

to imply benevolence, the man scorned them all, said he had no home, no boarding-house, no anything except what he called a skinful, and he implored Hoag.

"You—steer me round to Numb' Sheven shtation, pardner. The boys know me at Numb' Sheven. They'll gimme a—"

Totally against his ideas of what constituted ethics at that moment, Hoag took hold of the man to guide him to the police station. The man suddenly reposed such confidence in him that he consented to be dragged like a sack, on to a side street; until Hoag feared he would scuff out the man's clothes when he ducked and said unto him, "Here, get on my back, old top."

Obediently as a child, the man got on to Hoag, who, buoyed up by the strength of the movie, felt no fatigue as he carried him two blocks away from the main street into the receiving room of Number Seven, where he was at once relieved of his burden by a pair of constables.

Hoag began to give a circumspect account of how he had found the man; but all the response he got as one officer began to clean out the prisoner's pockets, at the Sergeant's wicket, was to be taken aside by the other and cross-examined as to what he meant by being found in tow of such a derelict.

"Something fishy about this man," said the officer. "For two cents I'd lock you up for the night and let you explain to the magistrate in the morning. Who are ye?"

Hoag fumbled from his pocket a card.

"Oh! Markhams, Ltd., eh? Yes, I've heard that gag before. This bumper says he used to be a yard hand at Markhams, but I guess they fired him because he had a game leg or something. Well, scat out o' this and see ye don't get in here again."

Which was one way of bringing Mr. Hoag back to the place of the commonplace in a hurry. So he went.

XII.

A BABY IN THE CASE

HOAG'S hunger for adventure was unsatisfied. The idea that a police system could come within an ace of hooking him in when he was doing good to other people gave him a great hankering for adventure Number Two, which befell him about midnight in the lower part of main street. The movie fronts were all dark now. The drunks were all in. After all, as he reflected, a drunk was not the best object of compassion; because drink dethrones reason.

Just as the city hall tower boomed midnight, in a scurrying light snow, Hoag—moving more slowly now—encountered a spectacle that at once made all his knight-errantry impulses leap within him. A wispy little wraith of a shabby woman, carrying broadside in a shawl what seemed to be a big, cumbersome baby. Hoag stopped short, lifting his hat:

"Pardon me, madam—but isn't that baby heavy for you?"

She gasped an incoherent reply, smiling.

"Won't you let me carry it for you?"

How could she refuse? The man's manner was so kind; he seemed such a gentleman; he could not possibly lead her into danger. This lady did not know Hoag, or what manner of experience he was working out of his system. Thankfully she gave up the child, which was indeed a big lump and quite asleep.

"Just down to Kristalo's," she said, indicating one of a group of Greek cafes, one of those marble-up, fruit-pyramided palaces of electric lights. And Hoag wondered. He had much preferred that she should be going home along a dingy street, up a rickety plank sidewalk into a ramshackle house. But things don't always cut themselves out according to the patterns of chivalry. Anyway, the woman was pale and thin enough and chattered quite volubly as Hoag carried the infant to one of the rooms behind a lattice-work screen, where seeming to be familiar with the waiter, the little woman ordered supper for herself, and some breakfast food and milk for the infant who



woke up and began to ogle Hoag with big, blue eyes, and a smile.

Sublimely indifferent to the sidelong glances of other people and the smirk of the waiter, Hoag fed the infant while the mother ate, telling him that the child—he observed that—did not in the least resemble her, but was the image of its runaway father. The poor little woman, with her tale of woe, just suited the occasion. Hoag was almost sorry when the supper was done, and he presented the checks at the pay wicket, while the woman bundled up the child in the shawl again and the snow went scurrying past.

She said they would go home now—far up street, block after block, at one a.m., as late as Hoag had ever been out, and he saying never a word, wondering why she had taken the child out so late to have a supper at Kristalo's. Not more than three blocks from where he had encountered the drunken way-farer the woman turned on to a side street. The houses here were quite dark; battered roughcast things bordering on the rags precinct. At one of them, with a low light through a transom, she turned up the steps, softly pushed open the door and stood a moment, seeming to Hoag quite a little nervous.

But she made no move to relieve him of the baby.

"I'm sure it's very kind o' you," she said.

What a pale, washed-out little wreck she seemed to be under the light. At the top of the staircase she gave a low whistle. In a low light at the landing came a woman in white.

"Would you please bring the baby up?" said the mother.

Hoag went up, still wondering. The woman in white snatched the child and vanished.

"Please come this way?" said the mother, leading him back a passage into a narrow little bedroom. She turned on the light, placed him a chair, and closed the door. She herself sat on the bed.

So suddenly mysterious had been all her actions from the time he met her until now, that Hoag, with some difficulty, convinced himself he was not again at the movie. This little woman seemed to him a being from another world.

"Listen!" she said, quickly, as though she heard voices below.

Perhaps it was the child crying.

Hoag felt his muscles quivering with nervousness.

What was this film play? Was he dreaming? She leaned upon her elbows.

"Please don't look at me like that," she said.

"I can't stand it. Not from you." She shuddered. Hoag rose to leave.

"Don't go. Oh, please—" She stepped to the door and listened below. "The house may be watched. You understand?"

Never had he beheld so forlorn a creature. Shame had made her cold with a sort of fear.

"That was my own child," she blurted. "I told you a yarn about its father. It never had a real father."

She scanned his face as though he were guessing the rest.

"I know you think I'm a miserable, low-down

woman," she said, dejectedly. "And I am. But that's not all. I do work for myself. But the wages I get don't keep my baby. Oh, my God, man! Don't look at me like that."

Hoag stood close to her. She was trembling.

"Where do you work?" he asked.

"Me?" she said, more matter-of-factly. "I'm a clean-up hand at Markhams, Ltd., up at the factories. Why—do you know Markhams?"

"Slightly," he coughed, as though he were still dreaming. He put his hand in his pocket and took out a bank bill, which he laid on the dresser. "That's for the baby," he said. Buttoning up his coat he opened the door. With something like a sob the woman watched him go. In a dazed condition, almost crumpled into his clothes, he fumbled his way out to the street door, opened it softly—and was at once confronted by a policeman.

"Oh," said the officer, pulling him close to the transom light. "I think I've got your card in my pocket. You are Martin Hoag, of Markhams, Ltd. What are you doin' here?"

"My very good friend," said Hoag, in a queer, quiet voice, "I have just been trying to help a poor, wretched woman, who has done nobody any harm since I last saw you. There's nothing to go in for. She'll be at work in the morning at Markhams, Ltd."

"Markhams, Ltd.," replied the officer. "By gravy; do all the suspects on this beat belong to Markhams, Ltd.? Mr. Hoag, ye'd better be going home. I've been shadowing ye. And I guess your yarn's O.K. Anyhow, it'll do for now."

XIII.

WEALTH vs. MISERY

A LETTER from Markham, to Helen, dated at Mooseville, said, in a postscript:

Everything O.K. Story when I get back. Meanwhile keep newspapers fed up with the usual bunk. Can't afford to have any scoops in this story. Must come out when it does with an organized bang. Soft-soap the financial department of the Clarion. They're after my scalp.

H. M.

Markham stood well with all the other five papers. He held stock in two of them, and the other three were carrying large space ads every day. Helen earned part of her handsome salary by looking after the details of this publicity campaign, which she handled better than most men could have done.

Hoag knew that Markham feared the Clarion, which refused to carry any advertising of his. He knew what was going forward up north, because he had been too long in Markhams, Ltd., not to be able to track up the Markham psychology. He found himself intensely interested in these two things:

The New Cycle of Wealth represented by ore, railways, docks, ships and smelters;

The old Cycle of Misery embodied in a woman underpaid by Markhams, and compelled to use



"I was just thinking how a full-page display ad might look advertising Markham products."