

The Rowdy

by Octave Thanet, 1850-1934

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MIKE HOLLIN'S nineteenth birthday was eventful. To have you understand how eventful, it is necessary to draw Mike's portrait. He was the seventh child of Thomas Hollin, an honest black-smith who could—and did—boast that he had never scamped a piece of work, broken his word, or taken the sight of man's fists in his face without fighting. Hollin belonged to a trades-union, but it was a trades-union of the old-fashioned kind; and he despised the „new-fangled notions“ of the Knights of Labor.

Mrs. Hollin may be called a semi-American; although her father was an Irishman, and her mother the daughter of an Irishman with a touch of some other nationality, she herself was born in Ohio; and a race that has been a certain time in America becomes, as it were, aired off, and the strong national flavor evaporates. Annie Hollin's brogue was enlivened by American idioms; in the same way her temperament had felt the climate; she was nervous, energetic, warm-hearted, hot-tempered, and tidy. Did you see her wiry little shape of a Saturday afternoon, hurling huge pailfuls of water over her back fence into the convenient ravine that served the neighborhood as a reservoir for tin cans, garbage, and diphtheria, you would call her „a genuine American“. Did you see her face—a small, round face, with a short nose, long upper lip,

brilliant blue eyes, and black hair—you would call her, just as decidedly, „an Irishwoman, of course.“ But even her Irish face had an American touch, for she wore her hair clipped short like a man’s: she never had time for long hair, she said. All her life she had been looking forward to a day of sufficient leisure to „do up her hair“; so far, the leisure was a mirage, receding as life advanced. Hollin was her third husband. The other two she had lost; one by death, one by divorce. She had seen hard days, had wept over little coffins, and known what it was to be cold, and hungry, and bruised. If she had not—so she sometimes told Hollin—she never would have married again.

It was not Hollin’s way to retort on such occasions, he being a man of deep experience in the married state—a widower with six children on his second wedding-day. He only puffed the harder at his pipe, and, if the atmosphere grew too dense, put on his hat.

Mrs. Hollin was not a bad stepmother: she kept the children warm, neat, and well fed; if she cuffed them vigorously in her tempers, she made amends by lavish indulgence at other times, and there never was a more fearless or devoted nurse in sickness. Mike was the couple’s only child. Notwithstanding his advent, the family circle dwindled. Tom, the eldest son, a stolid, good fellow like his father, married and moved to another town; two of the sisters died of diphtheria; the eldest girl was married; one sister went out to service; the brother next to Mike fell into the cistern, and before Mike left school he was the only child at home. This departure from school occurred suddenly when Mike was fourteen; the direct cause being his father’s running up against him just as he swaggered out of a saloon.

„That’s what they learn ye at school, is it?“ said old Tom, grimly. „Time you was at work!“ And to work Mike went the very next morning, in spite of his mother’s protestations and promises. Many were the tears shed by Annie Hollin because of Mike’s lost „learning“; for she gave the fetish-like worship of her class to „education“.

But Mike did not regret the school. Study was irksome to him, and work suited him better than any one could have expected; he really had plenty of energy. Moreover, Hollin had shrewdly gaged the youngster’s mind. He told him that he could have all he made over two dollars a week. The work was piece-work, and Mike very soon rose out of his humble beginning as errand-boy for the foreman in the machine-shop of the Agricultural Implement Company, for which his father worked, to a bench of his own, and the right to counter-sink cultivator-shovels at ten cents a hundred.

Mike’s spiritual training was not cut short like his secular education; on the contrary, although his father never went to church, and his mother seldom, I am inclined to think that the boy suffered from a plethora of religious advantages. He attended no less than four Sunday-schools—Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Episcopal, and Unitarian. He went to the first school because his mother had been born in the Church of Rome, and, long since estranged from it, still felt its attraction, and cherished vague hopes of reconciliation — when she could afford it. Therefore, she sent Mike to Father Kelly as clay to the potter. The other three Sunday-schools Mike attended on his own account because they had picnics and Christmas-trees.

It may be imagined that his religious instruction was variegated, even contradictory. Little, however, did contradictions trouble our young heretic; since his four guides each told him a different story of the way of life, he took a

short cut out of all difficulties by believing none of them. At sixteen Mike was beyond reach of such modest bribery as Christmas-trees and picnics can offer. He preferred to spend his Sundays dangling his legs from an empty packing-box at the street corner, puffing at a rank cigar, his ears gulping down unsavory gossip, taking new lessons in the cheap vices; at intervals (presuming him to have a few pennies, or some talker in the crowd to be in a generous mood) refreshing himself at the adjacent saloons. The town being under so-called „prohibitory laws“, you couldn't throw a stone anywhere without hitting a green screen.

By the time he was nineteen Mike knew how to drink, smoke, swear fluently, box in a crude fashion, and lose his money at any gambling game without wincing. He knew some other ways of pleasing the devil, if one may believe his father; in fact, he was a rowdy, the kind of fellow that women hurry past on the streets. But none the less was he his mother's idol. She dowered him with all the treasures of her dreams, from curly hair—the best you could say of Mike's red locks was that they were crooked at the ends—to a sweet disposition. He was such a handy boy about the house (Mike did care for his mother in a careless way, and had the grace to help her, occasionally, with a tub or a basket of wood). Then Mike wasn't like „them Murray boys—never could spend an evening home, always loafing and guzzling at the saloons—Mike was a great reader, he read aloud beautifully!“ If only Hollin had let him get an education, there was no knowing where he would have stopped. The truth was, Mike read a socialist newspaper, and some novels of the baser sort.

Yet I am not denying some virtues in the mire. By nature Mike had a sweet temper. He was neither envious nor churlish; and he was kind to helpless creatures, the fowls, the dog, the cow, and the children. He had a distorted sense of honor, that, so far, getting tangled up with his class feeling, had done him more harm than good. For instance, honor, egged on by class feeling, hampered him in his work, not permitting him to be industrious or a notable artisan, of which there were the makings in Mike, for he was nice-fingered, quick-witted, and patient; but where work is done by the piece, it is not considered square to the other fellows to do too many pieces daily. Should you be so inconsiderate, the „boss“ may put down the price on you; then, the slow workers will be in trouble, while the brisk workers cannot make any more. Therefore a shrewd mechanic will „nurse his job!“

Mike brimmed over with class feeling. He belonged to a union and to the Knights of Labor, and to a mysterious organization without a name that carried its aims farther than most men out of the penitentiary care to go. All the enthusiasm, all the capacity for reckless devotion, that belong to his own age and his mother's race, poured into this one channel—zeal for his class. Mike was as proud because he was a Knight of Labor as any medieval knight ever was of his gold spurs. He bragged and he fought for the order—bragged to his father, and fought three miserable „rats“ in the shop that refused to join the Knights and resented having their tools stolen: that was how his nose got broken. He made sacrifices for the cause, going without tobacco one whole month that he might contribute his share to what his father called „the fooliest fool strike in the country.“

Mike was capable of hero-worship also; he admired the foreman of his shop, Bill Nicker, who once had drawn a fifty-dollar prize in the Louisiana Lottery, and henceforth was a prime authority on betting, and knew how to drive so well

that the livery stables would trust him with fast horses. Only second to this hero was a big fellow in the blacksmith shop about whom there was a dark rumor that he had once stood up against John L. Sullivan, in a round at an exhibition, with bare fists! Mike himself never would make a pugilist, because he was a stunted little creature, agile and enduring, but small like his mother. All the more did he esteem inches and muscle. Secretly he admired his father; though Hollin made no secret that he despised his son.

„He ain't no good, and never will be,“ fumed Tom; „calling himself a Knight of Labor, striking for every cat that squalls; wanting to buy cigars—what business 'as a kid like 'im got with cigars, anyhow?—not wanting to buy them at Carter's, 'cause Carter's men was on the strike! Now what the --- is it his look-out what Carter's men does? They doesn't consult us when they strikes, and why the --- should we be paying for their fun? 'Tain't the way I was brought up. And them Knights ain't the wust, neither. He belongs to some other society that he keeps almighty dark about. Guess the darker he keeps the better. That Bill Nicker's a bad egg; if he don't end on the gallows, I miss my guess. And Mike's lucky if he don't git there with him. He's going to the devil fast's I ever see a boy yet.“

„No, he ain't, neither!“ Hollin's wife, who naturally got most of these gruesome suspicions, would cry. „No, he ain't; and you know it, Hollin. And you ought to be 'shamed talkin' so of your own son. Mike may be a little wild; but he never got drunk in his life, and he'll come out all right, you'll see.“

Perhaps in his secret soul old Tom craved to be proved wrong; for he never resented Annie's vehemence; rather, at times he seemed to invite it, as if he would see the other side of the argument, if he could.

In fact, however, Mike's society justified his father's fears. The doctrines would have scared any one except an anarchist. All the regular orders of labor have an unacknowledged and desperate kind of following, that are to them what guerrillas are to armies. Few people understand how important a part such irregulars play in strikes. The younger and wilder spirits belong to these secret bands; they are the ones having least to lose and most to gain, are always ready for a strike, tickled at the notion of the holiday, sure of being supported in idleness while the strike lasts (never having a penny of their own by any chance to fall back on), glad to get the better wage if the strike be successful, hardly the worse in any event.

Bill Nicker, already mentioned, was the originator of Mike's society; Tom Hollin, junior, afterward declared that Bill made most of it up „out of his own head.“ I cannot say how far he was right: certainly Mike had no suspicions; he believed in the society, and all its vague and tremendous penalties, with unctiousness; he was afire to distinguish himself, and felt vastly superior to the workmen who did not belong.

Long ago said wise Francis of Verulam: „There is nothing makes a man suspect much, more than to know little.“ Every man or boy—to say truth, most of the members were nearer boyhood than manhood—in Mike's society was convinced that he was wronged, even where he could not place the wrong. And, as ignorance is equally as hopeful as suspicious, they gave to Nicker's artless schemes for turning the world upside down a faith that ought to move mountains.

Nicker was a socialist, anarchist, moral out-law, every inch of him, having that facility for turning sentences that often passes for logic. He didn't always quite know what he meant himself, and his hearers never did, but they listened

to his flatulent eloquence with awe. He was not a lover of humanity, he had none of the pathetic frenzy of longing to help the woes of the world, which goads on many socialists: not he, not William Nicker, who could smoke his pipe when home on a strike, and let his wife fill her tubs to earn him drink-money; but he did have an unaffected hatred of the rich that he was convinced was sympathy for the poor. Thus he was a fanatic, with something of the fanatic's momentum. Mike considered him one of the great reformers of the century; but Mike's father, having been put to some trouble by Nicker's shifty workmanship, was outspoken against him, and usually called him „Gasbag“.

Nicker was the real mover in the strange experience that came to Mike on his birthday. There had been a change of ownership in the works. A new company had bought them, and a new superintendent had been sent to the shops. The men were suspicious of the change; Nicker said harsh things of the owners. But Hollin exulted. For one thing, his son Tom was coming with Mr. Thorne; and Tom was the good, dutiful son whom old Tom loved, the rising man of whom old Tom was proud.

„They say the new superintendent ain't much more'n a boy,“ Mike grumbled on one occasion.

„Humph!“ said old Tom, „one thing in his favor; he learned the business in the shop, come back from college, and put on his overalls, and got up at six, and kept hours. Say he kin do anything in the shops; invented a dandy spring to the cultivators; knows a good job from a poor one across the street: that's the sort for me!“

„Bill Nicker says he's a spy,“ said Mike; „says he worked in the shop and found out how much the fellers kin do if they hump themselves; and kept doing that much; so they put down the price.“

„I mind Bill Nicker came from the Thornes', and he got a hand mashed fooling with a punch. They paid him his wages full time and all the doctor's bills—“

„That's 'cause they're insured; Bill told me 'bout it.“

„Guess they got to pay fer insurance, then. Pay comes at one end or 'nother; no great difference 'cept to a fool like Bill. And they sent him off—oh, I know all 'bout Gasbag—they sent him off fer stirring up bad blood with the men. He got up a strike; but it didn't pay, and the Knights' Lodge there was close to firing him, they was. If ye want to know, that's why he hates Thorne like pizen.“ The old man puffed a minute, then summed up his case: „Tell ye, Mike, them Thornes is pretty decent folks, and fer one I'm glad they bought us out. I know they give their men fair living wages, and some of the older ones gits a share of the profits. There's Tom; he was keen to have me go there when he left; now he's a foreman, been with 'em three year, and got his wages raised twice without his saying a word. He gits thirty dollars a week now. I wish to the Lord I'd gone with him when he first went, for he says they know a good man when they see him, and are willing to pay for good work.“

„Well, I know one thing,“ said Mike, sulkily, „we ain't a-going to have any interference with our organizing here. That young Thorne's got to quit fighting organized labor, or we'll strike!“

„My, what a long tail our cat's got!“ said old Tom, with a Rabelaisian grimace. „Guess you better try to see what good work you kin do, and, my word for it, you won't have to strike. Look at Tom. He don't belong to no Union nor no Knights, and he's clumb up and up and up!“

„I ain't a-going to desert my comrades, anyhow,“ came round the corner of Mike's collar.

His father took a stride forward, and tapped him on the shoulder. The old man looked very tall, there at his elbow, and Mike was impressed by something unusual, almost solemn, in his expression.

„Mike,“ he said, „I've been living and thinking a good while; and I know enough to know I ain't going to do a bit of good by talking to you. No matter; it'll free my mind to tell. You're all wrong, boy, clean wrong, you and your societies. The way to help all the other fellers is to be a decent feller yourself. And it's a heap easier fer the strongest feller to climb the hill fust, and then—and all the while—be lendin' a hand to the hindmost, than it is to have the strong one stay underneath a-boostin' and a-boostin' up fellers that ain't got sprawl enough to help themselves when they are boosted. I tell ye, Mike, it's all wrong.“

Mike was not convinced, but he was cowed by his father's earnestness; he took refuge in sulky silence, glad to see the shop doors.

The superintendent came. He was a tall, slim, smiling young fellow, in the last fashion of clothes, with very bright, dark eyes. He did look absurdly young and gentle—„pretty as a girl!“ jeered Mike—but there was a faint contraction of the eyebrows giving to those bright and soft dark eyes a mingled steadiness and keenness of gaze, and a look that in a man's face never means but one thing.

„He's a hard hitter when he's mad, or I miss my guess,“ said old Tom.

The first thing to happen was a strike, the cause being persecution of organized labor, insomuch as Thorne had discharged four members of Mike's nameless society for drunkenness and inefficiency. Nicker was one of the men discharged. He had declared that it was not possible for his men to turn out more work a day than they did, without injury to the quality of the work; Thorne had replied that more work was done in the other shops, and if Nicker couldn't get it done, he would try to find some one who could. Nicker kicked the metal wheel in his hands to the end of the shop, and picked up his coat, profanely giving Thorne permission to try.

The condition of affairs was ripe for mischief. The former owners had been neither better nor worse than the bulk of their kind. As they themselves said, they were not running the implement business as a missionary enterprise, but to make money; it did not strike them as unfair or especially hard-hearted to pare down the men's wages in winter, when work was slack, and the shop could afford an idle time far better than workingmen with families. If the men did not like the wages, they could quit, which option the hotheads were for taking; but they, in general, had no children to clothe, or stoves to keep going, or butchers and bakers to satisfy. The men grumbled; but they did not strike. They organized, and bided their chance. Thorne walked into a crater. The season was summer now; the shops were running full time on heavy orders; it was the men's turn at the screw. Nicker was mightily busy with insinuations; whispering ugly stories about the Thornes' determination to root out labor organizations, and splendid promises of success—if they all pulled together. On the other hand, Tom Hollin and the men that came with Thorne represented that the new company (Thorne's father and brothers) were fair men, who made their contracts at the beginning of the year, and stood by them. They wouldn't ask better men to work for.

But an uneasy suspicion clings to the workman outside the unions and too successful to side with his mates. Tom Hollin had bought a house; his wife kept

a hired girl; Sunday afternoons he would go driving in a buggy, with his wife and baby, dressed up like a gentleman. „You couldn't expect such a man to be in touch with the toiling millions!“ declaimed Bill Nicker. Nevertheless, the Hollins and a few more of the cautious workmen did succeed in averting a general strike, and in persuading the local Knights of Labor to be neutral. Thus from the first the strike was doomed; in less than a week's time Thorne had filled half the empty benches with new men. The strikers began to be frightened. They sent a deputation to Thorne, who told them that what places were not already filled were open to the first comers; he would not discharge the men he had hired. While he spoke he brushed an insignificant mustache with a hot-house rose, looking more amiable and girlish than ever; but he was no more to be stirred than the huge engine buzzing outside.

„They don't belong to the Knights or the union or nothing,“ urged Mike, one of the deputation.

„Don't they?“ said the superintendent. „I didn't inquire. If they do their work well, they are free to belong to a dozen labor organizations or to none. It is none of my business; I shall go on filling the places as fast as I can. For you boys, I advise you to come back quick, while there are any jobs left.“

„And how about Ransom, and O'Brien, and Schreiner, and me?“ said Nicker.

„All of you, Mr. Nicker, will have to go somewhere else than here.“

„We'll see about that, Mr. Thorne. If this is going to be a scab shop, you'll find it isn't easy running it; and these men that have taken the bread out of our children's mouths, let them look out for themselves!“

The deputation went away, keeping a high crest, but inwardly disheartened by Thorne's composure. Tom Hollin, to this day, maintains that whatever their anger and disappointment, they would not have gone beyond petty intimidations with the new men, but for Nicker; to him Tom always charged the lamentable bloodshed that followed. Thorne gave warning that, at all hazards, he would protect his men. He kept his word; the most turbulent week that the little Western city had ever known ended in a frantic riot, with utter rout to the strikers, a score of broken heads and limbs, a policeman stabbed, and one poor lad struck so heavily that he could never wring his mother's heart again. Poor Patsy was the only son of a widow, the best-hearted fellow in the world when sober. He belonged to Mike's society. Mike himself helped carry him home, and came away crying.

Squalid, needless, futile tragedy that it was, it had more needless, more tragical possibilities in its wake. It is not an easy thing to propose assassination to American workingmen, even to young anarchists; but when, that night, Nicker rose in the garret that served his society for a council-chamber, and glanced from one bruised and lowering face to another, he recognized the image of his own passions.

With hardly a dissenting voice, Arthur van Rensselaer Thorne, superintendent of the Ernsdale Agricultural Implement Company, was tried by this modern Fehmgericht, for murder, convicted, and condemned to death. The execution of the sentence was to be deferred for two weeks, lest suspicion should be turned in the real quarter; for the same reason the strike was declared off. There only remained to settle who should be the executioner, and Michael Hollin drew the black lot. This it was that happened to him on his nineteenth birthday. He held out the palm of his hand, and they all could see it; very likely not a man there but drew a breath of relief.

„I am ready,“ said Mike in an even voice. Nicker, watching the lad keenly, nodded once or twice; there were certain dusky labyrinths in his memory where he did not often care to rummage; perhaps they held faces with a like sinister radiance to that shining through Mike’s freckles. „He’ll do,“ decided the socialist.

Nevertheless, he made him a sign to wait after the others had gone, having it in mind to „hearten him up a bit“; which he accomplished by kicking aside the huddle of chairs and pushing Mike past the eddies of stale tobacco smoke and dust from shuffling feet, until they stood under the full glare of the gas-jets, and then saying, in his most impressive chest-tones, „Remember our laws. If Thorne doesn’t die, you will! Think of that when you weaken.“

„I ain’t going to weaken,“ said Mike.

„Well, I believe you,“ said Nicker, heartily. „The social revolution would come quicker if there were more like you. Say, have you got any change about you? Let’s go take a drink.“

„I guess I don’t care for a drink,“ said Mike; „here’s a quarter, though, you’re welcome to. It’s all I got.“

The exhilaration that Mike experienced when the great man first condescended to borrow small sums had been dulled by repetition of late; and his cynical levity jarred on the boy’s strained mood. „He hadn’t ought to drink to-night“—thus for a daring second he ventured to criticize his chief—„it ain’t no drinking business he’s got us into.“

There was a relief when he could bid Nicker good night (every detail having been settled), and was free to go his own way. Mike’s home was on the hills, and his custom was to ride up the long street on the electric cars; but tonight he did not hail the flashing thing that roared past him, spattering blue and green fire off the rails.

„Ain’t it like the devil?“ occurred to Mike. „It ain’t near so much like the devil, really, though, as them saloons“—he stood opposite one, at the moment, able to see Nicker’s square shoulders and the back of the hand with which he wiped his black mustache, while he spent Mike’s quarter—„I guess I won’t drink any more.“

How devious and amazing are the ways of that strong spirit which, Christian or pagan, we may well call the Holy Ghost. Here is a young ruffian, whose life has been for years as evil as his wages would allow, who now is pledged to commit an atrocious crime; yet the weight of this very crime on his soul is crushing out his trivial vices. He, the idle, dissolute rowdy about to become an assassin, is nearer salvation than he ever was in his ignoble life. For the first time poor Mike tried to understand the meaning of duty and devotion. In some indistinct fashion the cruel deed that he was to do seemed to him a sacrificial act, and himself a priest of justice. He was no longer simply Mike Hollin, he was the representative of the avengers of the poor, who dealt with the tremendous issues of life and death. He was awed. „I guess I’ll behave as well’s I know how,“ said Mike.

He had mounted the hill, where lights were still shining from upper stories, behind dainty curtains; and now he turned into a side street. The houses grew smaller; and gradually the red slipped out of the windows until there was no light visible except in one house, a little yellow cottage on the slope of a hill. There was a garden about the house with an old-fashioned garnishment of peonies and hollyhocks; the latter sprung so close to the walls and the bright

window that the stalks were not only drawn but faintly tinted, the pink splashes showing amid the green.

Mike knew why that single window was bright while all the homes around were soundless and dark. He looked at it as he whispered: „Patsy, do you hear? I'm glad it's me will do it. Rest easy, Patsy, boy; we'll pay him up! We'll revenge you!“ Then he recoiled and hurried away, for he had seen a shape cross the translucent white screen—a little, bent woman's shape, a knitted shawl drawn over the gray head. „She ain't much bigger'n ma,“ thought Mike, swallowing at a lump in his throat. Again he could hear the little, wrinkled creature's wail above her son. Never but the one cry over and over, „Oh, he was always such a good boy to me!“

„It's more'n ma could rightly say for me,“ said Mike to himself; „but she would, though; you bet she would! Poor ma, I ain't done right by her, and that's a fact. I'll fill the wood-boxes to-morrow, by—“

The Hollins lived in a Mississippi town, not yet so old that the high bluffs have been cleft in any rectangular order; there remain picturesque ravines between streets, and hills tied together by slight wooden bridges that echo hollowly to the tread, and shady slopes with foot-paths under the bur-oaks. Such a bridge Mike crossed, and rested his elbows on the railing just where the string-course sags on its crooked piles. Although an electric lamp swings from its tower above the further bank, like a luminous porcupine, radiating fuzzy needles of light on the first half of the bridge, the shadow of the bank blocks off the last span. It is very dark. Sometimes the water stagnates in the hollow underneath, and the frogs croak. Always it is a lonesome, uncanny spot, past which belated children scamper on winter evenings. Mike laid his eyes on the bright path. Some night—a night not so far away—he must stand in the selfsame place, peering out of the dusk as he peered now, waiting, watching, until a light figure should step on the planks with an elastic footfall that Mike knew, should traverse the little portion of the road in the lamplight, and so—pass into the darkness and the jaws of death!

Everything was cunningly planned. Nicker had fitted in each detail, down to the alibi ready next day for Mike. There would be the revels at half a dozen saloons, three trusty comrades of the Fehmgericht to bear witness to the hours (omitting only one), a simulated drunkenness by Mike, and, finally, the bearing of him home, in the guise of a sodden and helpless wreck, to be put to bed by his mother.

„Oh, you don't need to be afraid, Mike,“ Nicker had chuckled, half an hour ago; „we'll see you through. I know the ropes.“

„I ain't afraid,“ said Mike. Nor was he afraid now; but his nerves thrilled as a violin-string will vibrate to a strong chord. He glanced from the light that was shining on Patsy O'Connor's winding-sheet to a light burning across the ravine where his mother waited for him, and he thought, „I wonder has he any folks.“ Then he set his face homeward, knitting his brows. All the way he could see the light.

His father flung the door open before Mike's thumb was off the gate latch.

Mike saw the room inside: the new brass lamp glowing on the table; the short waves of his mother's black hair; the lines in her worn little face painted in broad strokes by the light; and the gay rags, tumbled on her white apron, for the mat that she was knitting—to lie in front of Mike's bed. She looked up, and her lips trembled while she smiled.

„You're late, Mike.“ His father speaks sharply.

„Yes, sir,“ says Mike, with an extraordinary meekness—to-night he has no more heart to squabble than he has had to carouse—„there was a meeting, and the strike's declared off. I came right home after the meeting. I ain't been drinking, pa.“

„Had any money left to drink on?“ grunts old Tom. „Um—m—m!“—the grunt, this time, that of the justified seer, as Mike shakes his head, looking foolish—„I thought as much. Well, go into the kitchen and git your supper; your ma would save it for you. I told her like's not you was killed. Got hurted at all, hey?“

„No, pa.“

To hear Hollin's snarl, one would infer that he was rather disappointed at Mike's escape, whole and clean of limb—the fact being that young Tom and he had scoured the town for news; and since he had come home (on assurance from a friendly policeman that his boy was safe), he had been pacing the floor, pouring out his anxieties by jerks, for his wife to contradict.

„And didn't I tell you he wouldn't be hurt?“ shrilly chimed in Mrs. Hollin, among whose virtues magnanimity will not be reckoned at the last day. „And, Mike, don't you mind a word he says, or Tom, neither, for he's glad enough you're not laying alongside Patsy O'Connor; and so's Tom. And Clara was crying, she was so scared about you; but I fried you some liver and apples, and there's coffee—if it ain't all sizzled away; I guessed you'd like a hot supper better'n me cryin'—“

Mike astonished his parents no more than himself by obeying an unaccountable impulse to kiss his mother. „I wisht I'd never made you cry, ma,“ he growled, and plunged into the kitchen.

„Well!“ said Thomas Hollin.

The mother wiped the tears out of her eyes; but she called after Mike, in her natural high key: „Say, Mike, little Terry came round with Clara, and he was so worked up he jest wouldn't go home; said he would stay and sleep with Uncle Mike. I let him, 'cause I knew you wouldn't mind.“

„No; I'm glad,“ answered Mike, his voice deeper than usual.

Terry was the crippled seven-year-old boy of his sister Clara, who had married the grocer at the corner; and of all the four grandchildren he was the one that Mike petted most. Mrs. Hollin, unknown to any mortal, had her appalling seasons of vision with regard to Mike. His father was mistaken when he judged her to be blind; she knew more about Mike's vices than did he. But in her worst discouragement she would be comforted if she saw Mike with Terry. „He's got a good heart, that boy, or he never could love a child so—Lord, do save him yet!“ Then Annie Hollin used to pray—for she did pray, and fervently, although only on great occasions. „I ain't one to be bothering the Lord every time my bread don't rise,“ said Annie. „No, I help myself long's I can; and when I can't, I ask help. It's the way I'd be done by, and it's the way I do!“

The day must have been a hard one for her in spite of her bravado, since, after Tom slept, she stole to the window and kneeled there a long time, sobbing and praying. She might have judged her prayers answered could she have looked into Mike's room, and seen Mike's face pressed against the curly yellow head, with that better and softer look that Terry often saw. But surely she would have known a new foreboding had she tarried until the child roused himself to murmur sleepily, „Give Uncle Mike a kiss and a hug and a pat“—all his little store of sweets—„'cause the cops didn't kill you!“ and heard Mike say

huskily, „You won't quit liking Uncle Mike, whatever they say, will you, little Terry?“

The following morning (the day of the week was Wednesday) Mike applied at the shops for work. Before he started he filled the kitchen wood-box. Every morning he filled it. He pumped water unasked. The next pay-day he bought his mother probably the gaudiest and ugliest photograph frame to be gotten in the town for money. He put a photograph of Terry in it.

„Oh, dearie me,“ sighed Annie Hollin, „that boy must 'a' got something on his mind; he ain't natural at all.“

„Well, I hope he'll stay unnatural, then,“ said her husband, easily. „He ain't worked so well or kept so steady since I've knowed him.“

Mike, in fact, was working hard. The instructions given him were to be industrious and seem content. To work was a relief in the ferment of his mind, to seem content was a different matter. Possessed still by a somber enthusiasm, he took no pleasure in the „chaff“ of his mates in the shop, or in beer and dirty packs of cards, out of hours. He took to spending his evenings home. He was civil to his father and to young Tom. „I'd like 'em to have something kind o' pleasanter 'bout me to remember than jest always having to keep the coffee on the back of the stove for me,“ thought Mike.

Old Tom viewed his son's changed ways with a mixture of bewilderment and secret thankfulness; it was too soon to approve; but he ceased to sneer or grumble, preserving a decent silence, filled with tobacco-smoke. Young Tom was openly encouraged. „Mike's been brought up standing by Patsy O'Connor's death, that's what it is,“ said Tom. „He's trying to think it out; and one good thing, he's broken with the Nicker gang. Say, Elly, we must ask Mike to the house, sometimes, and lend him books. And I don't believe it'll break me to hire a two-horse carriage next Sunday, and all of us go riding, pa and ma, and you 'n' me and Arthur, and Mike.“

Even Clara's husband, hitherto the gloomiest of Mike's critics, had felt the contagion of the family hopefulness, and displayed his good will in a package of Durham tobacco and an invitation to a revival meeting, enlivened by stereopticon views of the Holy Land. Mike thanked him, smoked the tobacco, and went to see the pictures. What would the staid deacons in the pew behind him have thought, could they have looked into his brain and seen the pictures there! Steadily, these feignings of his fancy grew more terrible, more absorbing. He got no comfort from his comrades. Nicker made jokes about murder when in good humor, or ferocious threats when angry. The older comrades were shy of the subject. „They're scared, the cowards!“ thought Mike. The younger comrades had a callous cheerfulness that exasperated him. He couldn't help thinking that they would be less cheerful were their own necks in danger, instead of his. When was it that a new suspicion joined the tumult of his thoughts? They changed; insidiously, imperceptibly a doubt, not of the righteousness of the cause, not of the justice of punishing the oppressors, but a doubt of the exact measure of guilt of this special oppressor, Arthur Thorne, unarmed his purpose. Whether it was that seeing Thorne daily, discovering, as a good workman is never slow to discover, that he „understood the business down to the ground,“ and, discovering, too, that he was quick to commend, Mike had felt the personal charm that made his brother the young fellow's devoted adherent; whether it was that the talk of the shop, which had now veered over to Thorne's side, as to a „man with sand that would stick to them

that stuck to him," unconsciously affected him; whether he was influenced by the example of the principal Knights of Labor among the workmen, men not the least like Nicker, either in habit or principle, and giving a modified support to Thorne as apparently „meaning well“; in fine, whether any or all of these causes moved him to compassion for Thorne as a man too rashly doomed, moved he was, and deeply. He tried to brace up his nerves by a visit to Patsy's mother, whom he had not seen for a week, not since he helped carry Patsy's coffin to his grave.

She met his sympathy with a strange answer. „Is it Mr. Thorne you'd be imputin' it to, Mike Hollin?“ she cried. „He had nothing to do with it at all, except the goodness of him paying for the fine carriages at the funeral. He did that, God bless him! I know well the man that's my poor boy's murderer, and ye mind it, Michael Hollin!“

„Oh,“ said Mike, vaguely, „was it Officer Reilly?“

„No, it was not, Michael Hollin. Who hit him I know not, nor do I want to know. They was all in a heap, and ivery man a-striking for his own head—I might be blaming unjustly an I did know, so I pray God to keep it from me! No; the wan Almighty God blames for that day, an' the blood on it, ain't the cratur that was hitting, maybe by mistake; it's the man that druv them poor boys wild an' bad with his wicked lies.“

„And him, Mrs. O'Connor?“

„Ye know well that it's Bill Nicker I mean, Michael Hollin.“

Of course she was raving in her grief, but he could not tell her so; and her words recurred to him uncomfortably all the way down-town.

It was a half-holiday at the works, owing to some repairs, and Mike had the afternoon to himself. He thought that he would go to Terry's school in time to walk home with Terry. There was a reason for the heavy sickness of heart that made him crave the little fellow's companionship; time had not stood still for his struggles, and to-morrow was the night. Sunk in darker and darker meditation, he walked down the shady street toward the great brick building that is the Eighth District school. And so mutinous was the cast of his thoughts, that he gave a guilty start when he observed, a little in advance, Nicker himself walking with the gigantic blacksmith. Of late the blacksmith, who was a member of the society, had been restive under discipline, grumbling about Thorne's sentence; and indeed, Mike had noticed that while the hatred of Thorne had steadily grown more virulent and reckless in the men outside—those who like Nicker were refused any place in the shops—the men at work were becoming listless and uneasy. „Some of 'em would like to back out,“ said Mike, scowling. „After to-morrow, it will be too late to back out.“ He quickened his pace a little—as one will when Black Care strikes the spursin—and he was only the breadth of the street, obliquely, from the school-house, near enough to see the heads, white and yellow and brown, filing behind the windows, in the formal march to the doors; he could distinguish Terry's yellow curls, see the doors swing apart, the lower-room children pouring out into the street; when, quite without warning, all the people on the sidewalk began to run with loud screams. The horrid cry arose: „Mad dog! mad dog!“ Mike turned whence the noise mostly came, to behold an ugly sight. Down the side street, headed directly toward the crowd of children, ran the animal, one of those white, bow-legged, wrinkle-jawed, vicious-eyed bull-dogs, to which in their best estate one instinctively gives the larger half of the walk, at this moment a creature out of a nightmare,

with his ghastly mouth and the blind, crouching fury of his gait; and behind him raced fast and faster the single pursuer, a young man on a bicycle. He could see the children; in his set face and straining muscles was as fierce an eagerness as that hurling the brute. This picture flashed into Mike's consciousness before he wrenched a loose brick from the pavement and ran straight into the dog's path. He passed Nicker and the blacksmith, who had leaped a fence, and were hunting for weapons on the safe side. One chance in a thousand that he might hit the dog before he should reach the children! If not—Mike straightened himself and shut his teeth hard; the brick was poised in his right hand, he opened his pocket-knife with his teeth and his left hand. They were coming! A woman screamed as the rider gained. He was level with the beast, he swung his body over; nobody quite saw how it was done, but the dog was snatched up and held out at arm's-length by the collar, while the wheels whirled on.

„Hold him!“ screamed Mike. „Hold him! I kin hit him!“ The man on the wheels did hold the dog, held him far out, struggling savagely, a horrible mark. Mike threw his brick so truly, that the writhing, foaming mass collapsed into a string of limp legs and a bloody head, which the rider flung on the ground, just before he sprang down himself.

They saw a quick movement of one arm; there was a flash and a loud report.

Arthur Thorne replaced his revolver. „Thank you,“ said he, with a nod at Mike; "I really don't think he needed that last shot, but it was better to make safe. You throw well, Hollin.“

Mike had drawn near enough to be one of the crowd staring at the gory lump; a second earlier there were only Thorne, the dog, and he, but now at least twenty men bustled up valorously with improvised weapons, and one adventurous matron swung a tea-kettle. The blacksmith had wrenched off a pump-handle. Among them no one would have singled out Mike standing with shoulders relaxed, hands in his pockets, and mouth agape, for an actor in the scene. His head swam. A dizzy admiration for Thorne's feat mingled with something that suffocated him, as he saw Terry limping through the crowd, and heard the familiar little voice calling:

„Please let me get to my Uncle Mike. Did you kill him, Uncle Mike? Let me look. He can't bite nobody now, can he?“

Mike lifted the child up in his arms, and hid his face against Terry's jacket.

„You're a brave boy,“ cried the woman, sobbing.

„No, I ain't,“ said Mike brusksly; „there was all the children. Anyhow, Mr. Thorne done it. I must take this boy home.“ So he got away, got Terry home, almost staggered home himself.

His father smoked his pipe on the piazza steps; indoors his mother was setting the table, both waiting for Mike, with excited faces, for a neighbor had told them the story. Mrs. Hollin ran out and fell on Mike's neck. „But 'twasn't me killed the dog, ma,“ said Mike, who, indeed, was too harried by conflicting emotions to realize the splendor of his own conduct.

„Yes 'twas, too,“ sobbed Mrs. Hollin; „you hit him with the brickbat.“

„But I never could have got nigh enough in time to slug him,“ Mike cried very earnestly. „Mr. Thorne he caught him up like lightning—tell ye, ma, 'twas somethin' to see!“

„Well, yes, he was brave, too,“ admitted Mrs. Hollin.

„I say ye both done well,“ pronounced the father, „and I am going out this minute to git some beer to drink Mike’s health.“

Mike could hardly remember the time when his father had praised him before; and yet so confused and troubled was his mind, that he was only aware of a new kind of pang. Nevertheless, being occupied with the catastrophe and their own vivid emotions, none of the family except his mother noticed anything odd in his demeanor. Clara came before supper was ended, to relate the story with tears; and Clara’s husband choked when he thanked Mike. „I know little Terry never could have got out of the way,“ said he. Tom came, too, with his wife, who, having been a school-teacher and wearing a gold watch, was considered to hold herself rather above the family; and Elly actually kissed Mike, calling him, „You splendid fellow!“ while Tom held him out by both elbows, crying, „Let’s look at the young feller Mr. Thorne says is the bravest man he knows.“

„Oh, you get out!“ stammered the wretched Mike, feeling ready to cry. „And Bill Nicker,“ says Tom, gleefully—„bless you, Bill was there, but he wasn’t there long; he got over a fence like greased lightning, and Johnny Mahin was with him; he got over, too, and pulled the handle off the Lowders’s pump, and Lowder was round swearing he’ll make him mend it! The joke is, it’s cast-iron, and he broke it off short. ‘A feller’s strong’s that oughtn’t to be afraid of a pup,’ says Lowder. Bill Nicker got Mrs. Lowder’s carving-knife, and was round mighty brave after the dog was dead.“

„Is he gone to work yet?“ asked old Tom, who was puffing very comfortably on the step.

„No; says he’s waiting for the new factory to start up over the river. Says he’ll get higher wages there.“

„Bill Nicker,“ said old Tom, meditatively, „he tries every way on earth to get higher wages, ‘cept doing better work.“

To all this and more Mike listened. He said nothing. He felt no desire to defend Nicker. His moral world was in ruins. Nicker had shown the white feather, and Thorne had saved Terry.

But only his mother watched him anxiously, sitting mute and dismal amid the chatter; only his mother stole to his door during the night and heard his sobs. In the morning she made a pretext of some pie for his dinner to get him off to her little pantry. „You walk on, Tom,“ said she; „he’ll ketch up!“

„All right,“ called old Tom, cheerfully—he was in high good humor with Mike, the world, and himself—„give the lad a good dinner, he deserves it.“

She folded a napkin neatly about the „turnover“, and placed it in his pail. Her hands trembled. He could see her out of the corners of his eyes; he felt both those trembling hands laid on his shoulders; and he wriggled, blinking his swollen eyelids in the sunlight.

„Micky,“ said his mother, „you don’t need to wink, I know you been crying. You been wretched ‘s could be going on two weeks.“ He looked at her with a quivering mouth that wouldn’t smile for all his efforts. „Don’t you mind, Micky, when you was a boy, and you’d been bad or anything had gone wrong, how you’d come round after a while and tell all to mother? And then you’d feel all right! Micky dear, can’t you tell it all to mother now?“ She was afraid that he would be angry, but he was not angry.

„I wish I could, ma,“ he said, „but I can’t.“

„Micky, I know it's that society. Mrs. O'Connor told me she's sure they're after some mischief. Two or three of the boys was at her house; and you know boys: they can't no more help leaking out what's in their minds than a dish-pan with a hole in it; and they was bragging to her how Thorne would be sorry some day. Micky, don't go to feeling bad. Say, if I tell the police on 'em, and have 'em took up, will anything come out to hurt you?“

She was startled at his face, which turned a dark red, while he gripped her arms so hard that it hurt her. „Mother,“ he groaned, „if you do that, by—I'll cut my throat!“

„Oh, then, I won't, Micky. Then I won't indeed, Micky. But, Micky, I'd hate—I'd hate for any harm to come to Mr. Thorne, after Terry, you know, and him godfather to Tom's boy.“

„There'll no harm come to Mr. Thorne, mother; I promise you that.“ He spoke very steadily, and, after a long look at her, he kissed her. It was so unlike Mike, and she was so oppressed, so fluttered, that she had no more strength to detain him. All she could do was miserably to watch him running through the little garden, and to fall on her knees by the flour-barrel. But in an instant she was on her feet. „I dunno as I need to pray, after all,“ cried she. She intended no irreverence; she only meant that her own resources were not yet exhausted; unless they were exhausted, to her queer conscience prayer was unwarrantable beggary. Rapidly she made herself ready for the street, and ran over to Mrs. O'Connor's.

Mike was a hero at the shops that day. The men thought that he seemed embarrassed by their praises; but that was natural, and to be commended in a youngster. John, the blacksmith, himself the butt of many jocosely references to pump-handles, approached him at noon. Mike sat on the shady side of the carshed looking at the river. John said something complimentary about the dog; then he kicked at the bits of slag on the black ground. „Say, you ain't going on with it, are ye?“ said he in an undertone.

„No,“ said Mike.

„I won't let anybody hurt you. You can buy a revolver; I'll lend you the money. And I'll go home with you every night.“

„Oh, that's all right,“ said Mike. The big man glanced half wistfully at the insignificant bare arms folded on Mike's knee and at the freckled, pale face; but he was a man of few words, so he merely said, „I guess so,“ and went his ways.

„I'd need more'n him to stand them off me,“ thought Mike, who had lost some of his belief in the Fehmgericht's infallibility, but not a whit of confidence in its power. „I don't blame the boys, neither,“ he would have answered, had there been any one to argue with him. „I'm a traitor. But I can't help it.“

When the whistle blew for closing, Mike slipped away, and went to a toy-shop. There he bought some envelopes and paper and a toy pistol. He was very particular that the pistol should be a safe one, with a rubber ball. Having made his purchases, he took the street-car to his sister Clara's. Clara's mother-in-law, the only person at home, wondered a little over his evident disappointment when he found her there alone: he gave her the pistol for Terry. From Clara's house, instead of going home, although it was now past six o'clock, he went down the hill to the river bridge.

In sunny weather there are so many people loitering about the approaches to the bridge, on the stone wall above the river bank, or on the wharves of the bath-house and the boat-houses, that one more quiet figure attracts no

attention, even should it be that of a young working-man who chooses to write his letters with a lead-pencil, and on his knee. Who would divine anything tragical concerning a round-shouldered young fellow that wrote with his tongue between his teeth, or who would imagine, when, having written and sealed his letter (the envelop [sic] was addressed to „A. V. Thorne, Esq.“), he put both hands into his pockets and stared at the opal water and the great gold ball hung above it, that here was a bewildered and tormented soul, so tormented, so bewildered as to see but one dark passage of escape? „I’ll post it, and he’ll get it to-morrow,“ said Mike. „I had to give him a bit of a caution, and I ain’t told on anybody. I wisht I could get a word to ma; but—she won’t take it so hard, thinking it’s accidental.“ All his misspent life seemed drifting past him on the softly flaming, glowing water: if he were to have the chance again, maybe he wouldn’t be such a fool. Terry’s laugh sounded in the swash of the waters, his mother’s voice, his father’s gruff tones, and Nicker’s clear, rich intonations. He heard Nicker speak quite distinctly, „If Thorne don’t die, you will!“ No; there was no other way out, but—poor mother!

„For the land’s sake, Micky, what are you looking at?“ said his mother. „I’ve been a-waving and a-waving to you, to get you to look round.“

She stood before him in the flesh, wearing her best bonnet, and her black silk gown given her by Tom, sacred to high feasts, and smiling as if well pleased. „And why ain’t you walking home, Micky Hollin?“ she said, slipping her hand into his arm. „Do you know Elly’s been and got a grand supper for you, for a surprise, and all of us is coming, and Mr. Thorne, too? It’ll be great doings, and I’ve been hunting the town over for you. You’ve got bare time to put on your Sunday coat; I got the things all laid out on the bed.“

„All right, ma,“ said Mike, forcing himself to smile. „I’ll just run down to the bath-house for a plunge to clean up, and ride up in the street-car. You go on to Elly’s.“

„The tubs at home’ll do you, Mike,“ she answered, holding tightly to his arm. „Wait; I got a letter Mr. Nicker gave me to be sure to give you. I guess it’s about his going away, for I saw him getting on the cars.“

Now she released his arm. He read the note that she gave him, while the sky, and the street, and the lighted water, and her face, all reeled about him as about a man in an earthquake:

„Friend Mike: All is discovered. I’m off to look for work. For God’s sake, do nothing in the matter! Will write.“

When Mike looked up, Mrs. Hollin was laughing hysterically.

„Mother,“ he cried, „what have you done?“

„I ain’t done nothing, Micky dear. I ain’t let on a word to the cops. But I accidental like met Mr. Nicker to-day, and says I: ‘Excuse me, Mr. Nicker, was there a fire or a fight down your way, for I seen three policemen there this morning?’ says I—but I was lying, you know, God forgive me! I wish you’d seen the man; he was hopping round like a hen with its head cut off, trying all the while not to appear strange at all. But he went off, and he hadn’t got well round the corner before he runs up on Mrs. O’Connor, who said very stiff (she ain’t on no too good terms with him), ‘Mr. Nicker, there was a little boy handed me this, begging me to hand it to you. I ain’t easy in my conscience ‘bout it, but for old

times' sake, here 'tis. And you see, Micky, it was jest more lies, a letter telling him the police was on to everything, and for him to warn M. H—“

„Ma, you wrote it!“ gasped Mike.

„Of course I wrote it, Micky. Do you expect poor Mrs. O'Connor, who can hardly sign her name, to write a document like that? I wrote it. And the man took it all for law and gospel, like I knew he would, and run home quick for his gripsack. I had to laugh to see him rolling his eyes round down at the depot, trying to look out of the back of his head if he could see a policeman, he was so scairt. But, the Lord be praised, we're rid of him, for good! So, Micky, I sha'n't ask no questions and you don't need to tell me no lies; but don't never have no such awful things happen to you that your mother has got to be a liar for you, or think of taking baths in the river; and do try and be a good boy and please your father.“

„Fore God I will, ma,“ said Mike, out of a full heart.

