

THE BEGGAR'S VICTORY.

"A map of India hung against the white-washed wall, and nearly opposite a profile picture of the merchant in his younger days.

"One day, Robert Ritterbone was busy writing in his office until quite late at night. Finishing his labors at the desk, he at length drew a stool toward the hearth, and sat down to rest before the bright, blazing oak-log fire.

"The old man seemed ill at ease, and, as he reeled his tired limbs, murmured aloud the thoughts that filled his mind, and which seemed to trouble him.

"No, no, Robert will never fill the place I shall soon vacate forever. What will become of him I know not, when I am gone. The wealth I have saved by years of toil will soon melt away in the sunshine of his spendthrift way of living. Oh! how I wish it had been my lot to leave a prudent representative behind to profit by what I have done, and to improve thereon. But no; the name of Ritterbone, at my death, which can not be far distant, will become worthless, and the old signboard change from an emblem of activity to a symbol of idleness and inactivity.

"As the fire burned low, and began to flash and sparkle in the ashes, the old merchant rose up from his hard seat, and approaching the desk, stooped down and took from the shelf beneath it an old book, dusty and dark with use and age.

"Returning to his seat by the fire, he drew from his coat-pocket a package of notes on the Bank of England.

"Opening the old philosophy, the merchant, with great care, placed between its leaves ten of the notes. With the last note in his hand, he went to the desk and wrote thereon—

"If all the rest have gone away,
No longer bend thy steps astray.

Then, placing it in the old book, the merchant returned it to its previous place on the shelf beneath the time-worn desk; then, as he prepared to leave the office, he murmured to himself, striving to cast off in words the thoughts that seemed a burden to his mind:

"Yes, Robert is wild; he seems to see no value in gold but the pleasure it will buy; he feels in prison when within these walls, even for one day. I fear the future; in it I see harvests of sorrow for my son. It may be that when he needs the most, the old philosophy will be able to him good; so may it. I run the risk. There, in the good old book, is enough to start him anew, should he fail. There it must remain. Providence, in time, will restore it, if so intended, to his care; and if then in need, save him from want."

"With these words uttered, the old merchant cast a dish of water on the smouldering fire, placed the hour-glass upon the desk, re-examined the fastened doors and windows, turned the key, and left his office, never more to return.

"That night, in his sleep, calmly and without pain, died Robert Ritterbone.

"It was near the East River, at that period, that the poorer classes clustered. There, then, used to stand, not far from the foot of Wall street, an old building known as 'The Block.' In this old rookery lived many poor people; in fact, swarmed it when all were home. In one of the garret rooms, up under the very eaves, lived or hid away, at times, a homeless and nameless wail. Had this curious mortal specimen been asked his age, or from whence he came, or why he ever had being, he could not for his life have told.

"The dwellers in 'The Block' had each, in turn, given him for years from their scanty store, and allowed him to keep his hiding place beneath the rafters.

"The clothes he wore, and the covering that kept him warm in winter in his nest of straw, upon the hard floor, he had got by earnest begging. From the sailors he had learned to read and write catches of several languages. Once told, he never forgot; therefore, with such a memory at his command, became, as he gradually grew older, a favorite among those who, from time to time, sent him about the town on errands of trust. Yet, he was very poor, and often suffered for necessities beyond his power to obtain.

"He had often paused, when very small, before the door of Robert Ritterbone, tempted to ask from the kind-hearted merchant, employ; but when he had fully resolved, one look at his ragged clothing changed his mind. He had heard of the old merchant's death; he had also heard that the young owner of the establishment, by sumptuous living and inattention, had nearly lost his standing among business men.

"One bitter cold day in winter, the unknown of 'the block,' chilled and hungry, paused before the store of Robert Ritterbone, Jr., finally entered, and asked for assistance, but was refused; begged for work, but was again denied; pleaded for a few coins to buy bread; urged for something to exchange for food.

"At last the heart of young Ritterbone was touched, and taking from a corner of the much changed and ornamented office, a bundle of old papers and books, handed them to the beggar, with a few coins, and told him to be gone.

"That night, in his cheerless garret, the unknown sat on a block of wood before his hearthstone fire, and by its feeble light turned over, one by one, the dusty pages of an old philosophy, discovered in the package of worthless papers he had received that day from Robert Ritterbone.

All at once he started up from his seat and let the old book fall from his hands. Grasping firmly in one hand a small square slip of paper, he knelt down close to the fire, and with his eyes fixed upon the paper, read aloud: 'One thousand pound note on the Bank of England. Wildly turning, he grasped the old book again, and, as he nervously turned over page after page, his eyes sparkled brighter than his damp wood fire. Again he started, even trembled, from head to foot, for from the book he saw slide out, and down upon the black and dingy hearth, nine more notes, exactly like the one he held crumpled in his hand, round which his fingers, with a vice-like clutch, were fixed.

"Taking the notes from the hearth where they had fallen, he gave each a hurried look, again put them in the old book, which one, he threw his little stock of fuel upon the fire, and soon his retreat was illuminated in every corner by the blazing hearth.

"Once more opening the old book,

which he had again laid down upon the hemlock block, he took off his ragged coat, and hung it over the door-latch closely; then from his straw pile he borrowed his only blanket; this he folded over the sky window of his low-roofed home.

"Along the lower edge of the door he pushed up the straw that served him both as barrier and bed; then listening for a few moments, as if in doubt whether to proceed, he took up the book as carefully as it had been made of glass, knelt down upon his knees near the centre of his rough plank floor, the beggar boy's domain, and spread out before him in the fire light glare, the gift of chance, the ten bank notes that told him that he was worth ten thousand pounds. First, he placed them like a parabola line, from right to left; secondly piled them one above the other, patted them with his hands, then turned them over or took them up as if to feel their heft, for to him they balanced many years of want and sorrow that could not have been explained to him by tons. Next he laid them upon the floor in three rows of three, with one alone in their advance. This plan seemed to please him best, for they thus looked like some grand army marching victoriously onward, led on by some brave commander. Thus he sat until the fire grew dim. He had usually loved the darkness of his room, for then he slept; but now he hated its advance, and resolved to drive it back. Lifting the hemlock block, his only chair, from the hearth, he placed it on the fire and fanned it with his breath until it sent up the chimney a brilliant flame that made the room as light as day, then folding his arms, he walked round and round the precious emblems of his fortune with all the dignity of a king; and when tired of this, again bent down and imagined how best he should enjoy the pleasures, the thousand comforts it could shower around him. By turns he laughed and cried; became lost to everything about him, or felt the joy that swelled his brain and heart, the mighty fact that he was no longer poor."

"But, in the midst of all this, there came into his mind a sudden realization that hurried every castle he had built, to atoms, crushed every gilded hope, and rang through his brain the simple truth, and made his tongue speak out a single sentence, spangled with honesty:

"It is not mine!"

To be continued.

"Did you ever go to evening parties?" "No," said my friend Tom, "I used to, but now I am cured." "How so," said I, anxious to learn his experience. "Why, you see," said Tom, feelingly, "I went to one some years back, and fell in love with a beautiful girl, I courted like a trump, and thought I had her sure, when she eloped with a tailor. I swore vengeance. I patronized the robber of my happiness, and ordered a full suit, regardless of expense. I struck the tailor in his most vital part. I never paid that bill; but those infernal clothes were the cause of all my misfortunes. I captivated my present wife in them. She told me so. But I'm bound to get even with that tailor. I'll leave him a legacy, on condition that he marries my widow."

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