The Man of Flesh and Blood

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THE elements without were not in harmony with the spirit which it was desired should be engendered within. By music, by gay decorations, by speeches from prominent men, the board in charge of the boys' reformatory was striving to throw about this dedication of the new building an atmosphere of cheerfulness and good−will — an atmosphere vibrant with the kindness and generosity which emanated from the State, and the thankfulness, appreciation, and loyalty which it was felt should emanate from the boys.

Outside the world was sobbing. Some young trees which had been planted along the driveway of the reformatory grounds, and which it was desired should grow up in the way they should go, were rocking back and forth in passionate insurrection. Fallen leaves were being spit viciously through the air. It was a sullen−looking landscape which Philip Grayson, he who was to be the last speaker of the afternoon, saw stretching itself down the hill, across the little valley, and up another little hill. In his ears was the death wail of the summer. It seemed the spirit of the out−of−doors was sending itself up in mournful, hopeless cries.

The speaker who had been delivering himself of pedantic encouragement about the open arms with which the world stood ready to receive the most degraded one, would that degraded one but come to the world in proper spirit, sat down amid perfunctory applause led by the officers and attendants of the institution, and the boys rose to sing. The brightening of their faces told that their work as performers was more to their liking than their position as auditors. They threw back their heads, and waited with a kind of well−disciplined eagerness for the signal to begin. Then, with the strength and native music there are in some three hundred boys' throats, there rolled out the words of the song of the State.

There were lips which opened only because they must, but as a whole they sang with the same heartiness, the same joy in singing, that he had heard a crowd of public−school boys put into the song only the week before. When the last word had died away, there was over the whole crowd of them a look of well−defined regret, and it seemed to Philip Grayson that the sigh of the world without was giving voice to the sigh of the world within as the well−behaved crowd of boys sat down to resume their duties as auditors.

And then one of the most important of the professors from the State University was telling them about the kindness of the State: the State had provided for them this beautiful home; it gave them comfortable, neat clothing and well−tasting, nutritious food; it provided that fine gymnasium in which to train their bodies; it provided books and teachers to train their minds; it provided those fitted to train their souls, to work against the unfortunate tendencies — the professor stumbled a little there — which had led to their coming. The State gave liberally, gladly, and in return it asked but one thing: that they come out into the world and make useful, upright citizens, citizens of which any State might be proud. Was that asking too much? the professor from the State University was saying.

The sobbing of the world without was growing more intense. Many pairs of eyes from among the auditors were straying out to where the summer lay a−dying. Did they know — those boys whom the State classed as unfortunates — that out of this death there would come again life? Or did they see but the darkness — the decay — of to−day?

The professor from the State University was putting the case very fairly. There were no flaws — seemingly — to be picked in his logic. The State had been kind; the boys were obligated to good citizenship. But the coldness! — comfortlessness! — of it all. The open arms of the world! — how mocking in its abstractness. What did it mean? Did it mean that they — the men who uttered the phrase so easily — would be willing to give those boys aid, friendship, when they came out into the world? What would they say, those boys whose ears were filled with high−sounding, non−committal phrases, if some man were to stand before them and say, "And so, fellows, when you get away from this place, and are ready to get your start in the world, just come around to my office and I'll help you get a job"? At thought of it there came from Philip Grayson a queer, partly audible laugh, which caused those nearest him to look his way in surprise.

But he was all unconscious of their looks of inquiry, for his brain was growing hot with the thoughts that crowded upon it. How far away the world — his kind of people — must seem to those boys of the State Reform School. The speeches they had heard, the training that had been given them, had taught them — unconsciously perhaps, but surely — to divide the world into two great classes: the lucky and the unlucky, those who made speeches and those who must listen, the so−called good and the so−called bad; perhaps — he smiled a little at his own cynicism — those who were caught and those who were not.

There came over him then those divinely human words from a poet whom he had always loved:

In men whom men pronounce as ill,

I find so much of goodness still;

In men whom men pronounce divine,

I find so much of sin and blot;

I hesitate to draw the line

Between the two, when God has not.

When God has not! The words seemed to get into the very bone and fibre of Philip Grayson. He turned and looked out at the sullen sky, returning, as all men do at times — to that conception of his childhood that somewhere beyond the clouds was God. God! Did God care for the boys of the State Reformatory? Was that poet of the Western mountains right when he said that God was not a drawer of lines, but a seer of the good that was in the so−called bad, and of the bad that was in the so−called good, and a lover of them both?

If that was God, it was not the God the boys of the reformatory had been taught to know. They had been told that God would forgive the wicked, but it had been made clear to them — if not in words, in implications — that it was they who were the wicked. And the so−called godly men, men of such exemplary character as had been chosen to address them that afternoon, had so much of the spirit of God that they, too, were willing to forgive, be tolerant, and — Philip Grayson looked out at the bending trees with a smile — disburse generalities about the open arms of the world.

What would they think — those three hundred speech−tired boys of the State Reformatory — if some man who had been held before them as exemplary were to rise and lay bare his own life — its weaknesses, its faults, its sins, perhaps its crimes — and tell them there was good and there was bad in every human being, and that the world−old struggle of life was to conquer one's bad with one's good.

The idea took him in mighty grip. It seemed the method of the world — at any rate it had been the method of that afternoon — for the men who stood before their fellows with clean hands to plant themselves on the far side of a

chasm of conventions, or narrow self−esteem, of easily bought virtue, and say to those beings who struggled on the other side of that chasm — to those human beings whose souls had never gone to school: "Look at us! Our hands are clean, our hearts are pure. See how beautiful it is to be good! Come ye, poor sinners, and be good also." And the poor sinners, the untaught, birthmarked human souls, would look over at the self−acclaimed goodness which they could see far across the chasm, and though they might feel somewhere deep within them faint stirrings of that passion for good which, asleep or awake, is in everything that is of God, they were uncertain about the depth of the chasm, uncertain about that thing which awaited them beyond, and so the passions which had behind them the strength of years outmatched that passion which was but a possibility, and the untaught, birthmarked human souls looked purposelessly across the man−made chasm, and went on with the working out of that thing which is called destiny.

He was lost to the speaker now, lost to everything save this great thought which was burning through and through him, and to the sobbing minor of the world without. Was this chasm — this whole idea — but a wild creation of his fancy? With one of those great sweeps which the human mind can make in moments of white heat, he went back from the struggles of a primitive world up to the law−bounded philanthropy of his own time, and it seemed to him then — he could read it through the teachings of good and great men, and through the policies of good and great kings — that the aloofness, the self−centredness, the complacency of the good —

It was the shrill coughing of one of the three hundred which brought him sharply back to the concrete. He scanned the three hundred faces of the auditors, and then he looked into the faces of those few men who had been set up as embodying the other side of things. And the world of concrete things to which he had returned but moved him to a new sense of the absurdity of that man−made chasm, which was so real to him now that the chill from its depths seemed to blow over him and make him cold. Were they not of the same clay — the three hundred and the three? Had they not the same fights to make, and the same sorrows to know? If there was a difference, it was only that the three had fought their fight, had known their sorrow, and should it be that they were among those for whom the battle of self was an easy battle, then out of an easy victory should have been born a greater tolerance.

With what arrogance they had flaunted their virtue — their position! How condescendingly they had spoken of the home which we, the good, prepare for you, the bad, and what namby−pambyness there was, after all, in that sentiment which all of them had voiced — and now you must pay us back by being good!

Oh for a man of flesh and blood to stand up and tell how he himself had sinned and suffered! For a man who could bridge that damning chasm with strong, broad, human understanding and human sympathies — a man who could stand among them pulse−beat to pulse−beat and cry out, "I know! I understand! I fought it, and I'll help you fight it too!"

The sound of his own name broke the passionate, exalted spell that was upon him. He looked to the centre of the stage and saw that the professor from the State University had seated himself and that the superintendent of the institution was occupying the place of the speaker. And the superintendent was saying:

"We may esteem ourselves especially fortunate in having him with us this afternoon. He is one of the great men of the State, one of the men who by high living, by integrity and industry, has raised himself to a position of great honor among his fellow men. A great party — may I say the greatest of all parties? — has shown its unbounded confidence in him by giving him the nomination for the Governorship of the State. No man in the State is held in higher esteem to−day than he. And so it is with special pleasure that I introduce to you that man of the future — Philip Grayson."

The superintendent sat down then, and he himself — Philip Grayson — was standing in the place where the other speakers had stood. It was with a mighty rush which almost swept away his outward show of calm that it came to him that he — candidate for the Governorship — was well fitted to be that man of flesh and blood for whom in his dreamy exaltation he had sighed. That he — even he — was within grasp of an opportunity to get beneath the

jackets and into the very hearts and souls of these boys, and make them feel that a man of sins and virtues, of weaknesses and strength, a man who had had much to conquer, and for whom the fight would never be quite done, was standing before them stripped of his coat of conventions and platitudes, and in nakedness of soul and sincerity of heart was talking to them as a man who understood.

Almost with the inception of the idea was born the consciousness of what it might cost. And as in answer to the silent, blunt question, Is it worth it? there looked up at him three hundred pairs of eyes — eyes behind which there was good as well as bad — eyes which had burned with the fatal rush of passion, and had burned, too, with the hot tears of remorse — eyes which no mother had ever kissed — eyes which had opened —

And then the eyes of Philip Grayson could not see those other eyes which were before him, and he put up his hand to break the blinding mist — little caring what those men upon the platform would think of him, little thinking what effect the words which were crowding into his heart would have upon his candidacy. But one thing was vital to him now: to bring upon that ugly chasm the levelling forces of a throbbing humanity, and to make those boys who were of his clay feel that a being who had fallen and risen again, a being for whom life would always mean a falling and a rising again, was standing before them, and — not as the embodiment of a distant goodness, not as a pattern, but as one among them, verily as man to man — was telling them a few things which his own life had taught him were true.

It was his very consecration which made it hard to begin. He was fearful of estranging them in the beginning, of putting between them and him that very thing he was determined there should not be. And it was not easy to unlock the chamber of one's heart when that chamber held much of which the world did not know.

"I have a strange feeling," he said, with a winning little smile which had helped the candidate for Governor up many a round, "that if I were to open my heart to−day, just open it clear up the way I'd like to if I could, that you boys would look into it, and then jump back in a scared kind of way and cry, 'Why — that's me!' You would be a little surprised — wouldn't you? — if you could look back and see the kind of boy I was, and find I was much the kind of boy you are?

"Do you know what I think? I think hypocrisy is the worst thing in the world. I think it's worse than stealing, or lying, or any of the other bad things you can name. And do you know where I think lots of the hypocrisy comes from? I think it comes from the so−called self−made men — from the real good men, the men who say, 'I haven't got one bad thing charged up to my account.'

"Now the men out campaigning for me call me a self−made man. Your superintendent just now spoke of my integrity, of the confidence reposed in me, and all that. But do you know what is the honest truth? If I am any kind of a man worth mentioning, if I am deserving of any honor, any confidence, it is not because I was born with my heart filled with good and beautiful things, for I was not. It is because I was born with much in my heart that we call the bad, and because, after that bad had grown stronger and stronger through the years it was unchecked, and after it had brought me the great shock, the great sorrow of my life, I began then, when older than you boys are now, to see a little of that great truth, which you can put, briefly, into these words: 'There is good and there is bad in every human heart, and it is the struggle of life to conquer the bad with the good.' What I am trying to say is, that if I am worthy any one's confidence to−day, it is because, having seen that truth, I have been able, through never ceasing trying, through slow conquering, to crowd out some of the bad, and to make room for a little of the good.

"You see," he went on, three hundred pairs of eyes hard upon him now, "some of us are born to a harder struggle than others. There are people who study what is called ethics who might make a fuss about that statement, and there are lots of people who would object to my saying it to you, even if I believed it. They would say you would make the fact of being born with much against which to struggle an excuse for being bad. But look here a minute; if you were born with a body not as strong as other boys' bodies, if you couldn't run as far, or jump as high, you

wouldn't be eternally saying, 'I can't be expected to do much; I wasn't born right.' Not a bit of it. You'd make it your business to get as strong as you could, and you wouldn't make any parade of the fact that you weren't as strong as you should be. We don't like people who whine, whether it's about weak bodies or weak souls.

"I've been sitting here this afternoon wondering what to say to you boys. I had intended telling some funny stories about things which happened to me when I was a boy. But for some reason a sort of serious mood has come over me, and I don't feel just like those stories now. I haven't been thinking of the funny side of life in the last half−hour. I've been thinking instead of how much suffering I've endured since the days when I, too, was a boy."

He paused then, his face twitching with earnestness. At last he went on, his voice testing to the utmost the silence of the room: "There is lots of sorrow in this old world. It is sin causes most of the sorrow, and we all know there is plenty of sin. Maybe I'm on the wrong track, but as I see it to−day human beings are making a much harder thing of their existence than there is any need of. There are millions and millions of them, and year after year, generation after generation, they fight over the same old battles, live through the same old sorrows. Doesn't it seem all wrong that after the battle has been fought a hundred million times it can't be made a little easier for those who still have it before them?

"If a farmer had gone over a very bad road, and the next day saw another farmer about to start over the same road, wouldn't he send him back? Doesn't it seem too bad that in things which concern one's whole life people can't be as decent as they are about things which involve only an inconvenience? Doesn't it seem that when we human beings have so much in common we might stand together a little better? I'll tell you what's the matter, — most of the people of this world are coated round and round with self−esteem, and they're afraid to admit any understanding of the things which aren't good. Suppose the farmer had thought it a disgrace to admit he had been over that road, and so had said: 'From what I have read in books, and from what I have learned in a general way, I fancy that road isn't good.' Would the other farmer have gone back? I rather think he would have said he'd take his chances. But you see the farmer said he knew, and how did he know? Why, because he'd been over the road himself."

He looked down at them then with the almost overpowering sense of three hundred lives having been put in his keeping. Deep down in three hundred stormy and perhaps little understood hearts was a something which held wrapped within its own self the possibilities of manhood. Looking down into the three hundred faces now turned eagerly up to him, he was stern in the consciousness that if that potential manhood, that something which could germinate into the good, was not stirred to−day, it might enter soon upon its death sleep. It was with new force shining in his face he took a step nearer the edge of the platform. What he had done they could do — it was that he must show them. As to the hurt it might do his own career, that was disposed of by the simpleness of the ratio of three hundred to one.

It was thus he began, slowly, the telling of his life story:

"I was born with strange, wild passions in my heart. I don't know where they came from; I only knew they were there. I resented authority. If some one who had a right to dictate to me said, 'Philip, do this,' then Philip would immediately begin to think how much he would rather do the other thing. And," he smiled a little, and some of the boys smiled with him in anticipation, "it was the other thing which Philip usually did.

"I didn't go to a reform school, for the very good reason that there wasn't any in the State where I lived." Some of the boys smiled again, and he could hear the nervous coughing of one of the party managers sitting close to him. "I was what you would call a very bad boy. I didn't mind any one. I was defiant — insolent. I did bad things just because I knew they were bad, and — and I took a great deal of satisfaction out of it."

The sighing of the world without was the only sound which vibrated through the room. "I say," he went on, "that I got a great deal of satisfaction out of it. I did not say I got happiness; there is a vast difference between a kind of

momentary satisfaction and that thing — that most precious of all things — which we call happiness. Indeed, I was very far from happy. I had hours when I was so morose and miserable that I hated the whole world. And do you know what I thought? I thought there was no one in all the world who had the same kind of things surging up in their hearts that I did. I thought there was no one else with whom it was as easy to be bad, or as hard to be good. I thought that no one understood. I thought that I was all alone.

"Did you ever feel like that? Did you ever feel that no one ever knew anything about the feelings you had? Did you ever feel that here was you, and there was the rest of the world, and that the rest of the world didn't know anything about you, and was just generally down on you? Now that's the very thing I want to talk away from you to−day. You're not the only one. We're all made of the same kind of stuff, and there's none of us made of stuff that's flawless. We all have a fight: some an easy one, and some a big one, and if you have formed the idea that there is a kind of dividing−line in the world, and that on the one side is the good, and on the other side is the bad, why, all I can say is that you have a very ridiculous notion of things.

"Well, I grew up to be a man, and because I hadn't fought against any of the bad things in my heart they kept growing stronger and stronger. I did lots of wild, bad things, things of which I am bitterly ashamed. I went to another place, and I fell in with just the sort of set you can imagine I felt at home with. I had been told when I was a boy that it was wrong to drink and gamble. I think that was the chief reason I took to drink and gambling."

There was another cough, more pronounced this time, from the party manager, and the superintendent was twisting rather uneasily in his seat. It was the strangest speech that had ever been delivered at the boys' reformatory. The boys were leaning forward in their seats — self−forgetful, intent. "One night I was playing cards with a crowd of my friends, and one of the men, the best friend I had, said something that made me mad. There was a revolver right there which one of the men had been showing us. Some kind of a demon got hold of me, and without so much as a thought I picked up that revolver and fired at my friend."

The party manager gave way to an audible exclamation of horror, and the superintendent half rose from his seat. But before any one could say a word Philip Grayson continued, looking at the half−frightened faces before him: "I suppose you wonder why I am not in the penitentiary. I was wildly excited, and I missed my aim, and I was with friends, and it was smoothed over."

He rested his hand upon the desk, and looked out at the sullen landscape. His voice was not just steady as he went on: "It's not an easy thing to talk about, boys. I never talked about it to any one before in all my life. I'm not telling it now just to entertain you or to create a sensation. I'm telling it," his voice grew terrible in its earnestness, "because I believe in my heart of hearts that this world could be made a better and a sweeter place if those who have lived, and sinned, and suffered would not be afraid to reach out their hands and cry: 'I know that road — it's bad! I steered off to a better place, and I'll help you steer off, too.'"

There was not one of the three hundred pairs of eyes but was riveted upon the speaker's colorless face. The masks of sullenness and defiance had fallen from them. They were listening now — not because they must, but because into their hungry and thirsty souls was being poured the very sustenance for which — unknowingly — they had yearned.

"We sometimes hear people say," resumed the candidate for Governor, "that they have lived through hell. If by that they mean they've lived through the deepest torments the human heart can know, then I can say that I, too, have lived through hell. What I suffered after I went home that night no one in this world will ever know. Words couldn't tell it; it's not the kind of thing words can come anywhere near. My whole life spread itself out before me, and I saw it then in its blackness and its hideousness. But at last, boys, out of the depths of my darkness, I began to get a little light. I began to get some understanding of the battle which it falls to the lot of some of us human beings to wage. There was good in me, you see, or I wouldn't have cared like that, and it came to me then, all alone that terrible night, that it is the good which lies buried away somewhere in our hearts must fight out the bad.

And so — all alone, boys — I began the battle of trying to conquer the evil that was in my own soul. And do you know — this is God's truth — it was with the beginning of that battle I got my first taste of happiness. There is no joy in all the world so great as that of winning, in your own heart, a victory for good. It was not easy — the power that is above me can testify to that. I spent hours such as I hope few men have ever known, but out of every victory came possibilities of victories to come. I am not standing here to−day and asking you to look upon me as a man who has come into complete mastery of himself. There are many times when the old demonlike passion flames up within me; but I can say in all humility that I have fought a great fight, and that I have had some measure of success."

He leaned upon the table then, as though very weary. "I don't know, I am sure, what the people of my State will think of all this. Perhaps they won't want a man for their Governor who once tried to kill another man. But," he looked around at them with that smile of his which some way could go straight to men's hearts, "there's only one of me, and there's three hundred of you, and how do I know but that in telling you of that stretch of bad road ahead I've made a dozen Governors this very afternoon! Wouldn't it be a greater thing to make a dozen Governors than to make just one?"

He looked from row to row of them, trying to think of some last word which would leave them with a sense of his sincerity. What he did say was: "And so, boys, when you get away from here, and go out into the world to get your start, if you find the arms of that world aren't quite as wide open as you were told they would be, if there seems no place where you can get a hold, and you are saying to yourself, 'It's no use — I'll not try,' before you finally give up just remember there was one man who said he knew all about it, and give that one man a chance to show he meant what he said. So look me up, if luck goes all against you, and maybe I can give you a little lift." He took a backward step, as though to resume his seat, and then he said, with a dry little smile which took any suggestion of heroics from what had gone before, "If I'm not at the State−house, you'll find my name in the directory of the city where I live."

He sat down, and there followed a moment of eloquent silence. Then full−souled, heart−given, came the applause. It was not led by the attendants this time; it was the attendants who rose at last to stop it. And when the clapping of the hands had ceased, many of those hands were raised to brush away the tears which stood for gratitude and hope.

The exercises were drawn to a speedy close, and he found the party manager standing by his side. "It was very grand," he sneered, "very high−sounding and heroic, but I suppose you know," jerking his hand angrily toward a table where a reporter for the leading paper of the opposition was writing, "that you've given them the winning card."

As he replied, in far−off tone, "I hope so," the candidate for Governor, he who had laid bare his soul in all its one−time blackness in order that out of that blackness the world might know a greater light, was looking, not at the reporter who was sending out a new cry for the opposition, but into those faces aglow with the light of greater understanding and brighter hopes. He stood there watching them filing out into the corridor, craning their necks in order to throw him one last look of gratitude, and as he turned then and looked from the window it was to see that the storm had sobbed itself away, and that along the driveway of the reformatory grounds the young trees — unbroken and unhurt — were rearing their heads towards God's heaven.