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WHICH WAS THE MAN

Exra went out into the street. The lamps were lighted and a very thin, gray mist spread over the street. The mist had a peculiarly penetrating rawness that found out the worst-clad and least-fitted spots in Exra's person and worked its way in. Exra endeavored to delude himself into the belief that he was warm and comfortable by whistling a warm and comfortable tune. But chapped lips will kill the cheerfulness of any whis-
tle.

Out of the theatre on the opposite side of the road came Alexander Hil-
ton. He, too, found the air cold, but the coldness pleased him. He was clad in a fur coat, and, after the heat of the matinee performance, the rawness of the outside air acted as a comfortable tonic. He lit a cigar, then stepped out briskly.
Alexander Hil-ton was a busy man, with not much time for sentiment. But he liked to have his sentimental backbone tickled occasionally. The last love song of the leading lady had done that. He knew from experience that on the morrow he would laugh at himself for his foolishness, but to-day, while listening to the song, he had had a tingling sensation all the way down his spine, and a vague desire had floated through his soul to do something noble and heroic.

He steered his way delicately through the maze of fashionable cos-
tumes that emerged with him from the theatres. When he came into the stream that was pouring from the gallery he became less careful about steering. He thrust himself forward with bold, pushful strides that made other people unconsciously give way. He felt big and warm and strong and clever. The only sensation that he lacked was heroism. He would like to do something that would be showy and not too dangerous; something that would bring the cheers of a vast crowd without the discomfort of departure in an ambulance. To rescue a woman from a burning house, to stop a pair of runaway horses, even to whisk a dog from be-
neath a motor car would satisfy his heroic craving. He knew that the mood would not last, but it was very enjoyable while it lasted.

A boy came up with an evening paper. Alexander Hil-ton bought it and read his eye leisurely down the news. "Terrible shipping disaster! Over a hundred lives lost!" held the place of honor. Alexander Hil-ton shivered sympathetically. It was very unpleasant at that moment to think of being drowned in a cold sea. He read a little further. The victims were only stowage passengers and crew—quite common people. Alexander Hil-ton sighed with relief and felt comfortable again.

He had never mixed with any class but his own, and he seriously regarded that class as the only one whose fortunes or misfortunes in the least mattered. The great army of those who work with their hands he had all his life regarded as a species of domestic animal, existing only to satisfy the wants of gentlemen. It really never occurred to him that they were his fellow-men.

As he stood on the pavement, waiting for a hullo in the traffic in order to cross the road, his eye fell on Exra. Exra's unshaven face, tattered garments and cold, hungry air jarred harshly on Alexander Hil-ton's feeling of warm comfort. Really, it was scandalous that such wretched-looking creatures should be allowed in a well-to-do thoroughfare. There were plenty of back, grimy streets, where the cold and miserable and hungry could sink out of sight and out of mind.

Alexander Hil-ton looked again at Exra Mason. What a degraded sight the man was! Alexander Hil-ton lifted up his eyes to heaven and thanked his own birth and his own brains that he was not as this man was.
Exra's eye discovered Alexander Hil-ton, and discovered that he had a bag. Exra's nose, with its irrepressible optimism, scented a job. He took a hasty step forward and thrust out an eager hand.

"Carry your bag, sir?"
There was no particular viciousness about Alexander Hil-ton, but on a ragged, unshaven man he looked with as much repugnance as most people look upon a snake. The thought that the ragged and unshaven man yet have feelings susceptible to slights was a thought that could never occur to him. He shrank back and half raised his stick as if to knock away the polluting hand.
"No!" he shouted.

Exra winced and stepped back hastily. The disappointment in his face he vainly endeavored to cover with a smile.

Then a disagreeable thing happened. Somebody bumped against Alexander Hil-ton and caused him to drop the bag. The bag toppled off the pavement into the gutter and besmeared itself with mud. Exra lunged quickly forward and picked it up. With his coat sleeve he wiped off a considerable portion of the mud—an operation which made some difference in respectability to the bag, none to the coat sleeve. Then he offered the bag to its owner. It was still muddy, and Alexander Hil-ton shrank from his property in disgust.

"Suppose you must carry it, after all," he said reluctantly. "Hope you are honest," he added, not because he was anxious on the point, but because he was annoyed and wanted to vent his annoyance.

Exra looked him straight in the face and said, "Yes, sir," very quietly.
The expression in Exra's eyes was an unimpeachable testimonial. Alexander Hil-ton accepted it as such, and was the more annoyed. What business had a man in Exra's condition to be honest? The spectacle of cold and hunger was unpleasant enough even when one could comfortably imagine them to be accompanied by vice, but it was a thousand times more aggressive in connection with honesty.

"Temple Station," said Alexander Hil-ton, curtly.
The reluctant Exra slung the bag over his shoulder and shuffled at a quick trot in front of his employer's lengthy stride. The job meant at least a quarter, and that meant dinner. Exra had cause for exultation. Alexander Hil-ton strode moodily behind. His feelings of almost perfect comfort had been dissipated. The sight of Exra's shabby back and the thought that, despite his brusque refusal, he had been forced to employ him, after all, offended his pride.

He was very annoyed with Exra, and his annoyance took the form of lengthening his stride so as to hustle Exra's trot. Once he trod hard on Exra's heel. Exra only turned round with a smile and apologized.

Exra trotted ahead, and when he reached the station, went obediently down the stairs with the bag. At the gate at the bottom he was stopped by the ticket collector.

"Where's your ticket?"
"It's all right," called Alexander Hil-ton from behind. "The man's carrying my bag for me."

The ticket collector saluted. He knew Alexander Hil-ton. The latter's train had just gone. The next one was not due for ten minutes.

It was almost as raw down in the station as up above in the open air. Exra shivered. Alexander Hil-ton saw the shiver and felt chilly himself.

"You stand there!" he said.
Then, at a good, swinging pace, he strode up and down the platform. But he could not get comfortable. Every time he passed Exra he felt compelled to look at him. And every time he looked he felt more annoyed. Exra was really such a very unpleasant spectacle. His cheeks were so thin, his eyes so red, his whole body so very shivery. He crouched up against the bookstall in a huddled attitude, as if endeavoring to extend the covering power of his garments by contracting his body. Yet, despite all this, he insisted on looking cheerful. Each time their eyes met Alexander Hil-ton frowned and Exra grinned.

At last Alexander Hil-ton could stand the grin no longer. He stopped in his walk and turned on Exra abruptly.

"What's that everlasting grin of yours about?"
"It's over getting a job," said Exra, humbly.

"Ah, I suppose you evil yourself one of the unemployed?"
"Ain't had any regular work for months," said Exra, regretfully.

What business had Exra to infuse into his voice a note of cheerful martyrdom? Alexander Hil-ton resented that note fiercely. He must show the fellow that he had no cause to complain.

"I don't suppose it ever occurred to you why you are out of work?"

"Hard times," said Exra.
"Hard times?" Alexander Hil-ton repeated with angry contempt. "No, it's not that. A man like you never will find regular work."

"Peg pardoe, sir, but I'm certain to some day."

The contradiction, respectful though it was, irritated Alexander Hil-ton intensely.

"I tell you that you never will. You'll always be unemployed, because you're unemployable."

"I shall get work some day," repeated Exra firmly.

"Where do you think you are going to get it?"

Exra hesitated a moment.
Just then a train rushed noisily in from the darkness, and the reply was drowned by a roar.

Alexander Hil-ton strode again up and down the platform. His legs swung out in longer and longer strides, and he hummed the air from the leading lady's love song. Once more the comfortable feeling of warmth and strength and greatness surged over him. Once more he entertained himself with the notion of being cheered for a heroic deed.

A little girl in a red frock, who had wandered away from her parents, came down towards the middle of the platform. Alexander Hil-ton saluted in his walk and looked at her. She was a picturesque little figure, worthy of a place in the picture that his imagination was conjuring up. Suppose that she were to wander too close to the edge of the platform, and were to tumble over on to the rails just as the lights of a train gleamed in the black tunnel? What a chance for him to play the hero! No one else would be near enough to help; a single stride would take him to the spot. Even if the train were within a dozen yards, he might do the rescue comfortably. Even at six yards the attempt would not be suicidal.

His imagination painted the scene vividly. The frightened scream of the child, the wall of agony from the parents, the horrified gasp of the on-lookers, the roar of the approaching train. Then his own leap forward, and the hairbreadth scramble into safety. Last! the applause, the enthusiastic, tumultuous applause. A delicious thrill crept up his spine and into the roots of his hair.
Is it but an idle saving, or do com-
ing events really cast their shadows before?

Suddenly the mental picture had become reality.

The little girl had wandered too close to the edge of the platform and had fallen over on to the rails. And there in the darkness of the tunnel, some twenty yards away, were the lights of a coming train.

There was a frightened cry from

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the child, just as he had imagined it. There was the scream from the other end of the platform, where the forgotten parents stood. There was the gasp of horror from all the people who saw and were too far away to help. As in the picture, so in the reality. But what of the part that Alexander Hil-ton had to play?

In an instant the warm thrill of his body changed to a deadly cold. Those lights were so near! The chances of a stumble so great! Life so precious! Death so horrible! And death was not all. He must have a few moments to think of what might be coming after. Alexander Hil-ton with the sweat gathering on his forehead and his breath coming in quick, short gasps, stood where he was.

"Coward!"
Had someone shouted in his ear? No; it was the look in the eyes of Exra Mason as he ran past him.

Exra was down on the rails. The train was no longer two distant lights. The form of the shrieking engine broke clear from out of the surrounding mist. The child was flung up on to the platform, and then

Alexander Hil-ton put his hand over his eyes and reeled back.

The train came quickly to a standstill and backed. The hush of suspense changed to a hubbub. Excited officials ran up and down the platform, while curious passengers leaned out of the carriage windows and shouted questions at them as they ran. Everybody was either asking questions, shouting orders, ejaculating sympathy or offering advice. Alexander Hil-ton alone had no desire to communicate his emotions to his fellowmen.

The one thing he had to do was to get out of the station as quickly as possible. He did not want to be stopped and questioned and summoned as a witness before the coroner. His bag lay on the platform where Exra had dropped it, and he quickly picked it up and walked along the platform. In another minute he was out in the open air hailing a cab.

At the moment when the cabs of Exra rushing past him had glanced into his, Alexander Hil-ton had felt as if a flashlight had been thrown over the dark recesses of his soul. For that one moment he had felt himself suddenly shrivel, almost as if he and Exra had changed places, and he, not Exra, were the shabby, little, half-starved member of the unemployed.

But now, whirling home in his hansom, with his fur coat gathered comfortingly round him and a fresh cigar between his teeth, he slowly regained his normal feeling of complacency and he moralized.

After all, how wonderful are the ways of Providence! Exra, whose life was only a burden to both himself and others, had been taken, while he, Alexander Hil-ton, the really valuable member of society, was left. He hummed a little psalm of thanksgiving to his own prudence. But for that prudence what might he not now be?

The body of Exra Mason was borne by two policemen on a stretcher to

the morgue. And the soul of Exra Mason, making its triumphant entry into Paradise, looked down with a great pity on the soul of the man whose body was riding home in a cab.—James Curtis in The Gateway.

Damascus.

Damascus is the oldest city in the world. Tyre and Sidon have crumbled on the shore; Baalbec is a ruin; Palmyra lies buried in the sands of the desert; Nineveh and Babylon have disappeared from the shores of the Tigris and the Euphrates. Damascus remains what it was before the days of Abraham—a center of trade and travel, an island of verdure in a desert, a "predestined capital," with martial and sacred associations extending beyond thirty centuries.

It was near Damascus that Saul of Tarsus saw the light from Heaven, above the brightness of the sun; the street, which is called Straight, in which it is said he "prayed," still runs through the city; the caravan comes and goes as it did one thousand years ago; there is still the sheik, the ass and the water wheel; the merchants of the Euphrates and the Mediterranean still occupy "with the multitude of their wives." The city which Mahomet surveyed from a neighboring height, and was afraid to enter, "because it is given to man to have but one paradise, and for his part, he was resolved not to have it in this world," is this day, what Julian called it, the "Eye of the East," as it was in the time of Isiah, "the head of Syria."

From Damascus came our damson, our blue plums, and the delicious apricot of Portugal called damasco; damask, a beautiful fabric of cotton and silk with vines and flowers raised upon its smooth, bright ground; the damask rose, introduced into England in the time of Henry VII.; the damask blade, so famous the world over for its keen edge and remarkable elasticity, the secret of the manufacture of which was lost when Tamerlane carried off the artists into Persia; and that beautiful art of inlaying wood and steel with silver and gold—a kind of mosaic engraving and sculpture united, called damaskeening, with which boxes and bureaux, swords and guns are ornamented.

It is still a city of flowers and bright waters; the streams of Lebanon, the "river of Damascus," the river of gold," still murmurs and sparkles in the wilderness of Syrian Gardens.

When sorrow sweeps the heart like a great dark, stormy sea, carrying to destruction every vestige of peace, then burst, flinging its refulgent brightness o'er every wave that dashed our hearts. No matter how severe the storm, God is always there and in His own good time will say to the tempest, "Peace, be still."

The friendship which ends in fine words is not of great worth, neither is it loving as our Saviour loved us.

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