

the ten thousand to Mr. Richards in person at his home. Good-night."

Then he slipped out, and left the audience making a vast noise, which was composed of a mixture of cheers, the "Mikado" song, dog-disapproval, and the chant, "You are f-a-r from being a b-a-a-d man--a-a-a a-men!"

#### IV.

At home the Richardses had to endure congratulations and compliments until midnight. Then they were left to themselves. They looked a little sad, and they sat silent and thinking. Finally Mary sighed and said:

"Do you think we are to blame, Edward--much to blame?" and her eyes wandered to the accusing triplet of big bank-notes lying on the table, where the congratulators had been gloating over them and reverently fingering them. Edward did not answer at once; then he brought out a sigh and said, hesitatingly:

"We--we couldn't help it, Mary. It--well it was ordered. All things are."

Mary glanced up and looked at him steadily, but he didn't return the

look. Presently she said:

"I thought congratulations and praises always tasted good. But--it seems to me, now--Edward?"

"Well?"

"Are you going to stay in the bank?"

"N--no."

"Resign?"

"In the morning--by note."

"It does seem best."

Richards bowed his head in his hands and muttered:

"Before I was not afraid to let oceans of people's money pour through my hands, but--Mary, I am so tired, so tired--"

"We will go to bed."

At nine in the morning the stranger called for the sack and took it to the hotel in a cab. At ten Harkness had a talk with him privately. The

stranger asked for and got five cheques on a metropolitan bank--drawn to "Bearer,"--four for \$1,500 each, and one for \$34,000. He put one of the former in his pocket-book, and the remainder, representing \$38,500, he put in an envelope, and with these he added a note which he wrote after Harkness was gone. At eleven he called at the Richards' house and knocked. Mrs. Richards peeped through the shutters, then went and received the envelope, and the stranger disappeared without a word. She came back flushed and a little unsteady on her legs, and gasped out:

"I am sure I recognised him! Last night it seemed to me that maybe I had seen him somewhere before."

"He is the man that brought the sack here?"

"I am almost sure of it."

"Then he is the ostensible Stephenson too, and sold every important citizen in this town with his bogus secret. Now if he has sent cheques instead of money, we are sold too, after we thought we had escaped. I was beginning to feel fairly comfortable once more, after my night's rest, but the look of that envelope makes me sick. It isn't fat enough; \$8,500 in even the largest bank-notes makes more bulk than that."

"Edward, why do you object to cheques?"

"Cheques signed by Stephenson! I am resigned to take the \$8,500 if it

could come in bank-notes--for it does seem that it was so ordered, Mary--but I have never had much courage, and I have not the pluck to try to market a cheque signed with that disastrous name. It would be a trap. That man tried to catch me; we escaped somehow or other; and now he is trying a new way. If it is cheques--"

"Oh, Edward, it is too bad!" And she held up the cheques and began to cry.

"Put them in the fire! quick! we mustn't be tempted. It is a trick to make the world laugh at us, along with the rest, and--Give them to me, since you can't do it!" He snatched them and tried to hold his grip till he could get to the stove; but he was human, he was a cashier, and he stopped a moment to make sure of the signature. Then he came near to fainting.

"Fan me, Mary, fan me! They are the same as gold!"

"Oh, how lovely, Edward! Why?"

"Signed by Harkness. What can the mystery of that be, Mary?"

"Edward, do you think--"

"Look here--look at this! Fifteen--fifteen--fifteen--thirty-four. Thirty-

eight thousand five hundred! Mary, the sack isn't worth twelve dollars, and Harkness--apparently--has paid about par for it."

"And does it all come to us, do you think--instead of the ten thousand?"

"Why, it looks like it. And the cheques are made to 'Bearer,' too."

"Is that good, Edward? What is it for?"

"A hint to collect them at some distant bank, I reckon. Perhaps Harkness doesn't want the matter known. What is that--a note?"

"Yes. It was with the cheques."

It was in the "Stephenson" handwriting, but there was no signature. It said:

"I am a disappointed man. Your honesty is beyond the reach of temptation. I had a different idea about it, but I wronged you in that, and I beg pardon, and do it sincerely. I honour you--and that is sincere too. This town is not worthy to kiss the hem of your garment. Dear sir, I made a square bet with myself that there were nineteen debauchable men in your self-righteous community. I have lost. Take the whole pot, you are entitled to it."

Richards drew a deep sigh, and said:

"It seems written with fire--it burns so. Mary--I am miserable again."

"I, too. Ah, dear, I wish--"

"To think, Mary--he believes in me."

"Oh, don't, Edward--I can't bear it."

"If those beautiful words were deserved, Mary--and God knows I believed I deserved them once--I think I could give the forty thousand dollars for them. And I would put that paper away, as representing more than gold and jewels, and keep it always. But now--We could not live in the shadow of its accusing presence, Mary."

He put it in the fire.

A messenger arrived and delivered an envelope. Richards took from it a note and read it; it was from Burgess:

"You saved me, in a difficult time. I saved you last night. It was at cost of a lie, but I made the sacrifice freely, and out of a grateful heart. None in this village knows so well as I know how brave and good and noble you are. At bottom you cannot respect me, knowing as you do of that matter of which I am accused, and by the

general voice condemned; but I beg that you will at least believe that I am a grateful man; it will help me to bear my burden. [Signed] 'BURGESS.'"

"Saved, once more. And on such terms!" He put the note in the lire.

"I--I wish I were dead, Mary, I wish I were out of it all!"

"Oh, these are bitter, bitter days, Edward. The stabs, through their very generosity, are so deep--and they come so fast!"

Three days before the election each of two thousand voters suddenly found himself in possession of a prized memento--one of the renowned bogus double-eagles. Around one of its faces was stamped these words: "THE REMARK I MADE TO THE POOR STRANGER WAS--" Around the other face was

stamped these: "GO, AND REFORM. [SIGNED] PINKERTON." Thus the entire

remaining refuse of the renowned joke was emptied upon a single head, and with calamitous effect. It revived the recent vast laugh and concentrated it upon Pinkerton; and Harkness's election was a walk-over.

Within twenty-four hours after the Richardses had received their cheques their consciences were quieting down, discouraged; the old couple were learning to reconcile themselves to the sin which they had committed. But they were to learn, now, that a sin takes on new and real terrors when there seems a chance that it is going to be found out. This gives it a fresh and most substantial and important aspect. At church the morning

sermon was of the usual pattern; it was the same old things said in the same old way; they had heard them a thousand times and found them innocuous, next to meaningless, and easy to sleep under; but now it was different: the sermon seemed to bristle with accusations; it seemed aimed straight and specially at people who were concealing deadly sins. After church they got away from the mob of congratulators as soon as they could, and hurried homeward, chilled to the bone at they did not know what--vague, shadowy, indefinite fears. And by chance they caught a glimpse of Mr. Burgess as he turned a corner. He paid no attention to their nod of recognition! He hadn't seen it; but they did not know that. What could his conduct mean? It might mean--it might--mean--oh, a dozen dreadful things. Was it possible that he knew that Richards could have cleared him of guilt in that bygone time, and had been silently waiting for a chance to even up accounts? At home, in their distress they got to imagining that their servant might have been in the next room listening when Richards revealed the secret to his wife that he knew of Burgess's innocence; next Richards began to imagine that he had heard the swish of a gown in there at that time; next, he was sure he had heard it. They would call Sarah in, on a pretext, and watch her face; if she had been betraying them to Mr. Burgess, it would show in her manner. They asked her some questions--questions which were so random and incoherent and seemingly purposeless that the girl felt sure that the old people's minds had been affected by their sudden good fortune; the sharp and watchful gaze which they bent upon her frightened her, and that completed the business. She blushed, she became nervous and confused, and to the old people these were plain signs of guilt--guilt of some fearful sort or

other--without doubt she was a spy and a traitor. When they were alone again they began to piece many unrelated things together and get horrible results out of the combination. When things had got about to the worst Richards was delivered of a sudden gasp and his wife asked:

"Oh, what is it?--what is it?"

"The note--Burgess's note! Its language was sarcastic, I see it now." He quoted: "'At bottom you cannot respect me, knowing, as you do, of that matter of which I am accused'--oh, it is perfectly plain, now, God help me! He knows that I know! You see the ingenuity of the phrasing. It was a trap--and like a fool, I walked into it. And Mary--!"

"Oh, it is dreadful--I know what you are going to say--he didn't return your transcript of the pretended test-remark."

"No--kept it to destroy us with. Mary, he has exposed us to some already. I know it--I know it well. I saw it in a dozen faces after church. Ah, he wouldn't answer our nod of recognition--he knew what he had been doing!"

In the night the doctor was called. The news went around in the morning that the old couple were rather seriously ill--prostrated by the exhausting excitement growing out of their great windfall, the congratulations, and the late hours, the doctor said. The town was sincerely distressed; for these old people were about all it had left to

be proud of, now.

Two days later the news was worse. The old couple were delirious, and were doing strange things. By witness of the nurses, Richards had exhibited cheques--for \$8,500? No--for an amazing sum--\$38,500! What could be the explanation of this gigantic piece of luck?

The following day the nurses had more news--and wonderful. They had concluded to hide the cheques, lest harm come to them; but when they searched they were gone from under the patient's pillow--vanished away. The patient said:

"Let the pillow alone; what do you want?"

"We thought it best that the cheques--"

"You will never see them again--they are destroyed. They came from Satan. I saw the hell-brand on them, and I knew they were sent to betray me to sin." Then he fell to gabbling strange and dreadful things which were not clearly understandable, and which the doctor admonished them to keep to themselves.

Richards was right; the cheques were never seen again.

A nurse must have talked in her sleep, for within two days the forbidden gabblings were the property of the town; and they were of a surprising

sort. They seemed to indicate that Richards had been a claimant for the sack himself, and that Burgess had concealed that fact and then maliciously betrayed it.

Burgess was taxed with this and stoutly denied it. And he said it was not fair to attach weight to the chatter of a sick old man who was out of his mind. Still, suspicion was in the air, and there was much talk.

After a day or two it was reported that Mrs. Richards's delirious deliveries were getting to be duplicates of her husband's. Suspicion flamed up into conviction, now, and the town's pride in the purity of its one undiscredited important citizen began to dim down and flicker toward extinction.

Six days passed, then came more news. The old couple were dying. Richards's mind cleared in his latest hour, and he sent for Burgess. Burgess said:

"Let the room be cleared. I think he wishes to say something in privacy."

"No!" said Richards; "I want witnesses. I want you all to hear my confession, so that I may die a man, and not a dog. I was clean--artificially--like the rest; and like the rest I fell when temptation came. I signed a lie, and claimed the miserable sack. Mr. Burgess remembered that I had done him a service, and in gratitude (and

ignorance) he suppressed my claim and saved me. You know the thing that was charged against Burgess years ago. My testimony, and mine alone, could have cleared him, and I was a coward and left him to suffer disgrace--"

"No--no--Mr. Richards, you--"

"My servant betrayed my secret to him--"

"No one has betrayed anything to me--"

--"And then he did a natural and justifiable thing; he repented of the saving kindness which he had done me, and he exposed me--as I deserved--"

"Never!--I make oath--"

"Out of my heart I forgive him."

Burgess's impassioned protestations fell upon deaf ears; the dying man passed away without knowing that once more he had done poor Burgess a wrong. The old wife died that night.

The last of the sacred Nineteen had fallen a prey to the fiendish sack; the town was stripped of the last rag of its ancient glory. Its mourning was not showy, but it was deep.

By act of the Legislature--upon prayer and petition--Hadleyburg was allowed to change its name to (never mind what--I will not give it away), and leave one word out of the motto that for many generations had graced the town's official seal.

It is an honest town once more, and the man will have to rise early that catches it napping again.