

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.

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.

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.

For nine years there was but one break in our routine. We reached the bank at a certain hour and moment, and generally left just as promptly. Every one hung up his hat and coat on the same book selected at the start.

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.

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.

From May to September we were "standing on our heads," as the saying is, and every day brought some new surprise. On the first Monday of September I started off for a week's vacation. That had always been the rule. Mr. Cameron insisted that each of us take a week every year, though each had to lose his salary for that week.

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.

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 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.

"The doors of this bank have been opened for the last time!" "Why, what do you mean?" I asked. "Simply that I am a ruined man. I haven't £20 to my name!"

"And yet every pound of it is gone!" I sat for a time like one stunned by a blow. The Cameron bank has been noted for its conservatism. Its checks were as good as gold all over Scotland and England.

"But the police—she can be tracked—I know he confederate—there may be time to stop them at Liverpool!" "Nay! Nay! I shall do nothing of the sort. It would be ruin to me, even if I got every dollar back.

"We will now overhaul the safe deposit vault," he said as he lighted the way. We were a safe deposit company or institution, as well as a bank. Being the only one for a long distance around, we had many customers.

"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."

"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.

"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.

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.

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 Fuegians have recourse to 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.

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 Fuegian boy called "Bob" by the sailors. This boy was originally taken as a hostage, but was afterward kept on board as pilot, and eventually he was adopted by Mr. Low as his own son.

Unlike Jimmy Button, the boy Bob did not appear to regard such proceedings as in any degree reprehensible, being much surprised as well as hurt at the disgust which his story excited among the crew; so much so that he could never afterwards be induced to refer to the subject.

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A. P. 647



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Walk Two Miles which I had not done for six years. Think I am cured of erysipelas, and recommend any person so afflicted to use Hood's Sarsaparilla

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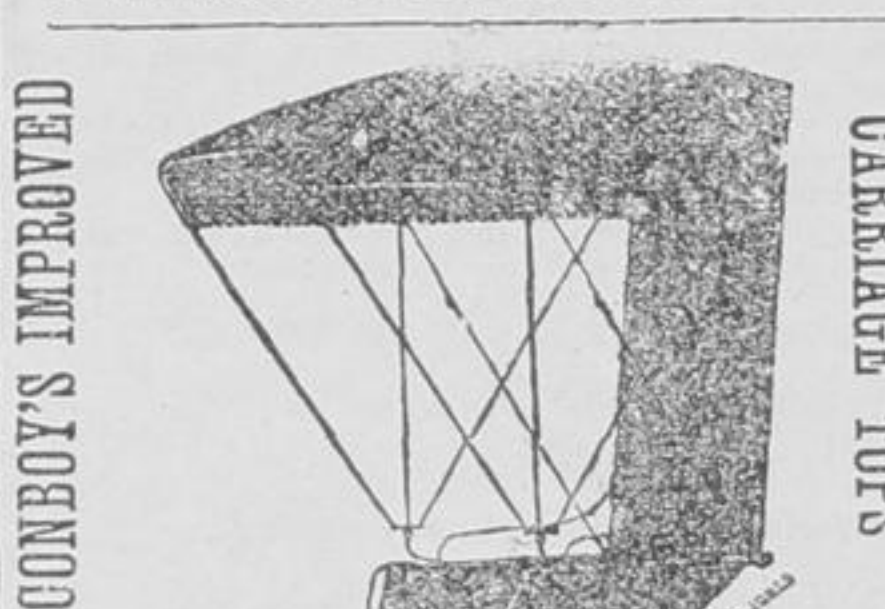
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