

The Grip Of Evil

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he resumed his evil propaganda that evening, with a sequel which proved instantly disastrous.

The men took their cue from the sheriff's attitude, and had arranged to tar and feather Foster the very next time he opened his mouth in condemnation of the new regime. This they now proceeded to do, and, not content with treating the man so ignominiously, rode him on a fall past a corner where they knew the sheriff was then lounging.

The autocrat saw them coming. He promptly produced a red bandanna, bound it tightly across his eyes and smiled broadly as the procession passed. Foster was so maddened with rage and real physical suffering that he never noticed the presence of the law, but one of the men was moved to be jocose.

"What's wrong with your eyes, sheriff?" he inquired.

"Shove along, you sucker!" came the answering growl. "Don't you know that justice is blind?"

"Well, chew on this," said the man, and he stuck a cigar between the sheriff's teeth.

Bill Foster was deposited at the outskirts of the township, and was never seen any more in Garden City. The incident showed, at any rate, the relations which had been established between masters and men in the new cardboard box industry.

But there were other influences at work. The president of the trust began operations with a dangerous suavity. He sent the following telegram to Burton:

Your plan appears to be a good one. If you are willing to sell out to us we will pay you a fair profit on your investment.
ELWOOD HAMER.

The two partners discussed the offer fully. They were not deceived as to its real nature, so Burton wrote a civil answer, the gist of which lay in one sentence:

"Our people are contented and our profits are fair. We have no desire to sell."

A fortnight later came the first shot of real warfare. One of their biggest customers in the East put the matter in a nutshell when they wrote:

We regret to be compelled to cancel our orders. Your competitors are offering us a similar product at a cut rate of 50 per cent. We recognize that this sort of thing is unfair and cannot last, but in our own interests must take advantage of the market. This matter is serious, and we respectfully advise that you deal with it promptly.

"These people mean well," commented John thoughtfully.

"My father is a bitter man," muttered George Hamer. "It would be folly on my part to try and conceal the truth. Rich as you are, Mr. Burton, the trust can break you. Though I am intensely disappointed, it is only fair to you that I should say your best plan is to come to terms."

Now, John realized the utter folly of sacrificing a great fortune in fantastic endeavor to carry out an impossible dream, though it went against the grain to yield without a struggle.

"I had better consult my lawyer," he said. "I shall do nothing in a hurry. If forced to sell, I shall certainly insist that the factory is conducted on the exact conditions already in existence. You and your wife need not worry, George. If your father and you do not bury the hatchet, which is the one thing I am hoping for, I'll fix you in some other way, and it will at least be a feather in our cap if we force the trust to treat its employees decently. Don't you see, once the principle is established it must spread? They cannot run the Garden City factory on our lines and maintain the bad old conditions elsewhere."

But Hamer was not to be comforted. He sensed disaster, and he and his wife passed an evening of gloomy foreboding, since their schemes for the regeneration of labor seemed to be on the verge of collapse.

They were not mistaken. The shrewd legal adviser whom Burton had learned to consult in every important affair advised him to reopen negotiations with the trust. He did so, and found Elwood Hamer quite conciliatory.

The cardboard box magnate agreed to maintain all the terms laid down by his young competitors for the working and management of the Garden City plant. But, like the good business man that he was, he decided to visit the factory before concluding the deal. As the weather was phenomenally fine, and Garden City lay some 40 miles from the city, he brought with him his younger son, the little boy, William, whom his elder brother had not seen since the family disturbance caused by the marriage.

Burton was unfeignedly pleased when he saw the child, believing that a complete reconciliation was imminent. But he had not yet taken an accurate measure of Elwood Hamer's sour spirit. The millionaire gruffly ordered the boy to remain near the car, and actually refused to shake hands with George, affecting to regard him merely as the manager of a business which he was about to purchase.

Inside the office, he dealt only with essentials. Herein he was reasonable enough. Having read through the agreement prepared by Burton's lawyer, he remarked that it seemed to cover the ground exactly on the arranged terms. Then he inspected the buildings and machinery, and was even graciously pleased to signify his approval

of certain new methods brought in by his son.

All this took time, and a grain of hope again peeped up in John's soul. He believed the man was only playing a part, and gratifying his own self-esteem by not giving way too easily. Elwood Hamer was actually signing the purchase deed when a man rushed

in excitedly, holding a small boy by the hand.

"This yer kid," he shouted, "says that he saw a little boy fall into that blamed quicksand on Cotton Tree Swamp. A lady pulled him out, and got him safe onto a dry patch, but she's gone!"

Somehow, George Hamer sensed the dreadful truth.

"A lady!" he cried hoarsely. "What lady?"

The messenger of evil hesitated. He



Hamer Objects to the Socialistic Ideas of His Son.

hardly dared to blurt out all that he knew.

"This yer kid," he began again—"George seized the trembling urchin by the shoulder.

"Boy," he said in a voice broken with despair, "was it my wife?"

"Yep," wailed the child. "I couldn't help it, mister. I ran like everything. A heap of men are diggin' there now." George raced out like a madman, and the others followed. The president showed no spark of real feeling, but he had the common sense to offer the use of his automobile, knowing, probably, that it would be taken with or without his leave.

It was then that he discovered that his younger son was missing. In reply to frenzied questionings the frightened chauffeur could only say that the little chap had been playing about the car and must have wandered off alone without attracting his attention.

The tragic tangle was soon unraveled. It was George's small brother who had fallen into the quicksand, where his struggles were seen by Janet, and the gallant woman had rescued him at the cost of her own life. The poor girl's body was never even found. She had been swallowed by the treacherous slime, and her frenzied husband had to be taken away by main force lest he follow her into the depths.

Elwood Hamer, after rushing the boy to the village on the pretense that his clothing should be changed, in case any noxious germs had found lodgment on his skin, did not wait a second after the little fellow was given a bath and attired in borrowed garments. When Burton inquired about him the millionaire was already well on his way to the city.

During the week that followed John Burton spent many miserable hours. George Hamer was nearly out of his mind, and needed safeguarding day and night.

The trust took over the factory as quickly as possible, and all payments were made, but the community was thrown into dismay by the placarded announcement that the plant would shut down on the following Saturday. Astounded by this wholly unexpected blow, John drove to the Hamers' town house.

He was admitted by the solemn-faced butler and shown into the drawing room, where Mabel Hamer was seated at the piano playing one of Chopin's dreamy nocturnes. The girl rose at once. She ignored the visitor's outstretched hand.

"Why should I recognize you, Mr. Burton, when you are the cause of my brother's downfall?" she said icily. Before he could even frame a protest, she had swept out of the room.

Mrs. Hamer evidently learned of John's presence. She came in, stood near the door and said, with tears streaming from her eyes:

"Mr. Burton, where is my son? Why have you taken him from me?"

Unjust though her words were, he could not argue with the stricken mother. He contented himself with indicating by a gesture that her son was hardly in his charge. At that instant Elwood Hamer entered, led his weeping wife into the hall, and returned, closing the door behind him.

"Why are you here?" he demanded brusquely.

"I come to ask you why you are breaking your contract by closing the factory," replied John with equal asperity.

"Broken the contract? Nothing of the sort! Read it! Consult your lawyer. Find any clause, if you can, which compels me to run my business at a loss."

Burton knew he was beaten. He went out sadly. Once again was he forced to admit that Humanity still felt the Grip of Evil.

(END OF NINTH EPISODE.)

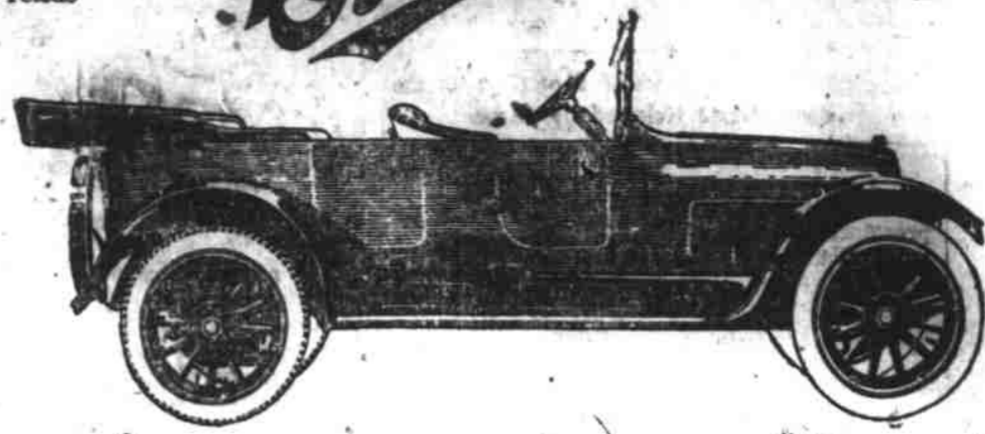
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Dr. MacArthur is one of the most distinguished Baptist leaders of the country, for 41 years pastor of Calvary Baptist church in New York city and since 1911 president of the Baptist World Alliance. He has been heard by North Carolinians at Meredith College and Wake Forest College as Commencement orator of the day, and will be warmly welcomed here by those who have heard him previously and by those who have yet that pleasure in store.



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