

A Thought and a Deed.

BY MARY E. BRUSH.

IT was a subject of wonder to many why Hugh Rushton had so far descended the social ladder as to become a mere ticket agent at a little wayside station.

He was of excellent family. His father had been judge, and his grandfather a member of congress. Whether they had been good men is quite another thing.

We think of bequeathing lands and money to our children, and too often forget, alas! the lawful inheritance we generally leave them—the stamp of ourselves, what we mentally, morally and physically are!

Hugh was barely thirty, yet he had squandered all his money—sown acres of "wild oats"—and now the reaping was at hand.

On a certain April evening he sat alone at the window of his little office. Nature generally gives balm to aching hearts, rarely though to the pangs of a guilty conscience; and the peaceful view upon which Rushton gazed was no more to him than the faded scenes of a show.

The sun had set a half hour before, and the tops of the distant hills were changing from rose and gold to amethyst and deep purple. Shadows began to creep across the nearer meadows, green, fresh, and with the faint odors of spring rising from them. A little east of the weatherbeaten station a creek came hurrying down from a cleft in the hills, the foamy, whirling waters full of petulant murmurings, as if angry that they had been spanned by an audacious bridge, over which ran the shining tracks of the railroad.

Tall, dark woods one side, a border of rocks and boulders on the other, made the place picturesque, indeed, but no less gloomy.

A robin lighted on the telegraph wires and sat there, swaying to and fro, trilling out his song, quite unconscious of the messages of joy or sorrow that might be flying beneath his feet.

The bird's ringing carol brought no smile to Hugh's gloomy face.

He was ever haunted by a horrible fear and the consciousness that he was on the eve of sorrow and shame, and that perhaps a prison cell threatened him.

A few weeks previous, when carousing with several dissolute companions, he had gambled away not only his own earnings, but also one hundred dollars of the railroad company, whose agent he was. Today the new superintendent had unexpectedly sent word that he was coming to settle up accounts. Exposure and disgrace were inevitable.

"I've half a mind to go out and

fling myself under the wheels of the express!" he muttered to himself, as the roar of an approaching train fell on his ears. "If the worst comes I can kill myself anyhow," he added, with a grim smile, as he took his signal lantern and went out.

The express stopped a minute or two to take on four or five packages lying on a truck beside the track, and as the conductor was idly watching these hoisted into the car, there alighted, unknown to him, from the rear of the train, a lady and a four year old child.

A sharp whistle, a snort, a puff, and away went the train up the shining track.

The lady, who had alighted, gazed around her in a bewildered manner, and then approaching Rushton, said in a nervous, tremulous tone:

"This is Brunswick, I believe—is it not?"

"No, madam," he replied, removing his cap, with the breeding of a gentleman. "I fear you have made a mistake. Brunswick is farther on. This is Dnnn's Creek. Doubtless the similarity in the sound of the two names deceived you."

"Yes, yes, that was it. I surely thought the brakeman called out Brunswick. What shall I do? I ought to reach Brunswick tonight. My husband expects me. He'll be so worried. When will the next train come? Or, perhaps I can go the sooner with a carriage. Pray tell me is there any conveyance?"

"No, madam, this is only a little way station. The people who get on the cars here are mostly farmers from up the country. Besides, Brunswick is twenty miles from here, and you could get there soonest by waiting for the next train, due at eleven this evening. It is quite cool out. I'll make a fire in the ladies' room, madam, and try and make you as comfortable as I can."

Damp airs from the creek crept up and a chilling wind from the hill swept down, so that the fire in the round, pot-bellied stove was decidedly comfortable.

When, however, the little stove, like a short, stout man of choleric disposition, began to grow red with heat, the lady felt the air of the room too oppressive. So, placing a folded shawl as a pillow beneath the head of her little girl, who had fallen asleep on one of the seats, she opened the door and went out.

The night was light and clear. Just above the purple rim of the hills hung the moon, its silver crescent reflected in the waters of the creek. The brown boughs of the maples and the red and yellow wands of the willows were beginning to be wrapped in a fringe of tender green foliage, while at the rear of the depot, which had also been the home of the former agent, stood two apple trees—one, rosy

with pink blossoms, the other, like a bride, all decked in white.

In the stillness, the waters of the creek sounded louder than ever, and farther down, where a stretch of meadow land bordered the bank, a whole orchestra of frogs was dolefully croaking, while from out the shadows of the woods came the melancholy call of the night bird.

Wrapping her shawl about her, the lady hurried along, as if by her rapid motion to wear away the dreary, nervous suspense.

Inside the station, dimly lighted by a smoky lamp, sat Hugh Rushton, his head on his hand as he peered carelessly out at the slight, swift moving figure.

"Gad! How worried she is over a trifle!" he muttered contemptuously. "What has she ever known of anxiety in her daintily cared for life? A little stupid mistake, resulting in the slight annoyance of a few hours' delay, quite upsets her. She makes as much fuss over it as if the whole world's happiness were at stake. What does she know of misery, or wretchedness, or temptation? Young, pretty, beloved—and rich, too, for when she spoke of hiring a carriage to Brunswick, she took out her purse, and I saw that it was filled with bills—ay, more than one fifty among them! She will——"

Rushton suddenly paused.

At that instant a thought came into his inflamed brain—a wicked, ugly, murderous thought.

He started from his chair. It fell over with a crash. Rushton turned toward the door, and stood with his hand on the knob irresolutely. Should he do this?

The lady was alone. No one had observed her alight from the cars. Her ticket had been marked Brunswick. Who, then, would look for her at another place? She had money with her.

He, Hugh Rushton, was in dire distress. Ruin stared him in the face. To avert it, money must be had—money at any price.

The sweat stood in beaded drops upon the man's forehead. The hand turning the door knob trembled as with ague.

He opened the door and went out, walking rapidly down the beaten path leading to the track. There, a few rods from him, stood the lady.

She was on the bridge, leaning over the low railing, and peering into the foam flecked water below.

One little push—the whirling waters and sharp, jagged rocks would do the rest.

That was Hugh Rushton's thought.

With livid face, red, inflamed eyes, and lips parted, revealing the clenched teeth, Rushton crept softly behind her.

Oh, how he hoped she wouldn't turn! One look from the fair face

and gentle eyes would surely unnerve him.

Nearer and nearer he crept, now and then, in his trepidation, hitting the iron rails with a metallic clang; but the babbling waters drowned his footsteps.

Just as his trembling hands were raised to do the dastardly act, two sounds interrupted him.

"Mamma, mamma!"

"Oo—oo—oo!" the whistle of an approaching train.

Both Rushton and the lady turned. There, on the other track at the end of the bridge, stood the little child, who had probably awakened and come out to search for her parent. She stood there smiling, her little arms outstretched.

But, Oh, mercy! behind her, just turning the curve, was the round, lurid light of an approaching engine!

A half minute more and the childish head, with its wealth of golden locks, the fair and delicate body, arrayed in its dainty finery of white and blue, would be lying crushed and mangled!

"My baby! Save her!" was the mother's frantic shriek.

Ah, where was Hugh Rushton's murderous thought then? Gone, like the ugly black bat of night! The divine spark of manhood in him had not been entirely quenched!

With one bound he reached the child, grasped her in one strong arm, and with the other swung himself and his burden around on one of the projecting beams of the bridge, and, by strenuous efforts, kept steady hold there until the train went thundering by.

Then, with one agile bound, he gained solid footing again, and soon placed the child in the arms of her trembling and half fainting mother.

This was Hugh Rushton's deed!

Giddy with the mental and physical strain, he turned away, unmindful of the lady's tearful exclamation of gratitude, and went back to his little office. He staggered to a chair and sat down, burying his face in his hands, while scalding drops trickled through his fingers.

"Sir," said a gentle voice at the little ticket window, "sir, money can never repay you for your brave act, but let me show my gratitude at least by begging you to take this," and, with pleading eyes, she held out her well filled purse.

He knew that the crisp, clean bills she offered would bring him release from disgrace—still, the awful thought of how he purposed getting possession of those same bills made his face flush with shame, and he drew back, saying kindly:

"No, dear lady, I can not accept them. Yet I thank you for your kindness and—Oh, there comes your train. Let me assist you and little missy here."

Soon the train bore away the