicker pace—

rushed into his old house, opened his iron safe in a great hurry, drew out two or three bags, and scattering the glittering contents on the table, counted the pieces, which were all half eagles, and when he had shoved the last aside, he struck his hand upon his knee, exclaiming with an air of boyish satisfaction,

'Five thousand dollars! That's just one thousand blessings for me, besides what I've got in other shapes!' and he looked at sundry packages which occupied several pigeon holes in his safe.

He locked his coffers with more than usual care that night; the true virtue of riches had been revealed to him; and when he laid his head upon his pillow, he exclaimed—

'I wonder if the Joneses have prayed for me!' after which Jake fell into a sweet slumber.

CHAPTER VI.

Mrs Jones made it a point to tell her neighbors that Mr Ward—she used to call him 'Old Jake'—had given her a whole quarter's rent, and that he was not an idiot.

'I wonder what Mary Parks is to him?' every one would say. Some reasoned that the old man had taken a fancy to her from her resemblance to his wife, who was a very good woman; others argued that he felt his life was on the ebb, and that he was beginning a work of atonement for his many offences against charity; while others again maintained that the old man had actually gone mad. These people warned the school master's daughter against him; 'He will be of no good to you,' they would say. But the girl clung to him, and visited him often, and would read to him from a little bible which her mother had given her.

'Let me see the book,' he said, one day after she had laid it down.

She handed it to him. He turned the pages over in a listless way, and said at last—

'My poor wife used to read a chapter to me every evening, and his eyes grew moist at the words.'

'My mother always gets us to her bedside and reads a chapter for us, too,' said Mary.

'How is she, my child?' he asked.

'Very poorly, Mr Ward,' was the reply.

'Couldn't I see her?' he asked, after a moment of silence.

'Certainly,' answered the young girl; 'mother has often said she would like to have you call upon her.'

'But your father dislikes me,' observed the old man.

'You are mistaken, Mr Ward,' said Mary; 'he begins to think a great deal of you—you are so changed.'

'Yes, I am changed—very much changed,' said Jake, who always repeated his words when anything drew him into some absorbing reflection. 'I wish I had seen you sooner Mary, and he laid his hand affectionately upon the girl's head; her hair was like gold, but he did not think of that similitude; he merely looked upon her as a being more than earthly, whom Providence had sent athwart his path to lead him out of the broad way of sin, down which avarice had been so long leading him. 'Yes my child,' he repeated, 'I wish I had seen you long ago, it would have made a great difference with me—a very great difference.'

Mary looked up astonished. If the old man's love for her had astonished the village people, her affection for him was a great matter of wonderment to them. They could not see how a young girl, so playful and gay as the school master's daughter, could attach herself so much to an old man whose very look had been the terror of the children of the neighborhood, and whose appearance had been often invoked by silly nurses to reduce their unruly charges to obedience. Her leisure hours were all devoted to him. It is true that he had been kind to her and her parents; but her gratitude, if such were the feeling that drew her to him, seemed inordinate, and a new surmise arose among the superstitious inhabitants of the place; it was, that Jake Ward had bewitched the young girl. These ignorant persons began to look suspiciously upon Mary; they forbid their children playing with her, and her little companions shunned her, or passed her in silence, or with perhaps a monosyllable in reply to the kind words with which she always greeted them. Officious matrons even went to Cicero Parks, and endeavored to open his eyes to the evil influence which old Jake exerted

over his daughter; but he merely smiled at their absurd counsels, at which they concluded that he too was in the wizard-miser's power. His school, which had never been too full, began to lose its pupils who were gradually withdrawn, until but half a dozen remained.

Cicero saw the children go one by one, as if each was a loaf of bread from his table. Mrs Parks's health grew weaker and weaker every day. At last he entered the school room one morning, determined to dismiss the six or seven boys who still attended, when he was struck with astonishment upon beholding Jacob Ward occupying a seat near the teacher's desk. Cicero turned pale. 'What is he here for?' said he to himself, as his hands fell powerless at his side, for he dreaded the old man had come to add to his misfortunes.

'Good morning Mr Parks,' cried the old man, benignly. 'I'm glad to see you, Mr Parks—very glad. I take you by surprise, perhaps; but I made up my mind last night to see you to day.'

'Well, sir, about what, if you please?' was the school master's question, expressed dryly.

'Only a piece of curiosity, Mr Parks—that's all—mere curiosity,' he exclaimed, rising. 'I want to see your wife—Mrs Parks, Mr Parks.'

'I'm afraid, sir, she cannot receive visitors, answered Cicero, 'she is quite unwell, sir.'

'That's just why I want to see her,' said the old man, thumping his cane to the floor by way of emphasis. 'Isn't it people's duty to visit the sick, Mr Parks?'

'Cicero was undecided what he should do, when Mary rushed in, her eyes bright and her face flushed with a morning race, and her long fair hair floating in ringlets about her neck.

'Good morning, my child,' cried the old man with the joy and affection of a father, as he held out both of his hands to receive her.

'Why, Mr Ward!' she cried, opening her large blue eyes in feigned astonishment; 'I want to know if you have come to school?' and she laughed very gaily.

'You think then, miss, that it is infringing upon your authority,' was Jake's playful reply. 'Mr Parks,' he added, turning to the teacher, 'you have a jewel of a daughter—I couldn't help loving her even'—he continued, his voice falling into a sad accent—'even if she did not remind me of my poor wife! Mr Parks, Mary is a jewel—a precious jewel,' and he patted her affectionately on the head.

Cicero had begun to breathe freely. Jake's demonstrations were not unfriendly, and he thought it would be well to humour his whims and allow him to see Mrs Parks.

'Mary,' said he, 'go to your mother, my child, and ask her if she can receive Mr Ward who would like to see her very much.'

'Yes my child,' added the old man; 'tell her I would consider it a great favor—a very great favor.'

Mary ran off, and returned very soon, saying Mrs Parks would be very glad to see Mr Ward.

The young girl took Jake by the hand, and led him into her mother's room, followed by her father. Mrs Parks was seated in an arm chair, and though her features were emaciated by long suffering, they revealed that she had once been a beautiful woman. She seemed much older than she really was, her age being a little past thirty. As Jake approached, he gazed keenly at her. She supposed it was from his eccentric nature; but when he drew nearer and stopped without uttering a syllable, his manner surprised her. Her husband came to her relief.

'My wife this is Mr Ward,' he said, drawing to the old man's side.

'I am very glad to see little Mary's good old friend,' said Mrs Parks in a feeble, but very sweet voice.

Jake started as she spoke, then he drew nearer. She extended her thin, pale hand to him, he took it eagerly, but was still speechless.

Cicero feared the old man was indeed out of his head. 'Mr Ward,' he exclaimed, noticing a quivering of Jake's lips, 'are you unwell?'

'No, no,' said the miser scarcely above a whisper, 'but there's something here,—and he struck his breast—'something' that beats as if it would break,' he added pressing his hand to his heart.

'Take a seat,' Mr Ward, and Mary brought him a chair.

The miser sat with his eyes still riveted upon the features of the astonished Mrs Parks. At last he spoke:

'I never saw such a likeness! Mary looks a great deal like her—but although you are thin and pale, I should say she stood before me.'

'Who?' inquired the invalid, alarmed at the incoherent sentences of her visitor.

'My wife, Mrs Parks—my poor wife!' and he rested his forehead upon his cane, and a big tear fell to the floor, where it spattered like a rain drop.

He still grasped the woman's hand, and having overcome his emotion, gazed at her as intensely as before, when suddenly he cried:

'My God!' and fell back senseless in his chair.

Cicero rushed to him, and took him in his arms and laid him on a bed in a room adjoining, where he soon revived under the application of restoratives. He gazed wildly about the room, and from the school master to his daughter, who were both at his side, speechless with astonishment.

'Where is my child?—my daughter?' was the first words which Jake uttered.

Cicero made no reply. He thought the old man was wandering in his mind.