

Stephen Westcotte's Lie

I.

He was the most disagreeable fellow who ever sat on an office stool. That was the opinion of everybody in the place, from old Mr. Maybury, the senior partner, to the youngest office-boy. It was generally believed among his fellow-clerks that Stephen Westcotte had been born and educated in the workhouse, and that his mother had died there. And when one added to this disadvantage the further one that he was extremely ugly, and a gloomy, taciturn fellow at best, it is quite easy to understand that young gentlemen, whose antecedents were above reproach, looked down upon him and made him the butt of their time-honored jokes.

They made his life a burden to him by means of these same jokes. Rulers were suspended in unlikely places and fell with a smart crack on the head of the unsuspecting victim; pins were stuck in his stool; hot cobblers' wax was spread upon it, and they almost ruined themselves buying squibs and crackers to attach to his coat-tails.

It was only when Frank Lammont made his appearance in the office of Maybury & Son that serious trouble began. It appeared that the two men had been fellow-clerks before and the hatred between them was bitter and rancorous. In their frequent quarrels everyone sided with Lammont, and this was not surprising, for he was the very opposite of Westcotte in everything.

In the first place he was a handsome young fellow, with handsome dark eyes and a well set-up figure; then he was always well dressed and was very open-handed with his money. But, above all this he had a pretty little house at Tottenham, and a still prettier little wife.

Business routine seemed particularly dull one Saturday morning, and the young men were at a loss to find means of enlivening it. Westcotte had been sent out on business, so there was no fun to be got out of him, until presently the office-boy, who was peeping over the wire blind, exclaimed:

"Here's Work'us coming up the street. Don't he look a shabby-looking chap, that's all?"

"Work'us' is too good a name for that fellow, Tom," said Lammont, with a sneer. "A pauper may be respectable."

"Westcotte does not look very respectable, it is true," said one.

"I'll bet you five that Westcotte comes in another suit on Monday boys," cried Lammont. "Just tell me when he turns in at the door."

"He is just a-turning in now," said quick as thought Lammont jumped off his stool, selected the largest and fullest ink-pot, and opening the door about an inch, balanced it carefully upon the top. The other clerks looked rather blank. They had never gone so far as this before, and if Westcotte complained there might be trouble. But there was no time to do anything now, for the door was pushed quickly open, and—well, it is wonderful how far a pennyworth of ink will go, in the wrong place.

Westcotte stood glaring at them from the doorway, like an inky spectre. No one smiled, for the look on the man's face was murderous. Just a moment he stood there, then, lifting the heavy ink-pot he hurled it straight at Lammont's head, dashed after it, and the next minute the two men were rolling over and over on the floor, tearing and warring one another like dogs. It all happened so quickly that no one attempted to stop them until the door of the inner office opened and Mr. Maybury stood on the threshold.

"Separate those madmen some of you," he shouted. "What is the meaning of this disgraceful scene?"

It needed no second word; in a moment a dozen hands were stretched out and the combatants were forced to opposite sides of the room.

"Is this the way you spend the time for which I pay, gentlemen?" said Mr. Maybury, coldly.

"I am very sorry, sir," began Lammont.

"Sorry, indeed! I should think that you were thoroughly ashamed of yourselves. Such disgraceful conduct was never heard of in a respectable office. No," as Lammont was about to speak, "I want no explanations from either of you. I care nothing about your quarrels; all I want is some assurance that this sort of thing shall not occur again. So shake hands with one another, and promise me that this shall be the end of such nonsense."

"I will apologize to you, sir," said Lammont, with an evil light in his eyes, "but I hope that you will not ask me to shake hands with that fellow. I cannot shake hands with a gaol-bird."

"What did you say? You had better be careful, sir."

"I said that I refused to shake hands with a gaol-bird."

"And what do you mean by that?"

"Westcotte can tell you better than I can, sir."

"You hear, Westcotte," said Mr. Maybury, curtly.

"He means to inform you," said Westcotte, scornfully, "that I spent six months in prison for a theft of which I was absolutely innocent."

"They are all innocent," sneered Lammont.

"That is enough," said Mr. Maybury. "I cannot ask you to apologize, Lammont. Westcotte, when you have made yourself fit to be seen come to my room."

When Mr. Maybury left the room Westcotte walked up to Lammont. All his rage was gone now, and he was cold as stone.

"You coward," he said, in a low, passionless voice. "You mean, pitiful coward. If I wait for twenty years I will be even with you for this morning's work."

And for once Lammont had no word to say in answer.

After that day no one expected to see Westcotte in the office again; but when Monday morning came, there he was in his place as usual.

II.

Stephen Westcotte was alone in the office. Lammont had not put in an appearance for two days, and a double share of work had fallen upon Stephen in consequence. He had been working late, but had finished now, and was just locking up when he heard a soft tap at the door.

"Come in," he cried, and after a short pause the door opened slowly, and a pretty, fragile-looking girl, carrying a small child in her arms, came in and leaned wearily against a desk. Stephen had only seen her once, but he knew her quite well; she was Frank Lammont's wife.

She was deathly pale, her pretty eyes were red with crying, and she seemed ready to drop with fatigue. Stephen gazed at her stupidly for a few moments, then he awkwardly brought forward a chair and the trembling girl sank into it, with a grateful glance at him. The steeping child stirred uneasily, opened her blue eyes, and calmly fell to examining his face.

"What a wolly ugly man 'oo is," she lisped, in a sweet little chirrupy voice.

Stephen flushed hotly. Somehow the babyish words stung him.

"Is Mr. Maybury here?" asked Mrs. Lammont, hushing the child against her breast.

"No, indeed. I expect that he is at dinner by this time."

"Can you tell me where he lives? I must see him to-night."

"He lives at Hampstead."

Mrs. Lammont sank back in her chair and burst into tears.

"What shall I do?" she sobbed. "I cannot go all that distance, and I shall not be able to come back again."

"He will be here at ten o'clock in the morning; you can see him then," said Stephen, shortly, as he picked up the office key and put on his hat.

"I cannot come again. The doctor kindly offered to stay with Frank while I came here to-night; but I am sure that I shall not be able to leave him to-morrow."

"The doctor! Is there anything the matter with Lammont?"

"Oh, yes, he met with a dreadful accident on Monday night. He fell from his bicycle and was run over by a van. The doctor says it will be months before he can go out again."

"That is bad," said Stephen, coldly. "Well, if you cannot come again you had better write to Mr. Maybury."

"I cannot write what I have to say," said the poor little creature. "I don't know what to do."

The child, who had all this time been gravely studying his face, suddenly stretched out her little arms with a pretty, babyish gesture.

"Ugly man carry Maisie," she demanded, with a radiant smile.

The burning flush rose once more to Stephen's face. He hesitated for a moment; then he opened his arms and the child nestled in perfect content against his breast.

"Maisie loves 'oo dear, ugly man," she cooed, softly. "Maisie will tizz 'oo if 'oo likes."

"I cannot let her trouble you," said Mrs. Lammont. "Maisie, come back to mother, darling."

"She is no trouble," said Stephen, roughly. "You are tired. I had better carry her to the 'bus for you."

III.

The next morning Stephen Westcotte presented himself in Mr. Maybury's private room and delivered his message.

Maybury, irritably. "Just as we are getting into the busy season, too."

"Mrs. Lammont asked me to say, sir, that she hoped you would not stop Lammont's salary, as they have nothing else to depend upon."

"What?" cried Mr. Maybury. "Not stop his salary? Is the woman mad? Does she expect me to pay someone to do her husband's work and pay him as well? No, indeed. I should soon be in the workhouse if I conducted business on that plan."

"You will not change your mind, sir?" Stephen said. "You will not make an exception in Lammont's favor?"

"Certainly not. I never break my rules. I shall pay him up to the end of the month, and not one penny more."

"Have you any objection to letting me take Lammont's money to him and telling him of your decision, sir?"

"You seem very anxious to be the bearer of bad news, but it is no business of mine. I should send someone in any case, for I want no correspondence with the woman."

Mr. Maybury counted out a little heap of money and handed it to Stephen.

"You will go after business hours, if you please, Westcotte. We cannot spare anyone in the daytime."

Stephen bowed and, putting the money in his pocket, went silently back to his work.

IV.

The winter had passed, and the breath of spring was finding its way even into dingy city offices, for it was four long months since Frank Lammont had met with his accident; when, one morning, a cab stopped at the door of Maybury & Son's, and a poor, shattered creature, who walked with two sticks, got out and limped slowly up the stairs. It was Frank Lammont.

Everybody crowded round him to shake him by the hand, and Stephen came forward with the rest, but Lammont stared stonily in his face and passed on to the inner office.

"Ah, Lammont!" said Mr. Maybury. "I am glad to see that you are able to be out again. If you are feeling up to work I shall be very glad to have you back."

"Thank you, sir; I am not quite fit for work yet," said Frank. "I only came out this morning to speak to you about a most unpleasant matter, and to thank you for your great kindness."

Mr. Maybury could not recall any particular kindness, so he only smiled and murmured, "Don't mention it."

"No, sir," answered Frank; "I understood that you wished me not to mention it, and I shall take care not to do so."

Mr. Maybury thought that his visitor had taken leave of his senses.

"I wish that I had not spoken of it, sir; it is a most unpleasant thing. I am afraid that Westcotte has been robbing me, sir."

"How, in Heaven's name, could Westcotte rob you?"

"He has been keeping back a part of my salary for a month past; only a few shillings, it is true; but even a few shillings make a difference to me, with doctors to pay and all that."

"To be sure. For a month past, you say. Did you receive it regularly up to that time?"

"Oh, yes, sir, and I am sure I am most grateful. I dare not think of what would have become of us without it. We must certainly have starved."

Mr. Maybury made no reply. He struck his hand-bell sharply and waited.

"Send Westcotte here," he said, when the boy appeared in answer to it.

Stephen came in, looking pale and worried.

"Lammont tells me that you have been robbing him. Have you anything to say, Westcotte?"

"No, sir."

"When you first spoke to me about Lammont's accident I gave you a message for him. Did you give it? What message did he bring from me, Lammont?"

"I remember quite well, sir. He said that it was against your rules to pay anyone who was unable to work, but that you would make an exception in my case upon condition that I mentioned it to no one."

"Then, if he told you that, he told you a most confounded lie," cried Mr. Maybury starting from his chair. "And I little thought, Westcotte, that I should ever be ashamed to look such a liar in the face. Listen to me, Lammont," he went on, laying his hand on Stephen's shoulder; "you have not had one penny from me since last October, and if you have escaped starvation you owe it to Westcotte's generosity, not to me."

child, who was the first creature on God's earth to treat me as if I were a human being."

Frank Lammont never came back to Maybury and Son's, for in less than a month after his last visit there he was dead. And now many years have passed away, and Stephen Westcotte is alone and despised no longer. He is high in the confidence of his employers, and a fair, grey-eyed woman has found a refuge from sorrow in his loyal heart. Children's tiny hands clasp his, and their sweet eyes greet him with love and trust.

"But I am sure that he loves Maisie better than any of us," Mrs. Westcotte would often say to herself with a heavy sigh.—London Answers.

ROYALTY'S SUNDAY.

His Majesty Spends the Day in a Quiet Way.

When King Edward and Queen Alexandra were the Prince and Princess of Wales, the following interesting account of how they were in the habit of spending Sunday appeared in the Quiver. The writer says:—

"Sunday with their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales is passed in much the same quiet way as with Her Majesty, the Queen, inasmuch as religious ceremonies are faithfully observed, and the household and servants are spared all unnecessary duties. The guests wend their way, as the hour of eleven approaches to the little church of St. Mary Magdalene in the Park. There is a private footway direct from the house to the church gate; by this, the Royal family and guests often proceed, driving round by the road only in case of unpropitious weather. Sunday afternoon is quietly spent in the house or park. Dinner is served at half past seven. Occasionally, however, dinner is a little later, as the Prince and Princess may be attending evening service in one of the village churches near. The small station, some two miles away, where the Royal Family have their own waiting rooms, is closed on Sunday as no train whatever is run on that day. By this means, the church is kept clear of an attendance prompted by curiosity, and also the men employed have the entire day's rest secured to them. In fact, no unnecessary work in any shape or way is performed on Sunday on any one part of the Prince's domains."

Sunday at Marlborough House differs slightly from Sunday at Sandringham, but the day is spent in comparative quietude. In the morning, their Royal Highnesses attend divine service in what is known as the German (Lutheran) Chapel. After luncheon, the Princess and her daughters may possibly attend one of the West-End churches to hear some popular preacher, or to be present at

A CHILDREN'S SERVICE.

It is not only at Sandringham and Marlborough House that Sabbath observances are rigidly adhered to by the Prince and Princess of Wales, but also in any of the Continental places where they may be staying.

There is an old saying that when you go to Rome do as the Romans do, but our Prince honors this rule in the breach, for although he has ever been a constant visitor to Paris yet he has never seen the French Derby for the simple reason that it is run on the Sunday. In a matter where hundreds and thousands of Christians have followed the fashion of the gay capital they are visiting, and indulged their love of horses and of pleasure, the Prince has set a good example and absented himself. In every way the Prince and Princess have always faithfully observed the Sabbath, and we, as a Christian people, may congratulate ourselves that our future king and queen will steadfastly uphold the sanctity of the Day of God, and the doctrines of the Christian Church."

A recent quotation from the St. James Gazette of London, England, saying that the King had refused to travel from Scotland to London on Sunday, and has "stunned society by putting all social functions and entertainments on Sunday under the Royal ban," would seem to indicate that His Majesty's accession to the throne of the "mightiest empire that has been" has not led to the relaxing of his scruples as to how Sunday should be spent.

If there is any truth in the rumors that are afloat about Sunday yachting excursions, mounted paper chases, and the like, starting from Rideau Hall, it would seem that His Majesty's example has not much weight with his representative in Canada, nor indeed with society leaders generally at the Dominion capital, where only a few months ago the servant girls had to form themselves into a mutual protective association in order to get deliverance, among other things, from seven-day-in-the-week bondage through having to dance attendance on their mistresses and their guests at Sunday dinners, suppers, etc., as well as on all the other days of the week. And we fear that if this Servants Mutual Protective Association does not extend to other cities, it will not be because there is not about as much occasion for it as there is at Ottawa. Society is fond of following the lead of royalty in many things. Why not also in the observance of the Lord's Day?

149,818 British farms out of a total of 520,106 are between 5 and 20 acres in extent.

POWERS YEARN FOR PEACE

EUROPE ANXIOUS TO HAVE BRITAIN FOOTLOOSE.

Assistance is Necessary in Restoring the Equilibrium on the Continent.

Special reasons just now cause the rulers and statesmen of Europe to desire a speedy ending of the war in South Africa. The stalking horse of intervention is no longer in evidence but from the capitals of all the great powers indirect pressure is being brought to bear upon the Boer representatives in Holland and Belgium to avail themselves of the only terms of peace the British Government will grant.

The motive is not so much a wish to help the burghers as a wish—which is especially strong in Vienna and Rome—to free Britain's hands, so that her voice may be more potent in the councils of Europe. This view of the situation is entertained in influential quarters in London.

STRAIN IN THE BALKANS.

Ever since the war began the relations of the continental powers toward one another have shown symptoms of increasing disturbance. The nicely adjusted equilibrium which had existed since the triple and dual alliances were instituted seems to have been lost.

Signs of fresh strain in the Balkan regions have appeared on the horizon. Europe is never allowed to be without an eastern crisis for many years at a stretch, and it would appear as if the difficulty in the remote Orient was hardly adjusted before there is a menace of trouble in a region where to two at least of the greater powers complications would be even more unwelcome.

RIVALRY IN THE EAST.

Rival ambitions in the near east are again threatening to tax the resources of diplomacy to the utmost. Dispute the assurances from Vienna that Russia and Austria are agreed that, whatever happens in Serbia, it shall not imperil European peace, these two powers are by no means agreed as to the best methods of carrying out their self-appointed task of guardians of peace in the Balkans. No secret is made of the fact that their views on this point are almost diametrically opposed, and it is a matter of common note that Austria is trying to secure Britain's support in her policy.

Meanwhile the new German tariff threatens the very existence of the dreibund, and the speech of Prince von Eulenberg, the Kaiser's friend and ambassador at Vienna, is interpreted by many good judges as all but foreshadowing the doom of that famous pact.

ATTITUDE OF ITALY.

As for "leaving Italy out in the cold" recent utterances of Italian statesmen do not indicate any burning desire to renew the alliance with the two German states. It is strongly felt at Rome that no renewal of the political convention should be tolerated which did not also confer substantial commercial advantages on all the members of the combination. Unless some compensating benefits are bestowed upon Italy she may decline to renew the arrangement. France, it is certain, can, if she pleases, offer to Italy some commercial inducements of the most alluring character.

By the bare suggestion that the dreibund, long and dominating factor in continental politics, may be eliminated a vista of wide possibilities is opened up. It is not too much to say that there is at least a prospect that a new triple alliance on an altered footing might be constructed or a different grouping of the whole continental system be evolved.

RUSSIA JOINS IN CHORUS.

This sentiment has repeatedly found expression in German and Austro-Hungarian official circles. It is one of the commonplaces of the Italian press.

It is the hope that Great Britain's voice might introduce a calming and moderating influence into these distracted councils which underlies the nervous anxiety of the continent to see an end of the Boer war. Even the Russian journals begin to sing the tune of Vienna and Rome.

"If by some means, no matter what, says the Novoe Vremya, 'an issue could be found from the South African war, then, and then only, would things in Europe return to the paths of peace from which the events of the past two years have forced them far astray.'"

REPLY FROM BRITAIN.

Britain, however, will not listen to the siren song of those who would tempt her, even when the war is out of the way, to become involved in the calculations and combinations of the continent. She replies to all such seductive appeals:—

"With dual or triple or quadruple leagues and alliances, whatever their component elements, we have nothing to do. We have definitely renounced all attempts to maintain the balance of power or to secure an equilibrium of forces among the great naval and military states of the continent. We have elected to stand alone so far as Europe is concerned. Isolation, with all its drawbacks, has at least one advantage. It will probably prevent us from being dragged into war over territorial ambitions or international jealousy in which we have no direct or immediate share. Our reliance continues to be upon the strength and unity of the peoples of the empire."