

the palace of Versailles, his brother was suffering the miseries of exile, or languishing in a dungeon, shut out not only from the outward world, but from all intercourse with mankind. But other writers think him to have been some less remarkable person.

The iron mask, of which frequent mention has been made in sensational books, was a very simple contrivance of velvet and springs of steel.

HOW JERRY SAVED THE MILLS

BY F. E. HAMILTON.



HE dull, cold day was at its close; but the heavy rain and the strong south wind which had swept the town since early dawn still continued with undiminished fury. The gale shrieked as it tore about the corners and lashed the faces of the few hurrying foot-passengers; while the driving rain

penetrated everywhere, drenching the streets, flooding the gutters, and collecting in deep, treacherous pools at the corner crossings. The bare trees moaned and writhed and wept; the swinging sign-boards in front of small taverns creaked and groaned dismally; the tall chimney of the Dumbleton Knife Works rocked threateningly; and, in the midst of all the tumult, the great river was swelling and straining at its wintry bonds, while a sharp crackling sounded over and anon from the broad field of ice that stretched from shore to shore and little streams of water began to appear here and there, running swiftly along the frozen plain.

March had come in like a lamb; it was departing like a lion; and, shrouded by wind and rain and heavy mist, the last night of the month came thickly down.

It was past supper time, past closing time for the mills and factories, past trading time for the stores, and, except for an occasional light here and there in some saloon or corner grocery, the windows along the business streets of the town were dark and the rain beat unheeded against their black panes. Few people were abroad, and even those few seemed to have been forced upon unwelcome journeys, for they hasted through the sloppy streets with bent heads, shivering as the sharp wind tore at their wrappings or the gusts of rain beat upon them.

One such man, clad in a heavy oil-cloth coat, was walking rapidly up State street, when, just at a particularly windy corner, he came in sudden contact with a lad who was crouching in front of a baker's window, where a single lamp still burned, glowing with hungry gaze the dainties within.

"Hullo!" cried the man, starting back, "I almost ran over you, my boy." Then, looking more sharply at the dripping figure before him, he continued: "Why, Jerry, is that you?"

"Yes, sir," replied the other, half-pulling his tattered cap from his head. "If you please, sir, it's me."

"What's wrong?" said Mr. Watterson, the proprietor of the great mills that skirted the river, for it was he. "What's wrong? Why are you not at home? The mills closed two hours ago."

"I know it, sir; but I haven't worked this week, sir, for Sister Nellie's sick, an' I've been a mussin' of her up at our boardin' house. You see, sir, since mother died, an' our house was sold, Nellie an' me has stopped at Mis' Crawford's boardin' house; but my money's give out, an' Mis' Crawford, she told me this mornin'—she said, sir, this mornin'— The boy stopped abruptly.

"What? Come, Jerry, speak out. You're not afraid of me. Tell me what she said."

"Well, sir, she did say as how I must pay our board in advance every week now; for, if Nellie was agoin' to be sick an' I was agoin' to quit work to nuss her, she didn't see how she'd get her money. An' our week ran out to day, sir, an' my money too; all but twenty cents, an' that I spent for oranges for Nellie. An' Mis' Crawford, she said as how I couldn't eat at her table, 'thout I paid first. So I jest slips out into the street at meal-times, for fear Nellie'd know I wasn't eatin', an' 'twould worry her, she bein' sick. An' that's how I came here, sir."

The boy finished, half-frightened at his own long speech to "the master," and again pulled at his ragged cap, while the wild March wind tossed his yellow hair about his wet face and the cold rain beat upon his scantily-clad shoulders.

Mr. Watterson stood a minute in deep thought. It was hard for him to realize such poverty as this, and among his own hands too. Jerry was a "bobbin-boy" in the mills, whom he had known for a year or more by sight, the only support of a widowed mother and a sister—now of the sister only, it seemed; but the lad had always been bright-faced and cheery and the great proprietor remembered him as one of the happiest among his boys. That this child could actually suffer for food while striving to care for his little charge (the orphan Nellie) seemed to the gentleman too terrible to be true.

And yet there just before him, his honest blue eyes telling the same story which his lips had repeated, stood Jerry—dinnerless, supperless, and almost homeless, upon this the wildest night of all the year.

Mr. Watterson forgot the rising flood, which even now was threatening his mills; he forgot the urgent errand which had driven him out into the storm; he forgot the wide social gulf between his servant and himself; and, remembering only that he was a Christian man, answerable to His Father in Heaven for the welfare of this child before him, he seized the boy by the arm, pushed open the door of the little bakery before which they stood, and fairly dragged him within.

"Here!" he cried to the baker's wife, who came, bowing and smiling, to execute the great man's commands. "See! Give the lad the best supper you can cook and all the provisions he can carry, and send the bill to me." Then, hurriedly drawing some money from his pocket-book, he thrust it into Jerry's hand, and said: "When you have eaten, go back to Mrs. Crawford's and pay her for a month in advance. Then find a doctor for Nellie, and stay with her yourself until she is well. After that, come back to me at the mills. If they are standing you shall have work. No. Not a word!" he continued, as the astonished boy would have spoken. "The money is a present to you and Nellie from me." And

before Jerry could recover from his surprise Mr. Watterson had gone.

Supper! money! and a doctor for Nellie! Could it be true? The boy unclasped his hand and looked at the precious bills. Yes, it was true!

As he ate the bountiful meal prepared for him by the baker's good wife, the bobbin-boy pictured Nellie's delight when he should return and tell her of what had happened him; and, later, when he faced the dreary storm, homeward bound, with a great basket heaped with buns and cakes and oranges from the baker's shelves, upon his arm, his heart was light and his laugh rang merrily out across the darkness and the rain, as he thought of how boldly he would meet "Mis' Crawford," and how astonished and puzzled she would be when he paid her—not a week, but a month in advance!

"It's just like a fairy story!" said he, half aloud, as he climbed the sloppy steps of his boarding-house—"just like a fairy story, with a great, big, splendid, rich man fairy!"

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It was almost morning. Already the black curtain of night, rent here and there by the furious wind, was slowly lifting toward the east and the dull gray dawn appeared, forming a sombre background upon which the leafless trees that fringed the far-away hills were painted in waving silhouette.

Since over the sun had gone down the wild storm had continued, and even now the rain, driven by the mighty wind, fell in long, slanting lances upon the town and the frothing river, that, filled with great masses of broken ice and debris from all the up-country, roared and plunged between its banks and shook with giant hands the foundations of the mills beneath which it ran. At the head of the dam, where the channel was the narrowest, and directly opposite the lower Watterson mill, was an ice-jam.

Piled block upon block, until it towered high in the air, pressing with terrible force against the mills upon one hand, and the natural wall of rock upon the other, the broken ice had formed a great, white barricade, growing each moment, which checked the mad rush of the water and sent it swirling backward in eddying waves, which beat furiously upon the mills and threatened each instant to engulf them.

Along the higher shore the townspeople had gathered, powerless to aid, but simply awaiting the catastrophe, and among them, pale and haggard, was the proprietor himself, already a ruined man.

As he passed to and fro, intent upon the scene before him, hoping against hope that the jam might even yet give way in time to save his buildings, many a watcher turned aside with pitying word and look, for Mr. Watterson was a man beloved by all his employes.

Suddenly there was a movement in the crowd—a hastening toward a common centre—and, with eager faces, both men and women gathered about a new-comer, who was speaking earnestly.

"Yes. If that timber could be cut it would break the jam! It lies just so that it holds—"

The owner of the mill burst through the little crowd.

"What timber? Where? Quick! Tell me! Can the jam be broken?"

"Yes, sir," returned the other, respectfully touching his hat, "It can;

but it's dangerous work. I have just been below, and from there I saw that a great log which has lodged at the very crown of the dam is all that holds the ice. If that could be cut, the jam would be broken."

"But how can it be reached?" queried Mr. Watterson anxiously. "Can any one get at it to cut it?"

"Yes, sir," replied the man; "in one way."

"And that is—"

"Over the ice itself!"

A shudder ran through the listeners, and even the proprietor's face grew more pale; who would venture upon such a bridge on such an errand?

With a common impulse, the crowd, led by the workman who first discovered the log, turned hurriedly away from the river's brink, ran through a side street, and gained a position lower down the stream, from whence the dam could be plainly seen.

The report was true. The jam was held in place by a single timber—a great square stick, doubtless torn by the angry waters from some bridge far up the country. If that could be cut, the blockade would be broken, the ice would no longer clog the stream, and the mills would be saved.

For a moment silence fell upon all; then, suddenly, Mr. Watterson's voice, hoarse and thick, rang out above the noise of the storm and the war of the waters.

"A thousand dollars to the man who will cut that timber!"

The women in the little group looked at each other and shuddered; the men fixed their eyes upon the dam; but no one replied. The roar of the angry stream increased and the waters deepened beneath the mill-wall.

"Two thousand dollars!"

The proprietor's voice was hoarser than before; but the women closed their lips firmly and shook their heads. The men moved a little uneasily, and one drew his hand across his mouth, as if he would have spoken; but still no one replied, and the white foam from the imprisoned river was tossed by the wind against the lower windows of the mills, while the corners of the buildings were already beginning to crumble and waste away before the grinding ice.

"Three thou—"

"I will go!"

The two voices sounded so closely together that it was not until the crowd turned their eyes upward and saw the one who had answered that they fairly understood the reply.

Running from a third-story window of the lower mill directly across the river, above the dam, was a long endless chain, used to convey power from the mighty water-wheel of the mills to the machinery of a little box factory, located upon the opposite bluff. This chain was at rest now, and there appeared at the window near it the figure of a boy, in a blue blouse, carrying in his hands an ax. He it was who had said, "I will go!"

When the people saw him and realized what he was about to attempt (for already he had fastened a rope round his body and was passing the end over the chain, evidently with the intention of sliding along the same until he found a point from which he could lower himself within reach of the timber); when they realized this, a great murmur went up from the crowd, and the women cried out in terror, while many turned to Mr. Watterson and urged him to order the boy back.