

THE VERDICT.

The morning of his trial. The sun is shining gloriously outside the jail, and he stands at his barred window and looks out over the green fields that lie around the village. He smiles when the jailer brings him his breakfast, and it is no forced smile, for his face retains its brightness after the man has retired.

His dress is meager and coarse, and the roughness of his hands indicates that he is a laborer. He is a carpenter, but the intelligence of his face suggests that he might have succeeded in a higher calling. There is something indescribably poetic in his bearing—something hidden in the man that gives great power to his eyes.

"I can't make that young man out," said the jailer to his wife, as he returned to the breakfast-table. "They have got all the proof in the world against him; he must have stolen the money—there is no disputing that—but I never saw such an honest looking face. He seems as confident that he will come clear to-day as if he had been promised so by the judge and jury."

"He is only acting a part," answered the woman, as she poured out a cup of coffee. "Wait till he is sentenced to a long term in the penitentiary—then you will see him wilt. It is easy enough for him to put on a confident look when he hears some one coming to his cell."

"I want to see my client before court opens," said the prisoner's lawyer at the jail door. "I must have a short talk with him."

The heavy iron door swung open. The accused and his counsellor were together. The prisoner's face grew expectant. He wiped his lips with a napkin and pushed the tray of eatables from him.

"I feel as if you bring me good news," said he. "I have never for one instant doubted that I would be declared innocent. I never knew a man to suffer for a crime of which he was not guilty."

The lawyer looked at him penetratingly for a moment; he looked as if he were vexed somewhat.

"My time is valuable," said he with a trace of impatience in his brusque tone. "I am your legal adviser. There is one thing I would like to say just now. You do not seem to comprehend the position of a client toward his legal adviser as well as you might. It is customary for one under trial for breaking the laws to confide wholly in the member of the bar to whom he intrusts his case. Nothing should be withheld. You may rest assured that what you tell me will never reach other ears; such disclosures are regarded as professional secrets and are held as sacred. It may be well to tell you frankly that a lawyer can not act with as much confidence in his own ability as when there is a thorough understanding between himself and his client."

The face of the prison-pale man had taken on a puzzled expression.

"I don't understand," said he, giving the lawyer his eyes unflinchingly.

The attorney frowned and twirled his watch chain impatiently.

"I will give you an example," said he, looking at his watch and then winding it as he continued. "I once defended a man for murder; I looked over the case closely; everything pointed to my client's guilt. I told him that all was against him, but that he could trust me completely, and that a detailed confession of how he committed the crime would enable me to be ready to combat as far as possible every point the prosecution could adduce. He confessed in full. I saw what had to be disproved and I cleared him; he is a free man to-day."

The prisoner turned two startled eyes full on the lawyer and said:

"And you want me to confess that I did it?"

"It would help me."

"But before God I am innocent."

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders and half smiled meaningly as he rose to go.

"Well," he said curtly, "I shall do the best I can for you as much as any member of the bar could do. But I am sorry to say that your case is almost hopeless. You were at work in the room from which the purse was stolen, and on the same day. When you were arrested you had the empty purse in your coat pocket, and had just changed a bill of exactly the same denomination as the one stolen. You are unable to show where you got the bill beyond your

own statement that it had been the savings of a number of years."

"The thief must have taken the money and hidden the purse in my coat, which lay on a table outside of my room. I know I am innocent, and am not afraid of being convicted."

The lawyer had reached the door; he turned back:

"I feel it my duty to impress on you the fact that if you were to plead guilty and throw yourself on the mercy of the court your punishment would be lighter. If you decide to do that you may let me know in the court-room. At all events I shall leave no stone unturned to help you. I must go now."

The prisoner's head hung down and he was in deep thought for a moment. Then his features grew tender as he moved nearer the window and saw a woman coming across the court-yard toward the jail leading a little boy by the hand. When she got to the window she lifted the boy up in her arms.

"Here I am, Jennie," called out the prisoner. "I can see you, but you can't see me back here in the shade."

"Have you had your breakfast?" she asked tremblingly.

"Yes, and have eaten heartily. You told me you would find out whether our neighbors believed me guilty; did you do it?"

The wife lowered her head and was silent.

"Jennie, did you hear me?"

"Some do believe it, and others won't speak to me about it."

He was silent, and the pained look that was settling on his face deepened.

"Jennie, now go get your seat in the court-room before the crowd comes. They will take me there as soon as the court opens."

As his wife walked away he rose on tip-toes to see her.

"God knows I have done all I could to teach my boy to be honest," he murmured to himself. "If they were to convict me to-day what a lesson it would be for him! As he grows up he would learn that his father was a convict. No, they will not condemn me. I shall speak to the jury; my words shall convince them, if all else fails."

A few moments later he sat on the prisoners' bench and scanned the faces of the jurors who had been chosen. They looked like honest, feeling men—men who had wives, perhaps, and children. His face showed that he had not lost hope even while the attorney for the prosecution was citing the strong circumstantial evidence against him. But the accused could not catch the eyes of the jurymen. They had looks for none save the speaker. When the prosecuting attorney took his seat there was a craning of necks over the vast crowd to catch a view of the prisoner. He wondered why they were looking at him so fixedly and pityingly. He looked at his wife; she was regarding him with such a look of hopeless misery that his heart sank within him. He saw his lawyer move over to her and whisper in her ear. She nodded her head, and then they both came to him.

"There is not a chance left," said the lawyer. "Judge, jury, and spectators are against us. If you will plead guilty your punishment will be lighter. I bring your wife to plead with you."

"Do it, John," said she, sobbing in answer to his startled glance of inquiry. "I know you are innocent, but the lawyer knows best what you ought to do."

"Confess that my boy is the son of a felon and that you are the wife of a convict! I will not do it. Go back to your seats. Let me speak to the jury."

The lawyer employed by the defendant rose and made a weak argument. Nothing he said could refute the evidence advanced by the prosecution. He sat down. Again the eyes of all save the jury were cast upon the accused, bearing looks pregnant with sympathy. Some looked at the pale-faced woman and the little boy and sadly shook their heads.

"Yes," said the judge, "the prisoner is entitled to make a statement."

The voice of the prisoner was very unsteady when he began to speak. He said that he hoped all would pardon his embarrassment inasmuch as he had never spoken in public before. He went on plaintively to tell about how he was at work in the room from which the money was stolen, how he had left his coat in the hall. He could not remember leaving the room, but once, and that was to go to the well in the yard to get

a drink of water. He thought some one had entered while he was out, had taken the money, and put the empty purse in his coat-pocket. The money he had changed was some of that he had been saving for several years for fear that he might be taken sick and not be able to earn a support. He had not told his wife of the savings. He seemed to want to say more, but his voice broke down and he began to shed tears.

The jury withdrew to a private room to make up their verdict after the judge had charged them as to their duty. They shut themselves in and the foreman handed each jurymen a small slip of paper and told them to write the word "guilty" or "not guilty". When all had written he took up the slips in a hat. After he had read them all he said:

"It is unanimous. Every ticket contains but a single word."

They slowly returned to the court-room and refilled the twelve chairs made vacant by their withdrawal. The foreman stood up and announced that they had found the prisoner guilty.

The prisoner had the eyes of the whole room. A wild, haunted look, in which lay the shadow of a strange, sudden determination, came into his face and eyes. He thrust his hand into the breast of his coat and held it there. Many thought his hand was pressed against his heart, but it was not, for he had taken hold of something in his breast pocket and was clutching it with a grasp of iron.

The house was as still as a grave, for he had risen to his feet. He was deathly pale and his lips were twitching as if he were in a spasm. He faced the jury, then he turned to the wondering judge.

"I have something to say!" he gasped. He paused, looked toward his wife and child, and continued: "I would not care to—to say it before them. May I ask them to retire?"

The judge nodded his head and the prisoner went to the woman. He kissed her tenderly on the lips, and then he kissed his boy and motioned them to leave. The wife wept freely, and her sobbing could be heard through the court-room as she went across the court-yard.

"He intends to confess now," a man said to a woman at his side.

"Yes," she answered, in a whisper, "and loved his wife so much that he could not do it before her. He has a good spot in him. He must have been strongly tempted."

The convict put his hand into the breast of his coat and stood near the judge and jury. There are people living to-day who say that tears were in his eyes.

"You have found me guilty," he began.

"I hoped, when I had told you with all the earnestness God has given me of my innocence, that you would credit me. You have not done so. The world is ready to look upon my child as the offspring of a thief. Ask yourselves in the quiet of your own bed-rooms to-night if I am guilty. Something tells me that you will not think so tomorrow; you will know that I stand acquitted."

His words clogged in his throat and he was silent. His hand under his coat seemed to ball itself. Every body was filled with intense surprise. Was he mad? Had his troubles dethroned his reason? He stepped back a step.

"I have made my last request: you will understand."

With a lightning-quick movement he tore open his coat. A knife blade glistened in the sunlight that streamed through the window. His arm went from him, and as quick as a flash the knife descended upon his breast with a thud that sent a thrill of horror into every heart present. The blood spouted out and dyed the hand that clutched the weapon. He dropped the knife, reeled, and fell. They ran to him and tried to stay the blood that was flowing from the gash in his heart, but they saw there was no hope. He was dead.

They bore him from the room. The jurors were awed so that scarce a word rose from them.

"The court is adjourned till the next day," said the judge, and he turned to the street. The jurors sat in the room, looking at the dead man on the floor. The judge said to the clerk: "The man who was at work in the room from which the money was stolen, how he had left his coat in the hall. He could not remember leaving the room, but once, and that was to go to the well in the yard to get

hastened home to his wife and children with such a men as might have been on a man who believed the world was about to end.

No one was in the court-room except the twelve jurors. They had not exchanged one word with one another. The noonday sun was shining full into the room. The foreman was the first to break the silence. He passed around some slips of paper.

"For our own satisfaction," said he, meaningly, "it might be well for us to know one another's opinion now."

"God knows we owe to his memory if—if we were mistaken," added a man as he reached for his slip of paper.

"And his wife and child," said another as he wrote on his knee.

The foreman took up the slips and ran over them nervously.

"Not guilty," said he with a groan. And then they dispersed.

A TRUE HERO.

A Pathetic Story by a Traveler.

A correspondent furnishes us with the particulars of the following incident, of which a friend of his was an eye-witness:

At a point on the side of a mountain where at one time used to arrive transshipments of passengers from the west, was moored a canal boat, awaiting the arrival of the train for the east. The captain of the boat, a tall and sunbrowned, rough and somewhat profane man, stood on his craft superintending the labors of his men when the cars came in; and in a few minutes a party of gentlemen came along and deliberately walked up to the captain and thus addressed him.

"Sir, we wish to go east, but our further progress depends on you. In the cars we left a sick man whose presence is very disagreeable to us. If you will deny this man passage on your boat, we will go; if he goes, we remain. What say you?"

By this time many others had come from the cars.

"Gentlemen," said the captain, "has the sick man no representatives here? I would like to know both sides of the question."

To this unexpected reply there was no answer. A moment's pause; the captain crosses over to the cars and entering, beheld a poor, emaciated, worn-out creature whose life was eaten up by the fell disease, consumption. The man's head was bowed in his hands and he was weeping. The captain advanced and spoke kindly to him, as he grasped his bony hand.

"O, sir," said the invalid, trembling and looking up in his face with hope and expectation mingled with tears, "you are the captain; will you take me? The passengers shun me and are unkind. You see, sir, I am dying, but if I live to see my mother I shall die happy. She lives in Burlington, sir, and my journey is more than half performed. I am a poor printer and the only child of my mother on whose arms I wish to die."

"You shall go," said the bluff captain, "if I lose every passenger for the trip."

By this time a crowd of passengers were grouped around the boat with their baggage piled on the tow path and themselves waiting the decision of the captain. A moment more and that decision was given. They beheld him coming for the invalid, the sick man cradled in his arms, pushing directly through the dying burden. He once laid in the choicest part of the boat, there he laid the poor man, the poor man's care of a parent. The astonished crowd of passengers looked on in amazement.

"That of the captain," said the invalid, "is a true hero."