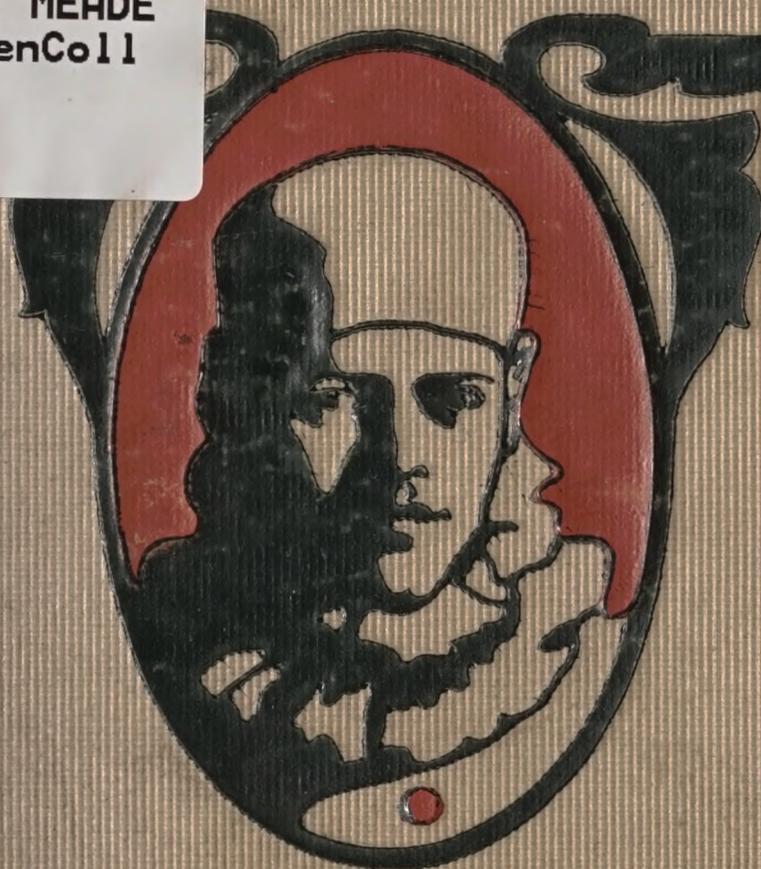


THE LITTLE MAN *in* MOTLEY

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ANNIE FELLOWS JOHNSTON
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“HE LEANED OVER AND TOOK OFF HIS GROTESQUE CAP”
(See page 32)

The Cozy Corner Series

THE LITTLE MAN
IN MOTLEY

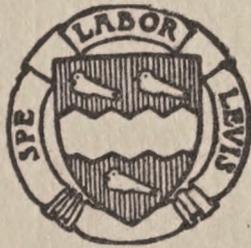
BY

ANNIE FELLOWS JOHNSTON

Author of "The Little Colonel Series," "Asa Holmes,"
"Joel: A Boy of Galilee," etc.

Illustrated by

EMILY B. WAITE



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The Little Man In Motley

THE little man in motley, thrusting his face through the curtains of the big circus tent, looked out on the gathering crowds and grinned. To him that assemblage of gaping backwoods pioneers was a greater show than the one he was travelling with, although the circus itself was a pioneer in its way. It was the first that had ever travelled through the almost unbroken forests of southern Indiana, and the fame of its performance at Vincennes had spread to the Ohio long before the plodding oxen had drawn the heavy lion cages half that distance. Such wild rumours of it had found their way across the sparsely settled hills and hollows, that families who

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had not been out of sight of their cabin chimneys in five years or more were drawn irresistibly circusward.

Standing on a barrel, behind a hole in the canvas of the tent, the little clown amused himself by watching the stream of arrivals. As far as he could see, down the glaringly sunny road, rising clouds of dust betokened the approach of a seemingly endless procession. The whole county appeared to be flocking to the commons just outside of Burnville, where the annual training in military tactics took place on "muster days." People were coming by the wagon-load; nearly every horse carried double, and one old nag ambled up with a row of boys astride her patient back from neck to tail.

It was a hot afternoon in August, and a rank, almost overpowering odour of dog-fennel rose from the dusty weeds trampled down around the tent. The lit-

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the clown was half stifled by the dust, the heat, and the smell, and the perspiration trickled down his grotesquely painted face; but an occasional impatient flapping of his handkerchief to clear away the dust of a new arrival was all that betrayed his discomfort. He was absorbed in the conversation of a little group who, seated on a log directly under his peephole in the canvas, were patiently waiting for the performance to begin.

“My motley can’t hold a candle to theirs,” he thought, with an amused chuckle, as he surveyed them critically. “Judging by the cut of that girl’s old silk dress, it was a part of her grandmother’s wedding finery, and she probably spun the stuff for that sunbonnet herself. But the man — Moses in the bulrushes! People back East wouldn’t believe me if I told them how he is togged out: tow trousers, broadcloth coat with

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brass buttons, bare feet, and a coonskin cap, on this the hottest of all the hot dog-days ever created!"

He wiped his face again after this inventory, and steadied himself on the barrel. All unconscious of the audience they were entertaining, the man and girl were retailing the neighbourhood news to a tired-looking little woman, who sat on the log beside them, with a heavy baby in her arms. Their broad Western speech was as unfamiliar as it was amusing to their unseen listener. The barrel shook with his suppressed laughter, as they repeated the rumours they had heard regarding the circus.

"Thar was six oxen to draw the lion cages," said the girl, fanning herself with her sunbonnet. "Sam said them beasts roared to beat the Dutch — two of 'em. And he says thar's a pock-marked Irishman as goes around between acts with a

nine-banded armadillo. Ef ye tech it, ye'll never have the toothache no more. But thar's suthin better nor him. Sam says he 'lows we'll jest all die a-laughin' when we see the clown. The whole end of the State has gone wild over that air clown. Sam says they make more fuss over him than they would over the President ef he was t' come to this neck o' woods."

Here the auditor behind the scenes, with his hand on his heart, made such a low bow that he lost his balance, and nearly upset the barrel.

"I reckon the elyfunnt will be the biggest sight," drawled the man. "That's what drawed me here. I ain't never seen even the picter of an elyfunnt, and they say this is the real live article from t'other side of the world. They say it kin eat a cock of hay six foot high at one meal."

Here the baby stirred and fretted in the

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woman's arms, and she wearily lifted it to an easier position against her shoulder.

"I wish Jim would hurry up," she sighed, wiping her hot face on a corner of her homespun apron.

"He's over yander helpin' ole Mis' Potter put up her ginger-bread stand," answered the girl, pointing to a large oak-tree on the edge of the common. "I seen 'em when she first come a-drivin' up on that big ox-sled, with a barrel of cider behind her. Law, I reckon she hain't never missed bein' on hand to sell her cakes and cider here on muster-days nary a time in ten years."

"'Tain't Mis' Potter," answered the older woman. "She's ben laid up with rheumatiz nearly all summer. It's Boone Ratcliffe's mother and his little William."

"You don't mean it!" exclaimed the girl, with eager interest, standing up to

get a better view. "Not ole 'Madam Ratcliffe,' as pap calls her! I've ben honin' for a sight of her ever sence last spring, when I heerd she'd come out from Maryland. I used to hear about her afore Boone married M'randy. It was M'randy as told me about her. She said the ole lady was so rich and so stuck up that she never even tied her own shoes. They had slaves and land and money and everything that heart could wish, and they didn't think that M'randy was good enough for their only son. The letters they writ to Boone trying to head him off made M'randy so mad that I didn't suppose she'd ever git over it."

"She didn't," answered the little woman, "and it was scant welcome they got when they come. The letter they sent a month aforehand never got here, so of course nobody knowed they was a-comin', and they wa'n't nobody down

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to the Ohio River landin' to meet 'em. My Jim he happened to be thar when they got off'n the flatboat. They was dreadful put out when they didn't find Boone watchin' out for 'em, after comin' all the way from Maryland. Goodness knows what 'ud become of 'em ef Jim hadn't happened acrost 'em. The boat had gone on down the river and left 'em settin' thar on shore amongst the bales and boxes, as helpless as two kittens. Jim he seen 'em a-settin' thar, and bein' a soft-hearted chap and knowin' suthin' was wrong, he up and spoke.

“They was so bewildered like, 'count of not finding Boone and everything bein' so dif'runt from what they lotted on, that they was well-nigh daft. The ole man had ben sick ever sence they left Pittsburg, and they was both plum tuckered out with that long flatboat trip. Jim he jest h'isted 'em into the wagon, big chest

and all, and brought 'em on to Burnville.

“ He said 'twas plain to be seen they hadn't never been used to roughin' it in any way. The ole gentleman was so sick he had to lean his head on her shoulder all the way, and she kep' a-strokin' his white hair with her fine soft fingers, and talkin' to him as if he'd ben a child. She tried to chirk him up by tellin' him they'd soon be to Boone's home, and talkin' 'bout when Boone was a little feller, tell Jim couldn't hardly stand it, he's that soft-hearted.

“ He knew all the time what a disappointment was in store when they should set eyes on M'randy and the cabin, and find Boone growed to be so rough and common. It was dark when they got thar. Boone hadn't got home yit, and thar wa'n't a sign of a light about the place. So Jim lef' the ole folks setting

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in the wagon, and went in to break the news to M'randy, knowin' what a high-tempered piece she is at times. He said she was settin' on the doorstep in her bare feet and dirty ole linsey-woolsey dress, jawin' little William. She'd ben a-makin' soap all day, and was dead tired.

“When Jim tole her what 'twas, the surprise seemed to strike her all of a heap. She never made a move to git up, and as soon as she could git her breath she begun to splutter like blue blazes. She said some folks had more burdens laid onto their shoulders than by rights was their share, and she couldn't see what made them ole people come trackin' out where they was neither wanted nor expected. She hadn't no airthly use for that stuck-up ole Mis' Ratcliffe, if she was Boone's mother. Oh, she jest talked up scan'lous.

“Jim he was afraid they would hear



“ ‘THEY STOOD LOOKIN’ AT EACH OTHER’ ”

her clear out in the road, so he kep' tryin' to smooth her down, and then he went out and tried to smooth things over to the ole people. By the time they'd climbed out'n the wagon and walked up the path, William had lit a candle, and she was holdin' it over her head in the doorway. The way Jim tole it I could jest see how they stood lookin' at each other, like as they was takin' their measures. Jim said they both seemed to see the difference, M'randy so frowsy and common-lookin', for all her prettiness, and the ole lady so fine and aristocratic in her elegant dress and bunnit. He said he'd never fergit how white and tired-lookin' their old faces showed up in the candle-light, and sort of disapp'inted, too, over the welcome they'd ben expectin' and didn't git.

“M'randy didn't even offer to shake hands. After she'd stared a minute she said, sorter stiff-like, ‘Well, I s'pose you

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may as well come on in.' Jim says there was tears in the ole lady's eyes when she follered M'randy into the cabin, but she wiped 'em away real quick, and spoke up cheerful to ole Mr. Ratcliffe.

"The room was in such a muss there wa'n't an empty chair to set on tell M'randy jerked the things off two of'm and kicked the stuff out of sight under the bed. Then she dusted 'em with her apron, and said in a long-sufferin' sort of tone that she reckoned 'twas about as cheap settin' as standin'.

"Ole Mis' Ratcliffe tried to apologize fer comin'. She said that their daughter back in Maryland tried to keep 'em from it, but that Boone couldn't come to them, and it had been ten years since he had left home, and they felt they must see him once more before they died. Jim said it was so pitiful the way she talked that he got all worked up."

“Why didn’t they turn right around and go home the next day?” cried the girl, with flashing eyes. “That’s M’randy all over again when she once gits her temper up, but people as rich as them don’t have to put up with nobody’s high and mighty ways.”

“They are not rich any more,” was the answer. “A few years ago they lost all they had, slaves, land, and everything, and their married daughter in Baltimore is takin’ care of ’em. She was sure they wouldn’t find it agreeable out here, so she provided the money for ’em to come back on; but the ole man lost his wallet comin’ down on that flatboat, and they don’t feel as they could write back and ask her for more. She’s good to ’em as can be, but she hasn’t got any more than she needs, and they hate to ask for it. That’s why the ole lady is here to-day, takin’ Mis’ Potter’s place. Boone per-

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suaded her to come, and tole her if she could make as much as Mis' Potter always does, it will be enough to pay their way back to Maryland. He helped her get ready. I don't know what he said to M'randy to make her stand aside and not interfere, but she made up the gingerbread as meek as Moses, and let Jim roll the barrel of cider out of the smoke-house without a word."

"Why don't Boone scratch around and raise the money somehow?" put in the man, who had chewed in interested silence as he listened to the story. Now he stopped to bite another mouthful from a big twist of tobacco he took from his broadcloth coat pocket.

"'Pears like their only son is the one that ought to do fer 'em, and at least he could make M'randy shut up and treat his parents civil."

"Boone!" sniffed the woman. "Why,

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he's under M'randy's thumb so tight that he dassent sneeze if she don't take snuff. Besides, he's ben on the flat of his back off and on all summer, with dumb ague. It's run into a slow fever now, and it takes every picayune they can scrape together to git his medicines. Then, too, M'randy sprained her ankle a month or so back, and things have been awful sence then. The ole man he don't realize he is in the way, he's so childish and broken down. He jest sorter droops around, pinin' for the comforts he's always ben used to, in a way that almost breaks his ole wife's heart. She feels it keen enough for both of 'em, because she can't bear to see him lackin' anything he needs, and she'd rather die than be a burden to anybody.

“ I tell Jim I'm sorry for the whole set, and I can see it isn't the pleasantest thing for M'randy to give up a room to them

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when thar's only two in the cabin, and her ways ain't their ways, and their bein' thar puts everything out of joint; but Jim he sides with the ole people. He's mighty sorry for 'em, and would have put his hand in his own pocket and paid their expenses long ago back to Maryland, ef he'd a-ben able. He's ben a great comfort to the ole lady, he's jest that soft-hearted. I hope she'll sell out as fast as Mis' Potter always done."

Before the girl could echo her wish, there was a discordant scraping inside the tent, a sound of the band beginning to tune their instruments. Instantly there was a rush toward the tent, and all three of the little group sprang to their feet. The little woman looked wildly around for Jim, with such an anxious expression that the clown lingered a moment, regardless of the stream of people pouring into the entrance so near him that the cur-

tain which screened him from public view was nearly torn down. He waited until he saw a burly, good-natured man push his way through the crowds and transfer the heavy baby from the woman's tired arms to his broad shoulder. Then he turned away with a queer little smile on his painted face.

"He's jest that soft-hearted," he repeated, half under his breath. The woman's story had stirred him strangely. "It's a pity there's not more like him," he continued. "I guess that too few Jims and too many M'randys is what is the matter with this dizzy old planet."

"What's that ye're grumblin' about, Humpty Dumpty?" asked the pock-marked Irishman as he came up with his nine-banded armadillo, all ready for the performance. Then in his most professional tones: "If it is the toothache yez have now, I'll be afther curing it en-

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toirely wid wan touch of this baste from ——”

“ Oh, get out!” exclaimed the clown, putting his hand on the tall Irishman’s shoulder and springing lightly down from the barrel. “ I’m dead sick of all this monkey business. If it wasn’t a matter of bread-and-butter I wouldn’t laugh again in a year.”

“ Ye couldn’t make anybody out there in that big aujence belave it,” laughed the Irishman. “ They think yer life is wan perpetooal joke; that ye’re a joke yerself for that matther, a two-legged wan, done up in cap and bells.”

“ You’re right,” said the clown bitterly, looking askance at his striped legs. “ But ‘ a man’s a man for a’ that and a’ that,’ and he gets tired sometimes of always being taken for a jesting fool. Curse this livery!”

The Irishman looked at him shrewdly.

“Ye should have gone in for a 'varsity cap and gown, and Oi've been thinking that maybe ye did start out that way.”

A dull red glowed under the paint on the clown's face, and he ran into the ring in response to the signal without a reply. A thundering round of applause greeted him, which broke out again as he glanced all around with a purposely silly leer. Then he caught sight of Jim's honest face, smiling expectantly on him from one of the front benches. It struck him like a pain that this man could not look through his disguise of tawdry circus trappings, and see that a man's heart was beating under the clown's motley. There came a sudden fierce longing to tear off his outward character of mountebank, for a moment, and show Jim the stifled nature underneath, noble enough to recognize the tender chivalry hidden in the rough exterior of the awkward back-

woodsman, and to be claimed by him as a kindred spirit.

As he laughed and danced and sang, no one dreamed that his thoughts kept reverting to scenes that the woman's story had called up, or that a plan was slowly shaping in his mind whereby he might serve the homesick old soul waiting out under the oak-tree for the performance to be done.

No wonder that people accustomed to seeing old Mrs. Potter in that place, gowned in homespun, and knitting a coarse yarn sock, had stopped to stare at the newcomer. Such a type of high-born, perfect ladyhood had never appeared in their midst before. The dress that she wore was a relic of the old Maryland days; so was the lace cap that rested like a bit of rare frost-work on her silvery hair. Mrs. Potter knew everybody for miles around, and was ready to laugh and



“ SHE AND LITTLE WILLIAM WERE LEFT ENTIRELY ALONE ”

joke with any one who stopped at her stand. Mrs. Ratcliffe sat in dignified silence, a faint colour deepening in her cheeks like the blush of a winter rose. It was so much worse than she had anticipated to have these rude strangers staring at her, as if she were a part of the show. She breathed a sigh of relief when the music began, for it drew the crowds into the tent as if by magic. She and little William were left entirely alone.

With the strident boom of the bass viol came the rank smell of the dog-fennel that hurrying feet had left bruised and wilting in the sun. All the rest of her life, that warm, weedy odour always brought back that humiliating experience like a keen pain. The horses in the surrounding grove stamped restlessly and whinnied as they switched off the flies. The long ride and the unaccustomed labour of the morning had exhausted her.

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She began to nod in her chair, giving herself up to a sense of drowsiness, for as long as the people were in the tent she would have no occupation.

Her white head dropped lower and lower, until presently she was oblivious to all surroundings. Little William, sitting on the old wood-sled with his back against the cider barrel, was forgotten. M'randy and the ill-kept cabin vanished entirely from her memory. She was back in the old Maryland days on her father's plantation, hedged about with loving forethought, as tenderly sheltered as some delicate white flower. Every path had been made smooth for her, every wish anticipated all her life long, until that day when they had set their faces westward to find Boone. It was coming down the Ohio on that long journey by flatboat that she suddenly woke to the knowledge that her husband's illness had left him a

broken-down old man, as weak and irresponsible as a child.

But mercifully her dreams were back of that time. They were back with Boone in his gay young boyhood, when he danced minuets with the Governor's daughter, and entertained his college friends in lordly style on the old plantation. Back of that time when the restlessness of his 'teens sent him roving over the Alleghanies to the frontier, regardless of their long-cherished ambitions for him. Back of the time when in a sudden mad whim he had married a settler's pretty daughter, whom he was ashamed to take back to civilization when he thought of the Baltimore belles to whom he had paid boyish court. He had not stopped to consider her rough speech and uncouth manners. He had been a long time out in the wilderness, he was only twenty, and her full red lips tempted him.

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If the dreams could only have stopped then, that little space she slept, while the circus band thrummed and drummed inside the tent, and the shadows of the hot August afternoon lengthened under the still trees outside, would have been a blessed respite. But they repeated the unpleasant parts as well. They came on down to the night of that unwelcome arrival. They showed her the days when Boone lay prostrated with a slow malarial fever; the days when the fierce heat made him drag his pallet desperately from one corner to another across the bare puncheons, trying to find a spot where he could be comfortable. She could see him lying as he had so often lain, with his face turned toward the back door, looking out with aching eyes on the tall corn that filled the little clearing. In his feverish wanderings he complained that it was crowding up around the house

trying to choke him. And there was little William, little nine-year-old William, sitting on the floor beside him, attempting to flap away the flies with a bunch of walnut leaves. There were long intervals sometimes when the heat overpowered the child with drowsiness. Then the walnut branch wavered uncertainly or stopped in mid-air, while he leaned against the table leg with closed eyes and open mouth. Sometimes Miranda slept on the door-step, bare-footed, as usual, with a dirty bandage around her sprained ankle.

In that short sleep she seemed to relive the whole summer, that had dragged on until her sense of dependence grew to be intolerable. Miranda's shrill complaining came penetrating again into the tiny room where she sat by her husband's bed, and the old head was bowed once more on his pillow as she sobbed: "Oh, Will-

iam, dear heart, if the Lord would only take us away together! I cannot bear to be a burden to any one!" It was the sound of her own sobbing that awakened her, and she sat up with a sudden start, realizing that she had been asleep. She must have slept a long time. In that interval of unconsciousness the tavern-keeper from Burnville had erected a rival stand a few rods away.

She saw with dismay his attractive display of "store" goods. Then her face flushed as he began to set out whisky bottles and glasses. Her first impulse was to gather up her belongings and get home as quickly as possible. In her perplexity she looked around for little William. Regarding a circus with such contempt herself, it had never occurred to her that he would care to see it.

He was a timid little fellow, who always hid when company came to the

house, and he had never been away from home more than a dozen times in his life. The crowds frightened him, and he stayed as closely as a shadow at his grandmother's elbow until the music began. Then he forgot himself. It thrilled him indescribably, and he watched with longing eyes as the people crowded into the tent. It seemed to him that he must certainly go wild if he could not follow, but they had sold nothing. Even if they had, he would not have dared to ask for enough money to pay his admission, it seemed such an enormous sum. As she began to nod in her chair he began to edge nearer the tent. He could catch now and then a word of the clown's jokes, and hear the roars of laughter that followed. When the clown began to sing, William had one ear pressed against the tent. People clapped and cheered uproariously at the last line of every stanza. He

could not hear enough of the words to understand why. In the general commotion he was conscious of only one thing: he was on the outside of that tent, and he must get inside or die.

Regardless of consequences, he threw himself on the grass and wriggled around until he succeeded in squeezing himself under the canvas. There was a moment of dizzy bewilderment as he sat up and looked around. Then some cold, squirming thing touched the back of his neck. He gave a smothered cry of terror; it was the elephant's trunk. He had come up directly under the animal "from t'other side of the world, that could eat a six-foot cock of hay at one meal."

As he sat there, shivering and blubbering, afraid to move because he did not know which end of the clumsy monster was head and which tail, he heard a loud guffaw. The pock-marked Irishman

who had charge of the nine-banded armadillo had seen the little side-show, and it doubled him up with laughter. He roared and slapped his thigh and laughed again until he was out of breath. Then he gravely wiped his eyes and drew the boy out from under the great animal. William clung to him, sobbing. Then the warm-hearted fellow, seeing that he was really terrified, took him around and showed him all the sights. In the delight of that hour, home, grandmother, and the world outside were completely forgotten.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Ratcliffe sat wondering what had become of the boy. People began to straggle out of the tent. There was to be another performance after dark, and she expected to find her customers among those who stayed for that. The tavern-keeper began calling attention to his refreshments in a facetious way that drew an amused crowd around him. Her

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hopes sank, as group after group passed her without stopping. Two young fellows from the village who had been drinking pushed roughly against her table.

“Hi, Granny!” hiccoughed one of them. “Purty fine doughnuts, ole girl!” He gathered up a plateful, and tried to find his pocket with unsteady fingers. She stood up with a sickening feeling of helplessness, and looked around appealingly. Just then a heavy hand struck the fellow in the mouth, and jerked him back by his coat-collar. The pock-marked Irishman, to whom the bewildered little William still clung, had undertaken to find the boy’s grandmother for him. The child’s artless story had aroused his warmest sympathies, and nothing could have given him greater pleasure than this opportunity to fight for her.

“Put thim back, you ugly thafe o’ the

worruld," he roared, " or Oi'll throw yez entoirely over the sorcuss tint! "

The man bristled up for a fight, but one look into the big Irishman's glowering eyes sobered him enough to make him drop the cakes and slink away.

The Irishman looked embarrassed as Mrs. Ratcliffe began to thank him with tears in her eyes, and hurried back to the tent. The look of distress deepened on her face. Everybody passed her table for the one made popular by the loud-voiced man who knew so well how to advertise his wares. With a stifled groan she looked around on the great pile of provisions she had brought. What quantities of good material utterly wasted! What would Miranda say?

As she looked around her in dismay, she saw the clown coming toward her, still in his cap and bells. He had been watching the scene from a distance. Her

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distress was pitiful. To be compelled to wait on this jesting fool like any common bar-maid would fill her cup of degradation to overflowing. What could she do if he accosted her familiarly as he did every one else?

He leaned over and took off his grotesque cap. "Madam," he said, in a low, respectful tone, "I have no money, but if you will kindly give me a cake and a mug of cider, you shall soon have plenty of customers."

Greatly surprised, she filled him a cup, wondering what he would do. There was a rush for that part of the grounds as the hero of the hour appeared. He had been funny enough in the ring, but now they found his jokes irresistible. His exaggerated praises of all he ate and drank were laughed at, but everybody followed his example. More than one gawky boy bought something for the sake of being

made the subject of his flattering witticisms. The tavern-keeper called and sang in vain. As long as the clown told funny stories and praised Mrs. Ratcliffe's gingerbread, all other allurements were powerless. He stayed with her until the last cake had been bought and the cider barrel was empty.

It was nearly sundown when she started home. Jim came up to roll the empty barrel on to the sled, to place her chair against it, and help little William hitch up the oxen; but when she looked around to thank the little clown, he had disappeared. No one could tell where he had gone.

Never in her girlhood, rolling home in the stately family coach from some gay social conquest, had she felt so victorious. She jingled the silk reticule at her side with childish pleasure. She could hardly wait for the slow oxen to plod the two

34 The Little Man In Motley

long miles toward home, and when they stopped in front of the little cabin she was trembling with eagerness. Hurrying up the path through the gathering dusk, she poured her treasure out on her husband's bed.

“Look!” she cried, laying her face on the pillow and slipping an arm around his neck. “We are going back to Maryland, dear heart!” She nestled her faded cheek against his with a happy little sob. “Oh, William, we need not be a burden any longer, for we're going home to-morrow!”

Later, the full August moon swung up over the edge of the forest. It flooded the little clearing with its white light, and turned the dusty road in front of the cabin to a broad band of silver. A slow, steady tramp of many feet marching across a wooden bridge in the distance

fell on the intense stillness of the summer night.

“It’s the circus,” said Boone, raising his head to listen. “I reckon they’re travellin’ by night on account of the heat, and they’ll be pushin’ on down to the river.”

His wife limped to the door and sat down on the step to watch for its coming, but his mother hurried out to the fence and leaned across the bars, waiting.

A strange procession of unwieldy monsters, never before seen in this peaceful woodland, loomed up in the distance, huge and black, while a stranger procession of fantastic shadows stalked grimly by its side. The sleepy keepers dozed in their saddles, filing by in ghostly silence, save for the clanking of trace-chains and the creaking of the heavy lion cages.

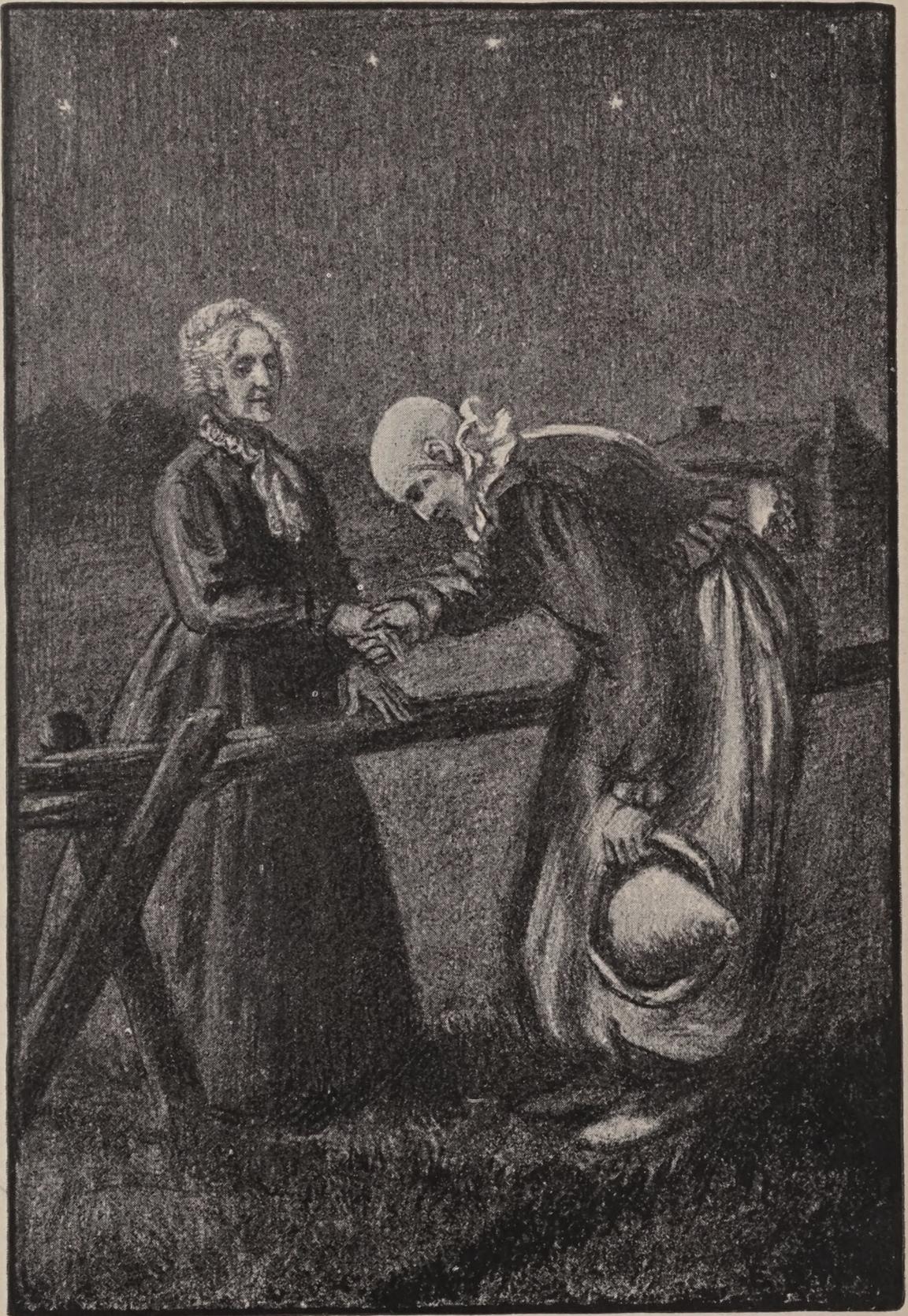
At the extreme end of the long line came the tired little clown on the trick

mule. A sorrier-looking object could not be imagined, as he sat with his knees drawn up and his head bent dejectedly down. He did not notice the figure leaning eagerly over the bars, until she called him. Then he looked up with a start. The next instant he had dismounted and was standing bare-headed in the road before her. The moonlight made a halo of her white hair, and lighted up her gentle, aristocratic face with something of its old high-born beauty.

“I wanted to thank you,” she said, holding out her slender hand to the painted little jester with the gracious dignity that had always been her charm. “You disappeared this afternoon before I could tell you how much your courtesy has done for me and mine.”

He bowed low over the little hand.

“I bid you farewell, sir,” she added gently. “The truest gentleman I have



“ HE BOWED LOW OVER THE LITTLE HAND ”

met in many a day!" It was the recognition that he had craved. She had seen the man through the motley. He looked up, his face glowing as if that womanly recognition had knighted him; and with the remembrance of that touch resting on him like a royal accolade, he rode on after the procession, into the depths of the moonlighted forest.

THE END

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