THE TEST, A Story of Modern Finance

By LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

In the Popular Magazine.

(Continued.)

XI.

"It seems to me," Grey mused, bitterly, "that sometimes things—all circumstances—conspire to make it particularly hard for a chap to keep his feet in the right way; and sometimes it's so that he can't tell the right from the wrong!"

With the departure of Prendergast, when Grey knew himself to be finally committed to the transaction, a mood of black depression had settled down upon him. The high spirits, the confidence in himself and in the ultimate goodness of the world, which his exercise and subsequent cold plunge had inspired in him, were definitely vanished, and naught remained but bitterness of heart.

It was hard — the world schemed to make it hard for a man to know his duty. Grey could not distinguish it — the honorable course from the dishonorable. At one moment it seemed perfectly fair and just and right to him that Prendergast and his wife should profit by their happchance knowledge.

Why not? The Mogul played his big game in his own fashion, and, privately, it was Grey's opinion that at times he was not over scrupulous as to the distinction between fair moves and foul. Why should others not adopt his methods and profit thereby, even as the Mogul profited? Why, indeed?

And — in strict justice—perhaps the young man would not have found such fault with Prendergast had the latter gone to any firm in the city but Grey & Moxon. Grey considered himself bound to the Mogul's interests just so long as he handled commissions for that great operator.

At any other time, however reluctant he might have been to see Prendergast risk his last cent on his judgment, he would have accepted the commission without a regret. But now—now that Prendergast had seen fit to inform him of the circumstances — he rebelled; and yet, rebellious, knew that he would redeem his pledged word to his former associate.

If only he dared go to the Mogul, tell all he knew! He was well enough acquainted with the great man of the Street to know that his gratitude would not stop at trifles. Grey would profit much by such constructive dishonesty.

And it was such a little thing, so warranted when one looked at it from one angle—that is to say, obliquely. Prendergast had no right to this knowledge; therefore, he had no right to confide it in others; therefore, Grey would be entirely justified of his action should he decide to apprise the Mogul. And yet—one's word is not lightly broken.

But this was not all. No man lives so upright as to be immune to such temptation. It came to Grey with an almost irresistible seductiveness — the temptation to cast duty and honor to the winds and to go in with Prendergast on this deal, to sell Pacific Midland heavily and hammer the market with it, until the price was so low that he could cover any amount at almost his own price! The profits that he could realize by so doing were staggering to the imagination. It would not be a matter of half millions, nor of a single million, if he played his cards properly.

It involved rank treachery to the Mogul, whose patronage he enjoyed; and that patronage had kept the firm's head above water at a time when announcements of suspensions were matters of daily occurrence on the Exchange. That patronage had made Grey & Moxon what it was—a firm of unimpeachable credit and impeccable standing.

But what did reputation, integrity, amount to, put in the scales against absolute and unquestionable wealth? Other men even stole—and were looked up to in the community. Others lied and thieved, and circulated false reports to the detriment of their neighbors' business—and prospered. Others stooped to every species of villainy and their names were held as synoms for probity.

And it was such an easy thing, so simple, so plausibly to be explained away—to break faith with a man whose own honor was not above libel. Such a simple lie would set it all straight—and leave Grey the possessor of that wealth which he must control ere he could marry the woman he loved with all his heart and all his strength and all his soul! Why not?

If others profited by one fell swoop from grace and an immediate return to that pedestal of virtue, why not Grey, likewise? Why not?

Even to break faith with Prendergast—that would be immensely profitable. Why not? Prendergast had not held faith with Grey in days past. Why was Grey now bound to keep his word with Prendergast?

And the poison entered into his soul and rankled there. The question ceaselessly iterated itself in his mind: "Why not? Why not?" Nor could he silence it. Not even the eyes of the woman of his heart would have power to move him from this mood of gloomy abstraction. He conducted himself very properly, but his mind was not in aught that he did.

He left his lodgings, hailed a cab, was driven to the house of his hostess, took Esther in to her dinner—all automatically. He smiled mechanically, mechanically listened to meaningless remarks, and mechanically returned vapid answers.

His eye was clouded with the reek of that poison which had subtly been distilled into his mind. He looked, and saw nothing but the lure of gold. He ate, and tasted nothing but anguish of soul. He talked—and the wonder is that he uttered aught but disconnected phrases, empty and incoherent.

Late in the evening he came out of a period of concentration, more than normally prolonged, to find himself seated in a coupe, facing the Mogul and the Mogul's daughter. He was without any connected notion as to the manner in which he had won to that place, which on any other evening he would have coveted mightily; now his only thought was one of illimitable consternation, his only desire to contrive an escape as quickly as possible—to get away from association with the man toward whom he had, momentarily, been base enough to contemplate treachery, with that woman whom he had even for an instant, dared hope to win with the fruits of his faithlessness—the girl whose faith in him had been his guiding star.

Her last remark, lightly uttered, was still ringing in his ears; indeed, it was her words which had roused him.

"It seems to me, sir," he had heard her say archly, "that you are uncommonly silent and savage tonight."

"Beg pardon," he said. "Oh, yes." He tried to laugh, but the laugh failed to ring true, for her eyes were on him, and ordinary subterfuge was a matter of impossibility in such a case. He passed his hand wearily across his eyes. "I'm very tired," he said—"very. I've worked pretty hard recently, and I guess I'm a bit stale."

He heard a soft and coarse chuckle from the shadowed corner where the Mogul's ponderous frame was resting. A flash of light from a passing lamp momentarily illuminated the great man's features—boldly, even brutally, modeled, heavy, of a kindly cast.

For an instant Grey fancied that a sardonic smile was wreathing the thick, firm lips. But he could not be sure. When another lamp afforded him a second furtive glimpse the features where as he knew them in their customary aspect.

But the voice of the girl—toward whom he dared not look, as one feeling himself unworthy her regard—there was an instant solicitude.

"Poor fellow!" she said sympathetic. "You're pushing yourself too hard, Thornton. Don't do it."

For by this time they were quite brazen as to their sentiments—that is, so far as concerned the Mogul.

But the Mogul merely chuckled again—a ponderous, rumbling chuckle. "Don't you go discouragin' him, little girl," he told his daughter, maliciously. "He's tryin' to figure out how he's goin' to make half a million. It ain't so easy as it sounds."

Something seemed to contract inside of Grey. He felt a sudden impulse of rage, was swayed by an almost uncontrollable and quite unreasoning desire to silence with a slap of his fingers those heavy lips which had mocked him so aptly, touched him so near the quick. He smarted with resentment. Fortunately, he held his tongue.

The coupe rolled silently, but for the hollow clatter of the horse's hoofs up the Boulevard. Esther nestled back in her corner, resting her head upon the cushions, watching Grey through the long lashes that drooped over her eyes.

The Mogul sat in bulky discomfort, longing for the moment, when, in the security of his own room, he would be free to tear from his neck the starched linen that bound it in stiff, uncompromising propriety. The lagging moments exasperated him. He grumbled, half to himself, staring out of the window beneath his heavy eyelids.

"He could have it in a minute, too." Grey heard him mutter, "if he could tell me something I want to know."

Amazed as he was by the sheer coincidence, Grey glared at him, wide-eyed fascinated. An irresistable desire to know the ultimate depths of temptation, its fullest enticement, forced him to ask—and he put the question in a tone of unperturbed, casual inquiry: "What do you want to know, Mr. Pendelton?"

For an instant he was aware that the Mogul had turned upon him those cold, blue eyes, with their penetrating stare, which nothing escaped, that few men deceived. Then the big man resumed his contemplation of the street.

"That Midvale Securities decision," he said, grumpily. "It's due day after tomorrow. It'd mean money in my pocket if I could guess what the court's got up it's sleeve—for or against." He laughed unpleasantly. "I'd give a cool million to any man who'd tell me—if any man who knew enough to."

"I——"

Grey's jaws closed, almost without his own volition, biting his sentence in two. He choked, swallowing hard, as if to keep down the impatient words: "—can tell you."

His face was burning; he could feel the heat of his cheeks, hot as though he had been standng too near a furnace, and he was thankful for the obscurity within the vehicle, although he suddenly found the atmosphere almost unendurably suffocating.

And the Mogul was eyeing him in a mildly inquiring, bovine fashion.

"Hey?" he prompted.

"I suppose so," stammered Grey.

"Humph,!" grunted the Mogul, gruffly, "Better bet I would."

The carriage swung around a corner, and Grey drew a sharp breath of relief; a moment later he was helping Esther to the sidewalk. The Mogul, groaning, got himself slowly out.

"Good-night," said Grey, abruptly.

The girl's surprise was apparent. "Why, she protested, "you're not——"

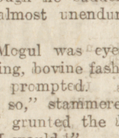
"Better come in, Jim, and have a smoke," urged the Mogul, evidencing on his own part some slight disappointment. "Come on, boy."

(To be Continued).

Duffer—"I see an increase of twenty per cent in the number of tourists to Europe is expected."

Puffer—"Well, maybe the investigating committees are striking some clew after all."—Indianapolis Star.

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VICTORIAN ORDER

Miss Allen, the Superintendent is in the City.

Miss M. H. Allen, superintendent of the Victorian Order of Nurses, arrived in the city Saturday from Ottawa. Miss Allen, who is a native of Fredericton, and a graduate of the Waltham (Mass.) Hospital, is on her annual tour of inspection, this being her second visit here in her capacity as superintendent.

At 8 o'clock Saturday night Miss Allen attended a meeting of the local board of directors at the residence of Mrs. J. V. Ellis, at which H. D. McLeod presided. Two new nurses have been appointed for this district to take the place of those retiring—Miss Touch and Miss Kirkpatrick. The former leaves the order and will go to her home in Chicago, and the latter will go to her home in Nova Scotia. Both the new nurses, Miss Maxwell and Miss Muir, come direct from the traing school in Toronto.

Miss Maxwell, who is a North End girl, is already here and Miss Muir, who is from Edinburgh (Scot.), is expected on the 18th.

"We have," said Miss Allen, "seventy-seven hospitals and fifteen districts. In Toronto the order has a well equipped training school where it is necessary to take a four months' course before going out in a district. If the central fund only had an endowment fund we could do so much more as we now are daily refusing calls for help."

Miss Allen will leave for Fredericton this evening, returning the next day, when she will go to Nova Scotia.

WONDERFUL TRAINS

Probably the Finest Ever Made Up on This Continent.

It is doubtful if a finer train was ever made up on this continent than the special train of 25 Pullmans which left Bonaventure station, Montreal, last Thursday morning for Saratoga Springs, carrying the 200 railway delegates from foreign countries, who visited Montreal as one of the points on their long tour. The train was made up of three sections, each section being in charge of a Pennsylvania Railway tourist agent, with a special baggage master as his assistant, the whole being in the hands of George W. Boyd, traffic manager of the Pennsylvania.

As these trains were run over all the lines which formed a part of the tour, and were not claimed, therefore, by any one railroad, the equipment of them may be considered to show what height of perfection present day railroading has reached. A few facts in connection with the trains speak for themselves. Each had state-room, dining room, and observation cars. They were heated by steam and lighted by electricity. Each had a barber shop and a bath. A maid was assigned to each section. The last state-room in the observation car of each section was used as a telephone booth, arrangements having been made to connect the train directly with its local and long distance wires, wherever a stop of any length was made, giving the delegates complimentary service. This was a feature which has never before been afforded except experimentally. It was one of the conveniences which greatly interested visitors from abroad. In addition to this, telegraph service was maintained by special messengers. They met the trains on their arrival at stopping places, to deliver and take despatches. Arrangements were also made for the delegates to receive their mail while on their travel Letters were addressed to them in care of the special train and a porter went to the post office as soon as the train stopped at a station, and got the mail for the party. On each train also was an interpreter and a stenographer, who was constantly on duty while the train was in motion. The plans for each member of the party were so systematized that his baggage was delivered at his hotel and put on board the train without any directions being given by him. Whether the the service on these trains was installed particularly with the view of showing the foreign representatives what railways can do on this continent, or for the purpose of making the trip of the visitors as enjoyable as money and thought could make it, is a matter of no importance, but the installation of all these conveniences and comforts for any purpose whatsoever, show what wonderful improvements have been made in train service in America during the last quarter of a century.

REMARKABLE INTERVIEW

A London cable says:—"The Rome correspondent of the Chronicle says that Prof. Charles Briggs, the well known American clergyman and author, has had a remarkable interview with the Pope, in which they discussed matters affecting the higher criticism and the obstacles to reunion of the churches. His Holiness displayed a great breadth of view. He admitted that the policy of the Roman congregations of the Index and of the Inquisition might sometimes prove ill-advised, even when backed by the Pontiff's personal approval. He cited the case of Pius IX.'s famous Syllabus and observed that Catholics might disagree with the various propositions contained in that document, despite its higher authority, without thereby becoming less good Christians. The audience, which was carried on with Father Genocchi, of the Vatican Biblical Commission, acting as interpreter, was prolonged beyond the customary half-hour. Prof. Briggs says that the Pope profoundly impressed him by his sincerity, which prompted him to grapple with difficulties immediately, instead of conveniently evading them. His personality is permeated with loving kindness."

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IT WAS THERE

(Philadelphia Post).

An amusing instance of "literal-mindedness" was afforded not long ago by a bell-boy in a hotel in Washington.

One of the guests, a congressman from the West, had hurried to the hotel clerk's counter. He had just ten minutes in which to pay his bill, reach the railway station and board his train.

When he hastily had transacted his business with the clerk and had turned to dash out of the door, it suddenly occurred to him that he had forgotten something. "Here, boy!" shouted he to a diminutive negro on the bench, "run to room No. 48 just as quick as you can, and see whether I have left a box on the bureau. But hurry, as I have only five minutes."

The boy rushed up the stairs. In two or three minutes he returned out of breath. "Yes, sah!" he panted, "you left it, sah!"

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