

ruptcy. When the world knows that, what will the world say?"

"How the devil is the world to know it, Reuben?" asked Sir Jacob angrily.

"By the books, All your books will be examined. Your position can be and will be traced year after year. The transactions of every day in your business history will come to light. Man, your affairs did not begin yesterday to end to-morrow. You are too big a ship to go down without a splash. There will be too many drowned when you are wrecked for the world to sit down quiet and say: 'Poor Sir Jacob!' They will examine all your books."

"All, Reuben?" His face was white now, and the perspiration stood upon his brow. "All?"

He spoke as if he was a child learning for the first time what is done in the case of a great smash. In point of fact, he was bringing the thing home to himself, and realising what its effects would be upon him.

There were certain books known to him alone, and to no one else, not even to Reuben. These books were downstairs in his own room, locked in a fire-proof safe. Should they, too, be examined? He mentally resolved that the key of that safe should at least be kept in his own pocket. And yet, how instructive to the student in the art of rapidly piling up a fortune would be the study of these volumes! More instructive than any books kept in the office of Reuben Gower, because they showed of late years a history chiefly of wild speculation, decadence, and approaching ruin. When a man, for instance, has had extensive dealings with the Russian Public Works Department, when he obtains contracts in other foreign countries, when he provides estimates for great national works, which are afterwards largely exceeded, when he receives payment for work never done, and when he makes charges for materials never delivered, the private history of these transactions would, if put into the form of a continuous narrative, be as pleasant reading for the fortunate holder of the fortune so acquired as the true story of his own life by Cagliostro or Beaumarchais, or the faithful narrative of his own doings by a member of the great Tammany Ring. For in such a book there would be bribes—plentiful and liberal bribes—the giving and the taking of commissions, the giving shares in transactions not quite warrantable by the

terms, strictly interpreted, of written covenants, and the introduction of illustrious names—grand dukes, princes, ministers, all sorts of people, whom, for the credit of their biographies, as well as that of the age in which they lived—it would be well not to mention in connection with such doings.

There is no absolute law laid down on this delicate subject; in the Decalogue it is certain that it is nowhere stated in so many words: "Thou shalt not bribe; thou shalt not take a commission; thou shalt not receive interest other than that agreed upon." Whatever is not forbidden is allowed. That is the rule on which the Ritualist clergymen always act, and if Ritualists, why not that much more respectable body—public moralists? It is a sad thing to own that the censorious world looks with disgust—affected, no doubt—on a man who has built up a fortune in such a way. Sir Jacob might have thought, when he was tempted, of a leading case. There was a man a few years ago who was greatly, implicitly trusted by his employer, and paid well for giving honest advice to a confiding public. He sold that advice; he took money right and left for the words he wrote, which mightily influenced the fortune of companies and shares, and though his friends pleaded, perhaps quite honestly, that the advice he had given was good, neither his employers nor the public accepted the plea, and the mistaken man retired into obscurity, nor was he forgiven even when, after he died, he was found to be worth a quarter of a million sterling. Actually, a rich man died, and was not respected for his wealth! Wonderful! Perhaps Sir Jacob did think of that case when he trembled to think that *all* the books might be examined.

At least those should not.

But Reuben had others. Among them, as he said, were the books of seven years ago, when the shipwreck was only averted by the timely aid of seventy thousand pounds, all Julian Carteret's fortune. There should be, Sir Jacob resolved, a break in the sequence of those books.

"Is it necessary, Reuben," he asked, mildly, "that all the books must be handed over? We might begin, say, three years back."

"No, Jacob. Some of your transactions date farther back than seven years. That year must go with the rest. There is one chance. Julian Carteret is a friend of yours,