

THE POVERTY OF RICHES.

The Bank Clerk's Whist Coterie was holding its weekly meeting at the rooms of the president, Mr. Thaddeus Butts. The title, by the way, was more respectable than accurate; for whist was never played there. But the hour was late, and the game whatever its nature, had been abandoned. Easy chairs were easily occupied, and through clouds of tobacco smoke disjunct remarks were gradually consolidating into a conversation. Naturally enough, from the foibles and shortcomings of individual employers, the topic had developed into a general consideration of the use and management of a great fortune.

"Why, there's old Mainwaring," Butts was saying. "He's worth \$50,000,000 if he's got a cent, yet he doesn't have half so much fun as I do. Now if I were in his place I'd show you that money can be an oasis in the desert of life, bringing comfort to all within its view."

"Humph!" interrupted Markham. "What could you do? It would take all your time to count your loose change."

"Yes, if I clung to it, but I wouldn't. I'm not blessed with many relations, but such as I have I would use to fix that name of Butts before a synonym for property. As for you fellows, I would send for you one at a time and we would have a bird and bot, and a Jim Hickey cigar, by Jove, and then just at parting I would say, 'Slip this envelope in your pocket, old boy, and don't open it until you get home; no thanks, you know you would do as much for me. And then you would dust along lively, and wouldn't your eyes stick out when you saw a check for two hundred and fifty thou, hey?'"

"It would be all in your eye, I guess," growled Blakely.

"Say, Butts," cried Johnson, "if you can't have my share now I'll stand a liberal discount for cash."

"Of course I would do as I say," continued Butts. "Anything more than a million is vexation of spirit. I'd just sock that away and cover up sins with the rest. 'I don't know about that,' expostulated Graham, a wild-eyed youth with a crimson necktie, 'why, I think I'd spend \$40,000 a year on cigars alone. I would harass my soul to a much greater extent, I imagine.'"

"I like to do good now," said Butts. "Why shouldn't I then, and in proportion, too? For instance, say I retained sufficient of my fortune to give me an income of \$100,000. My salary now, as you all know, is \$1,000 per year, and I think nothing of throwing a dime to a beggar or putting a quarter on the plate. Hence I would give a \$10 note to the one and put \$25 on the other. But first, like a well-ordered friend, I would attend to relatives, friends and acquaintances. Why wouldn't I? There's no credit in being a hog."

"No credit," sneered Markham. "Perhaps not, but there's plenty of cash. Don't you know that a rich man glories in the 'needle's eye,' and that the richer he becomes the richer he yearns to be? Besides, you forget that your wants would increase proportionately also."

"I wouldn't give them a chance before I had attended to you fellows, my dear, my intimate friends."

"Say, Thad," said Johnson, politely, "when this day of jubilee comes you will kindly send for me among the very first? You might be suddenly taken sick, you know."

"I don't believe in fairies," added Butts, meditatively. "But I just do wish one would give me the chance to take old Mainwaring's place for a single day. I'd set an example for millionaires that might bring about the millennium. You'd be the old curmudgeon be surprised to have the poor rise up and call him bless'd?"

"They will always be with him for all he would do," said Graham.

"I think it's we who had better rise up," suggested Blakely. "It's after one o'clock, and notwithstanding our president's good intentions, which are really fine specimens of asbestos pavements in their way, I presume the banks will open at the usual hour."

There were noisy salutations, a disordered descent of the stairs, and Mr. Butts was left alone with his thoughts. His cigar was only half finished, some punch still lurked in the bowl, the fire was burning brightly on the hearth, so that he sat at ease and continued his musings. Yes, philanthropy was undoubtedly the magic spring of happiness. No wonder the principle of altruism was termed the Golden Rule, since only the rich could fittingly fulfill it. If he only had the chance, wouldn't he cut a broad swath through the field of wretchedness? Not that he should stint himself; oh, no! But enough was as good as a feast, and surely there was no zeal like hospitality! Mr. Butts was all aglow with satisfaction as he crept into bed. "Peace on earth and good will to men," he murmured as he closed his eyes.

It was an hour later that Mr. Butts awoke with a start. Something had touched him on the shoulder. The room was radiant with a silvery light, and the light came not from the fireplace, but emanated from a fantastic little creature seated on one of the lower bed posts and gently waving a wand to and fro.

"You see, Butts," she said as she gaped and blinked in amazement and dread there are such things as fairies after all. Now since you doubted and boasted, I shall show you our power and frailty. Incidentally, too there may be lessons, but you can discover these for yourself. You shall have your wish; tomorrow you will be Mainwaring. Your relatives, friends and acquaintances shall have due notice of the change; but never fear, they'll not give you away. They'll look to you to do the giving, ha, ha! And so to sleep." The wand slowly descended, and with it the stupor of oblivion.

When next Mr. Butts awoke he was conscious of two unusual sensations; his bed was luxurious, his body was uncomfortable. The depression of the mattress was deep; but so, too, alas! was the depression of his mind. His limbs felt stiff, his frame heavy, and his head muddled. "It must be that confounded punch," he growled. "I put too much sugar in it." And yet his health had always been superior to overwroughted conviviality.

Damask curtains! Lofly windows! Stately apartment! Oh, dear! Oh dear! Here was his third-story back? Mr. Butts growled again.

At the sound the man bowed reverently and said: "Good-morning, Mr. Mainwaring. I trust you rested well, sir?" Then Mr. Butts remembered, and with regret. That confounded fairy! What business has she to interfere with the ordinary workings of nature? If feelings were any criterion, then Mr. Mainwaring was apt to die before the day was over, and then where would he be?

"Your bath is ready, sir," said the man. "That will do; you may go," replied Mr. Butts, rather astonished at his own gruffness.

"Yes sir. Very good, sir. The usual breakfast, sir?"

"Oh, let them cook whatever they've got."

The man would have stared had not his eyes been too well trained. "Yes, sir; oh, certainly sir," he stammered, and backed out of the room. Mr. Butts raised himself awkwardly and set on the edge of the bed. He felt a singular aversion to dressing himself. He looked at his shoes and tried to look at his knees. "Confound such a corporation," he grumbled. But as he completed his toilet and passed through the corridors and the grand stairway to the breakfast room the sense of his new identity enthralled him.

He quite forgot his clerical existence, He quite ignored his ephemeral future, He was Mainwaring. The modern Croesus, the multi-millionaire, and port and saddle proclaimed his awful presence. He found elegance and profusion awaiting his presence. Yet somehow that appetite that used to rise superior to boarding-house delicacies now deserted him. The butler approached with vial and spoon on a salver. "Your medicine, sir," he said hesitantly.

"I suppose I must," sighed poor Mr. Butts, as he made a very dry face after a very noisome dose. And still the stream of urchins and chafing dishes had no allurements in their song.

"Take 'em away, take 'em away," motioned Mr. Butts, and bring me some oatmeal and a glass of milk and lime water."

"As usual, sir. I thought so, sir. I have them ready, sir," replied the grave butler.

Mr. Butts dined lackadaisically over his breakfast. There were three letters lying by his plate addressed to Homer Mainwaring, and after a little he broke the seals and them. One was from his wife—at least from Mrs. Homer Mainwaring—at his country seat at Oldport. Another was from his daughter at boarding school, and the third from his son on a yachting trip through the Mediterranean. Mr. Butts crushed the missives together and jammed them into his pocket. "The same old story," he muttered. "Money, money, money! Do they think I'm made of it? Well, they can take it out in thinking. I never felt so poor in all my life."

Here the door opened and a solemnly-appearing man, whose garb had an official touch, entered and saluted. "At your service, sir," he said. "The night-watchman reports that they were at the butler's window again last night. And the mine by the observatory must have exploded, for I've just found a leg under the century plant, sir. Surprised you weren't disturbed, sir; but then you must have slept soundly after your escape of yesterday. How will you be going down town, sir—the landau or the gray?"

"Not at all," said Mr. Butts. "It looks like rain, and I can't risk them. I'll walk."

"Very good, sir, I've my revolver handy, you see. There's a mob of hoodlums on the lower corner. I've turned a half dozen cranks away from the door already, sir. And I'm sure I've seen three ruined brokers lurking in areas across the way. Begging your pardon, sir, but if walking is to be a permanency, I'll be asking for a raise."

"Nonsense! You'll be lucky if you escape the cut in expenses I'm about to institute. Can't we go through the stable and catch a horse-car?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"And you have a pass, haven't you?"

"All of us private detectives get such trifling favors, sir."

"Let me take it. The conductor won't ask you. Blast my corns! What comfort for a state walking on tracks and red hot coal?"

Mr. Butts settled himself in a corner of the car and bought a paper. On examining the change he discovered a dubious looking coin, which acumen assured him was a hammered was token. He swore a little under his double chin, for the spy little newsboy had escaped, and then, with some latent purpose, retained the piece, as he thought, in his pudgy palm. Of course the financial page was the page to which he turned, and in its predictions, for first time this morning, Mr. Butts found comfort. Yes, it did seem probable that certain of his stocks—oh, what pride there was in the personal pronoun!—were in for a rise.

Well, if anyone needed such luck, he did. "It's about time," he thought, with a sigh of relief. But why do the tiny eyes protude, the thin lips twitch? What goes on in this? On that Ebenezer Stubbs, through his recent cornering of Olive Oil Trust had landed a cool ten millions. Brother Mainwaring should look better to his laurels, or he'll lose not only the 'facile,' but the 'principes,' also.

Could it be, was there really danger of his losing the scepter of the richest man in the city? He was being displaced by one whom he had contemptuously helped to make? Oh! that would be intolerable. What would there remain of life worth living? It must not be! Mr. Butts folded his paper. His square jaws closed grimly. His chin settled on his chest. He was thinking—thinking the thoughts of restless nights, of troublous days, how much money might be made more. The car reached his cross street, and Mr. Butts descended with the alert detective by his side. On the curb stood a blind man, with his hat extended. Into it Mr. Butts dropped the coin. "The luck's sake," he explained almost apologetically to his attendant. "God bless you," said the medicant, thus showing that his affliction had its recompenses.

And now the bustle of the street stirred Mr. Butts like a trumpet call. He pressed on eagerly, puffing, perspiring, grinning, yet superior to his physical infirmities. He brushed through the counting room of his establishment with a gruff "Morning!" in response to the reverential salutations of the clerks. Somehow their evident vivacity exasperated him. "What right had such beggarly persons to be so healthy and merry? Did he hire them to crack jokes?"

"Too much pay, too little work," he inwardly commented. "I must retrench. I must reform."

"The old man's on a rampage this morning," said a shrewd young teller to his fellow. "I think something will drop."

The shrewd young teller was right. Through room after room Mr. Butts hurried; through winding hallways and furtive doors. At length his private office, that holy of holies, was reached. The detective took a seat without, but the magnate entered, and in an instant was at his desk with coat off, waistcoat unbuttoned, arms deep in a mass of papers. "Zip!" went his electric bell. The manager dashed in as if he had been stung.

"Jenkins," snapped Mr. Butts, "our expenses are one-third too high. Cut them down at once. I don't care how; but mark this, if the service suffers off your head." Jenkins now assured of the stinging, bowed and retired.

"The lazy hounds!" soliloquized Mr. Butts; "I'll show them whether they can't keep their heads on their necks."

Then followed Mr. Butts, his stenographer, his typewriter, telegrapher, were all as closely engaged as if millions were nations and dollars drops of blood. The details of an immense fortune were scrupulously examined the bricks of another Tower, and the increase was belittled, its death enlarged. Sums that would furnish happiness to a community were tossed aside as trifles. Trifles that a beggar might ignore achieved the importance of the purse of Fortunatus.

And the while the magnate saw before him the fleeting image of his rival, well in the fore! And great drops of sweat dropped from his brow in the mental struggle to surpass him. Time, circumstance, existence itself, were all swallowed up in the awful necessity of making much money more!

Then came a diversion. There was a rap, and the detective entered, frowning against the suspicion of a grin.

"Are you in sir to personal calls?" he asked.

"You know I am not; go to the devil," grunted Mr. Butts, barely raising his eyes from his calculations.

The man hesitated, withdrew, but soon returned again.

"They won't go sir," he explained. "They say you made the engagement yourself, and they send these cards."

Mr. Butts scanned the missives and read their contents in amazement: "Uncle Jim Butts and Aunt Maria!" "Cousin Susie." "We're on deck, old man. Yours to command. Markham and Blakely!" "Bring on the scads." Your old friend Johnson."

"Government bonds are good enough for—Graham." What could such enigmas mean? Was he dreaming? The heavy curtain over the past waved and let escape a ray of light! Uncle Jim Butts! Then who, then, then, where was he?

"Where are the people?"

Mr. Butts pondered for a few moments; then he stood up and addressed his assistants. "Do you notice anything queer or unnatural about me this morning?"

"Why, no, sir. Unusually energetic and resourceful, you might say."

"What a fool he was to doubt his own identity. What dangerous mania would be those who might dare to impugn it? Mr. Butts stepped into the anteroom and examined himself in the mirror. Yes, he was old Mainwaring, last enough. There were the little eyes, the crooked chin, the paunch, the suit of broadcloth, the white shirt, the cluster in the shirt front. Wasn't seeing believing?"

With massive dignity Mr. Butts entered the reception room. Its occupants sprang forward eagerly, and then hastily retreated. "By word of mouth from one to the other with cold displeasure. 'Well, what is it?' he asked. 'I am a busy man. What do you mean by disturbing me with your unintelligible noise?' Uncle Jim looked foolish, and Cousin Susie simpered and sucked her thumb, but Aunt Maria flouted to the front. 'By word of mouth from one to the other with cold displeasure. 'Well, what is it?' he asked. 'I am a busy man. What do you mean by disturbing me with your unintelligible noise?' Uncle Jim looked foolish, and Cousin Susie simpered and sucked her thumb, but Aunt Maria flouted to the front. 'By word of mouth from one to the other with cold displeasure. 'Well, what is it?' he asked. 'I am a busy man. What do you mean by disturbing me with your unintelligible noise?' Uncle Jim looked foolish, and Cousin Susie simpered and sucked her thumb, but Aunt Maria flouted to the front. 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