

MEMORIES

And How They Affected an Editor's Decision

By GEORGE F. MILLNER

"JOHNSON, I cannot do it. Your son is a thief."

"No, sir—only short in his accounts."
"Well, what's the difference? The bank officials say he took the money. He doesn't deny it, does he? No. Well then my paper is run to tell the absolute truth without fear or favour. I cannot shield him. I should like to do so for your sake, but—good afternoon. I am sorry, very sorry."

Jethro Johnson turned away, dejected, miserable, his shabby clothes and down at heel shoes emphasizing his misery. His features as depressed as his appearance; the tears very near his smarting eye-lids; his weary brain obsessed with the fact that James Jepson, his former school-mate, would, as editor of a most powerful daily newspaper, print the next day, the disgrace of his only son.

"And you won't keep silence?" he asked, reaching the door to fumble nervously with the door knob, and the other looked up with a frown.

"I cannot," he said, harshly. "If I did, what good would it do? The other papers have it." Then the abject misery, the supreme wretchedness of the man standing waiting, touched a chord of memory, and he came to place a hand upon a shrinking shoulder. "See here, Johnson, you know my paper has been honestly run for twenty years. I have shielded none that I thought honestly deserved punishment. Never have I kept back from the people I try to serve, anything my duty plainly shows me is in their interest to publish."

"What good will it do the public to know of a boy's peculation?" came the sullen question.

"This much—a warning to those who are placed in positions of trust. That's what we print newspapers for, Johnson—warnings." And as the other shook off his friendly fingers—"It will do no good to become angry with me. I am simply doing my duty as I see it."

"Is it your duty to hound a youngster to jail?"
"It is my duty to give publicity to wrong-doing. Besides, I am merely the instrument—and, well that's all there is to it. Another thing, the other papers have it. What good will it do if I keep silence?"

"The officials of the bank told me only half an hour ago, that no one outside their office knew anything of the trouble save one man. And he was a reporter of your paper. They pointed him out to me. I followed him here. He never spoke one word to a soul. I know your paper is the only one who has the tale. The bank won't prosecute. They told me so."

"All the more reason why the public should know."

"Then you won't do as I ask?" Johnson's nervous hands clutched at the other's arm; trembling, yet with something of violence, he almost shook the black cloth coat sleeve. "You can do it," he gasped. "You must—for his mother's sake—for mine, a man who has sacrificed much in life to give his boy a good start."

MR. JEPSON frowned. The tears steaming down the cheeks of the man he had known from school days, came near unmaning him; near making him break that cast-iron rule, that news was news, and the public must be protected at all costs. Also that mention of mother—the unhappy boy's mother he had known and loved.

"I can't do it," he said, after a long pause. "I won't. Good morning, Johnson. I am sorry, real sorry, that is my last word," and he moved over to his desk and commenced to write.

"Oh, I know you've never forgiven me for taking her from you," the man at the door burst out. "I might have known what you would do, if the chance ever came your way. You and your d— paper. Print your cursed lies—send my boy to jail—break his mother's heart—a torrent of sobs choked further speech, as the miserable one opened the door, slammed it behind him with a thud and disappeared.

The editor looked up from his desk, frowned, made a move to rise, then continued his work. He was, at the moment, busy with an article concerning the folly of shielding men in positions of trust. His words, a scathing diatribe directed against just such speculations as that of the boy, whose father had pleaded for silence. For half an hour he continued to write—he meant to prominently feature his article, and therefore paid much attention to its style—but the tears of his distressed school-mate

flooded his mind, interfered with logical reasoning, and at last, with an angry mutter, he rose, walked to the window to stare out over the grimy roof tops.
"Johnson always was a selfish beggar, even when a boy," he muttered. "And to think of his saying I was doing this for revenge. Faugh! I suppose his youngster has been betting on horses or something of the kind. Boys nowadays want to be millionaires without working. I won't break the rules," he said, almost fiercely. "I won't do it." Then he turned again to his work, completed the article, laid it carefully away, donned his hat, and with a few words to his sub, walked out of the office, in search of dinner and a few hours' quietness at his bachelor home.

Rain had fallen in the afternoon, leaving a few puddles here and there, especially at the crossings. Just where he waited to board an up-town car, a thinly-clad girl stood, an armful of books beneath one arm, an umbrella whose ribs showed in places, a shabby raincoat tucked under the other. As the crowded car clanged to a stop, one book fell, stayed in the mud unnoticed by the owner, and Mr. Jepson, with a quick movement, rescued the pages, jumped for the step swinging past, clambered on board and struggled to the side of their owner.

"You dropped this," he said, puffing a little, for he owned to more weight than was good for him. "On the street," he went on, trying to raise his hat, as the girl thanked him with a smile. "I see we both have the same friends."

"Marcus Aurelius," she said, seeing with quick eyes that no impertinence was intended. "Yes, one of my best," she added, with a sigh, eloquent of weariness. "People say that he is dry, but I am afraid he became a trifle wet to-day." Again she smiled, the man followed suit at the trifling jest, but his face changed to a frown, for on the title page, the owner was wiping with a tiny handkerchief, he saw written in a flowing hand, "Agnes Johnson," and the name recalled the scene in his office, a memory he was doing his best to forget.

Just then his street was called, and the girl struggled through the crowd, evidently trying to leave the car. He followed her and they both came near smiling again, as they stood waiting to cross the busy thoroughfare.

"It seems we both live near here," he said, somewhat awkwardly, for the companionship of girls was strange to him. "My name is Jepson. I live on Queen's Square," he added, growing red, for the girl regarded him with some hostility of manner, her grey eyes betraying a sudden dislike Mr. Jepson found it hard to discover a reason for.

"You are the gentleman I intended visiting," she said, quickly.

"I do not live any where near here," the tone rather bitter. "We live on Fourth Street, a cottage. A mansion would be out of place for a school teacher."

"And may I ask the reason?" he said, slowly, though in his heart he suspected he knew only too well.

"I waited at your office," she replied, simply. "They told me you had gone for the night, after keeping me there two hours. Father told me it was of no use to see you, but he did not tell you the real reason of my brother's shortage, did he?"

"Does it matter how the money—er—disappeared?" he ventured.

"Does life or death matter?"

"I do not see the analogy, and, my dear young lady, we are standing in the street. Come to my house. My housekeeper is old, thoroughly respectable, and—" he ended lamely, for the eyes of the girl shot sparks of anger.

"Respectability!" she snapped out sharply. "Re-

spectability. Do you think so much of that quality? I fear not, save only where your own interest is concerned. My brother will be respectable until to-morrow morning—then—" The tears were very near her eyes, and Mr. Jepson, thoroughly uncomfortable, motioned the girl to follow, and they came to a large stone house set back from the road in green velvet lawns.

"Now, young lady," he said, hanging up his hat and relieving her of her burdens, "my housekeeper shall make you a cup of tea, and I will hear your story—but," here he frowned, and the girl drew herself together in the huge chair, "I cannot see how you will make me change my mind."

"Not if I give you good reasons?" she queried, leaning forward.

"Not without excellent reasons."

"Then, my mother is one, I am another, my poor brother comes last of all."

"But the money was stolen."

"The money was borrowed," she said, fiercely. "Borrowed, I say. And if anyone should suffer, I am the one. No—please listen."

The housekeeper entered with a tray, and Mr. Jepson awkwardly did the honours, that the girl refused politely, but firmly. "I cannot drink," she said.

"Please listen." The door closed behind the prim woman responsible for the editor's comfort, and he resigned himself to what he thought was to be a very painful story, with a decided refusal to follow. "Please listen," she repeated, but remained silent, as if considering best how to begin.

At last she commenced, two red spots on either cheek, her breath coming and going in little gasps that seemed to hurt the hearer more than the breather.

"My mother is sick, very sick," she said. "Oh, yes, she has not been well for years. I try to write short stories and articles for the papers, but I have had little success. I have no talent. All I do is the result of hard work."

"Genius is an infinite—" he muttered, encouragingly, but the girl interrupted harshly.

"Then I should be a genius of the first water," she said, quickly. "I spare no pains to make my work a success. Your paper offered one hundred dollars for a prize story. I competed. Indeed my friends said I must win. I thought so myself, though I am my harshest critic. The doctor said mother *must*, must be gotten away to the seaside if we would have her"—here her voice almost whispered—"live. Do you know what poverty means when the one you love best on earth is slowly fading away, for lack of means to keep her? Do you? I don't think so. It does not look like it, here."

"Why did your father not come to me?" the man muttered, uneasily.

"You see him nearly every day. Have you ever enquired how he was getting along? He is a book-keeper for a firm whose offices are in your building. He has

not missed a sight of you for years, but he is shabby—you are well dressed—you are editor of a powerful paper—he is but a poor, underpaid clerk—why should you see him?"

"That would make no difference to me. Anything I could do for him I would—"

"Then why refuse the first request he ever asked?"

"Oh, but my dear young lady, this is a matter of duty—something entirely different."

"If my poor mother came to see you, would you do as she wished? You were old friends—she often has spoken to me of you. Would it be of any use if she came?"

"I thought you said she was very ill," Mr. Jepson said, rising to pace the room. The girl was so persistent. Her face reminded him of one wet day in April, years and years gone by, when some one very like her had gently told him that it could not be, and he had taken the matter so much to heart,

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