

A STRANGE STORY.

How a Woman Came to be the Ruin of Donald Cameron's Bank.

"Cameron's bank," as it was known to the commercial world, as a private institution, owned and managed by Donald Cameron, who appeared to be about 50 years old when I entered his employ, and did not look a day older ten years later when the tragedy of which I am about to write took place. "As good as Cameron's bank" was a popular saying. "As honest as Donald Cameron" was another. "As hard-headed and sensible as Cameron" was a third. He was, as a matter of fact, a shrewd, level-headed Scotchman, as honest as you please and as conscientious as you ever find a man in business or out of it. He wanted all due him but nothing more.

There were four employees in the bank, and Cameron himself did not miss a day for twenty years. He was his own cashier, while I had the place of teller. I don't think there was ever an opportunity to put my hands on over £20,000 had I desired to rob the bank, but before I secured the place he made himself safe to the amount of £25,000. Even the janitor had to furnish a bond, although there was no possible chance of his getting at a dollar. While he paid fair salaries, Mr. Cameron had the reputation of being very tight and close. Some people said that he had never married because he was too stingy. He did not seem to be aware of the existence of woman kind except when one of the sex had dealings with the bank, and then he treated her exactly as if she were a man.

While I fell into his ways after a bit and was with him for ten years, I never got to know him. He never smiled nor joked. He never threw off his icy dignity for a moment. He never departed from the first rules laid down. He had our time figured down to minutes. If any of us were obliged to remain even one minute over time, we were paid for it. If any one was a minute late in arriving at the bank, it was charged against him. We had so much stationery to last a month, and if one extra envelope was used it had to be accounted for. He once charged me four cents for accidentally breaking a ruler; he made the book-keeper pay two cents for breaking a pen holder; the janitor fell over his broom and had to ten cents for the broken handle, although spliced and continued to use it for weeks. I tell you these things about Mr. Cameron not to slur his general character, but to show you may thoroughly understand the sort of man he was.

For nine years there was but one break in our routine. We reached the bank at certain hour and moment, and generally left just as promptly. Every one hung up his hat and coat on the same hook selected at the start. There was no change in employees, no painting or papering, nothing new. The break occurred when I cashed a forged check for £200. It was a nice piece of work, and I believe Mr. Cameron himself would have been duped. When discovered that I had been bitten I handed the banker £200 and the forged check. I made no remark whatever, but at the end of the month he charged me up with the loss of interest on the money for thirty-four hours. I made no protest, and the matter ended the affair. The forger might have been caught, but Mr. Cameron had suffered no loss, and he would have charged me with lost time had I spent even five minutes consulting with the police. This was in January, and the beginning of my ten year with him.

One day in May a strange lady called and had a long interview with Mr. Cameron in his private office. It was only at rare intervals that a strange lady entered our place. This one was about 25 years of age, richly dressed, and as handsome a woman as you would find in a week's travel. We learned after a bit that she was a Scotch Canadian who had returned to the mother country to assert her claims to a large estate. I suppose the object of her call was purely business, but it had a queer effect on Donald Cameron. You'll think it funny that a man like him and at that date fully 60 years old should be upset all of a sudden by a woman, but such were the facts in the case. When the hour's interview was ended and Mr. Cameron returned to the counting room he was a changed man. He was actually trying to smile. When he attempted to pick up the routine business he was nervous and uneasy, and when he put on his hat and went out upon the street without saying when he would return we looked at each other with something like consternation.

"Well, we had queer times in the Cameron bank for the next few months, and the public did a good deal of sly gossiping about the banker. We got the news from outsiders that the woman was a widow and very well off; that she expected to get about £60,000 out of an estate; that she was staying at a fashionable hotel, and that the most famous law firm in Scotland had her case and were sure of success. A well-known estate was then in litigation, and the papers had something to say almost daily. Mr. Cameron could have found out all the inside particulars by paying a lawyer £5 but I doubt if he would have parted with a "bob" for full information. After events proved that he accepted the widow's statements and documents without question, though he would not have taken the note of a millionaire for £10 without an endorser.

Within a month after the widow's appearance Mr. Cameron got a new business suit. He had worn the old one four years. This new suit, as we all agreed, was the finest thing he had ever worn. He also got a new hat, went to the barber to be shaved, and there was such a change in his general demeanor about the office that the head bookkeeper, who had been with him eighteen years, seriously thought of tendering his resignation. When a grocery man came into the bank one afternoon at 2 o'clock and solemnly asserted that he had seen Donald Cameron out riding with the Widow Stirling, the routine business was interrupted for fully twenty minutes. When the banker came in half an hour before closing time, looking very happy and humming a tune, we were knocked so completely out that the book-keeper made the first mistake of his life in adding up figures, and my count of the funds on hand was wrong by nearly £100.

Stirling in confidential conversation with a very keen-looking, well-dressed man whom I took to be an American. Without any management on my part I overheard enough of their conversation to make me suspect some conspiracy against my employer. His name was frequently mentioned, and I caught something about "plans," "money," "old fool," and "America."

The woman left in the afternoon without having seen me, while the man remained. I fell in with him later on and seized him up to his discredit. I let him know after a bit that I was from the town where the Cameron Bank was situated, and in a cautious way he made many inquiries about the banker. I learned at the hotel office that the woman paid him a brief visit about once a fortnight. Before the week was out I was perfectly satisfied in my own mind that there was a conspiracy afoot to victimize the banker, but my hands were tied. I not only had no proofs, but he was a man who could not be approached on his private affairs. I was full of trouble for the remainder of the week especially as the stranger made a hurried departure on Thursday, and the hotel people then announced that they had looked upon him with considerable suspicion for many weeks. He left Aberdeen ostensibly for Dundee, but I accidentally learned that he had bought a ticket clear through to Liverpool and engaged passage or two on a steamer to New York.

I returned home feeling sure that something wrong had happened during my absence. I reached town at 8 o'clock on Saturday evening, and Mr. Cameron was at the depot to meet me and asked me to accompany him to the bank. He was not the man I had left the week before. All his sternness and gruffness had returned, and I could detect something beyond that. He looked pale and desperate. I asked if anything had gone wrong during my absence, but he only answered by a gesture of impatience. We walked side by side for half a mile without another word being spoken. The bank was always guarded by a watchman inside. He had already been sent away. Mr. Cameron locked the door behind him as he entered, removed his coat and hat, and after taking a seat and motioning me to another, he said:

"The doors of this bank have been opened for the last time!"

There were some written instructions to me, by following which every depositor would be paid in full and beside them a notice to be pasted on the front door that Monday morning. It read: "This bank closed for two days, after which all depositors will be paid in full."

About the woman? She simply walked off with the man I had seen at Aberdeen and the banker's money, and neither the police nor the public were ever told of the cause of failure, though many shrewdly suspected what had brought it about.

Cannibals.

When driven to extremes by famine during an exceptionally long and cold winter, these wretched Fugians have recourse for satisfying their hunger to an expedient so horribly revolting as to be well-nigh incredible. The oldest woman is seized upon, dragged to a green-wood fire, and held with her mouth and nostrils over the smoke, while some of her relatives compress her throat until life becomes extinct. The body is then divided and eaten, no portion being rejected. The authenticity of this account can hardly be doubted, for it rests on the testimony of some of the Fugians themselves. It was first narrated by "Jemmy Button," one of the four Fugians whom Admiral Fitzroy brought home to England, and who was so named because he had been sold by his people for a few buttons. This had learned to speak English very fluently, and he gave the above details, which were corroborated by his three companions. It is, however, but fair to state that Jemmy Button, as soon as he had become moderately civilized, expressed his disapproval of these proceedings, and added that, rather than again partake of such a feast, he would eat his own hands.

Mr. Low, the Captain of a small vessel who is mentioned in Admiral Fitzroy's narrative of the cruise of the Beagle, had on board for eighteen months a Fugian boy called "Bob" by the sailors. This boy was originally taken as a hostage, but was afterward kept on board as pilot, and eventually was adopted by Mr. Low as his own son. Bob, during the eighteen months which he spent on board, learned to speak English fairly well, and one day during the course of ordinary conversation he gave an account of the cannibalism of his people.

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as many as 150 packages, for which the owners held receipts. While he read off the names from our books I made an investigation to see if the box or parcel was all right. Nothing whatever was missing or mislaid.

"Now Andrew, figure up the rents due up to this date," said Mr. Cameron as we returned to the office.

In about fifteen minutes I gave him the sum in gross.

"Now how much do we owe depositors?"

"Not over £2,000 sir."

"Be exact, Andrew, I must know to a penny. Give me exact figures."

"Well, then, it is £1,800 10s. 7d."

"Ah! that is better. What should you say land, building, and belongings are worth?"

"About £1,000."

"A good guess, my lad. That will be about the true value under the hammer, for we have the best location in town now, there's my land on the hill."

"That's good for £500."

"And my half of the woollen mill."

"That ought to bring up the balance."

"So it will, and my watch will make another £30. The hands are all paid up and I owe nothing for either pew rent or my board. Here is your salary for next week, Andrew."

"But—but what are you going to do, sir?" I stammered.

"Going away, my lad."

"But there is no need of that. You can pay dollar for dollar even if the news gets out that we are shaky and brings a run. And why should the news get out? It is known only to you and me. You have the confidence of hundreds of good men, and can raise all the money you want to go ahead on."

"That woman!" he whispered, as he dropped his chin into his hands and sat thinking for a long time.

"Give me authority to go to the police, and I'll almost guarantee her capture and the return of the money."

He shook his head in a sad way and did not speak for five minutes. Then he said: "You can go now." I'll think it over. Come at the usual hour on Monday morning. I left him sitting in his chair, but as I paused for a moment outside I heard him lock the door behind me. I was about a good deal on Sunday, but there was no gossip. No one knew what had happened. I did not see the banker nor hear of his being seen, though he was a man who never missed his church. At 8 o'clock on Monday morning we had to summon the police to break open the door of the bank. Donald Cameron lay dead on the floor, having fired a bullet into his head with his own hand.



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