

Whose was the Sin.

Written for The Western Home Monthly. By William Spencer.



MORNING," snarled old John Swift in his customary manner to the cheerful salutation of pretty Jennie Dean. Jennie seemingly paid no attention to his gruff manner, as she smilingly added, "Glad to see you out; feeling pretty well?"

"Well 'nough," John grudgingly grunted; and Jennie hastened along on her way to school. Old John looked up as she passed, and his eyes followed her retreating form till the turn at the corner shut off his view.

"Blamed fool I am," he growled. "Every time that girl goes by, I speak to her when I've said a hundred times I'd never speak to any woman again. Well, I've done it for the last time. If I ain't man enough to do a thing when I make up my mind to it, I wish somebody would just tie me to a post and cat-tail me till I get some sense."

But as whipping posts were things of the past and there was no probability of getting any sense into John's head by that means, he jerked himself off the chair, gave it a vicious kick, stalked into the house, and went to a dark closet under the stairs, when he emerged with two bank bills of large denomination, which he leisurely, and with apparently much satisfaction proceeded to destroy in a most methodical manner: first tearing off the corners, which he threw into the stove, then bisecting the remainder, throwing one half into the fire, and so on until the bills were all consumed.

"There, by Gee Columbus, so much saved. I feel better." And he shook himself like a great dog, and resumed his accustomed seat on the porch. After Old John's self-arraignment, and unique mode of "getting square," he settled back into the same taciturn being as before; but try hard as he might, and resolve as often as he would, to ignore Jennie's sweet recognition, every morning found him venturing the same chopped off replies. Jennie's thoughts

that morning also dwelt on the same incident, though she knew nothing of the strange effect of her usual greeting.

"Dear me," sighed Jennie, "I'm afraid the people were right in what they said of Old John. Here I've been trying for three months to get a friendly word from him, and this morning it seems as if he was more curt than ever. I wonder if I am making him worse by my efforts to draw him out of himself. Perhaps it were better that I take another street, and not pass his house."

But when ready for school next morning, something seemed to draw her in the same direction, and she followed its leading.

Old John was a character, whose friendship none had ever been able to gain since he came to the village to reside, some four years previous. The story of his life had been gathered from various sources, and I will give it in its most approved version.

It has been authentically established, that in his younger days, he was very wealthy, but there the favor of fortune ended; for he had a most repulsive face; in fact, he was known all over the country as being the ugliest man on the Continent, a statement which might easily be believed from his present appearance, for time had not softened those irregular lines, but rather accentuated them. His hair, what was left of it, was not as might be supposed at the age of sixty, grey, but a deep red with an almost purple tinge, and its southern sweep fringed an enormous wen, which, despite its color, reminded one of little Moses in the bulrushes. His nose, large and seedy, with a hairy mole on the tip, could never deny relationship to that face; for one glance, suggested just such a nose. Now, if Nature had but given him two respectable looking eyes, one might, by a heroic effort, fix his gaze on those organs, and pretend to ignore the major part of his unsightly physiognomy. But no—it was not to be. No beautiful soul beamed forth from those mismatched optics, one of which had evidently been inherited from his mother, a somewhat doubtful blonde, and was a watery blue and absolutely expressionless the other, brought down from the paternal side, was a savage looking black, and was set down in the corner next his nose, where its fierceness might be curbed no doubt by that extraordinary member.

As if these were not enough afflictions for one poor head, Nature had further asserted her determination of making as unsightly a human being as possible, by adorning his mouth with two rows of teeth in front, which showed to decided advantage neath his short upper lip. Could John have cultivated mustachios, some of these inaccuracies might have been concealed but bare as a baby John's face ever remained, save for the wisp of red hair, which flourished in the aforesaid mole.

With all these personal defects, it was little wonder that John held himself aloof from all companionship, especially as it was a common saying, that after the fine materials had all been used in the make-up of John's brothers and sisters, the edges had been trimmed off, tag ends picked up, and all refuse and surplus material had been turned into the machine—and John had been ground out.

John's parents were from an old English family, who owned the whole of Cheshire, and since their death, the property had been in Chancery, and was finally settled just a few months before their decease. An epidemic, with fatal effects, had carried away his brothers and sisters, but John, being such a travesty on humanity, not even disease would touch him, and he therefore was left sole heir to all the estate. Small wonder, then, that heretofore John had been shunned as a thing unclean, and indeed so general was this ostracism, that for a time it looked as if the family might starve to death for

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