

A CORNER IN TROUBLES.

BY CLINTON DANGERFIELD.

At first people had been so sceptical regarding the truth of the report that they would not go near Wyse & Co's office; but when one or two finally entered, boldly attacked the brokers on the subject, and found they had no difficulty in unloading on them—then an endless stream of wildly eager sellers poured into the big room all day, and fairly fell over one another on the stairs. Those fortunate enough to squeeze in, came out looking remarkably well satisfied, buttoning their coats over very fat pocket-books.

Adams, struggling with the rest, was now mid-stream; but his foot-ball training enabled him to wedge through the mass and get in after two hours' hard work. The office door was bolted behind him as he was admitted. He sat down wiping the perspiration from his forehead.

"Understand," he gasped, "that you are—er—er—"

"That we are trying to make a corner in Troubles," said the suave Mr. Wyse. "Quite true! We only make one stipulation—you must make no reservations; you must sell all your troubles or none."

Adams could scarcely conceal his scorn. "The 'em and welcome!" he said, "and at your own price."

The broker glanced at his clerk.

"Make an itemized list for Mr.—" he glanced at the young man's card,— "for Mr. Charles Adams."

Adams cleared his throat.

"Debt," he began.

"Debt," clicked the echoing type-writer under the clerk's rapid fingers.

"Limp in one ankle from college scrimmage." ("Makes me look like a fool where 'she' is," he muttered.)

The machine rattled and ceased.

"Rivals," itemized the other, flushing angrily at certain recollections.

"Rather briefer than usual," smiled the broker, finding the list completed, and signing a cheque, which he handed Adams pleasantly. The latter gaped at the amount.

"In five years," said the broker, still smiling, "you can repurchase if you wish at a cost of one hundred per cent. rise in price. I shall close my office here shortly, and not return for five years."

"Not likely I'll want to buy," snapped Adams in a tone which asked, "Am I a fool?" Then he added with a sudden thought, "Would you be so awfully kind as to let me watch the crowd awhile?"

"I don't mind," said the broker easily.

"Sit over there and pretend to be one of my clerks."

As Adams crossed to the designated chair he observed joyfully that the objectionable limp had already vanished.

For several hours he sat and watched the incomers.

The first was a flurried-looking woman, who had squeezed in by sheer weight of bulk. She was perhaps fifty, and immediately sputtered into an incoherent statement of her troubles. They resolved themselves into scripping and planning to dress her two grown daughters and the numerous sacrifices necessary to keep a third at school.

Then came a young man and woman hand-in-hand, who looked at the broker with half-terrified eyes and whispered shamefacedly:

"Love isn't what the stories said it was! We've been married only a year, and already we have had a dreadful time putting up with each other. We want to be free, so that each can marry a perfect individual."

"Divorce wanted," clicked the machine.

"That's all," they said with relief.

Another said wearily:

"I was born to the stewardship of money. I have the pressure of responsibility on me all the time. No matter what I do with it, I am hooted at by the newspapers for a selfish, designing dog. I am, in a word, misunderstood. Take away my stewardship. Give me freedom again."

Still another cried fretfully:

"Pain—pain—physical pain. Take it away! Blot it out of my whole family! We are fond of the fleshpots, and they give us pain. Take away that useless infliction."

At five o'clock the office closed relentlessly, and in a week's time Wyse & Co. disappeared, leaving the city of Z— practically destitute of troubles.

Z— had always been an exclusive sort of place, and its inhabitants kept the whole matter to themselves, and went their daily ways in the firm belief that they now had a paradise on earth.

It was six months before Adams saw "her" again, for she had been in Europe when Wyse & Co. opened their place.

As soon as she returned he made haste to call on her.

When the word haste is used it must be understood in a mild sense. He knew very well that no rivals would be beforehand. No other suitors would ever again approach her. He had forestalled and prevented that. She would never again seem attractive to other men. He wondered vaguely why this thought gave him a distinct sense of uneasiness, a

feeling as though somehow he had been cheated. He was quite sure that his estimate of his future wife could in no way depend on the value in which others held her; and yet when he pictured Jones and Smith passing her with a sort of indifferent sniff he felt a desire rising to punch their heads for lack of taste.

She received him graciously, though she covertly looked him over as they sat together, while he explained in a self-satisfied way that he no longer had any difficulties to meet.

"That accounts for it," she observed unexpectedly and in a very discontented tone.

"Accounts for what?" he demanded with some offence.

"For that fat look about you," she said. "You used to have sort of daring expression in your eyes, as though you were ready to meet all that Fortune could send. What's become of that?"

"How do I know?" he said in natural pique. "Do you expect me to keep keyed up all the time, now I'm out of debt and know I'll never be in it again?"

"You certainly are not keyed up," she retorted. "You have flopped down spiritually to the sort of level that those old retired bankers show in their faces."

"Thank you!" he said sardonically as he rose and began pacing the room. She gave a little cry of dismay.

"What's become of your beautiful limp?"

"My beautiful limp!" he repeated, astounded.

"That's why I liked you," she said, beginning to cry. "You looked like a soldier with that limp! It made you different from the other men."

"See here," he retorted furiously, "you'd better find me 'different from the other men' anyway, for I'm all the—"

He checked himself in time. He could not be so brutal as to tell her that he alone, of all the men in the wide world, had any admiration for her!

He looked at her critically instead of speaking, and was dismayed to find himself picking flaws in her really pretty face—that face he had once thought a synopsis of heavenly loveliness.

After this things went on very strangely.

Where, he asked himself, was the ardor with which he had hastened to her side when he had feared the attentions of those fools that used to hover round her so eagerly? Poor girl! To be with her had become a distasteful duty, for she was a marked wall-flower at every dance unless he danced with her. Other men were civil—no more. One day he overheard his special friend, Herbert Lance, wondering what Adams had ever seen in that Miss Cumming, and he cursed his luck and agreed.

Something else worried him. Whence came this feeling of perpetual discontent with his future—that beautiful future now so pleasantly mapped out for him! He did not have to raise his finger. His wife to be and his money were utterly secure in his hands, and yet he began to realize with a kind of dull horror that the only things that really gratified him now were the brute delights, such as eating and drinking, which once he had wholesomely despised.

He determined to see an old acquaintance—the middle-aged dame who had to scripp for her daughters. He would get sympathy from her, as her own ills were healed.

She forestalled him by pouring out a torrent of personal woe.

"I must tell you!" she mourned. "I've known you since you were in arms. And you are close-mouthed. I am just miserable—miserable! I never was an intellectual woman, but I always was necessary to the girls because they had to come to me for advice in a thousand ways about housekeeping and clothes. And 'twas me that kept Clarice at school by makin' preserves and sewing at night. I wish you'd heard them! 'Twas, 'Mother, how'll we do this—do that?—so sweet an comfortin'! Now it's all changed! I can't advise 'em about anything! They've got all they need—and more!"

She burst into a flood of tears, and Adams retreated in disgust.

"Fool of a woman," he muttered, and just as he spoke he ran into the new minister, who clutched him by the arm and said hoarsely:

"What is the matter with this God-forsaken town—this despicable place—where I find nothing but selfishness incarnate! We used to be friends before you lived here. Tell me?"

"I don't know what you mean," retorted Adams resentfully. He did not want to be disturbed just then.

"But you must help me," persisted the minister, dragging his reluctant companion into a park and pulling him down on one of the benches. For the minister was a Christian after Kingsley's heart, a compound of muscularity and forceful will.

"You see," he explained earnestly, "I go to this man and that woman, and I ask for aid in such movements as are sadly needed. What answer do I get? Just, this: 'Why should we bother about those people? They have no troubles. There is no longer any need to think of anyone but ourselves.'"

"I suppose," said Adams sulkily, "that

the whole affair dates back to the corner in Troubles made by Wyse & Company. They brought them up left and right.

"And you," said the minister curiously, "did you sell yours?"

"Of course I did."

"And are you happy?"

"I suppose so," said Adams wearily.

"Only," he added with a painful smile, "it does seem to me as though the verve—the snap—was gone out of everything."

"Have you no genuine joy in anything now?" asked the minister, "you who used to be tiptoe to meet the world?"

"Yes," said Adams frankly, "I am happy while I am eating my dinner. We have a remarkable cook at our boarding house. Really," he added with a touch of genuine enthusiasm, "the fellow is a genius in his sauces. I can eat twice as much there as I can elsewhere. The—"

"Your cook!" interrupted the minister somewhat rudely. "The cook and the sauces! That's what the whole Glamson family talked of yesterday. I wish you could see them! They gorge from morning to night."

"More fools they," said Adams disdainfully. "I hope I have more sense than that. My palate would soon be blunted—to say nothing of getting gout, et al."

"They are not afraid of getting disease," returned the minister, "for they informed me that they had lost their sense of pain."

"Then they've lost the only guard they ever had over their health," said Adams cynically. "All that kept those people alive was the twinges and cramps that attacked them after their orgies and forced them into moderation. Nobody but a Glamson," he added scornfully, "would of asked obliteration of the sense of pain. Suppose one of them catches on fire?"

He will burn to a crisp before he even knows anything is wrong. They are idiots!"

"Do you," said the minister abruptly, "consider the sale of those troubles a good thing for this city?"

"Why not?" returned Adams with a slight yawn. "It used to be an awful bother thinking about other people in misfortune. Now we only have to think of ourselves. And, of course," he added, "the things we believed of most value we all had sealed to us in such a way that they are perfectly safe."

The minister fastened a lance-straight glance on his companion.

"Has it," he demanded significantly, "has it—this safety—added to their value?"

Adams felt his thoughts revert to his fiancée waiting patiently for him—alone, as she always was now. He remembered the pride he had once felt in appearing everywhere with her—in showing his treasure to admiring eyes. He felt himself squirming on the bench as he used to do in Sunday school in his childhood days when a too pointed question reached his soul.

"Er—er—that's a different question."

The minister rose, buttoning his light top-coat.

"I think I can answer it for you," he said contemptuously, "you well fed—good looking—animal!"

His tall, thin figure disappeared among the trees. Adams stared after him.

It was now two years since the disappearance of Wyse & Company. He wondered cynically why he did not find himself married—why he had not asked his fiancée to set the day for their union. Then he told himself there was plenty of time for that. Suddenly in the midst of a train of rather maudering thought he flung up his hands desperately.

"My God," he cried, "what an insufferable bore life is!"

A single gamin, loaded with papers, came flying across the common yelling shrilly as he ran.

As he neared Adams the latter began to distinguish the words:

Unexpected return of Wyse & Company! All about it in the evening paper! Their office open to sell troubles!"

He bought a copy, startled and interested by the news. His good angel made a gallant struggle past the folds of fleshy selfishness that had lately enwrapped and embruted him, and cried into his ear. With something of his old liveliness he strode towards the former office of Wyse & Company.

"I can buy them back," he muttered, "and if I find life any worse, I can throw myself in the river!"

He expected to sink up the office stairs alone, contemptuously commented on by the passers. He found himself buffeted through a determined mass.

When he did get into the office the couple he had seen there before were there again, hand-in-hand.

"And so," sobbed the woman, "we have both found that there aren't any perfect people! We want the old, sweet life, the old, dear troubles back again! We are ready to bear with each other."

"It will take every cent we own to buy them back and so return to the old life," said the man, "but it's worth it."

As they went out a man, in spite of the doorkeepers, slipped in and cried before Adams could speak:

"I want to buy back that stewardship."

The deuce take what people say! The fan lies in helping where it's needed. "What's gratitude got to do with it? Why, I—"

"Sir," said the broker firmly, "you must wait until this gentleman is served," and he turned politely to Adams. "What will you have?"

"My debts, a limp, and some rivals," returned Adams simply.—Lippincotts Magazine.

A Busy Woman.

Eh-yah! There was my Aunt Debby, who was as good a woman as most ever walked the ground, and so busy that she was mighty near painful, at times," said old Timrod Tarpy, whose jovial philosophy was occasionally strabimessed by pessimism. "She raised eight children that were fully as good as the average, contributed to over 200 missionaries of one kind and another, fed 400 preachers, mostly on chicken-and-dumplings, darned 9,000 socks, cooked 65,000 meals, washed 900,000 and several dishes, and had something near a million different last words with the husband of her bosom, who weighed 107 pounds and sorter reminded you in certain ways of a goose in a hail-storm."

"At last, she laid her work down, and, according to the testimony of the attending physician and clergyman, died, and entered into her eternal rest. But two hours, or such a matter later, she opened her eyes and inquired if her husband hadn't failed, with his usual absent-mindedness, to put out the cat. Having been assured by word of mouth and the sight of the cat held up outside of the window, that such was not the case, she sighed satisfiedly and passed away. And all of us who had known her so well and respected her accordingly said it was just like her; and her husband wore sort of a chastened apprehensive look for quite a spell afterwards, and would kind of dodge when spoken to hastily—for he knew very well in spite of himself he sometimes forgot to wipe his muddy feet on the mat, and that, when washing the dishes on the third day after the funeral, he had accidentally let a good sized piece of soap slide down the sink-drain and couldn't get it out."

"In Moscow," said Nathan Haskell Dole, translator of Tolstoi, "I saw a little child crying miserably one afternoon. He walked slowly down one of the principal streets, and his howls soon brought a big crowd around him."

"What is the matter my child? What troubles you?" every one asked.

"The boy paused finally. He looked at the multitude which had assembled. Then, lifting up his voice, he shouted in a shrill treble:

"I am lost. Will somebody please take me home to Ivan Troubetsky, the champion clothier of the South End, who has just got in his new stock of spring overcoats, suits, neckties, shirts, hats and umbrellas, which he will sell cheaper than any one else in the city."

Says Mrs. Farmer to her husband: "Josiah, I'm going to buy a new carpet for the parlor. What kind had I better get?" And Farmer Josiah replies: "Any kind ye like, Belindy. It makes no difference—bustles, ex minister, croquette or ingrate. Suit yourself."—Kansas City Journal.

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