

THE FATHER WHO WAS A FAILURE

(By William Hamilton Osborne.) In the hallway, on the topmost floor of the dingy Birdseye Building in lower Broadway, there stood a small group of business men, interspersed with clerks and office-boys. The eyes of all rested upon a ground-glass door.

Some viewed it curiously; some anxiously, some angrily. This door, save as to its inscription, was like any other office door; and even its inscription was quite harmless in its way, for this was all it said: LAW OFFICES OF E. TOLLIVER, Notary Public.

Commissioner of Deeds. That was not quite all; for, inserted in one corner of the ground-glass pane, was a business card with a written word or two across its face. Back in five minutes. Wait.

So said the card. Each member of the crowd in turn had read this card. One, bolder than the rest, had plucked it from its place and looked upon its back, and turned it upside down and then upside down. They had sighed, as though it were too deep for him, and then restored it to its corner.

An office-boy laughed. "Gee," exclaimed the office-boy, "that card's been there for three days anyway. Wot d'ye think? Five minutes!"

"Five minutes!" snorted one of the men, "he ought to be sent up where he can't get back for five years. The skin!"

He turned to the rest, and stretched out a protesting hand. "Five hundred and forty-six dollars of my good money," he continued, "that scoundrel ran away with."

The others nodded sympathetically. Those who had lost lesser sums held their peace; the bigger losers told their tales. "Confounded little snipe," growled another man, "I'd like to meet him on the street. I'd do for him in five seconds, let alone five minutes."

disappointed, dropped once more to the level of the floor. "Ain't no good waitin' here," suggested some one. Then the crowd began, gradually, to break up. As it straggled slowly down the hall, the man who had furnished the office with the information as to residence, broke forth once more into speech.

"I was out to his place," he volunteered; "I saw his women folks—at least," he added suspiciously, "so they say. Say, but they're just wild—his women folks; especially his wife."

What was this thing that E. Tolliver had done? It was simple enough in its way. E. Tolliver did a collection business; he had collected; and what he had collected from time to time, he had appropriated unto himself.

To himself? To his wife and family. He had needed money for his wife and family, and he had used it. How much no one could say. E. Tolliver hardly knew himself.

But it was less than many people had supposed; at the outside it could not have more than fifty-five hundred or six thousand dollars. He had taken it as it had come in—dribbles. He had disappeared.

His biggest creditor set a detective on E. Tolliver's track, but when the detective's bill for services came in, had lost his ire and called the detective from the chase.

"What's the use," said Tolliver's creditors, "of throwing good money after bad? He hasn't got a cent. You can't get blood out of a turnip. So what's the use?"

Charitably—or otherwise—they had charged the deficiency up to profit and loss, and then proceeded to forget E. Tolliver, attorney and collector of accounts.

The daily press, with fortunate inaccuracy, noted the fact, in a casual sort of way, that one "E. Tolliver, of the Birdseye Building," had "skipped with fifty thousand dollars"; and there the matter dropped.

WEAK TIRED WOMEN

How many women there are that get no refreshment from sleep. They wake in the morning and feel tired than when they went to bed.

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are the very remedy that weak, nervous, tired out, sickly women need to restore them the blessings of good health. They give sound, restful sleep, tone up the nerves, strengthen the heart, and make rich blood.

But she did not understand. Poverty to her was represented by a class of genteel men who lived upon the interest of their debts; whose acres of ground were mortgaged up to the handle; who borrowed money every year, every month, every day; but who, notwithstanding all this, had houses stocked with good food, good wines, and sweet-tongued instruments of music; with stables full of mediocre horses and ramshackle old carriages, comfortable old conveyances—all this to Miss Charlotte Longstreet was poverty, pure and simple. It was the kind of poverty she understood.

Here was Tolliver's opportunity to make things plain. He let it pass. He left undone that thing which he ought to have done; he ought to have stated the figures—to have entered into financial details with this young wife of his; he ought to have told her what it meant—poverty in the city of New York.

He did not do it. It was a disastrous omission. When, in later years, he came to think it over, he was not so sure, however, that it would have made so very much difference to this girl who viewed poverty as an abstract proposition.

Tolliver purchased a piano—in the eyes of his young wife one of the necessities of life. They had to starve to get it. He drew his salary many months in advance to accomplish this thing; but accomplish it he did. He was glad to do it.

In due time, Tolliver introduced his wife to his associates in the metropolis; he had had few. Roberts, a young married man, invited them one evening to his home. It was some time after the Tolliver baby had arrived; and Tolliver had not yet recovered from the financial vacuum caused by the piano and the baby.

Some nights before the Roberts affair Tolliver found his wife admiring a new piece of dress goods. "I must be dressed as well as the wives of your friends, Teddy," she had said, "I must be a credit to you. And besides, Teddy, I bought this at a place where they will trust me. I managed it. We won't have to pay for it for an age. And when it is made up, I can get the old dressmaker to hold up her bill for—oh, so long. And besides, these things are necessities, dear."

Edward Tolliver said nothing. He began to understand that these things were necessities. When they reached Roberts' modest home, Tolliver found that Roberts' wife was tastily arrayed in a gown superior to Charlotte's; and all the other women seemed marvellously up-to-date. Yet Tolliver knew that these people, so far as their incomes were concerned, were in his own class.

seemed to bear its scantiness so easily. "It must be," Tolliver told himself, "that Charlotte and—and I do not know how."

After the purchase of this gown, Charlotte Tolliver never spoke of luxuries; her mind dwelt constantly upon what she was pleased to class as necessities merely. They could do without the luxuries, she assured her husband.

Edward believed that she knew; that she was right. But there were things that he couldn't understand. It was Tolliver's wife who insisted finally upon his resigning his salary, but safe, position, and setting up in business for himself.

"You have talent, Edward," she told him, "and I know just from hearing you talk of business, that you are a thorough business man."

She was right. Tolliver was a thorough business man; but he was a thorough clerk—a born clerk. Tolliver ought to have remained a clerk. As such, he might have commanded, in time, five thousand—possibly ten thousand dollars a year.

For there is no man so much in demand in the city of New York as a thoroughly good clerk—there is no city that pays good clerks so well. But Tolliver still believed that his young wife was right. He started out.

He hired a modest office and hung up his shingle. And from that time on, almost abject poverty stared them in the face. Charlotte Tolliver, growing older all the time, attributed his failure to the laziness of Tolliver. She had broad and liberal ideas of business men in general and of lawyers in particular. She believed that hard work was immediately rewarded with financial success.

She assured herself that if, on any given day, it was necessary for Edward or herself to use, say, fifty dollars—that Edward need only go to his desk in his little office and work and work and work until he had made the money. It did not occur to her that getting work to do was a superhuman task. She didn't understand.

Tolliver got along—how or why, he hardly knew. He was a good collector, though, and he picked up a little business here and there. Once in a great while he would collect a goodly sum, and he paid a goodly fee.

called him into the office and recited to him his private history. "Is it true?" they asked him. "It is," he answered simply. "Here is your money," they responded curtly, "you can go."

He went—home. He stayed there; attended the furnace and took out the ashes; performed the menial offices. He understood that he was of no account.

He accepted the situation; but he always hoped for something better, and in his innermost consciousness, he felt that he was wronged and misunderstood.

Genevieve, his second daughter, openly despised him. She was too young to understand the situation as Leonora understood it; and too old not to realize that her father had been a thief. To her he was simply a criminal.

Fortunately for him, Lulie, the little girl, knew nothing at all about it. She loved E. Tolliver and played games with him. She would do anything for him.

He and Lulie set the table for the meals, and sometimes washed the dishes, and had good times over it—quiet, homely, comfortable times they were.

It was in July, after four years' service in the high school, that Leonora died. She died suddenly. Her death was accompanied by the grim circumstances that she had received her June salary some weeks before, and that the family had nearly spent it.

Mrs. Tolliver was grief-stricken. But she had her wits about her; she had understood her daughter's merit, and she was determined to do full honor to her memory.

She was a woman who believed in elaborate funerals. She ordered one. She started in to clothe the family in the richest kind of somber garments. Tolliver, noting this, for the first time in many years, lifted up his voice in grave remonstrance.

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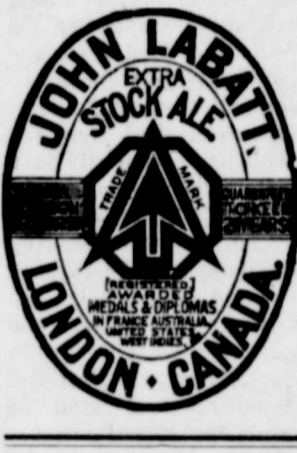
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to say about her? My daughter Leonora shall have the honor that is her due—I don't care what it costs. What do I care for expense at such a time as this? She hastened into the next room and hurried her face in her arms. "Leonora," she wailed, "my Leonora."

Tolliver said nothing more. He was sorry for his wife, genuinely sorry. He was very sorry for himself. Mrs. Tolliver ordered everything on credit; this was possible, for Leonora had kept the family credit good. The family was richly clothed in black. Leonora was buried. Immediately after the funeral E. Tolliver slunk out of town. He did so upon his wife's suggestion. He was glad to do so, for he shrank from the added burden to his troubles.

When the tradesmen called on Mrs. Tolliver with their bills, she put them off. She told them to see Tolliver. She promised payment within a few days. And then the family pulled up stakes and went elsewhere. And once more there was a stigma upon the name of Edward Tolliver. But through it all, Charlotte Tolliver's intentions were of the best; she had thought of her daughter; of her duty to her daughter; of the dignity of her family.

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