

# The Bedford Gazette.

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BY MEYERS & MENGEL.

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"By the grace of God, I am what I am." I was born in London, and I remember nothing but poverty—stalking crime and absolute want. The houses where I lived were in various stages of filth and decay. Whether the old bear eyed man who kicked and commanded me was my father I never knew. Whether the woman who sometimes fed and often beat me was my mother, I cannot say. All I know is, that I had a miserable drag about life of it, going round after cold victuals, knocking smaller boys down to get the contents of their broken baskets, and hunting for old rags in the gutter.

I suppose I was rather a good looking boy; they call me good looking now for an old man. I know I was smart, comparing myself with children as I see them.

Of course I was like the rest of my class, I could fight a little, wear a little and steal a little, and at a good deal, that is, when I got the chance, which was seldom. I was ignorant—I didn't know one letter from another, and didn't want to. What did I care about education—I, who never saw a book from one year's end to another?

And love, gratitude, hope, I could of course understand neither. Nobody loved me, therefore I loved nobody. Nobody had ever made me grateful—had ever held out hope to me.

Some strange impulse was given me one day. I waked up, sprang from my bundle of straw, and involuntary words came from my lips, "I am going to do something to-day." What that something was, I had not the remotest idea, but I put on my ragged clothes, and sallied out in my vagabond way whistling, caring for nobody.

It was about noon, and I had not yet tasted a mouthful of food. I was hungry, and skulked about grocery shops, hoping I could get an opportunity to take something that would stay my appetite, till I felt in the humor for begging. Passing round the corner of a public street, I saw a genteel-looking man, standing at his horse's head, gazing about him somewhat perplexed. "Boy," he cried, "won't you take care of my horse for half an hour?"

"Yes sir," said I. I think it was the first time that I ever put on the "sir."

"There's a man!" he exclaimed. I've got considerable fruit here and you must guard it well; just stand here quietly—nobody'll disturb you. He went away, and I stood for a while till I was tired. Then, thinks I, "I'll get a haful of fruit and run." But for the first time I felt an instinct of shame at the suggestion.

"He trusted me—he saw I was a mean looking fellow, too; but he trusted me and I won't abuse his kindness."

Something like this reasoning ran in my head, and I squatted down on the curb stone feeling the importance of an honorable trust as I had never felt such a thing before. Presently some of my fellows came along and hailed me. I told them to go on. They peered about the cart, and saw the sunny faces of the peaches. "We'll have some of them," they said.

"No you won't," says I, "I'm put in charge here, and I won't see the first thing stole." With that they began a rumpus. They reached over the cart. I struck them, and used such efforts that they all came pell-mell upon me, and we fought till the blood came; but I vanquished them.

Just then came the proprietor. "What's the matter?" says he. "Oh, nothing; only I had to fight for your stuff here," says I. "You did, eh? You've got a black eye for it."

"No matter," says I. "I mean them boys shouldn't steal a peach, and they didn't neither."

"Well, you've good pluck—here's a crown for you."

"My eyes stood out. 'A whole crown,' says I. 'Yes; do what you please with it, but I'd advise you to buy a pair of shoes.'"

"Thank you, says I, with a beating heart. It pays to be good don't it?"

He smiled a curious smile, asked me several questions, and ended by taking me home with him.

Home! I thought I was in heaven, albeit I have seldom heard of such a place. My heart beat heavily every time I dared put my foot upon those rich carpets. The mirrors were some thing new to me. The next day they came a man to see me. I was washed clean and had on a good suit of clothes. Says he, "Youngster, I am going to where you live, and probably shall make a bargain with your people. I want a boy, just such a bold clever boy as you are, and if you behave yourself, I promise you that you shall have as pleasant a home as you desire."

Well, that was good. I hardly dared to speak or breathe, for fear of breaking the illusion. I never was so happy as I was that day. They gave me light tasks to do. I wished they were more important. From that day I was treated as one of the household. The man was a widower, and had no children; consequently, I became to him as a son. He educated me handsomely, and when I was twenty one, he died, and left me three thousand pounds.

Well, I considered myself a rich man. I gloated over my wealth; it became an idol to me. How to increase it was my first desire. I consulted competent men, and under their counsel I put my money out on interest, bought stocks and mortgages.

I grew wealthier; my business (my benefactor had stocked me a fancy shop) prospered, and I was in a fair way, I thought, to marry Lucy Manning.

Sweet Lucy Manning! the most artless, winning maiden in all the world to me. I loved her deeply, dearly. She was blue-eyed, auburn-haired, her disposition was that of an angel, and I had pledged my vows to her.

One night I was invited to the house of a prosperous merchant, and there I met a siren in the person of his niece, a black eyed girl, whose charms and whose fortunes were equally splendid. She was an heiress in her own right, was beautiful and accomplished.

Heavens, what a voice was hers—pure, clear, sweet, ravishing! I was charmed, and she was pleased with me. Alas, I met her too often!

In her presence I forgot my gentle Lucy; she magnetized, thrallwed me. It was triumph to feel that so beautiful, gifted, and wealthy a woman loved me—me, who had been brought up in the purlieus of a city, who had known misery and corruption all the first years of my life.

Gradually I broke off my intimacy with Lucy. I received no token from her, she was too proud. But that cheek grew pale, that eye languid, and though I seldom met her, I knew in my heart that she was suffering, and branded myself a villain.

At last she knew with certainty that I was to marry Miss Bellair. She sent me a letter, a touching letter, not one word of upbraiding nor one of regret. Oh, what a noble soul! I wondered!—But she could calmly wish me joy, though the effort made her heart bleed. I knew it did.

I tried however to forget her. I could not. Even at my magnificent wedding, when my bride stood before me, radiant in rich fabrics and glittering diamonds, the white face of poor Lucy glided in between, and made my heart throb guiltily. Oh, how rich I grew! Year after year I added to my gold. My miserly disposition began to manifest itself soon after my marriage. I carried my gold first to banks, and then to my own private safes.

I put constraint on my wife, for very generously she had made over her whole fortune to me, and began to grumble at the expenses. I made our living so frugal that she remonstrated, and finally ran up large bills where and when she pleased. Against this I protested, and we had open quarrels more than once.

My clothes grew shabby, I could not afford to buy new ones, although the interest of my investments was more than I could possibly spend for rational pleasures.

I grew finally dissatisfied with everything but my money. I neglected my wife, and grew careless of her society. Several gentlemen came to my house, among them a would-be author and celebrity. He came, I thought too often for my good name, and I ordered my wife to discontinue his company. She refused, and I locked her in her room. How she managed to set herself free I never knew; but in the evening, when I returned, she was gone from the house. That caused me some uneasiness; not much, for I was soon absorbed in taking account of my gains.

It was, perhaps, nine in the evening, I had just managed to take up a paper for a moment to read out its business details, when the door opened, and in came my wife, dressed bewitchingly, as if just from an evening concert, followed by that mouthached celebrity. "Good evening, my dear," she said in the coldest way imaginable, and placed a chair for her friend. "Stop!" I cried, my jealousy aroused; "what man sits down in my house?"

"That man—a gentleman and my friend, shall sit here if I please!" said my wife, firmly.

My passion was excited then as it never was before, and I collared the second. He was a my match; but my wife put a dirk-knife that she drew from a case into his hand, and he stabbed me. I fainted, and I remember nothing more till I found myself on a bed in my own chamber, watched over by my housekeeper.

"Where are they?" I gasped. "Gone!" was all she said.

It occurred to me then, like a flash of lightning, that somebody was near me at the time I was wounded, that my keys were about my person, and that I had been robbed, perhaps, of all my available property.

The thought threw me into an agony of fear. I ordered my clothes to be brought to me. The keys were there. Taking one of them out, I told Mrs. Hale, my housekeeper to go to my safe, and bring me the papers that were there. She returned, her face white with terror, to say there was nothing there, all the little doors were open.

"Robbed! robbed!" I yelled with imprecations, and again my senses deserted me.

Brain fever ensued. For weeks I lay deprived of reason, literally treading the verge of the grave. One morning I was conscious of a sinking, deadly feeling, as if I had opened my eyes. Was it an angel I saw standing beside me, her soft eyes full of pity, looking down upon me with the most commiserating gentleness. For a moment I thought I might be in heaven; but no, I reasoned with myself—My treasure was all of the earth, earthly. Again I opened my dim eyes. The vision seemed wavering now, but oh, did it not wear the beauty of sweet Lucy Manning? A quiet, motherly peace took possession of my entire being. I forgot wealth, health, everything.