

The Benevolence of I. Solomon

By Max Marcin

Drawings by M. Leone Bracker

SUSPENDERS, shoelaces, collar buttons!" The drawing monotone in which he called his wares had in it something of the appealing helplessness of his expression. He was a young man, although the fringe of tawny beard gave him an appearance of middle age. His figure was heavy, its awkward lines accentuated by the loose drooping clothes he wore. He had the slow, shuffling gait of enfeebled age, as if each step brought a twinge of pain. There was a lumbering gawkiness in his movements, like an animal crossing a stretch of shifting sand. Across his shoulders a broad black strap was looped; from it was suspended a long, flat, glass covered box which appeared to be hinged to his form. The rigid lines of the box, supported against his belt, inspired the suggestion of a walking showcase.

The forlorn look of the immigrant who has not yet adapted himself to his new environment intensified the hopeless expression of his face. An air of depression, of utter desolation, enwrapped him like a fog. As he walked slowly homeward, his shoes were sodden with the slush of the streets, his hands were benumbed with cold. He had the distressing appearance of the hunted animal.

With a weary jerk he turned the corner of the block in which he lived. As he did so he observed a group of boys scattered about a mound of snow piled between the curb and the car tracks. Instinctively he scented danger. He lifted his arms as a shield against the volley of snowballs that fell about him. The shower of white shot, compressed into hardness, cut across his path as he quickened his steps; his grotesque efforts to dodge the hail of frozen balls impelled the young miscreants to more ferocious onslaughts. When he reached his home he leaned for an instant against the iron support of the steps. As he did so, a ball that had been squeezed into ice caught him between the eyes. A great rage, accompanied by a desire to strangle one of his tormentors, swelled within him. He made a wild dash in the direction of the snowy mound, when a second shot struck him above the ear. Its stinging impact sent him sprawling helplessly in the street.

A SHOUT of hilarious triumph came from the throats of the assailants. It was turned into a cry of pressing danger when a woman's form darted out of the basement of the house and hurled itself among the pelting youths. Her two clenched hands cut a variety of figures in the air and descended on the heads of the tormentors.

"You dhurrt imp!" she exclaimed with a broad, angry accent. "I'll crack the skull av the furrst one av yez I lay me hands on. Why can't you let the poor man alone? He ain't botherin' you."

When she had dispersed the attacking party she turned her attention to the peddler. He had lifted himself to a sitting posture, his arms supporting his frame. His breath came in painful gasps; he had not the strength to rise. A convulsive shudder racked his frame, a look of harrowing misery was stamped on his face. From his eyes, as he looked into the face of his rescuer, beamed the gratitude of his heart.

Moved by his misery, she looked at him pitifully, a great human tenderness glowing on her face. "Mike! Dennis!" she shouted with sudden determination through the grated basement door. The tall form of the janitor of the building emerged from the areaway and stood by the side of his wife. Behind him came Dennis, a chubby youth in patched knickerbockers.

"He's one av the boarders up shtairs," the wife explained. "Carry him inside."

They laid him on a sofa in the janitor's apartment. "He's terrible sick," she said compassionately. "We'll look after the poor haythen till he's able to go out."

I. SOLOMON, wholesale clothing manufacturer, occupied four big lofts facing Broadway. Two large factories in Brownsville kept the lofts supplied with an imposing stock of garments. The traveling salesmen of I. Solomon spread like tentacles across the country, drumming business to the office and earning comfortable commissions for themselves. Twice a year I. Solomon took stock and counted the profits, which—please God, he would acknowledge humbly—showed a consistent tendency to climb upward.

The personal appearance of I. Solomon reflected the prosperity of the clothing establishment. His heavy form, inclined toward corpulence, radiated business acumen. A neatly trimmed beard set off in a tawny framework features instinct with lively good humor. Two shrewd eyes, peering beneath a well shaped forehead, illumined the face with a watchful glare.

Solomon's office was on the first floor at the Broadway end of the loft. The door always stood



The Forlorn Look of the Immigrant Intensified His Hopeless Expression.

invitingly open. Rows of shelves piled high with white boxes stretched from the office half the length of one side of the loft. These boxes, for which Solomon could have no possible use in his business, invariably aroused wonder among new customers.

"Branching out with a side line?" a buyer would ask.

"No, sir," would come the quick response. "I, Solomon is strictly a manufacturer of men's and boys' clothing. He has troubles enough without taking on extra ones on the side."

"You don't pack your goods in those pasteboard boxes, I hope?" the buyer usually asked.

The question invariably brought to Solomon's face an expanding smile of self satisfaction. It was followed by a little speech. "I am a business man," he would say, with an approving look down the length of the loft. "I run my establishment on strict business principles. I buy as low as I can and sell as high as I can; but always a little lower than my rivals. I pay good wages and demand good work. There is no waste here; everything is utilized. But I find time for a little charity. It's a hobby of mine. When a man is down, I believe in uplifting him; but I have my own way of doing it. I uplift him by the feet."

When he had noted the puzzled expression of the buyer, Solomon continued. "A man may be hungry, and retain his courage; his clothes may be worn and shiny, yet he may retain his self respect; but when he is down at the heels, when the soles of his shoes are worn away, he is a pitiful object indeed. So I always keep on hand a large variety of shoes. When a man asks me for help, I look at his heels. If they are worn, I bring him here and give him a new pair of shoes. Maybe I do a little more for him; but it's the shoes that count. You have no idea how a solid sole and a well shaped heel will brace a man. If he's any good at all, they'll make him expand his chest, throw back his head, and start out with new courage.

With a pair of new shoes on his feet, he feels the ground under him firmer. The dying fires of his ambition are fanned into a new flame, hope succeeds dejection, and he starts out to win in the fight for existence. I tell you, the average man with a pair of good shoes on his feet will never lie down!" Having finished his little speech, Solomon invariably turned to the business at hand.

IN the big packing room of the establishment Dennis O'Brien worked. The sturdy vigor of his frame enabled him to bear with ease the heavy loads of garments he carried from the elevator shaft to the big packing cases. He lifted a battered nickel watch from the pocket of his open waistcoat and, noting the time, went to Solomon's office. As he stood timidly at the door, he observed his employer busily sorting a pile of invoices.

"What is it?" Solomon asked, looking up from the accumulation of papers.

"I'd like to knock off work at two o'clock to-day," O'Brien responded.

"What for?"

"My parents celebrate their silver wedding to-night. I want to go home and help fix up the house."

"What!" O'Brien noted the rising inflection of the voice. "So you want to leave business at two o'clock in the afternoon, eh?" The employer looked thoughtfully out of the window. "Well, I guess it's all right. I guess— What! You just wait a minute!" Solomon suddenly spluttered. His demeanor underwent a remarkable change. His eyes seemed to flash anger. "You've got the nerve to tell me you want to knock off work so you can decorate your house?" he continued. "Do you think my customers will wait for their goods because your parents are celebrating their silver wedding? No sir, not on your life! I'm paying you to pack cases, not to decorate houses."

"But—"

"I don't want to hear any 'buts'!" Solomon snapped. "Go back and do your work!"

Solomon watched the retreating figure of his employee with a quaint smile. The angry glint faded from his eyes and in the widening orbs appeared a wistfulness which followed the broad, muscular form until it disappeared behind a row of stacked garments.

O'Brien, puzzled by the sudden change that had come over his employer, returned to the packing room.

"Turned down?" the foreman asked, noting his air of dejection.

The packer did not respond. He was unable to comprehend the sudden discrimination against him, knowing as he did that in ordinary circumstances Solomon would have sent him home in all probability with a message of congratulation to his parents. He asked himself what had come over the boss; but was unable to think of a satisfactory explanation. Gradually anger and resentment rose within him, threatening an explosive outburst which was restrained only by fear of the consequences. The reflection that the busy season was drawing rapidly to a close and that a new job would be hard to obtain checked the impulse to quit his employment. He continued to work; but on the edge of revolt.

IT'S four hours' overtime work for everybody to-night," suddenly shouted the foreman. "The boss's orders," he added.

O'Brien dropped the stack of garments he was carrying. The lines of his face contracted to resoluteness and he marched boldly to his employer's office.

Solomon was hanging up the telephone receiver when he observed his employee at the door. "What! You here again? Did you hear what I said over the telephone?" he questioned.

"No, I didn't," came the sullen reply. "I didn't come here to listen to what you said over the telephone; I came here—"

"I won't listen to you!" Solomon shouted in exasperation. "You go back to work! And if you don't want to work, get out!"

O'Brien's face grew livid with rage. "That's what I'll do—get out!" he shouted. He shoved his clenched fist close to the face of his employer. "If it wasn't for the disgrace of being locked up on the day of the old man's silver wedding," he continued. "I'd knock your block off! There ain't another man in the place you wouldn't have let off to-day. I've worked here six years, and there's never been a thing against me. Why should I be discriminated against? Just because I want to get off early, you make us work overtime—"

"Don't you get double pay for overtime?" interrupted Solomon.

"To the blazes with your double pay!" shouted the enraged packer. "You can keep your money."

"Much obliged to you for telling me," Solomon answered complacently. His indifference aggravated the seething anger of the packer. O'Brien's arm shot backward in preparation for a vicious thrust; but he checked himself in time and marched out of the office.

"I'm afraid," he said, turning as he passed through the door, "if I hit you I'd kill you."

A sigh of relief came from Solomon when he saw his employee depart. He walked to the window and