

A STRANGE FELLOW

A STORY WITH AN IMMORAL

INTRODUCTION

IF THE DAILY papers had made the "scoop" our story probably would have come to us in different form. There would have been much more of sensationally imaginative detail and less of quiet truth. There would have been headlines — block letters, double leaded — like this:

MIDNIGHT ASSASSINS PUT TO ROUT!

A Band of Bloody Minded Robbers

*Invade the Hallowed Precincts of a
Wealthy Home on Michigan Avenue
— and are nobly Repulsed by the Coura-
geous Owner, Samuel Wheattop, Es-
quire. He engages one of the Murder-
ers in Personal Combat and forces him to
the Wall. Valuable papers Recovered!
Loaded Weapons fall Undischarged!
Where were the Police? Let Chief
Hubbard Rise and Explain!*

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Then would have followed a diagram of the room in which the terrific conflict took place, made up of rules and dashes and uppercase letters, and underneath a descriptive reference such as must of necessity accompany any highly imaginative work of Art.

A — bed in which the intended victims were quietly sleeping — wholly unconscious of the unholy dangers breeding about them.

B — stand — a drawer of which contained valuable papers and a loaded revolver.

C — stand at Mr. Samuel Wheattop's bedside, on which lay a well filled pocketbook!

D — chiffonier — on which in a golden bowl, containing delicately scented water, reposed two rows of pearls in a gold setting — Mrs. Wheattop's artificial teeth!

E — door by which assassins entered the apartment!

F — toilet stand whereon lay frizzes, bangs, powder, etc., in fact all the delicacies necessary to the finished toilet of a lovely society leader.

Then would have followed a hatchet cut of Samuel Wheattop Esq. and his wife from life and a portrait of the assassins from the newspaper artist's comprehension of a confused description — giving the police a very tangible clue on which to base detective operations. Now, if the daily papers had made the scoop the story would have been exciting

and no doubt some family skeletons would have been exposed in a heartless way to public gaze. But the police did not hear of the case for some time and then their knowledge would not have been sufficient to found a newspaper lie on — how slight that knowledge must have been! — and we are at liberty now to hear and tell the truth about the matter!

THE STORY

Over nearly half the world the mantle of darkness was spread. In the depth of its folds the great city lay in slumber. The myriad chimneys had ceased for a time to belch out black smoke which made the darkness of the day more tangible if not more profound than the darkness of the night. The last of the suburban trains were sleepily dragging their slow lengths along. By some strange accident Bridgeport had closed its doors early in the evening and of all the vile odors Chicago knows so well, that of the river alone was loud enough to break the general stillness of the air!

Of the dust stirred up by the street sweeping machines, much had fallen quietly back into place, much had lodged in the lungs and on the clothes of those who were exposed and much had descended upon the roofs of the street cars to be carried out onto the prairie farms which had recently been annexed to the city, to be spread over them by the

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gentle lake zephyrs that they might present on the surface, at least, an urban air, and take the keen edge off those numerous jokes that lifted their grinning faces above the heads of waving corn:

THESE CHOICE CITY LOTS
FOR SALE BY NARYGOLD
100 NEWBORN STREET, CHICAGO

Through the heart and along the main arteries of the city where, indeed, peace never comes, the blood was still noisily throbbing, but in the residence districts quiet reigned. However, sleepless ones and watchers by beds of pain could hear, now and then, the whack of the policeman's billy against the lamp-post and the answering whack in the distance; and at regular intervals they could hear, if they were in range, a buzzing sound, like a dentist's drill in a soft tooth, issuing from a dark box on the corner and could catch fragments of one side of the conversation which generally followed the buzz: "This is Murphy! — ach! — kim off — Cronin! — naw!" At least that was what Raymond Hope heard as he was passing the patrol box in an aristocratic neighborhood at about 1:30 A.M.

There were few or no lights to be seen in the windows round about, for sleep, with firm, though gentle hand, had temporarily throttled the gas trust and

stopped the flow of gold into its bottomless pocket. A gleam from a watchman's lantern showed now and then on the houses along the street and now and then again would be reflected from the star on an officer's breast.

The young man who overheard the fragment quoted wore a cheerful professional air and carried what the policeman, who had just issued from the box, took to be a case of surgeon's instruments. The two met face to face, and the young man asked, "What about Cronin? Have they caught him yet?" Supposing his questioner to be a clever young physician from a neighboring hospital, the officer sought to correct his slip.

"Ye mane Tascott!" said he. "Naw, and its mesilf" —

"No!" said the other, "It was the doctor I had in mind. I have paid no attention to the case since he was seen in Canada — in fact had forgotten about him till you mentioned his name just now."

"Why! he's dead! and they're thryin him!"

"No!"

"It's mesilf that's thinkin' whot an illegant jury you'd have made in this case!" exclaimed the officer.

"Well, why didn't they send around for me. I'm always willing to do my share for the public good."

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"But you doctors is eximpted," said the officer, "perhaps that's why ye didn't kape up on the case!"

"Oh pshaw! I don't care anything about that," returned the young man. "I'd rather appear in Court as a jurymen than in any capacity I am *likely* to appear in!" and with a light laugh which broke into a whistled air the young man with the case of instruments started off in the direction of the hospital — but he didn't reach there that night.

Broker Samuel Wheattop had returned home from a meeting of the Sunset Club some hours before, ready to start out on a crusade and reform the world's labor and criminal classes. The discussion at the Club dinner had touched on these classes, and although the dinner was served in courses, evidently the classes were not; at least, when, on his return home, he reported certain phases of the Club talk to his wife, the classes were as hopelessly jumbled in his mind as were the dinner courses in his stomach. He spoke of reform; what he really meant — if he could have read himself — was annihilation; for in his human instincts and sympathies he was altogether too narrow to be able to appreciate the standpoint of the reformer. Of course, there were speakers at the club who expressed strong sympathy with labor! but this, he told his wife, was merely for effect; they did not believe what they were saying, and to argue with them was to no purpose. As for

himself, he wanted to meet one of this labor class, this criminal class, in person and determine from him what his thoughts and ideas really were — and to convert him if might be.

So far as a part of his wish was concerned, it was granted that night and the broker found himself decidedly at a disadvantage.

The Wheattop residence was not far from the box at which Officer Murphy and the young man had chatted. It was what is termed an elegant mansion, and in all its appointments was exquisite for the Wheattops were, fortunately, people of taste as well as of great wealth.

As Mr. Wheattop's sentiment for the beautiful in nature and in art was profound and his judgments of technical work just, a lavish expenditure had procured to him a rare collection of paintings and objects of vertu. Moreover, he talked well on art matters and when he spoke of the Mystery of the Corot, the beautiful drawing of the Meissonier or of feeling or technique generally, evidently he knew whereof he spoke for he never belied himself by purchasing a chromo or a daub. It does seem, however, that beyond their high technical qualities the value of some of his poetical paintings must have been lost to him, he was so deficient on the side of his human sympathies, though he did not know it. But his wife did appreciate the fact, and it was more

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than fortunate that she contributed to the common store a nature highly sensitive along those lines when the marriage vows made their two souls one! Their combined forces made their home an attractive point to a noble line of guests. Not the least notable of their callers, though perhaps the least noble, and again perhaps not, was the young man who had the few words with Officer Murphy.

Now that young man was in many ways as eminently respectable a fellow as one would be apt to meet with in a night's journey. His ear was never closed to the cry of the poor and his hand was stretched out to their needs. It would be easy enough to lionize him for in his way he was a genius. He was a burglar — but he was a genius!

There is a sickly sentimentality which will ask, does not the day-star of genius illumine the blackness of a stained character, of a ruined name? Doubtless this has been true of many who have walked along the most exalted plains of intellectual and moral life. Many a slip may be forgiven to him through whose heart rushes the impassioned, resistless tide of humanity, making him an inspired mouth-piece, making him to elevate and cheer and charm the race in poem and story, in song and in art.

But Raymond Hope's genius was not of this sort for, in spite of his real love for his fellows, he was a menace to society and placed himself beyond the

pale of sympathy by the continued acts of his daily, or rather nightly, life. Had he stolen — once — or twice — even, through hunger! But he was a burglar — by choice!

The reasons he once gave for making that choice, for placing himself in a position antagonistic to all recognized forms of law, might fall flat on staid old conservatives of a straitlaced school, but they would appeal, and not without force, to the sympathetic student of American life today.

“ Oh! no! ” he was heard to say, “ business is not degrading, but not every bright boy even has an aptitude for business. Can an American boy enter the trades? The professions are overcrowded. Oh, yes! there is room at the top! But that is cold comfort for one who, though ambitious, knows his limitations; and especially for one who scorns trickery and has not the patience to plod, while others are passing by him up the hill of public esteem by taking disgusting advantage of their fellowmen. However, there are members of one profession I have in mind, and which I admire, who do not jostle or crowd each other because there are too many to the square foot. I refer to the medical missionaries in the slums. It is a great field, that! But to invest one's life in that way doesn't bring sufficiently large or speedy returns for most of us. Art is not appreciated by the public sufficiently to make the life of

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the artist more than drudgery and disappointment, and many a sensitive soul, capable of highest development under the genial sunshine of intelligent appreciation, has refused to prostitute his art, has fallen back into business lines for which he had no flair, and has failed — he may have made a good living but his life was a failure! All paths, smooth or rough, to honest toil seem to be guarded against the American boy today.

“As for politics, which should be in the hands of incorruptible men, surely no American father would want to see his boy embark in that rotten ship on the seething sea of demoralization. A few men have manned their own craft and by a kind fate have happened to sail through unharmed — but they are few. What is there in our local administrative departments which should not put a sensitive man with any idea whatsoever of justice in direct antipathy to the powers that be?

“I don’t want to say anything against the police,” said he, “they don’t bother me much, but is not their whole internal system a hollow mockery? They have to get the Irish murder cases worked up by German detectives! The German anarchists are hunted down by Irish policemen — and they are all dead against the American. A friendless young fellow has a hard pull in the great city today. My trial in

some of the so-called straight lines was not a brilliant success — consequently — I am here.”

His confreres, who had never an idea above the most improved methods of cracksmanship, looked on him as a strange fellow, and after one of his talks one asked him why he didn't preach for a living. Certainly his answer was strange for one in his branch of art — “ Well — I don't care to be responsible for more souls than one! ” A preacher responsible! — a ball like that once set rolling would knock down long rows of preachers!

And now we may view the direction in which Raymond Hope's genius lay. He planned his campaigns with all the clear sightedness of a general and almost always carried them out to the letter, for he usually caught the enemy napping. Late in the afternoon of the day on which broker Wheattop uttered his wish Raymond Hope, in the character of telephone company's lineman, ascended to the roof of a neighboring building and severed the wires which connected the Wheattop mansion with the district headquarters of the police and fire departments. This was a wise precaution in this day of delicate electrical apparatus. It is a high function of genius to note trifles and to use them to advantage. To many the fire alarm would have been an unimportant feature; not so to this man. He had known

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men to be very warm when awakened to no good purpose from a sound sleep. He had heard, even, that the touch of a dainty feminine toe or a wife's cold foot against the small of the back would sometimes awaken in men such warm expressions of opinion that the fusible metal of the fire alarm would certainly burn with shame if it were as sensitive as it should be. Then, moreover, some occupant of a distant chamber might be awakened by a disturbance and take the fire alarm method of sending a call. It does not pay to take risks — so he always disconnected both systems.

Upon leaving the Officer, the supposed doctor went directly to the home he intended to honor with a call. He scanned it carefully for a moment to make sure all was well, then walked quietly to the back porch and with little or no inconvenience found himself on the roof. The bathroom window was unfastened as he had expected and raising the sash he entered. He had been in the house years before in another capacity and also but a few days before in still another capacity and he knew the lines. He descended to the porch door and undid all the fastenings but one thumb-bolt which could be quickly turned in case a hasty exit became necessary. He left this bolt undrawn to protect the house against watchmen and common thieves and, so guarded from interruption from without, he quietly got

down to business. The safe door responded to his magic touch and some valuable silver was placed conveniently near to the door through which he was to take his leave.

But the safe had not yielded up all he expected of it, and after an unsuccessful search through the drawers of the library he ascended to the sleeping apartments to see if they would not furnish the desired booty. This was no acceptable part of the mission to him for, in these undertakings, he always tried to avoid contact with human beings, even sleeping, and had never started on one of his expeditions with a murderous weapon in his possession. Tonight was no exception.

Why it should have happened just as it did, the fates alone can tell, but the injured capitalists and oppressive laborers had met in Samuel Wheattop's dream with a crash. He had awakened with a start, and was sitting bolt upright in bed, when the chamber door opened softly and Raymond Hope entered. The burglar had not expected this, but he took the situation by the horns.

"I beg your pardon!" he said.

"Pray don't mention it," returned the broker with a majestic sweep of the arm. He was calming the disturbing elements of his nightmare with his waking thoughts and this was still part of his dream.

Suddenly he realized his position and knew that

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his wish to meet a criminal face to face had been granted. And O, Lord! how was he to sustain his dignity — much less make a convert, he might have thought, if that phase had struck him!

As soon as the burglar saw that his victim had no weapon at hand, the calmness of his expression became a truthful index to his mind. He did not seem to notice the broker's action in placing his hand on a pocketbook on the stand at his bedside. That pocketbook was one of the broker's little devices — under ordinary conditions to grasp it would be to send a call to the police.

"Don't mention it!" the broker had said! It touched the burglar's sense of humor under the circumstances and with what might have been a wink, had his face been less sternly set, he responded:

"No! I won't speak of it in public!" "Come now, not a motion," he added, as the broker stirred his legs under the covers, "just one peep and you are a dead man;" and the burglar's hand went very suggestively to his pistol pocket and rested there.

"Quietly now," he said, "so as not to disturb your wife." The broker watched with some apprehension the movement of the intruder's hand, and seeing, as he thought, the murderous expression of his face, wisely concluded to remain quiet — for his own sake as well as for his wife's.

"What do you want here?" he asked in a hard whisper. "There isn't a cent of money in the house except what is in this pocketbook."

"I don't want your money," said the burglar, "I want a package of papers, sealed and marked 'Special' and I want it pretty speedily too!"

The broker started and the cold perspiration broke out all over him. A package of bonds with coupons attached—how did he know of them? The broker, himself, had brought them up from town with papers for his wife's signature and they were to go to his daughter's husband in New York in the morning. They must not be taken. They lay in the unlocked drawer of a desk just behind the burglar, and beside them lay a loaded revolver. He would deceive the villain, would get up to open the safe for him and in passing would get the weapon, and then he would be a more even match for the wretch whose hand seemingly was still on the handle of his gun.

It would have been an immense relief to the broker to know that besides the hand there was nothing in that pocket but a sponge and a vial of chloroform. Oh, too! that he might gain time for the police patrol which surely would be upon them before many moments.

"They are in the safe down"—he began.

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"Hist!" said the burglar, as he turned the night light a trifle higher, "they are not there, I have looked!"

That was an unexpected blow to the broker and knocked nearly all his wind out but he had enough left to continue feebly "at the office!"

"No! you l— excuse me, they are in this house. Come, where are they?"

The broker unconsciously cast a longing, almost vanquished look at the drawer in which the revolver lay at rest.

The burglar had noticed his glance take that direction before and moving quietly backward, with his eye still fixed on the broker's face, at last put his left hand down and touched the desk. He knew it perfectly. Years before, as representative of a great daily, he had been in this same room with this same man who now lay there breathless and trembling in his bed, and with his wife, who lay calmly sleeping at his side — but she must have had a clear conscience — and among other bridal gifts to their daughter, for it was her wedding day, they had showed him some bonds in that drawer! The thought of that time made him take back his hand with a start, but soon he put it out again and opened the desk.

As he reached down to discover the contents he gave a shudder for his hand came in contact with the

cold steel. He knew instantly what it was and cursed luck for putting it in his reach. Then, he thought, after all fate was doing him a good turn in disclosing to him this hidden danger and in giving him a chance to leave the house alive. As he took up the weapon a swift glance downwards revealed to him the coveted papers!

In an atmosphere so charged with the curious, chloroform itself could not have held in bond the weakest of feminine instincts, to say nothing of the most powerful, and Mrs. Wheattop awoke.

There was a sharp rattle in the broker's throat and a fragment of an oath escaped from his lips. His wife turned toward him with an expression of tenderest solicitude.

"What is it?" she asked in alarm. "Are you ill?" as her eyes fell on her husband's ghastly face. Immediately she turned in the direction in which his gaze was strained and beheld the intruder. She did not shriek nor faint, but gave the wretch a glance which was intended to pierce him like a knife.

"Sir!" she demanded, "what do you wish?"

"I beg your forgiveness, madam, I mean no harm to either of you!" He had considerably put the weapon out of sight. "I came to your husband on a matter of business with which I could not well approach him at any other time. I am sorry to have

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disturbed you, believe me, it is against my wish! ”

“ And against mine,” she cried. “ Leave, this instant! ”

There was something so persuasive in her command, that the burglar was well inclined toward going. But the situation was so unique that he did not care to break it, especially as he knew that he could hold it as long as he chose and with harm to none of them.

There was now one spark of hope in the broker's breast. Evidently the villain had not discovered the papers and by some means he must be enticed away from their immediate vicinity. He turned and whispered a word in his wife's ear. The look of pain which shot instantly across her face was a full noontide to which the intense expression of her husband's visage was but a twilight, so fathomless is a mother's love.

“ He must not get them! ” Their hearts said that much and more. “ He must not get them! ”

The burglar read that much in their faces and behind his imperturbable features there played a smile of scorn, for people who cared so much for money, to whom the prospective loss of the bonds and of the little money it would take to redeem those papers could cause such pain. Their circle of friends, their tastes as expressed in public, their surroundings and manner of life, all pointed to them

as people of higher ideals. He could not resist the temptation to play with them — so he moved a few feet from where their treasure lay and coolly seated himself in full sight of them both on the arm of a chair.

But he had not read their hearts. Ah! there lay the skeleton those vultures, the reporters, would have picked at before the eyes of the world. Their only daughter's husband had betrayed a great trust and was on the verge of a dishonor worse than ruin. To shield her, it might be to save him, those papers must be in a distant city within forty hours of that time, and if they missed — God help them all and especially her! It was altogether a pity that the burglar could not have read their hearts — but he was human and was just then bent on enjoying the advantage of his position.

His change of base had brought to them easier breathing — and oh! again that they might detain him till the police could arrive! In the broker's fancy the police had come! Singular that fellow should sit there so seemingly undisturbed and let himself be taken!

Thus, strangely, were brought face to face these two men of pronounced and widely varying traits of character. The underlying element of the broker's life was a deep moral or, perhaps better, intellectual principle of right, a character which in its complete-

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ness gives nobility and grandeur to humanity. But in the broker it seemed so deeply buried that it rarely stirred upon the surface. He sometimes swerved from the straight line in matters sentimental — who of his type does not?

As to the other — his wellspring of action seemed to be a sentiment which lay near to the surface and responded to the lightest call. It is a trait of character which brings relief to distress and lends the hand of comfort to sorrow. This man was not always found in the paths of rectitude, but who is who commits himself entirely to the control of sentiment or the passions?

“As you passed the Palmer House tonight,” said the burglar, looking the broker straight in the eye, “you were speaking of reforming — the criminals — was it not? — well how are you going to do it?”

To an ordinary man, a question like that, coming so close upon a time of burning emotions, kindled by such anxieties, would have been fraught with something of terror. Not so to the broker, the reformer. A reformer is a creature more strange than a sentimental burglar. Why does the reformer always climb upon the line fence and closely scan his neighbor's garden, heedless of the rank tares spreading in his own. Reform like charity should begin at home, only reform must take one more step, a

personal step which charity can never safely take, and begin in the individual.

But the broker was not now thinking of himself or of his daughter's husband. The laborer was rising before his excited vision. "You devil!" said the broker internally, and he may be pardoned under the circumstances.

"Sir!" he said aloud, "it would be fruitless to speak of this with you!"

"How do you know?"

The broker hesitated.

"You are fallen too low!"

"I thank you, but is that the position a reformer should take?"

"Yes! in some cases," returned the broker somewhat hotly.

"Perhaps you don't think I am worth reforming," smiled the burglar. "Let me give you a little advice for your own sake to aid you in your work of reform. We used to learn in our study of the equations of the curves, that what was true of a curve as it approached the limits was true at the limits, and we learned that the reverse was true, did we not? Well sir! when you find one case too low to try to help, you may be sure there is something vitally wrong with the law of your curve, and that there are other cases way back, higher up, that you cannot

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touch. Will you pardon me if I go on? I will not be personal longer, what I say is general. This is the age of reform, yet no one seems to understand its laws. Capital is setting out to reform labor. Labor strikes to reform capital. Each hopes for success and the struggle continues. I think labor has rather the worst of the fight."

"I hardly think you understand the position of capital today," the broker was forced to interrupt.

"Not from personal grounds," admitted the burglar.

"The fight today," continued the broker, "is between factions of capital, and it is the capitalist who suffers, not the laborer."

"The stones grind one against the other," exclaimed the burglar, "and the grain between is crushed; if labor did not of necessity get between it would not be ground."

"But capital suffers primarily," persisted Mr. Wheattop.

"And labor is ground, and not through fault of its own," returned the other. "Do you expect to reform labor by telling it that capital suffers through internal derangement? Then labor will say to you, and justly, 'reform capital!' and that is the pith of the matter; for this world has swung along too far in the orbit of reform for one class to seek to reform another because it holds temporary power! That

already has been tried in many fields and has failed. Riches cannot reform poverty — labor cannot reform capital — capital cannot reform labor. He who would take upon his shoulders the burden of the reformer must have a heart as deep as another's misery — a sympathy as broad as humanity and a spirit as lowly as the lowliest, otherwise he must confine his work of reformation in very narrow circles! ”

The lines of mild irony which had been deepening about Mr. Wheattop's mouth finally parted his lips and he said: “ You amuse me, and yet I feel like correcting you. You very evidently do not understand the relationships existing between the various classes. You certainly do not appreciate the attitude of the rich to the poor — nor could you be expected to — but you do an injury to the cause of universal peace by willfully misunderstanding the motives and feelings of the upper class toward the lower and by misrepresenting us to the lower. It is the ravings of these blatant agitators that widens the gap between the classes.”

“ Pardon me,” said the burglar, “ but if we are to place so grave a responsibility let us place it rightly. It is not lodged entirely with the blatherskites nor with the supersensitive ones of the lower classes as many good people are led to believe. Too much of it lies with the upper class as you are pleased to call

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it. It is mighty little the members of your class (in general I mean, there are some noble exceptions) care or think about their less fortunate brothers. They regard any movement on the part of the laboring class, for instance, to better its condition as a presumptuous striving to climb out of the mould in which fate — you call it Providence or God — cast them, and to fit themselves into a sphere forever above them. It takes a time of discord and of upheaval to call the attention of many of you to the downtrodden at all. And when your attention is called, is it not rather in a personal manner as to how the trouble will affect you, as to whether the red flag will really float triumphantly for a time, than what of permanent value and benefit to all concerned will be reached in the ultimate outcome of events? How can I misrepresent you to the poor. My associates, contrary to your implication, are not among the lower classes. I enter more frequently into the homes of the rich than into the abodes of poverty. There are not many valuable papers in the homes of the poor and their safes are not worth the cracking.”

The burglar could not resist the temptation to play on tender chords.

“But I could not misrepresent your class feelings if I would — your weak ones too vividly present them. Let me show you how heartless you can be.

It was on that sad May morning, whose fatal consequences will not soon be forgotten in many homes of this city. There had been blood shed at McCormick's. The strikers had come in contact with the police. Right into that quarter of the city drove a tallyho — a coach and four, with coachman, footman, and wind-bag, done up in white skin trousers, top boots, green coats, high hats and cockades — complete and absolute personifications of servility and degradation — how can one stoop so low as to wear that rig! On that coach which passed through that region of pain and starving and despair were the daughters of your class, with bright, happy, careless faces, and your sons — shallow pated dudes, with monocles and high collars which creased their chins and kept their lower jaws from slipping back into imbecility; and in spite of the insult offered to men of sense and sorrow by such a display, at such a time and in such a place, the party passed unmolested, unheeded perhaps, in spite of the tooting of the long horn, unheeded perhaps, except by those whose hearts were not stirred to envy, but whose eyes were moistened by the heartlessness in the upper class! I tell you the red flag on Michigan Avenue on that Thanksgiving day was a more blessed sight in the eyes of the angels — at least in the eyes of respectable humanity.

“Do I misrepresent your class?” continued the

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burglar. "What is to be said for a class, acceptable members of which ride through the city stretched out at full length in their victorias with ankle joints exposed, embracing little curs the cost and maintenance of each of which would more than endow a cot in the hospital which its mistress passes daily in ignorance of its purpose or existence. It makes me sick! "

It was beginning to make the broker sick too, when suddenly there came to his ear a faint sound which caused new life to flow in his veins. A distant rumble — a clang — as of a gong. They were coming but why would they not come quietly and surprise the wretch and not give him an alarm and a chance to escape? The noise grew louder, the clangor fiercer and, in a whirl of uproar and flame, the district engine rounded the corner and vanished down the side street.

Forty shades of expression passed over the broker's countenance as the burglar sat there coolly eyeing him, and his profound fall from the pinnacle of hope into the pit of despair cast a gloom over the party for some moments. Finally the burglar broke the silence.

"That slight disturbance in the street interrupted our line of conversation. We were speaking of that incident of the strikes."

The broker's disappointment almost had the

better of him. "That one word — 'strikes,' " he muttered, "is enough to divert all sympathy from the laboring classes. The strike is the most wanton engine of destruction in the hands of labor today. To strike should be a criminal act! "

"And so you would manufacture criminals — not reform them," suggested the burglar.

"It would lessen the propensity for striking if justice were to hold its flaming sword before the strikers," dogmatized the broker.

"That fabled sword of justice had two edges," said his tormentor quietly. "Let us not condone the wrong of the strikers, nor let us impute all the evil to them. Is it wrong for a single employee to leave his employer in a time of need, supposing previous relations between them to have been just? Morally wrong, always. Legally wrong, never! Is the situation changed when the single employee is multiplied into a hundred? Hardly, I think. But, Mr. Broker, the laborer acts and conducts his affairs under the same general immoral law that governs the universe of trade today — your necessity is my opportunity."

"It certainly is so in your branch of trade! " sadly remarked Mrs. Wheattop.

"Let us not be personal," said the burglar. "I could not well exist in an age and be entirely out of harmony with it — no more could the capitalist!

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It is the general law though and even personal friendship sometimes falls before it. But we are not so apt to take advantage of those toward whom our personal sympathies extend and so it seems to me that when the 'brotherhood of man' is made a factor of daily life instead of a text for vague preaching, as it is today along with the kindred topics of sweetness and light, the element of personal sympathy will enter more broadly into the mixture of life and the immoral law as formulated will be a thing of the past."

"Is not the reign of brotherly love hopelessly far away," asked Mrs. Wheattop in a tone wavering between kindliness and bitter irony, "when one who, like yourself, speaking in its behalf still bends his life energies against it?"

"It does seem hopelessly far away, Madam, when those who would care the most for it know not how to bend their forces toward it. Our human natures and all the wanton engines of civilization, as you would call them, Mr. Broker, are fighting against it."

"I do not recognize the force of this law of trade you have formulated," said the broker.

"The law is none of my formulating. It is a condensed decalogue and, so far as it touches the relationships of men, was engraved on everlasting bronze long ago by the adamantine tool of human

selfishness. It is a principle of the great law of evolution, nature obeys it implicitly and on her immortal tablets it is inscribed — ‘The Survival of the Fittest!’ ”

“You are pessimistic, young man!” said the broker partly in interest, partly with the police patrol in mind. “This law you propound antedates the earliest days of creation! Come down to today and, to be precise, tell me one product of modern thought and meanness which contributes to delay this Utopia of Brotherly Love!”

“Your question is so tersely put,” responded the burglar, “that there can be but one answer and that is — the daily press!”

There was silence for some moments. Two minds were working along somewhat similar lines; the broker’s was shooting off at a tangent. Two of them were thinking of characters blackened, homes and family altars desecrated, friendships severed, fortunes overthrown by the malicious lies and misstatements of the unbridled press. The broker’s thoughts soon took the form of words.

“You must have had large experience with the papers to know them so well!” he said, by way of a grim joke.

“I have had unpleasant relations with the papers,” quietly returned the burglar, “in ways you would be very far from imagining, and must say

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that in the editorial columns, in the news departments, in the garbled reports, it is one and the same vile mess. It seems to me that the daily press engenders more ill feeling between capital and labor, between rich and poor, between operator and operative, than any other one outside agency, yes! or than all combined."

"Young man," said the broker with severity, "you are as crazy on this topic as on the others you have touched. I read the papers and get a vast deal of information and benefit from them. Their stock reports are invaluable to me, their news items are necessary to a knowledge of what is going on in the world about us, their literary and religious departments are replete with interesting matter."

"I must be on track of a new bird," said the burglar, with a satirical little grin. "Do you mean to say that you read the literary and religious matter in the daily papers? I had supposed that men of culture went to periodicals and reviews and technical journals for such mental and moral sustenance as their libraries or their own experience could not furnish; and that no one read the Monday morning sermon except the man whose conscience was troubling him over a certain empty pew in his church the day before! "

"But the matter is there for those to read who cannot afford the reviews," insisted the broker.

It would have been of interest to Mr. Wheattop and his wife, especially to the latter, to have known of one unpleasant experience this man had had with the papers. He had reported their daughter's wedding and had lost his position because of it. He had done so well in police and criminal matters for the paper on which he was then engaged that the managing editor considered him fit to deal with the affairs of "high life." He had treated this matter in a gentlemanly manner altogether devoid of sensationalism and had purposely withheld the copy till it was time for the edition to go to press that it might not be altered. Mrs. Wheattop, with her fine instincts, had appreciated the notice and had gone, after some days, to the publication office to thank the reporter in person. But he was not there. His chief had taken him to task over that very article and the reporter had left abruptly. His whereabouts were unknown. A gentlemanly treatment of a delicate affair was that man's crime against modern newspaper methods! So it is not to be wondered that it was with a slight touch of bitterness that he heard the broker defend the press.

"Whether the influence of the press be for good or for evil," continued Mr. Wheattop, "it is hardly just to condemn that institution in a wholesale manner, for such as it is the public demands it."

"I must admit that the public furnishes a good

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market," said the burglar, "but I do not believe the public created the demand. In fact I know that the newspaper, like all novel ideas, had to struggle for a footing and it is only by mixing good with the evil that it retains its hold. As to the moral purposes of the press we must let that institution determine. No paper has advocated a righteous cause but a rival sheet has at least attempted to show that it was actuated entirely by selfish or partisan motives, or has accused it of falsehood direct. And things have got to that pass that when the newsboys yell in my ear 'The Chicago Liar! for five cents!' I instinctively ask which one? — and if he does not happen to have mine which lies least often — well, I choose the least of greater evils — or take none at all."

A slow rumble along the side street, coming out of nothingness and fading away into the vast stillness from which it had emerged, told the trio that the engines were returning home. The fire could not have been much of an affair — it was so soon over that what had probably threatened a great loss had died away in a mild excitement!

"Sir! Madam!" said the burglar rising from his seat after this last explosion, "it would be unkind to keep you longer in suspense, your wires are cut and the police have not heard your call. I am free to act as I choose. I have been very pleasantly en-

tertained and I may hope that this visit has been not without a certain interest to you."

He made a quick step toward the desk and deftly passed the package of papers from the drawer to his pocket.

"You will hear from me before many days as to when and how you may redeem these papers." "I shall keep the bonds," he added, as with his most polite bow he backed toward the chamber door. A groan escaped from the broker's lips and over his wife's face came such a look of despair that Raymond Hope, not the burglar but the man with whom they had been conversing, felt instinctively that in the minds of these people there must be some grief deeper than could be caused by the loss of the ransom money.

"O God! " groaned the broker.

"My poor daughter! " sobbed his wife.

The burglar for the time had vanished and in his place stood the reporter and across his brain there swept a vision of that fair woman, their daughter, whom he had seen but once and then, to love, as she was about to become the wife of another.

"Your daughter? " he said, stopping quickly upon the threshold, "your daughter, what of her? "

His tone was so gentle and full of concern that Mrs. Wheattop and her pride broke down, and be-

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tween heavy sobs, hardly knowing what she did, she told the story of her daughter's sore trial and the certainty of her son's dishonor.

Her husband had tried to dam this rushing stream of a mother's woe, but to no purpose.

"Madam," said Hope, as Mrs. Wheattop convulsively finished her recital, "believe me you have not done wrong in thus honoring me with your confidence. Your secret is safe with me — how safe you may judge from my actions. This is a painful experience to you — it must be to any sensitive soul. The moral sense of the community receives a more violent shock by the discovery of crime and rottenness where purity is supposed to exist than when the crime emanates from confessedly criminal circles. That is looking at the question from the point of view of your class. But as for me, so far as I can discern its workings, the moral tone of the community is an impalpable affair and not worth taking into account in shaping the individual life. I return these papers and do not stand in the way of their safe delivery. I do not return them to shield crime in high places, for fear of the deleterious effect of the exposure on public morals — the exposure of hypocrisy in whatever quarter would not grieve me — I return them, for I must lose, if to gain however greatly to myself is to cause one additional throb in a pure woman's breaking heart."

While speaking Hope quietly laid the papers in

the drawer from which he had taken them, and placed the revolver at their side.

"It seems," he continued, "that the financial profit of this visit is to be small to me; and in return for what I have missed I am going to ask a favor — where I might, perhaps, issue a command. Mr. Broker! I wish that at your earliest convenience you would send a check for \$500.00 to the management of the training school for boys, an institution which well appreciates the difference between the criminal class and the labor class and is trying to save from the one into the ranks of the other. And then, too, I wish you would donate \$500.00 to the city missionary society to be used for medical work in the slums. These donations are not to go in over your name, but over a name I will give you, say — Faith Hope. You may supply a third word if you choose. When these donations are made I will return the silver which anxiously awaits me at the door below. I have the honor now to bid you a good night," and the burglar left the room.

Mr. Wheattop's first impulse was to get the revolver, but somehow he got the better of it and lay for a few moments quietly in bed. In his superlative joy at still possessing the papers, the broker assured his wife that he would soon redeem the silver, and to this moment she believes that he has acted in good faith his part of the programme.

But between us, one thousand dollars sunk in an

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obscure investment which would not reap to him even the interest of renown, was not to the broker's taste, and by and by, after an endeavor to put the police on track of the missing silver, he calmed his conscience by investing one thousand dollars in a picture of "Charity" in an elaborate gold frame on which his name appeared in large black letters as "donor" and presenting it to the Art Institute. His wife, with now and then a tear and many a warm feeling toward the frail side of fallen humanity, has never failed to remember that night and always winds up her line of thought something like this:

"He was a strange fellow! a strange fellow! There must have been two men in the house that night! It was doubtless a noble, true man who sat and talked with us — but it was a burglar who took the silver!"