

Common Business Honesty

By Arthur Stanwood Pier

CASPER Dane put down the newspaper he had been reading. He was a man of sixty, big, massive and powerfully built, with a strong, shrewd, healthy face which was smooth-shaven, except for short, gray side-whiskers; his head was bald and rose to a benevolent dome, and his blue eyes, in spite of a cynical glint which was always in them, were softened by the twinkling crow's feet in the corners. He reclined at his ease in his comfortable leather chair, unperturbed by the dropping of his cigar ashes on his dinner coat.

He looked at his daughter who sat quietly on the other side of the fireplace, pretty, fair-haired head bent over her embroidery. Casper Dane knew that she had been waiting all the evening for him to speak.

"Helen, it was to Paul Herrick's father I paid my fool tax forty years ago," he said.

"Your fool tax?" A flush tinged her cheeks and she put down her embroidery with trembling hands.

"Yes—what every young man pays for his share of worldly wisdom. He was a good-looking, sprightly man, with curly, black hair and very handsome, dark-red cheeks and an attractive smile—Paul Herrick is like that, isn't he?"

"Yes," Helen murmured.

"I noticed it especially when he came to interview me to-day. His father was a crook—kept a bucket-shop, and I was one of the young fellows he fleeced. He ended as a floater on the streets."

"Why do you tell me this?"

"Because of that interview which Paul Herrick had with me to-day. He comes of bad stock, Helen, and he deals in stocks as a business. I don't know which is the worse. I'm told that he's a better fellow than his father; I dare say he is, or he wouldn't have got you to care for him, as I understand the case. Or has he misinformed me on that point?"

Helen came over and pressed her father's hand appealingly. "No," she said.

"He's a fellow director with me in Valdez Mining; he's been straight enough as far as I know," Casper Dane admitted.

"What did you say to Paul?" Helen asked timidly.

"I said that it was a most unwelcome surprise and that I would look into the matter."

"Not very cordial, were you? What do you say to me?"

"The same."

Helen sighed; she was aware of her father's stubborn prejudices and of his eccentric and perverse methods of confirming them.

"Helen, my dear,"—he put his arm round her and drew her closer to him,— "don't think I'm unsympathetic with you. I remember how dear a thing it was when I won your mother's consent—and I don't think I could really be unsympathetic at such a time. I want you to have all the happiness there is in young love—and there's a great deal. But I don't want you to miss all the happiness there is in love that's no longer young—love that grows and keeps on growing, even when the man and the woman are on the down-

ward slope of life. Compared with that, your young happiness, my dear, is nothing—literally nothing. And I want you to have the affection of a man so good that you can give him all your life a full, ungrudging, always increasing love and loyalty. If I find Paul Herrick is such a man, the fact that he's the son of his father won't make any difference to me."

The girl was touched, but not quite satisfied.

"How will you find out?" she asked.

"Something may happen," he answered vaguely.

She was aware that the reply masked an eccentric purpose, but she had to be content.

The directors of the Valdez Mining Company had been summoned for a special meeting in the law office of Mr. John Welch. It was generally understood upon the "street" that at this meeting the first dividend would be declared. The mining expert, Casper Dane, was returning that day from an examination of the property and upon receiving his report, expected to be favorable, the board would take action.

Mr. Edward Shinn, the wealthy stocking manufacturer, and Mr. Lindsay Tweed the eminent wool merchant, met in the elevator on the way up to Welch's office. As they recognized each other they nodded each with a confident and initiated smile. "Going to cut a melon to-day?" inquired Tweed, and Shinn answered, "I guess we'll thump it any way to see if it's ripe."

Having had each one his joke, they entered Welch's office in excellent humor.

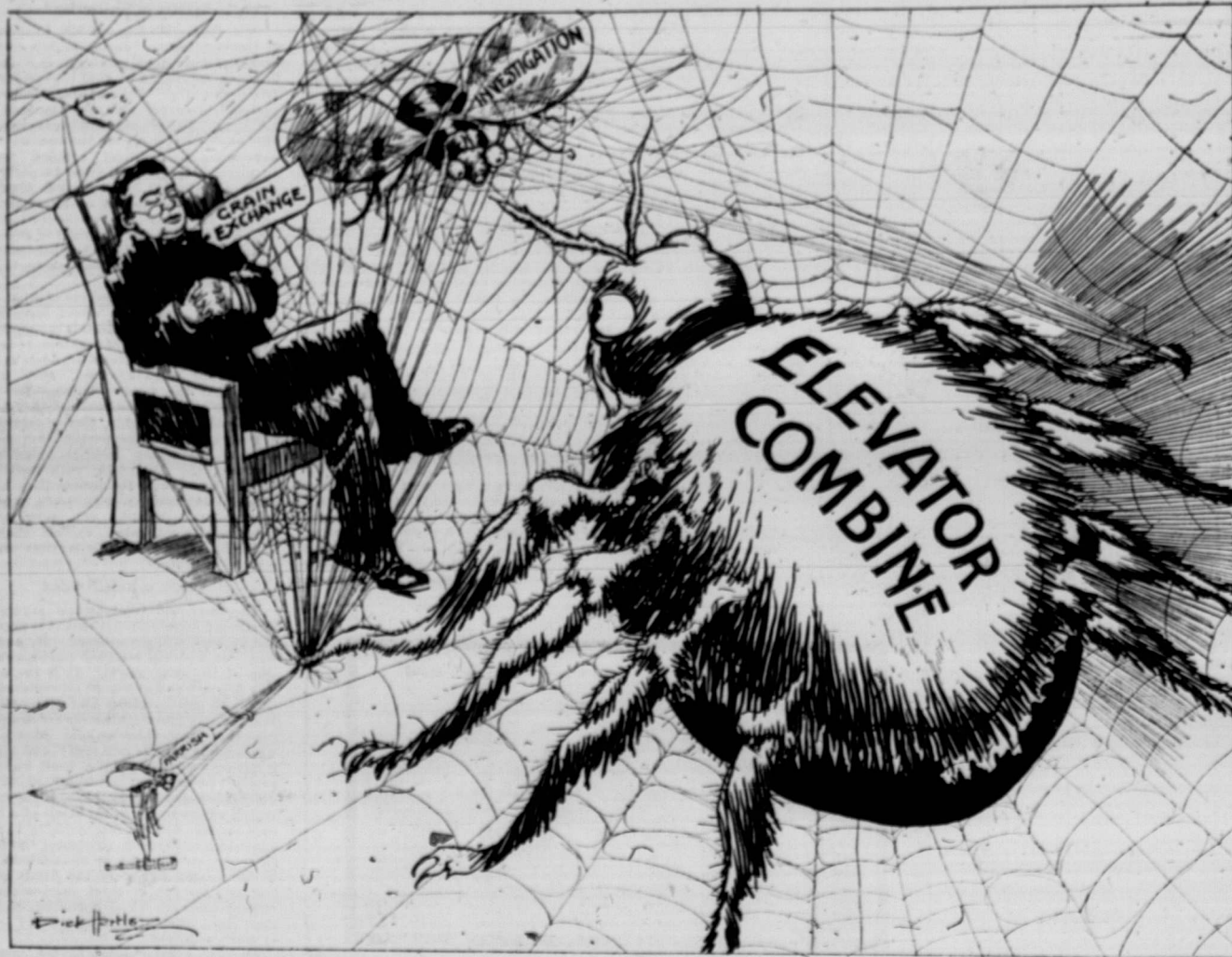
The office boys directed them to one of the inner rooms; Welch and Paul Herrick were awaiting them.

"Old man not come yet?" asked Shinn.

"He'll be here," Herrick answered.

"He telephoned me just an hour ago; he arrived in town only this morning."

Welch passed round a box of cigars; the four men seated themselves and began to smoke. Shinn, stout and short, had the appearance of being snugly buttoned in from his blunt little boots to his stiff little collar. The bland good nature of his mouth, the dull kindness of his eyes—oddly at variance with the choleric red of his face—intimated his contented indulgence in high living and plain and obvious thoughts. With this little gentleman, whose clothes were fresh with each season and who had the alert and apprehensive eye of a collegian for a change in style, his friend Tweed contrasted absurdly; for Tweed upheld the tradition of the old-fashioned, severe man of business; because of his shaven upper lip, gray beard, and frick coat he was often taken for a parson. However, he hitched his chair close to Shinn's and engaged him with an underlaid delight in the recital of a smoking-room story. As he talked, he gesticulated with his long arms and big, ill-proportioned hands and worked his cuffs back from his bony wrists; he was an uncouth figure, but he had a winning smile and a quick, intelligent glance. Welch, a dyspeptic man of middle age, whose sallow and sunken face, with its drooping moustache and keen, narrow



The Meshes are Tightening