

"Uncle Ben"

How hot it was that August day—how intensely gloriously hot! The fields shimmered in the torrid glare, and the new tin roof on the old court house seemed a burnished reflector to increase the general discomfort.

Something more than heat, however, would be necessary to cause the absence of the ever-increasing crowd that since early morning had traveled over the dusty white roads and having tied their horses in the moss-sheltered spots, had gathered in groups in the stores and on the court house steps to talk over the session of Circuit Court.

Excitement of any kind was scarce in that little inland town, and this semi-annual break in the monotony of everyday life was a general holiday. Men met to talk over crops and prices, to stroll across the public square, and to hear and relate all the news of the county.

The women, too, gathered in to trade eggs, butter and dried fruit for calico and "trimmings," and incidentally to note the styles and prices in the one millinery establishment the town boasted.

Twice a year the dilapidated court house was filled to its utmost capacity to hear the speeches of opposing lawyers and the summings up of the judge. The offenders themselves were a secondary consideration, excepting in the case of relatives, and the various sentences to jail, or more frequently the penitentiary, caused but little comment; nor did the white faces and despairing looks of the condemned elicit much compassion.

Dull and heavy this inland community, unaccustomed to the momentous events, pathetic to the great world of unrest and sorrow and striving, living only in the present, careless and indifferent of others' joy or sorrow.

The big waiting-room of the "Halliday House" is filled with the waiting crowd, while listening somewhat impatiently for the court house bell to announce the opening of the second day of court, employ the time in exchanging opinions of the presiding judge, who had been newly elected, and of the stranger who had accompanied him.

"Some says his son," remarked Bob Halliday, the landlord, "but I know he ain't got a son that old. Some kin, I reckon, but they don't favor much. And last night I heard—"

Clang! clang! The opening bell cranked a general murmur for the most available seats and what the landlord heard was not told.

address the court at all. For a few minutes he stood silent then asked permission for his client to make a statement in his own behalf.

"This was unusual," the crowd was disappointed. Suppose after all, they had no speech in this case either. The sudden murmur died into silence as the old man stood up.

"Yo' Honah," he began, "they is very little I can say, but as the lawyer says to tell how things is, I will. Two year ago me and Chloee come up from Tennessee. We was alone in the world and poor, and all we wanted was a roof over our head and a place to work to earn our livin'."

"The second year I worked that ground 'n' I had a crop of corn, but Chloee she holds there, too; so we got 'long pretty well. At the end of the year she Mistah Hill say I owes him ten dollars for the use of his horse, to break up the ground 'for fall plowin', and so that is to go out of the crop when I raise it."

"The records of the War Department show that on a certain day in April, 18—, this brave soldier turned traitor to the flag that had sheltered him and deserted from his post, but they do not show how in the darkness of the night he came weary and foot-sore to the door of the cabin that had been his home and falling on his knees by the side of his mistress showered kisses and tears upon the hands that once had ministered to him."

"He himself does not know that the faithful mistress is dead, and dying bequeathed to her soul as a sacred duty to seek out and provide for those faithful friends who had come to her in the dark hour of her affliction at the utter sacrifice of all the human heart holds dear."

"The joy was too sudden, too overwhelming. He had joined Chloee—George P. Spencer, in the Midland Review."

"If life is worth taking care of, Recklessness does not enter into our work or our pleasure. There are people who are reckless of a young man who has a head on his shoulders while performing his duty, some other hard work, but their safety is insured with surprise that any business being should thus carelessly risk his life."

"All disorders of this nature are cured by Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery. It restores the lost appetite, gives sound and refreshing sleep, makes the digestive organs act in a normal way, and makes it rich with the life-giving elements of the food. It is the great blood-purifier, and gives a healthy complexion and the brain keen. It is the best of nerve tonic. Thousands have testified to its merits. It is sold by all druggists and is a sure, speedy and permanent cure for constipation. One little 'Pell' is a genuine tonic, and two a mild cathartic."

of love and gratitude borne in every untended heart.

"There was among the slaves one man who had in some way incurred his owner's lasting dislike. He had been lashed most severely by the use of a riding-rod and while yet he suffered from the first catigation a second was ordered."

"In vain the mistress pleaded—there was no mercy for him, so in the dead of night he freed him from his bonds and provided him with food, told him to seek refuge in the swamps. A tender heart was hers, too pitying and kind for the heavy weight of sorrow she was called on to endure."

"For months this man eluded pursuit, hunted down by the owner who he idolized, until the long-threatened war became a reality, and he left his refuge to fight for freedom."

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Fra Pacifico

A Story From "Temple Bar"

Just as I opened the hall door to go out into the street, the house bell rang apologetically.

The door was darkened by a figure whom I had no sort of wish to encounter, of whom I had perhaps a sort of vague fear and dislike. But I could not now withdraw. This kind of figure had become very familiar to me in Tuscan streets. All my life long I had been familiar with it in the world's heritage of religious pictures. But I had never exchanged a word with such figure, nor had I hitherto heard the sound of human speech come across the lips of any of them.

"I was a Franciscan friar who humbly darkened my door, and he had come to ask an alms. As I stood gazing at him curiously, it seemed to me, by one of those psychological freaks which visit us at all times, that I had enacted this scene in another existence. But I was wrong. Reason and memory came to my aid. It was not I who had enacted this scene in another life, but Lorenzo, who had enacted it in this, and he had described it for all time in 'The Sentimental Journey.'"

"Blessed be Laurence Sterne, who, having sinned the sin of discourtesy against the most courteous of all mankind, has by the moving confession of his crime, made it impossible that any gentleman should ever again treat a monk with discourtesy. Leave him to go from the sin that day."

"Pacifico was this friar's name, and 'Fra' his usual appellation. He was no priest or father, but a simple lay brother of the Franciscan Observantines. His habit was of coarse brown stuff, faded and threadbare; a knotted cord was girded around his waist, his sandals feet were covered with fine, white dust of a Tuscan highroad; and by his appearance he had lifted the small black scull cap, which was his sole protection against the fierce sun and stood bareheaded, twisting it apologetically between his fingers. The more I looked at him the more did I wonder back in fancy to the room in Dessein's Hotel at Calais, where Yorick met with Father Lorenzo. Here was the same 'attitude of entreaty,' the same 'thin, spare form,' the same 'mild, pale, penetrating face,' the same freedom from all 'conspicuousness of fat, contained ignorance.' And his face, too, 'looked forward and looked as if it looked to something beyond this world.'"

"The friar's embarrassment was great when he found the door thus suddenly opened upon him by the signore of the house, a manifest foreigner, too. 'Buon giorno, signore,' he began, with quaint courtesy. 'I demand thousand pardons.'"

"His voice was very musical. I looked into the mild, blue eyes, and liked him. Then I had never spoken to a friar, and there was about this friar as about Father Lorenzo so simple a grace, such an air of deprecation in the very cast of his look and figure that I should have been bewitched had I sent him straight to the palace of my books."

"'Pace!' I said, 'come in, won't you?'"

Fra Pacifico held back diffidently, and his eyes lit up with a childlike wonder.

gazing he turned to me, and his blue eyes were moist.

"The signore is Catholic, then," he said, "that he has a picture of our holy founder."

"Your holy founder," I answered, "if the product of one Church, it the founder of one order is the inheritance of the world, and the beloved of all mankind."

"How musical his voice was, and how innocent, how captivating his enthusiasm. I made him sit down, and I made him discuss a glass of vermouth, but an English bias, though it greatly excited his curiosity, he would not touch because it was the season of Lent."

"My mind wandered as he talked courteous compliments to me, and I took instead to gazing at him, and speculating about him. What was he before he put on that habit? What was the rank of life from which he sprung ere he had become transmuted by the magic wand of St. Francis? Was he of patrician family? Had he been a peasant's son? Surely the son of a prince or duke, if gentle manners are an index of noble birth. It was a quality that might have been attained by any poor or peasant, but not easily either by one or the other. For want of a better word I must call it spirituality. And then a sudden explanation of it all rushed into my mind—this was a religious man, and I had never been face to face with such a one before."

"Is your convent far from here?" I asked presently.

"Some twelve miles or so along the coast."

"And do you come into town often?"

"Every week or ten days, according to our necessities, for we live entirely by alms."

"But there is no train or other conveyance along the coast."

And temporal. It represents the holy father, St. Francis, in the cave at Alila Verma, where he received the stigmata, in the act of giving his famous triple benediction to poor, tempted Fra Leone. The benediction is in the form of a scroll, which Fra Leone was to carry about him, and on the scroll is written:—

Il Signor to benedica e ti custodisca; Ti mostri la sua faccia e abbia misericordia; Volga a te il suo sguardo e ti dia pace. Heaven forgive me! There is superstitious in the air of Tuscan, it penetrates the veins of the most complacent Epicurean, it sits the soul of the doubtless Protestant, it puts to confusion even the most rabid anti-clerical. I do carry the picture about me, and no grave evil has befallen me since, true as it is that no grave evil ever befell me before, save once.

I go to bed late and I sleep late. Fra Pacifico came in the early morning at "breakfast" time, and so, wrapped in slough, I never chanced to see him. Six months went by. Either it was hot or it was wet, or it was windy. I fancied myself mighty busy, or, truth to tell, not seeing him, his image and his influence grew faint; but certain it is I did not pay my visit to the convent.

Twelve months passed or more, and I suddenly became aware that I was no longer having cardoons for dinner. And then, why of course, that month's fare was no longer figuring in my accounts, and it must now be quite a long while since I received a new stamino. Could the humble friar be offended because I had never paid my visit? That was impossible in one who had so perfectly moulded his soul to ancient Christian models. Like Father Lorenzo, nature in him, too, had loved some other her necessities. Could he be ill then? I ordered around Beniamino, my cabman, at once, and drove off to the convent, twelve miles along the hot, white, dusty coast road.

The convent was no convent, but the poorest kind of a house; the church beside it was bare, not any conventional. But there was a cross upon the top of the church, and there was a magnificent Annunciation over the door of the house, and as I looked narrowly enough to see whether the one or the other could have belonged to any but the poor son of St. Francis, for above the stone porch of the garden gate you would have seen a rude, discoloured fresco of a cross of Calvary traversed by two human arms in saffron, one in hand naked, representing the arm of the Saviour, the other in hand shaggy, clothed in the habit of St. Francis, both bearing the stigmata. I knocked at the door. It was opened by the cheeriest of lay brothers. His face beamed like the sun at morning, and his eyes twinkled upon me as if my presence had given him the one pleasure in life he most of all desired.

"Is Fra Pacifico in?" I asked.

"Then that beaming face all of a sudden grew woefully chagrin; those twinkling eyes started with tears, and as my hand there on a sore pangs. He did not have spoken."

"Alas! he is dead, dear signore. He died close upon two months ago. We are all distracted and suffer the sorest privations. He was such an excellent beggar, was our dear brother, we wanted for nothing. But he never wrote down anything. We do not know who his friends were in the big city. I, who am his unworthy successor, do not know whom to look to, and have no success. We are like to die of hunger, and our only hope is in God Almighty, and our holy father St. Francis."

"I was one of his friends," I answered; "an altogether unworthy one. Come to me when you come into the city, and I will double my alms for the sake of his dead memory. Is he buried here?"

"I continued, again remembering Yorick and again blessing him."

"Over yonder, signore," replied the lay brother indicating a tiny campo santo not a quarter of a mile distant. His mute, astonished look seemed to ask, if it could be possible, that I, a signore, that I, a forswearer, really wished to see the grave of a lay brother of St. Francis? But I did not tell him, and bidding him cordially adieu begged him to call upon me regularly when he came over to the big city."