

Complete Story.

A Marriage of Sympathy.

(By Gertrude F. Lynch.)

Night in Union Square. Not the night of God separated from the day by the curtain of blackness, but the night of man, hideous with noise, glaring with electric light, teeming with suggestions to unrest. On the hot pavements, baked by the merciless sun of noonday, still exhaling scorching breaths, still burning the thinly-clad feet of the passers-by, men and women strolled along, coming from the vaudeville, from the restaurants, from the "gardens," where a momentary refreshment of food and drink had palliated the misery of the stifling heat. A cosmopolitan crowd, even the enforced slowness of movement not disguising its excitability, with littleness of aim and motive written in face, clothing, gesture; a middle-class crowd out for an airing, interspersed with women of the street, shop-lifters, pickpockets, disguised by placidity of motion, and now and then a blue-coated policeman, awe-inspiring, not by his individuality, but by the silent power of the institution which he represented; a loitering crowd, many of whom had left hot rooms for a breath of cooler air and now, tired with heat and noise, were returning to them again.

Swirling around curves the cable-cars, stopping here and there to pick up and dislodge passengers, added their not inconsiderable tumult to the general turbulence and unrest.

In the centre of the square an oasis of silence and verdure left by grasping corporations; a plash of fountains, a subtle fragrance of foliage; a majestic outline, of bronze statues; on the asphalt walks which crossed the park; vignettes cut by the moon-like rays from towering arc lights and, overhead, interlacing branches of trees, forming arcades of restful splendour, suggesting solitude, the one beauty in an environment of hideous architecture, death-dealing mechanics, inharmonious humanity.

At about eleven o'clock a young man, leaving the crowded pavements, entered the park at the corner of Broadway and Fourteenth street. He was a young man who had never seen better days. His clothing hung about him, ill-fitting, ragged, and marked with travel stains. It was not a clothing which boasted the benefit of a fundamental note of harmony in its selection, but like those apartments furnished by the caprices of auction-mad inhabitants, had in its completeness a certain grotesqueness, a detail of which the wearer was as unhappily indifferent as he was to most of the unfortunate realities of existence—an amiability which was nature's compensation for generations of subtractions. It was a clothing which had come to him by beggary, by charity, by chance, a sartorial jest bringing a smile to many a face as he pursued his way, unconscious of the buffoon role he was called upon to enact.

He was as much at home in the Square as the birds that fluttered among the trees, as the flowers outlining the fountain's rim. The summer, so hateful to many with its heat and noise, meant to him the opportunity of resting on a park bench in the fresh air of night instead of the stuffy atmosphere of a lodging house, where, for ten or fifteen cents, he could secure a "shake-down," filthy with its odour of past sleepers, in a crowded loft, or a cot in a police station where, under the title of "vagrant," in colder weather, he could obtain a housing at the city's expense.

He had a shock of yellow hair, unkempt, with a tendency to curl; a stubble of beard of slow growth and light, which did not detract from the freshness of his youthful face and big blue eyes, infantile in colour and superficiality of expression, completing a physiognomy which helped him when necessary to establish relations of confidence with his fellow-men.

He was a waif of the streets. Born in a distant State, a foundling, he had been turned out by the generosity of taxpayers when his age was such as to render the generosity practicable. In the shadow of eternal hills, in a barren village where the anæmic in-

habitants forced by superhuman industry a meagre living from the unfruitful soil, he worked out the first years of his life. Scanty hours of teaching were given him, required by that law which was the only parent he would ever know. His was not the nature which produces a great man from such beginnings. He accepted the educational efforts as he accepted everything else that came to him; as he did everything required of him, without question, without protest, without curiosity. He learned to read, to add a little. He gained a few vague ideas of the world outside his limited horizon—that was all.

His manual information was more exact and more abundant. He learned to hay, to sow, to reap, to saw and cut wood. He was a healthy animal, untainted by the caprice of ambition.

Occasionally in the warmer months he rested in the shadow of a wall whose stony crevices were benignant with running vines, or by the side of a redolent hayrick. In colder weather he sought a corner of the barn loft where he reclined on the golden straw. There, wearied by physical activity, he would spell out painfully random paragraphs from newspapers, or, lured by some hideously inartistic nightmare on a yellow-covered, coarsely-printed book which had fallen into his hands, would piece out his scanty store of worldly knowledge by patchwork morsels of fact and fancy.

In the haying season tramps would come demanding work, attracted by the presentiment of food and roof. Then he would listen to their tales of that Southern district toward which, later, like migratory birds, they would start, eager to go as they had been to come.

One night he awoke in the darkness. In the distance he could hear a rumble coming nearer—nearer, nearer. He pictured the approaching monster as he had so often seen it, a long, sinuous trail tearing along the earth, heralded by a luminous eye which fascinated, terrified, emboldened. It was the freight train. Two miles from this tiny attic loft it would wait a half hour on the switch. He knew this as he knew other details of his surroundings. He had never anticipated using the information, he had simply absorbed it as he did the air.

He had a few things in a corner of the loft for which he fought with the rats for possession. A rusty knife with two half blades, a tiny compass he had found in the woods, a pair of mittens, a bright scarf, red and yellow, given him by a Cuban refugee, with whom he had farmed the year before. These he tied together in the remnant of an old bandanna handkerchief. He climbed down the steep ladder which led to the attic, opened the door and pursued his way in the direction of the moving train, controlled by an irresistible impulse to get away; to go somewhere, he knew not where; to do something, he knew not what. He esconced himself in a corner of an empty freight train and, in this way, commenced his vagrant career.

He did not know the name of the town where he was finally ejected with a laugh and curse, nor the names of other towns and cities he visited in turn, and he did not care. There were other things to engage his attention, novelties of buildings, of men and women, of parks, of shops, of slums. He slept in doorways, on benches. He ate when he could. He made transient friends; he did odd jobs of work when impulse or starvation prompted; he stole rides on trains; he got "lifts" on country roads. He walked and rested, then walked again. Sickness he did not know; sorrow and happiness alike were strangers. In time the meagre beginnings of his education were increased by strange additions. He could tell an honest from a dishonest man. He knew when to ask charity and when to abstain. He saw the terrible chasm in the existing social system and wondered, not bitterly, not with any coherence of ideas or reasoning, as he wondered at the cosmic forces, as he wondered at the structure of railroads, sky-scrapers, or bridges. He learned something about laws, those of nature and those of man, and

separating the chaff from the wheat, retained only those which were essential to his own particular needs.

In his blood, which had filtered like that of most ancestors, through knave and saint alike, there was a predominant trait of honesty, kept alive in its sickly infancy by his training in a New England village where watchdogs were unknown and doors left unguarded at night.

He respected the rights of property. Vagrant he might be, thief he never was. Except for the rides he stole on trains, denoting a mental inability to grasp the fact that corporations can be cheated, a belief shared by older and wiser men than himself, his honesty was almost phenomenal in its simplicity. Companioned often with thieves, he never partook of their bounty, never shared the excitement of search, never betrayed them. To steal one must have wants, and he had none. To betray one must have jealousy, discontent, and he knew them not.

In the ceaseless panorama of men and things which formed his daily life, in the constant and regular succession of irregularities, he saw and heard many wonderful things. Ignorant of the world's necessities, he was unmoved by its achievements and discoveries. In him, the cyclone in Kansas aroused no greater feeling of wonder than the thunderstorm amid the hills of New Jersey; the palatial residences of fifth Avenue no greater interest than the hovels of Chinatown.

One thing alone ever seemed to move him from the inertness of a regard, paralysed by the violent contrasts of an existence which was lived out in city and country, in the north and south, edging luxury, and squalor, the wandering existence of a nineteenth century Ishmaelite.

One thing alone! Sometimes on country roads, sometimes on the city streets, attracted by a light from an unsheltered window, he would peer in to see an interior which suggested permanence, a man and woman with children about them, a happy household. There he would always stop and look a long time, his eyes enlarged in wonder, an indefinitely wistful expression on his unwrinkled face, symbol of something stirring within.

Had his mother, outcast from such a home, stamped on his pre-natal existence a desire for that which she had forfeited? Or was the Divine spark, seemingly extinguished by materialism and indirect strength, seeking this means to establish its possession?

In the streets or parks, in stores or lanes, this domestic tri-union ever attracted, ever drew from him longing looks, ever caused him to turn and watch it wend its way content in its triple completeness.

His Rome was New York, and towards it all his roads led. In New York, Union Square, with its tiny park and its surroundings of constantly changing crowds, high buildings and turbulent movement, was the climax of his desires. To him it was the hub of the universe, the centre of irresistible attraction.

He nodded to the tall policeman as he entered. The latter did not deign to return the salute, but looked at

him not unkindly, remembering him as one who had never given him any trouble, never been drunk or disorderly, never refused to move on as an example to other loungers.

There was a give-and-take comradeship between them, an unacknowledged bond of sympathy. In cold weather when the park was uninhabitable the tall policeman would take him to the station and enter him there as "John Smith, vagrant," and he in turn would often keep guard, watchful of possible accidents, when the policeman, unmindful of duty, was attracted by the coyness of a pretty nursemaid.

The benches were well filled. One or two fashionably dressed men, walking through from angle to angle, had stopped for a moment to untangle some mental problem or, perhaps, for a few seconds' unthinking leisure to enjoy their cigars near the sound of the plashing fountains and the occasional frou-frou of green leaves overhead. A few sodden women with piercing eyes, whose dress and manner betokened a calling which was in its depths; the rest, like himself, vagrants, homeless, with rags for clothes, without ambitions of trained faculties, rousing from somnolence at the approach of the policeman to sink after his departure into the sleep of physical weariness; some under the influence of the night's beer, their only luxury, gained by the thoughtless charity of well-fed philanthropists.

There was one empty seat lately occupied by a pick-pocket who had waited there the signal of a co-operator. Toward it he wended his way, thankful for the unexpected vacancy.

He sat down, lighted his short clay pipe, and ruminated. A noontime nap in an accommodating barn had satisfied his requirements for sleep, and he liked better to watch the people come and go, the illuminated cars, the tall spectral buildings, the shop windows, the gaily decorated entrance of a near-at-hand vaudeville. He liked the roar of the distant elevated roads, the tinkle of cable cars, the swirl of carriages, the occasional whiplash of hansom cabbies. The life of the pavements exhilarated him, excited him. He watched it a long time until the crowds thinned out, until the cars and pavements were almost deserted, until the ragged denizens of the benches slept and snored profoundly, or moved away to some questionable rendezvous.

Suddenly he roused from growing drowsiness. He had heard no one approach, but felt the subtle presentiment of a presence at the other end of the bench. He turned his head slightly and surveyed the newcomer, the rays from a neighbouring lamp favouring the scrutiny. The intruder was a young woman, rather pleasing in feature, with a pallor of complexion which denoted a shut-in life. Her hair was grotesque in its exuberance of crimpiness and puff; around her neck she wore a brightly-hued ribbon, and her dress combined an exceptional neatness, with a love of decorative effect, dwarfed by incompetence. Even in his first stealthy glances he

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