

Retribution.

THROUGHOUT the peaceful little Ontario town the news had spread rapidly. Even before the morning paper was in the hands of the citizens almost everybody knew that Tom Healy, head-book-keeper for the Royal Cold Storage Company, had been arrested for the theft of the five thousand dollars which had been missing from the office of that concern.

The local dailies were full of the story of the theft and arrest. Under glaring headlines they told how Fred Evans, an under-clerk in the employ of the same company, had so connected Healy with the crime that a search of the latter's house by detectives, resulted in finding the missing packet together with about five thousand dollars in cash in his private desk.

"It is really too bad," remarked Mrs. Grant, as she and her neighbor, Mrs. James, walked down town on a shopping trip that afternoon, "He was getting along so well I always thought Tom Healey was one of the most upright young men in our town."

"But what could have been his motive?" rejoined Mrs. James, "Why it was only a few weeks after he married Marion Philips that she told me he owned his own house and was in no way bad off for money."

"Poor Marion, so young to bear such trouble, and Tom was so fond of her and the baby."

In this way the people talked and sympathized and "re-talked" and "re-sympathized" until the day of the trial.

On that day it seemed as if all streets led to the court-house. Those who were personal friends of the accused went to see how he would conduct himself and even some among them held out a hope that he might prove his innocence. Those who did not know him went to have a look at the man who had been the subject of so much conversation and conjecture. The prisoner's appearance was on the whole very pleasing. Scarcely thirty years of age, tall and straight, he was an admirable type of the healthy, clean-living, young man. They looked at him but as they turned away were forced to look again at those dark, keen eyes

from which shone such remarkable self-control and resignation—at those firm-set jaws depicting such a determination—at that high expansive forehead proclaiming that here was an intellect of no mean order.

But their scrutiny of the prisoner was soon interrupted by the clerk of the court summoning the witnesses. Several were examined in turn. The defense consisted chiefly in an establishment of the prisoner's previous good character and the failure of the prosecution to present a probable motive for the crime. For the prosecution, the detectives testified to the discovery in Healy's house. But the most important evidence was that of Fred Evans. He, too, as we have said, was an employee of the cold storage company. But in the race for promotion with Tom Healy, his mediocre talents had left him far behind and it was with no little jealousy that he saw his clever rival rise to the position of head book-keeper and most trusted servant.

His testimony was, in brief—that on the evening of March 5th, the witness, through the half-open door of the main office saw the accused place a packet in his overcoat pocket and later depart from the building. He testified further that this was the same registered packet which he had, earlier in the evening, delivered from the Post Office and left it with other mail matter on a desk of the company's main office where the prisoner that evening was alone at work.

It was sufficient—defense was henceforth useless and the prisoner, when asked if he would speak in his own behalf, only shook his head. His thoughts were now wholly of his wife and babe and as he looked upon them seated—as near him as possible—in one of the front seats, a flow of bitter tears betrayed the emotion of his breast.

The evidence being finished, the lawyers made their pleas. Then the judge arose to address the jury.

“You are to bring in a verdict to-day on a man whose character has been, up to this time, beyond reproach. It seems almost incredible that he could be guilty of such a crime and yet there has been linked about him a chain of evidence which must force you to but one conclusion.” He then outlined the salient points

of the prosecution and defence and concluded with the admonition to the jury : " Go and may God guide you in your deliberations."

Three minutes sufficed—minutes of torture to the prisoner and his heroic wife—and the jury were back bearing that pronouncement which has struck terror into many a wretched heart—" Guilty." Once again the judge arose and this time addressed the prisoner :

" I have weighed carefully the evidence of guilt against you. I do not forget that you are bound to a loving wife and child, who need your support nor that your character has been, throughout your whole life, most exemplary. However, having considered carefully all things, I have decided the following sentence to be in proportion to your guilt : You shall serve a term of four years at hard labor in Rockwell Penitentiary."

The trial was over. Fate had dealt a heavy blow to Tom Healy. Through the malice of an unscrupulous man, he was forced to leave his wife and child and all the joys of home life to eke out a wretched existence in a prison cell. Yet he did not despair. He consoled himself with the thought : " Some day, perhaps, I shall have an opportunity of proving to the world my innocence."

Time wore on and the twelfth month of Healy's sentence had almost passed when even into the confines of Rockwell Penitentiary came the news that the great nations of Europe had laid down the implements of peace and that the whole continent was rocking in the convulsions of a great war. Tidings were occasionally brought also of the many Canadians who were leaving their native soil to fight for the common good of mankind and Tom longed for the opportunity of joining them. This impulse remained with him and grew until at last, he decided to have a petition presented to the governor begging for a release in order that he might enlist as a soldier. Through the good offices of friends in his native town of Auburn, a document was at last presented to that official setting forth the particulars of the case and the desire of the prisoner. Added to it were testimonies from the prison authorities vouching for his excellent

conduct as an inmate. But another month passed without bringing the desired response, and Tom was on the point of giving up all hope when one day in early October, a message was brought to him informing him that his prayer had been granted and that, his sentence having been suspended, he was now free to do his part as a true and noble citizen of Great Britain.

CHAPTER II.

It was midnight when the "Forty-ninth Canadians," weary and footsore, arrived at their dug-outs. The past weeks of strenuous training had so accustomed them to trench life that they regarded as veritable couches, their hard pallets of straw. And so they made no delay in getting ready for the much needed rest, to which they had so anxiously looked forward. Yet exhausted as they were they could not but tarry a moment to view the scene around them. Although the moon did not shine, innumerable stars twinkled in the heavens as if in mockery of the flittering search-lights of the opposing forces. Like monstrous serpents, the winding trenches could be discerned, stretching on all sides. To the front lay the open plain which, as far as the eye could reach, was broken by neither bush nor rock nor hill. Away to the right, a ruined castle, with its partly destroyed towers, stood out in the darkness. Little noise was heard except the tread of the guards on their ceaseless beat. But he who had seen the preparations of the previous days could not but realize that this was only a very transitory calm before the approaching tempest. Those long lines of British guns placed in their position, carefully inspected and provided with shells were not to remain silent long. The ever increasing activity of the Hospital Corps proclaimed that work was in the near future expected for them. In fact, the "Forty-ninth" together with the "Sixty-eighth Edmonton," had received orders to take the third line of German trenches at all costs, the attack to begin at 6.30, the following morning. It was with high hopes for victory, therefore, that the boys turned into their pallets and slept—many of them for the last time.

Six-thirty the following morning! "Forward!" and

over the sandbags leaped two thousand heroes in khaki and with a lusty British cheer threw themselves against the enemy. The struggle was not for long. The valiant Canadians once having reached the enemy's trench, soon proved their superiority in hand-to-hand fight. The Germans were cut to pieces—a few fled to the next trench leaving in possession of their dug-outs the victorious Canadian regiments. The success had not been won, however, without proportionate loss, for as the raiders rushed across "No Man's Land," a terrific fire was opened on them by the German artillery. Some hundred and fifty, as a result, never reached the enemy's trench. Most of them were killed; and many, fatally wounded, lay insensible on the ground. One poor fellow from the 68th, terribly wounded about the legs, made desperate efforts to get to shelter; but at every attempt to rise fell back exhausted. Even above the uproar of battle the cries of this poor sufferer could be heard. Was there no one who would brave the fire of the enemy and bring him to safety? Yes, suddenly from among the soldiers of the "Forty-ninth" a tall figure with determined mien and steady stride made his way back towards the wounded soldier. "Bravo, Healy." "Plucky Tom," cheered his admiring comrades as the deliverer, amidst a shower of shot, grasped the shoulder of the fainting man. But why does he hesitate in the moment of rescue? Why does he return alone and leave the poor wretch to die? Again, as if he had overcome an unworthy prompting, he turns to the wounded soldier and a few moments later, despite the increasing fire of the German guns, has the insensible man within a few yards of safety. The exasperated Germans redouble their volleys. Will he make the trench? Even now he is on the very edge lowering the rescued man into the dug-out. But thug! An enemy bullet has found its mark and Tom Healy drops in a heap into the trench.

Clean, bare walls,—spotless furniture,—long lines of beds filled with wounded,—French Sisters of Charity flitting about bringing consolation and relief to all—such was the scene that greeted Tom Healy as he awoke to consciousness for the first time after his memorable res-

cue. It was morning, bright and sunny, such as cheers the sick and brings joy to the suffering. For twenty-two hours from the time he was taken from the trench by the stretcher-bearers, he had lain unconscious. But now his brain was clear and thoughts of the seriousness of his situation began to occupy his attention. He felt no great pain—in fact, it took him some time to find out that this wound was situated near his left ankle. Among those who were busy tending to the other wounded, he recognized the chaplain of his regiment, Father Ryan, and anxious to find out the result of the attack, he resolved to ask him when the opportunity arose.

“Well,” responded that good man, when his attention had been attracted by Tom, “And are you alive again? I thought you had left us for good. You are more fortunate than the poor fellow whom you rescued. He is still unconscious.”

“But will he not survive?” asked Tom.

“Chances are against him; his legs are badly mangled.”

“But where is the regiment? Did they get the Huns?”

“Never fear for that,” chuckled Father Ryan, “before you were tucked snugly in your bed in the hospital here, three trenches had been won by our fellows with a loss of only about four hundred.”

“That is splendid; I knew they would do it. But, Father, is my wound thought to be serious?”

“The surgeon says that with proper precaution against blood poisoning and the like, you have a splendid chance of complete recovery. Your unconsciousness was caused by the heavy fall against the concrete floor of the trench at the time when the shot splintered your leg. However, I have grave fears for Evans—he is badly wounded about the legs and is still insensible. He sleeps next bed to you.”

Tom, with difficulty, turned and recognized the features of him whom he had rescued, the same Fred Evans whose perjury had wrecked his life and made him an outcast from society. Thoughts crowded his brain in quick succession—sweet thoughts of home and

wife and baby but bitter ones of the helplessness in which he had been forced to leave them. "Did I do right," he mused, "in risking my life for a man who has committed worse than murder, who, though not destroying my corporal existence, has taken away 'that which not enriches him and makes me poor indeed'? Would I not have been justified in leaving the wretch on the ground as I had partly decided to do when I recognized him?" But no, something told him otherwise and he recalled the words "Greater love hath no man than that he lay down his life for his brother." Thus he received a sort of consolation which lulled him once more to sleep.

It was afternoon when he awoke again. Surgeons were working over the mangled limbs of Evans; and when they had finished, Tom asked what was the condition of their patient. They replied that he had no chance for recovery.

The news saddened Tom and he resolved to watch closely for a return of consciousness so that he might prevail upon the dying man to send for the chaplain. His vigilance was rewarded about twilight, when suddenly Evans' eyes opened and with a start, he rose in his bed and stared blankly about him. The movement caused a re-opening of his wound and a fresh flow of blood. Yet, it was with the greatest difficulty that the nurses could prevail upon him to remain on his pillow. His ravings were terrible to hear and continued so for about an hour. But at the end of that time, he became calmer and the light of clear intelligence shone from his eyes. He spoke to the nurse; was told he had not long to live, that the man who had risked his life to save him was wounded also and that, if he desired, a chaplain would be sent for. This last offer he disregarded but asked if he might speak to his deliverer. At the request of the nurse, Tom, who had pretended to be asleep, turned on his side and the two men looked each other in the face.

"My God," burst out Evans, "is it not enough that I have been tortured with a burning remorse for my wrong-doing? Is it not sufficient that I have suffered and will shortly die in expiation of my crime? Is

not all this enough without my soul's being tortured by the spirit of him whom I have wronged? Away your demon and let me see the man who would hazard his life to save such a wretch as I."

"It is no spirit you look upon," returned Healy, "it is I in flesh and blood. Our regiment charged together. You were wounded before you reached the trench. I could not see a fellowman,—even my worst enemy,—in distress, without offering him assistance."

Evans' head dropped on the pillow. He lay silent for several moments. At last, he extended his hand and Healy grasped it. Evans spoke again in weakened accents: "Healy, I have wronged you but I have had remorse. In that remorse, I could not bear to look upon the faces of those who have always trusted me. After the trial, I left for Western Canada and at the beginning of the war joined a regiment there and came to Europe. I was glad of an opportunity to hide my wretched self among the heroes in Flanders."

"And now, I know you will not refuse the one request I have to make," added Tom, still holding the other's hand, "I beseech you, let me send for a chaplain that you may in peace pass to your Father in Heaven."

"If you desire it, I shall not refuse. For, Healy, I have come to believe that the religion that moves a man to such generous and noble acts as yours cannot but guide me, in my remorse, to happiness."

Word was immediately sent to the chaplain and in less than half an hour, he was at the bedside of the dying man. Sufficient strength remained for the penitent to make a complete and sincere reconciliation with his God, Whom he had so long before forgotten to love. For some time afterwards, Tom could hear the broken voice of Evans dictating to Father Ryan certain statements which the latter hastened to write down. The document, completed and signed by the dying soldier, was handed to Tom. In it was a confession of Evans' guilt and an establishment of Healy's innocence in connection with the theft of the five thousand dollars. "It is all I can do. With your forgiveness I

‘shall now die,’ ” were the last words which Fred Evans spoke. Before morning, he had died from his wounds.

For several weeks, Tom lingered in the hospital, his wound showing little improvement. Finally, the surgeons decided on an amputation. The operation was successfully performed and in due time the patient was provided with an artificial leg which, although it gave excellent satisfaction, made him unfit for further service.

Again the people of Auburn are pouring in the direction of the court house. Again, Tom Healy is the object of their curiosity and admiration. This time, he is not seated in the criminal box but under a canopy richly ornamented and draped with the Union Jack. Again, his wife and child are present, but this time peace and joy—not grief and despair—beam from the woman’s happy countenance. Again, the judge rises to speak, but, how different his sentence! With trembling voice he reads the confession of Fred Evans, stating how he, moved by jealousy against Tom, had contrived to disgrace him; how after delivering the packet to the cold storage office, he had later succeeded in removing it and, during the following night, placed it in Tom Healy’s private desk. “Liberated from all charges of crime.” continues the judge, confirmed in those noble virtues of bravery, magnanimity and charity, our noble citizen, Thomas Healy, has returned to us, bearing that reward which is received only by “the bravest of the brave,”—and he point to our hero’s breast upon which rest a Victoria Cross bearing the inscription: ‘For conspicuous bravery in the field of battle.’

A. A. O’B.’ 19.

Men who stand much upon their dignity have not, as a rule, much else to stand upon.

You need not choose evil ; you have only to fail to choose good, and you drift fast enough toward evil.—
W. J. Dawson.