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## Literary Selections.

### THE CONVICT'S CONFESSION.

The circumstance which I am about to record was one that, at the time of its occurrence, made a strong impression upon me, and even now sometimes across my mind, bringing with it a stronger feeling of what deep and dreadful injustice might be done to an individual who possessed not sufficient moral courage to take those steps which were necessary to his own redemption from evil attempted to be thrust upon him.

It so happened that I was in attendance upon a family professionally for some years, where there were several daughters; and out of compliment to me, I presume, I was invited to the wedding of one of these young girls, with a gentleman in my way, worthy of her as regarded habits, and manners, and education; although unhappily he did not possess that amount of wealth he could have dispensed so well, and which, somehow or another, generally gets into wrong hands.

It's all very well for foolish, unthinking people who form this fault, to prescribe to say that learning is better than house or land; but others, who know the world, would have no difficulty whatever in making a choice.

Those who are at all practically acquainted with society know that it is not education or manners, or talent, that makes the man—but money.

The question now asked concerning anybody is not "What is he?" but "What has he got?" and if the answer can be "Money," he of course becomes possessed of every virtue under the sun.

But to return to my tale. Mary Dampsey, then, was about to be married to Mr. John Sinclair, who, as I have just observed, had the learning, but alas! not the house and land, which the proscriber makes no light of.

In fact, he was a man of good talent, making a living by an exercise of that talent; and it was no difficult matter to premise that he was a man who, in due time, was highly calculated to become famous and celebrated for his acquirements; but it requires a long and toilsome journey before any one—let his qualifications be what they may—can reach—"Fairies' proud temple, where the envious throng within, Fling missiles on the envious throng without."

And as he did not come of a noble family, and as he would not pander to a political party, he was on what may be considered the longest possible road, and the steepest to the supposed temple.

But, however, he won the heart of Mary Dampsey, and that was indeed, to my mind, a conquest worth the making; for a gentler, fairer being, never had his birth.

Before the marriage I happened to be mentioning the matter to a friend, he said, when I uttered the name of the bridegroom,

"Sinclair—Sinclair. God bless me! Did you say Sinclair? Is he a young man with a—good looking expression of countenance?"

"Yes, the same."

"Oh, well, there's something wrong about him."

"Something wrong! What, is he out of his senses? I never saw a better looking head in my life. There must be something wrong about you to say so."

"Oh, no! I can't tell you what it is, exactly, but I know I have heard a something or another that I cannot exactly call to mind. It's very provoking to chase a thing through your memory, but really—hang it, what can it be? It's a something, however, against him, I know."

"It cannot be anything very important, then, as you have forgotten it; and I should suggest that you ought to be very careful indeed how you say anything of the sort against anybody. You don't know the incalculable injury it may do."

"Oh! I won't say anything against anybody—not I. But now I perfectly recollect, it is Smith that told me there was something or another that he had heard of Jones."

"Now, really, this is too bad."

"Oh! no, it ain't too bad; and as I have recollect it, I'll ask Smith, when I see him, what it really was, now; and, if he can tell me, I'll let you know, and then you can judge for yourself. Upon my word, I feel quite uneasy about it; and for the sake of Sinclair, it ought to be sifted, you see."

"Very well—very well. Do as you like in the matter. I don't think such vague charges ought to be brought against any one; and I had been you, I would

not have said a word about it. I don't mind saying so, because I know you would not do an injury to any living creature, except through carelessness, and careless you know you are."

The short conversation I had had with my friend had left an unpleasant sensation upon my mind with reference to Mr. Sinclair; and when a note came to me by post, the next day, the superscription of which I knew to be in the handwriting of my friend, who had made the unknown charge against Sinclair, I opened it with some eagerness, and read as follows:

"Dear—:—I have seen Smith, and found out all about Sinclair. His brother was transported. What do you think of that, now, my dear fellow? The idea of a young lady marrying any body belonging to what may be called a respectable family! Isn't it dreadful? It was some forging business. Yours, in haste, GEORGE LUTINGTON.

P. S. Don't say I said it."

This note gave me some uneasiness, although if Mr. Sinclair had twenty brothers, and the one half of that number had been hung, and the other half transported, I could not, for the life of me, see that it constituted any charge against him.

But I knew that I was on such points rather singular, and consequently it gave me some uneasiness to think that this matter might seriously affect the prospects of Mrs. Sinclair.

I went to the wedding. All was in readiness—all was sunshine, joy, expectation, and hilarity, until the time arrived when the bridegroom ought to have made his appearance. And lo! he came not!

Minute after minute flew by in anxious expectation, and at length the bride burst into tears, and declared that something must have happened to him, and implored some of the gentleman to go and make inquiry for him.

One of her sisters, however, interfered, saying:

"Mary, you ought to feel by far too indignant to send after your bridegroom. The insult of his being now five minutes too late should be sufficient to eradicate him from your thoughts."

"No, no, Maria," said Mary; "I know him better than you do—much better, I assure you. His absence is no fault of his, and an accident, let it happen when it will, should have no effect upon my affections."

"That sentiment does you a world of honor, Miss Dampsey," said I; and if you will permit me to go and make inquiry for Mr. Sinclair, I shall go, I think, in the spirit you would wish me."

She thanked me by a look, and I left the house. Luckily this affair did not take place in the church, but in the house of the Dampseys, where, although it was a little contrary to custom so to do, the bridegroom had agreed to meet the bride, and accompany her to the sacred edifice.

I had the address of Mr. Sinclair given me, and as it was not above three streets off where he lived in chambers, I walked there, and knocked at the door on one of the staircases, which bore his name upon its panel.

For a few seconds there was no answer, although I thought I heard some one move in the room, and then I knocked again rather sharply, when the door was opened by Mr. Sinclair himself; and I think I shall never forget the look of unutterable woe that was upon his countenance.

"Mr. Sinclair," I said, "if this is an intrusion, I hope you will pardon it. I come from Mary Dampsey."

He did not speak, but stretching out his hand he took hold of me by the arm, and led me into the chambers. Then, when the door was closed, he said, in nervous and excited accents:

"Tell her to forget me—beg of her to forget me!"

"But what for? You have gained her affections; and it is a very strange thing now for you to make such a request."

"It is a desperate thing, and under many circumstances would be a wicked thing, doctor. But I am doomed. Something has happened which may, and which I dread will involve me in disgrace. She shall not share it with me, if I can help it."

I was silent for some moments, and then I said, in as impressive a tone as I could assume:

"Mr. Sinclair, beware of what you do. Your own fate in life—your own happiness, as well as the happiness of the fair and intelligent girl whose affections you have won—depend upon your conduct. If you have yourself committed any act that ought to make you hesitate about yoking the fate of another with your own, say so; but if you are a victim, instead of

guilty, I implore you to summon courage to your aid, and not allow yourself to be borne down by any amount of circumstances."

These words of mine seemed to have a great effect upon him. He staggered to a seat, and covering his face with his hands; for some moments he appeared lost in thought. Then suddenly he said, "Heaven knows I am guiltless!"

"That's enough," I said. "I will believe you. And now it is a strange thing to ask, but will you take me into your confidence?"

"I will."

"Agreed. I will go and calm the fears of Mary, and return to you immediately."

I accordingly went back to the Dampsey house, and said, aloud:

"I have seen Mr. Sinclair, and a circumstance which he will write an explanation of to Miss Dampsey, forces the putting off of the marriage for a short time. He is well, and the circumstance cannot be explained without prejudice to him."

I perhaps really did go a little too far in saying this much, but somehow I had faith in the man, and I was amply rewarded by the look of gratitude that was cast upon me by Miss Dampsey, who immediately said,

"I am quite satisfied."

The guests were rather wonder-stricken at this state of things, and some of them put on such stupid looks of wonder, that it seemed doubtful whether they were awake or not.

The ladies were of course indignant, for they had dressed themselves all for the occasion, and now for there to be no wedding at all, was too provoking.

How they settled it among them after I left, I do not know, for I got away as quickly as I could, and hurried back to Sinclair's chambers, who seemed wonderfully calmed by the assurance I brought him, that even what had just happened had not shaken the confidence which Mary had in him; and then he cried,

"Oh, can I ever be worthy of such a creature?"

"Yes," said I, "you certainly can be worthy of her if you choose."

"I cannot," he replied; "I cannot. How am I to do so, when you have heard, which you shall hear, the melancholy circumstances by which I am surrounded, you will admit that I no longer ought to think of Mary Dampsey as a wife."

"And yet you say that you are guiltless."

"I am—I am. But know you not I have seen enough of this world to know that, in order to preserve a fair fame, it is not enough to be innocent, but you must manage to seem so likewise, or you will not escape the very worst of censures."

"I certainly know that the world is a censorious world, but I know likewise that we are always the worst judges of what affects ourselves, and that, let those circumstances be what they may, our imagination is apt to dress them up in false colors, giving an importance to them which they do not deserve."

He looked at me with something like hopefulness in his countenance, and I proceeded:

"Mr. Sinclair, it strikes me strongly that you are allowing your imagination to get the better of your reason, and supposing yourself to be involved in some affair, from which extrication would be easy with a little more resolution than you possess."

"Think you so? But you cannot judge until you know all, and all you shall know if you will do me the favor of listening to my recital."

I signified my assent, and at the same time expressed what pleasure it would afford me to be of service to him, after which he began as follows; and I can only inform my readers that the tale is most strictly true.

"Sir," he said, "about ten years ago I was in a far more precarious situation than I am now, for I was too young then to have found out my real powers, and was, as it were, floundering about without a profession, and being first one thing and then another, in the hope of making a respectable livelihood."

"I was unfortunately situated in my bringing up, for I had an ignorant mother, and a father, who, although a man of considerable abstract attachments, had not one particle of knowledge calculated to be useful to himself or his children. However, he had constitutionally such an irritable temper, that at the age of sixty, when he died, he had not a friend in the world to follow him to the grave, with a sigh or regret."

"I had several brothers—one older than myself, who was of a morose, not to say vicious, turn of mind; and three younger. The one next to me was named George, and he had always been ill-used and neglected by the whole family and more particularly by his mother; I suppose because he had the misfortune of not being very good looking. Moreover, as she, from some unaccountable idiosyncrasy made a pet of the eldest, who was about as lovable a personage as a pig, she tho't, I fancy, that she was making the matter all square, by showing ill-will towards another member of the family, but certainly she did behave towards us all in a manner to excite my indignation for a long time—a feeling which has now softened down to pity."

"Next to George there was Alfred, who made himself acceptable to my mother by humbling to the elder brother, who was the prime favorite; and altogether Alfred had a very contemptible character."

"Then there was the youngest, of whom I don't know much, except that there were some indications about him of the sulky, morose disposition of the eldest, which might, or might not develop themselves."

"After my father's death I gradually left off having any communication with them, for with one act and another, they certainly did disgust me, and now I never see any of them at all."

"Indeed!"

"No. There has been no quarrel, but a complete and entire separation; and although, I believe, they all live in London, I don't know where, and I dare say I should hardly know them if we were to meet accidentally in the public streets; so that you may say we are not according to the common acceptance of the term, a united family."

"But do you mean to tell me, Mr. Sinclair, that anything of so trivial a nature as a general difference of sentiment, temper and opinion can alienate a mother's love?"

"It has alienated now, for she has not made the ghost of an effort to clap eyes upon me now for six years."

"Is it possible?"

"It's true; so you may guess she is not a body possessed of the finest feelings in the world, and her conduct goes a long way towards upsetting the theory that there is a natural and instinctive love between child and parent."

"I am of the opinion," said I, "that all duty and affection is due from the parent to the child and that the affection of the child for the parent is and should be merely an acquired feeling, and solely dependent upon the conduct of the parent."

"Were that opinion universal, doctor, it would I think, make fathers and mothers a little more careful of what they would not fancy, as thousands of them do now, that they are entitled to some particular admiration and reverence, because they have brought a number of children into the world, and that those children owe them a respect and duty for that mere fact, which may be a very doubtful advantage, quite independent of their own conduct towards them."

"You may depend," I said, "that as the world advances in knowledge these things will be better understood. But proceed with your story, Mr. Sinclair."

"Well, then after my father's death, there was evidently a sort of coalition got up between my mother, her darling, the eldest, and his ever-pleasant Alfred, so George was made to look after himself, and I candidly confess that, whether from education or natural bias, he had some bad qualities about him."

"For myself, I was hustling about and trying to get a living where I could, by turning to account what artificial and scientific knowledge I had, and flagging hard to acquire more."

"Thus some years passed away, until one day, George, who had learnt copper-plate engraving, came to me, for I was the only one who had held out a friendly hand to him, and said,

"A hair-dresser has employed me to engrave for him one of those 'Bank of Elegance' notes, which are used as an advertisement by many tradesmen, and as he wants it to be as like as possible to a real Bank of England note, can you lend me one for a day or two, to copy?"

"I thought nothing of the application, except that I had not the note, but I attempted to borrow one unsuccessfully, and in the end Master George had to wait a day or two until I could accommodate him, and then I lent him a five pound note which he promised to bring back in a day or two."

"Now, except that I wanted the note, I tho't nothing of the affair at all, for the whole thing was so natural and clear, be-

cause at the time the whole town, and particularly the hair-dresser's shop windows, were full of these 'Bank of Elegance' notes, offering a thousand pounds, and so on, to anybody who would cut hair better than Tompkins, in Fizzle-lane."

"The day or two passed away, and then one Morning George called upon me."

"Here's your note," he said, "it's all right."

"What's all right?" I said.

"Oh! nothing particular. I don't intend to be poor any more."

"A worthy resolution!" said I; "but the only difficulty remains in the execution."

"Ah! well," he said, "Good morning, All's right. You will see, perhaps, in time what will surprise you."

"Well, away he went, and I thought nothing of what he said. I had got my note back again, and I fancied him hard at work at his business."

"A day or two were now elapsed, when a note came to me, saying that he was going to Ipswich, and that he would not be back for some time, although why he volunteered that piece of information to me I did not know."

"However, I threw the letter on one side, and having at that time some lectures to deliver on some scientific subjects a little distance from town, I forgot all about the affair, until, about a week afterwards I received a note, signed by George, which requested me to meet him by the general post office, at nine o'clock that evening."

"There was something about the tenor of the note that gave me some uneasiness, I knew not why. It was so extraordinary that he should make a street appointment with me, instead of coming, as it seemed to me he might as easily have come to my chambers, as he had frequently done before."

"But I went. I had not walked above twice past the general post office, when I saw him."

"He did not speak, but in a hurried manner he led me down an opposite street, and then he said:

"Did you see anybody watching?"

"Watching what?" said I.

"Watching us. Are you sure we are not followed?"

"Good God!" said I, "what do you mean? What if we are followed?"

"Hush! hush! You recollect I borrowed a five pound note of you? Well, you thought it was to engrave a 'Bank of Elegance' note by, but between you and I, it was to engrave a real one."

"A what?"

"A real one—a forged one. I have got the plate in my pocket. I have changed one to-day, but I had to pay some of the money, and I have spent the remainder; and what's more, I know I am suspected, because I have been followed about, and I think have only just eluded some one who was sent after me."

"You may guess, doctor, what must have been my feelings at that moment. I recollect a sort of mist flocking before my eyes; and, clinging to some iron railings for support, I thought I should have fainted; and, as George went on talking, all I heard was a confused sound, without the least understanding of what he said."

"This dreadful feeling, however, soon passed away, and a dreadful feeling it was. I can compare it to nothing but what I should suppose would be near the approach of death."

"Why do you think more of it," said George, "than I do. What's the matter with you?"

"Oh, God!" I said; "do you ask?—George, have you no heart? I should have no head-piece, that you can talk so lightly of what must be your ultimate destruction? What—oh! what is now to become of you?"

"Oh! I must get somewhere in the country, and try to change a few of the notes."

"No, no—for God's sake, no," said I. "Listen to me. There is but one chance for you, and that is to leave England at once and forever."

"And is it possible," I said, "that for such a poor, wretched motive, you have stooped to such criminality?"

"Never mind that. It's too late now for reproaches. If by any means you can get me twenty pounds or thereabout, I will leave the country at once. I can get down to Liverpool, and then I shall find some American trader, but I cannot go without money, you see, or else I would not trouble you. But if I have any good fortune in the world, you may depend me returning it to you, and with interest too."

"Never mind that," I said, "never mind that. Meet me here again at this time to-morrow evening; and in the meantime I will see what can be done."

"My state of mind can be much easier imagined than described, as I walked homewards, for I was at that time most peculiarly situated. I had lost what was to me a considerable sum of money by the insolvency of one upon whom I had relied, and it was only by the greatest industry, and the most indefatigable exertions, that I could at all hope to meet my own engagements; so that, in fact, I was in a ticklish position, that a very few pounds abstracted from what was required to fill up some gap or another, would be to me a most serious affair."

"But what was I to do? Could I run the risk of the disgrace which must attach to the very name of Sinclair, if I allowed any exertions to be wanting on my part to save George from the dreadful consequences of his own folly?"

"I resolved to sacrifice myself. I owed much—I owed several little matters, and I had the means of paying, but only just the means—the sum of money in my hands amounted to about fourteen pounds. That was not enough, and although I had not seen them for some time, I resolved to go to my mother and brothers, and crave their assistance."

"I did not consider that I was justified in telling them exactly how the matter stood, but I went to them on the next evening, just a little before the hour at which I had to meet George again, and I saw them all."

"I told them that George was now quite willing to go to America. I told them that I had reason to believe it was quite necessary he should go. I represented that for our own credit's sake, he had better be given the money to go. I knew to them it would be no use to put the matter in any other light than as a matter of interest, and I exhausted all the rhetoric I was master of."

"I soon got my answer, and that answer was decisive. I cannot, at this distance of time, take upon me to say from whose lips it came,—I think it was my mother's—Heaven forgive her if it were so. I cannot assert that it was, but the answer, which came from one of them, and was fully subscribed to by all the rest, was this:

"There are four of us, and if a farthing each would save George from being hanged, we would not subscribe the penny."

"I went away at once. I took him all I had myself, and handed it to him."

"Go," I said; "go at once, for Heaven's sake, altho' this may not be sufficient. Go away from London. Let me know where you are; and if any more is absolutely necessary, I will stir Heaven and earth to get it for you."

"He took the money—that amount which ruined me—and promising that he would leave London at once, in fact that he would walk toward Liverpool, getting what cheap lifts he could on his way, and write to me when he got there, stating what amount he could get a passage in one of the American traders for."

"Now I felt comparatively easy; at all events I thought that there was a chance of his safety; and although I knew not which way to turn myself for means, I felt as if a great weight had been lifted off my heart."

"Alas! only two days passed, when one morning I received notice that he was in the hands of the police, at Bow street—that he had given his real name of Sinclair, and had actually had the folly to mention me and my address—thus doing me all the harm he could, and himself no good."

"Well, doctor, I attended his examination. I did all I could, but the whole affair was my destruction for the time—it blighted every prospect I had in the world, and another week saw me arrested for debt, and an inmate of Whitecross

prison, while George lay, awaiting his trial in Newgate."

"Nearly ten years have passed away since then. George plead guilty and was transported for life; and gradually I began to get resources around me. From the time that I visited him in Newgate till this morning, I never saw him."

"This morning, Mr. Sinclair? Did you see him this morning?"

"Yes. He came like an apparition. I could scarcely believe my eyes as he stood before me, and said—

"Well, brother, you see I have come back. They let me off with eight years instead of life, and I have found my way back. I understand you are pretty well off, and are going to be married."

"Good God! George," I said; "who would have thought of seeing you?"

"Ah!" he said, "who indeed! But to business. I expect you to support me now, and if you don't, I shall accuse you of having a guilty knowledge of my criminality; and altho' at this distance of time, I don't suppose anything would be done by the magistrate in the matter, it will ruin you in reputation, mind you. I learnt this dodge in Australia, so you had better put up with it quietly. I intend to live in London, and to call on you and your wife whom I like, and shall expect you to supply me with money."

"Villain!" I said, "can you look me in the face and utter such words?"

"Oh, yes," he replied. "I'll leave you till two o'clock to consider it. If you consent, well and good; if you refuse, I shall go up to Bowstreet, and make the accusation against you of having known all about it at the time I was transported, and that will be enough to get it into all the papers, you know; so you can decide for yourself."

"With that he left me; and I appeal to you whether under the circumstances I ought to have united myself to Mary Dampsey."

"It is a most sad affair," I said, "but let me propose a course to you. I will wait here until two o'clock. The only thing that can save you is some evidence of a disinterested character to the effect that this is but an attempt to extort money from you. Now if you can hide me somewhere, I will listen to what is said."

"That might succeed in frightening him away. There is a cupboard in your corner, into which you can introduce a chair, and sit down, so that you will not be uncomfortable."

This plan was duly adopted; and about five minutes before two I took the chair in the cupboard, and waited not a little anxiously for the coming of the convict.

He was punctual to the minute, and I heard him say to Mr. Sinclair, in a rough insolent tone:

"Well, have you decided? I have been on the watch, and you have not left these chambers, so you have had no opportunity to play me a trick."

"You know I am entirely innocent," said Mr. Sinclair, "of any participation in your crime, and that to make an attempt to save you, I actually ruined myself at the period."

"Oh! yes, I know all that. I don't blink the matter, at the least. I know you had no more to do with it than the man in the moon, but how are you to prove that? You can't deny meeting me at the Post Office. You can't deny lending me the note to copy. In fact, you can't get out of it, though you had nothing to do with it; so hand over some cash to begin with at once."

"Stop!" said I as I emerged from the cupboard; "I shall hand you to a policeman, Mr. George Sinclair, and swear to what I have overheard, when you will stand a very fair chance to be transported again."

"Damnation!" he said. Done at last!

Then without another word he dashed out of the place.

On that day week Mr. Sinclair married Mary Dampsey, whom I made privately acquainted with the circumstances I have narrated before hand. Her reply was worthy her.

"What difference," she said, "can the criminality of others make in my affections? The misfortune of James Sinclair in having so unworthy a relative, on the contrary, attaches me stronger to him by the bonds of sympathy? Oh! could he for one moment suppose that such a circumstance should make any difference to me?"

I had frequent opportunities of seeing the Sinclairs afterwards, and I will say—because I can say it with truth—that a greater share of happiness never fell to the lot of any human beings than was theirs.

There was to me all the qualities which have a tendency to ensure domestic felicity in the disposition of Mary, and she had by marrying Sinclair the rare good fortune of meeting with a man in every way qualified to appreciate the many excellencies of disposition to which she could so justly lay claim.

The vagabond brother was never again heard of.