

POOR JACK.

A STORY OF SOME HOLIDAYS.

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"Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all."

I.

The summer had been an unusually hot one, and all through the sultry month of July, I had been endeavoring to decide as to how I could best spend my annual August holidays. For the previous eleven months I had applied myself closely to business, and, day after day, had performed the routine of duties pertaining to my office without much cessation. I was beginning to feel that I was slowly becoming nothing more or less than a kind of useful machine—wound up in the morning, as it were, and then kept ticking away all day until sun down at night. The monotony of the thing was becoming intolerable. "I must have a change; it will be not only agreeable, but it is an actual necessity," was the conclusion I came to, without much trouble, for I always had a good deal of faith in the old adage, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." Perhaps I never realized the truth of that axiom as I did while waiting for the dawn of that particular first of August. I kept continually asking myself "Where shall I go?" and "What shall I do?" but seemed incapable of deciding upon any definite course. An innumerable number of ingenious plans and tempting schemes were flitting through my mind, but I was so greedy and so anxious to make the most of my little month that I could decide upon nothing. My cousins had written inviting me to visit them at their quiet home in the country, and with them I might ramble in green meadows and shady dells, or idle away the sunny hours in their delightful company on the tranquil stream that flowed by their peaceful abode. I was half tempted to join a number of my city companions on an excursion up the lakes to Fort William, and then return via the chain of cities on the south shore of Lake Erie to Niagara Falls. At other times I had a notion to go down the St. Lawrence and spend the days at Cacouna and River du Loup, or perhaps branch off from Montreal through Lake Champlain and Lake George, thence up among the mountains of New Hampshire. Thus was I distracted with the sheer wealth of the possible. As the end of July approached my dilemma increased, for in spite of all my rumination no definite course had shaped itself. I was at a loss to know how to extract every speck of pleasure out of each moment of the thirty days which were at my disposal; where fancy would have led me, and into what folly I might have all unconsciously wandered, I know not, had I not received the following letter:

"New York, 29th July, 187—.

"My dear Mulkins,

"If you place any value whatever upon my good will, explain immediately why my last letter remains unanswered. In fact I don't think I can accept a written explanation; you must come and see me in person. That is if the burden of your years and sin will admit of your taking a railway trip. If not come by boat, or balloon, or by whatever other means you may think best, only start at once. If you had answered my last I might not have become entangled in the confounded mess in which I now find myself. It may not be too late, however, and if there is any escape for me the only person who can help me is my dear old friend, Tom Mulkins. Don't disappoint me, Tom, for my whole future depends upon your assistance. Come on at once and telegraph me where to meet you upon your arrival, and be prepared to stay at least a month with me.

"Yours as ever,

"JACK PERCY."

I must confess the letter was unexpected, for I had somewhat lost track of the writer since he went away about a year before, but the contents, singular though they were, surprised me very little. It was so like him—so like the reckless, good-natured, dear old Jack, who had spent the best part of four years with me at college, and for two years afterwards we had wandered together abroad. Ah! what reminiscences the letter called up; of escapades and adventures in which we figured in those halcyon days when we were each without a care. As I pondered over the past, his handsome, boyish face loomed up before me and recalled hundreds of our odd experiences. I could not restrain a smile as I remembered the absurdly penitent expression which would cloud his countenance as he seriously related to me each new mishap into which his superabundance of mirthfulness and animal spirits was continually landing him. Among other things he was everlastingly falling in love with somebody or other. Sometimes it would be "raven locks and roguish black eyes" that had captivated him; next it would be blue eyes and golden hair which he admired most. Once he was on the verge of proposing to an Italian flower girl on account of her vivacious manner, merry brown eyes and rich olive complexion; and on another occasion he was actually engaged (or thought he was) to a handsome young English

woman who had been kind to him while he was laid up with a broken arm. He delayed our stay in Baltimore for five weeks on account of an attachment which had sprung up between a dashing young widow and himself and narrowly escaped an action for breach of promise in consequence, and so on, and so on. Notwithstanding his lamentable lack of constancy he seemed to be everywhere a general favourite with the fair sex, and I would no sooner extricate him from one difficulty than he would be engulfed in another. I reasoned with him; threatened him; swore at him; but it was no use. He would promise not to make a fool of himself, and would keep pretty straight until he came in contact with the next pretty face, and then it was all up with his resolutions. Poor Jack! you have plucked the roses, but they were not always without thorns. Your grief was sincere for a whole week when you realized that I had succeeded in causing one charmer to throw you over for an ugly, but wealthy old iron founder. You did not shoot me either as you threatened to do two years ago when we learned of the success of our mutual scheme to get the little Miss F— married to that industrious and well-to-do corner groceryman by telling her father that you were a spendthrift. You were real sorry for a few days on each of the two other occasions when certain marriages were announced, but how quickly you recovered from all of these apparent losses! You have been a flirt of the first water, Jack, but you were not altogether to blame. I have helped to make you what you are, and although all that I have done was done from a pure motive and from a simple desire to prevent my best friend from plunging into that whirlpool of misery which arises from a marriage without love, still, I am not sure that I will not have a heavy record to answer for when I stand face to face with all these unhappy women whom I have assisted to obtain husbands in order to save you.

"And so you have been at your old tricks again, Jack," I continued to soliloquize, as I folded up the letter for the last time, "and you once more rely upon me helping you to break another innocent and unsuspecting heart. You are not satisfied with all the misery you have caused that poor old iron founder, and the corner groceryman, and the others, not to speak of the dozens of gushing maidens whom I cannot just now call to mind, but must try and add another one to the long list of sufferers. Yes, old boy, I will run down to New York, and will do all in my power to help you, but it will be in a different way from what you suspect. If by any means, fair or foul, I can succeed in getting you firmly tied up for life, a great burden will be taken off my mind, and it will also be a matter of safety to hundreds of blooming girls who are not acquainted with the crooked ways of this world."

II.

All who have been up or down the Hudson will no doubt remember the commodious steamers which used to ply between New York and Albany. I went on board the *Daniel Drew* at the latter place at 9 a.m., and was glad of an opportunity to spend at least one day upon the water. The boat moved off with a large number of passengers and continued to pick up many more at each stopping place along the river. I took up a position in a quiet part of the deck and exhausted my cigar case in idly gazing out upon the delightful scenery, and in thinking of Jack. With the exception of what his brief letter conveyed to me, I had nothing to build my plans upon, but I felt sure that my first conjecture was correct and that whatever trouble he had got into there was a woman at the bottom of it. As the smoke of cigar after cigar went up curling in the air I had plenty of time for reflection. I knew Jack well. He had a good heart, was affectionate and would make a good husband to any woman whom he truly loved. He had been a bit wild, but what young man of spirit can help that? If he could only find the right kind of a woman they would be the happiest couple in the world. I revolved the matter thoroughly in my mind and the conclusions I came to only strengthened my previous determination to get him finally "married and settled down," as my good old grandmother used to say. So engrossed was I in my own thoughts I paid little heed to the fact that the boat was gradually becoming crowded with people. The deck was rapidly filling up and my little corner was being encroached upon. Perhaps I would not have noticed this had it not been that the empty chairs grew less and less, until at last I was called upon to give up the one which had so long elevated my ugly feet in the air. A party of two ladies had taken up a position at my elbow, and when I had succeeded in getting them comfortably seated I sat down again and endeavoured to resume my meditations.

I daresay I looked sleepy and harmless, for, after observing me for a moment, the ladies evidently concluded that I was deaf and of no consequence, and they, therefore, felt at liberty to continue a conversation which had apparently been commenced before they came on board, or, perhaps, before they left home.

"Ada, dear, I do hope you will be guided by the advice of one who is much older than you are, and one who has no other interest now but your welfare."

"O aunts, you have always been very kind

to me, and I know you would not advise anything but what you think is best,—but—but—"

"But what, Ada?"

"But I know he loves me. I do know it."

I tried to close my "big ears" as Jack used to playfully term them, for I had no desire to listen to such conversation.

"I don't see how you could know that so soon. Believe me it takes years to find that out."

"But I have known John for a whole year."

"You mean that you have seen him a few times during the year, and you may be sure he did his utmost to appear nice."

"I think he would always be the same to me."

"Poor foolish girl, how little you know of these men. They are nothing but a lot of adventurers. They win an innocent girl and marry her for her money, and when that is all squandered she can spend the rest of her days in misery," said the elder lady.

"O aunt, surely all young men are not like that. John is so good, so noble. I am sure he would like me just as well if I did not have a cent in the world."

"Don't be too sure of that, Ada—"

I could not stand it any longer. I had coughed, whistled, looked intently down into the water; tried to get up a handkerchief flirtation with some kind of a female who was standing on the shore; had, in fact, done everything I could think of in order to make the ladies conscious that I was present, but all to no purpose. I could not extricate myself from the delicate position without disturbing several dozen people who were quietly sitting around.

As a last resort I got up, and in doing so, managed to upset my chair which tumbled over and came down on the old lady's foot. A little scream from that personage was the result, then in an instant all eyes were turned towards us. For the first time in my life I began to feel my presence of mind deserting me. If I had been a pickpocket trying to relieve the old lady of her purse, and was caught in the act, I don't suppose I could have looked more bewildered. I stammered out an apology of some kind, when to my astonishment the dear old lady smiled and begged of me not to mention the circumstances as it was really her own fault for having her foot where the chair happened to fall. She then insisted upon my sitting down again and pleasantly inquired as to the time of going down to dinner, as travelling on the water always sharpened her appetite. I was myself again in a moment and endeavoured to give all the information in my power, and while doing so had an opportunity of looking at her fair companion who had so nobly defended her admirer whoever he might be. I was instantly struck with her beauty. She was the most lovely girl I had ever seen. Regular features, delicately arched eyebrows, expressive eyes, an abundance of soft dark hair that would not be concealed beneath her jewel of a hat; a sweet countenance and a graceful figure. I lifted my hat and she returned the salute with a sweet little smile. She turned her eyes away, and as she trifled coyly with her costly fan, I could not help envying the lucky fellow who was so fortunate as to have such a charming advocate to sound his praise. I hoped in my inmost heart that he would prove himself worthy of the precious prize, and that she would never have occasion to alter her high opinion of him. He must be a paragon of perfection, I thought; something far above the average young men whom I had met with (and I travelled considerably), if he does not some day descend a little in the scale of her estimation.

"How do you like the scenery of the Hudson?" asked the elder lady, turning her face towards me, a little later on.

"I think it is very nice," I replied, "so calm and placid (and pointing over towards a farm-house on the shore) with its rural homes nestling so cozily among the shady trees."

"It's wild enough and bleak enough, goodness knows, up among the Catskills," she continued.

"There are, indeed, some grandly romantic views in that neighbourhood," said I.

"Do you think any portion of the Hudson can equal the grandeur of the Thousand Islands of the St. Lawrence?" asked the young lady, turning her bewitching eyes towards me.

"I think not," answered I, but did not dare say more.

"I am glad to hear you say that," she exclaimed, with a little enthusiasm, "for aunt won't agree with me in the opinion that the scenery of the St. Lawrence, especially about Alexandria Bay, is unequalled," then she laughed a little as she saw her aunt smile. I began to wonder if the old lady was really in earnest, a short time ago, when she spoke so derogatory to her niece of young men in general. I wondered why she was not afraid of me. I began to wish that I had a nicer name than MULKINS; Mulkins is a cognomen that never seems to inspire anybody with awe.

"I have heard a great deal about the beautiful scenery around Alexandria Bay," I remarked quietly, determined to keep the conversation up if possible, "a young gentleman friend of mine spent a few weeks there last summer and he speaks very highly of the place."

"Last summer!" exclaimed the young lady, looking at me a little alarmed, "why, we spent three weeks there last July; I wonder if we had the pleasure of meeting your friend?"

"I think he was also there in July," I replied.

"What might his name be, pray?" asked the

elder lady carelessly, as she drew her wrapper a little more over her shoulders.

"Mr. John Percy," said I.

The announcement caused the young lady to start and look up with, as I thought, a rather pleased expression. She was about to say something, but was silenced by the authoritative tone of her aunt, who exclaimed rather abruptly:

"Ada, dear, draw your wrapper a little tighter the wind appears to be freshening up." Then turning to me she continued, "We travel a good deal and meet so many people it's almost impossible to remember the names."

Her niece did not raise her eyes again for some time. The elder lady made a few casual remarks and then remained silent. Meanwhile some Italians, with harps and violins, who had been playing in the other end of the boat, took up a position not far from us and commenced to play a selection from the opera of "Martha." The young lady listened to the music and looked pleased, remarking at the close that "bad as it was it was better than none." They played "Norma" and numerous other pieces, after which my fair friend and myself had an interesting conversation in which she charmed me with her knowledge of music. Her aunt had become absorbed in the contents of a paper-covered book so that we had the whole talk to ourselves.

"You told us your friend's name, but you have not yet told us your own," she said, looking shyly at me.

"Ah, excuse the neglect, lady," said I, as I took a card from my pocket and handed it to her. She looked at it and read:

"MR. THOMAS MULKINS,"

and then burst out in a most unaccountable fit of laughter which lasted long enough to occasion alarm to her aunt. In reply to the elder lady inquiry as to the cause of the unseemly mirth she exclaimed, "This is Mr. Mulkins, aunt," and then indulged in another little fit of laughter. It's all up with me now, I thought, that name will ruin me yet. I had better keep a good face on me, however, so I playfully remarked,

"It is not one of the most classic names, it is true, but it is one that I hope will be widely known some day." We chatted away pleasantly for a few minutes longer and then my fair friends retired for a time to their state-room.

Sauntering in the other end of the boat, some time after, still wondering whoever in the world my new-made acquaintances could be, I was suddenly accosted by a blue-coated, official-looking man who tapped me on the shoulder and requested me to step below with him for a moment as he wished to speak with me. He led the way into an apartment near the gangway. We were no sooner inside than a second official-looking man entered, looked the door behind him, and then proceeded to address me as follows:

"We've got you at last. We've been on your track dozens of times, but you have always managed to give us the slip. You are caged now though, 'Mr. Jim Benton,' alias 'Sharpy,' alias 'Mulkins,' or the hundred other names you are known by, and we rather guess you will not slip through our fingers this time." They pounced upon me and in an instant my hands were locked together in a pair of handcuffs. My amazement can be better imagined than described. I demanded to know the meaning of this gross outrage; by what right they dared to molest a gentleman in this inhuman manner.

The two men laughed and one of them coolly replied, "Come now, Sharpy, that kind of thing won't do." I told them they had made a mistake; that they had taken the wrong man, and if they did not release me at once and apologize, it would be the dearest day in their lives; but the fiends only laughed the more and acted like a couple of exulting demons. I told them who I was, declared my innocence, protested in every way, but all to no purpose. "They had me, and they intended to keep me," was all the satisfaction I could get from either of them. At the next stopping place I was taken from the boat, placed on the cars, and, in charge of these two horrid men I arrived in New York and was soon after locked up in the "Tombs."

All sorts of surmises had arisen in my mind. Could that reckless Jack be trying to play some practical joke upon me? and had it been carried farther than what he had intended? No; bad as he is, he would not dare do this thing. Could it be that my two new lady friends were female detectives in disguise, and mistook me for some scoundrel who was known by the name of Mulkins? Impossible; surely that sweet young creature could not be so base, so treacherous; no, no,—and yet did she not laugh in a most unaccountable manner when she read my name on the card which I had given her? There is some mystery, and if Jack is in any way connected with this matter I will never forgive him. Meantime I despatched a message to him informing him of the predicament in which I was in, and begged of him not to lose a moment until he had secured my release.

III.

Confined in a cell in that awful place, each minute seemed like an age to me. What if Jack should happen to be out of town? if he should fail to receive my message? What could be the nature of the trouble he is himself in? Could he, too, be locked up somewhere? As the time wore slowly on the terrible uncertainty was working