

Sir William Harley

A Detective Story for Today

by WM. H. S. Atkinson

In a very ancient building near the Battery, New York City, there is a very modern sort of office. That is to say, the internal arrangements of the second floor in that antiquated block comprise every modern improvement known to the present-day office-builder and furnisher.

Not many years ago, upon the ground glass in a door upon that same second floor, in neat black lettering, appeared the words "Arlington & Kane," while upon a lower line, in bolder letters, one might have read "American Merchants."

Arlington & Kane was a very old business firm, whose credit in New York, London, and any South American city was almost boundless. Three generations of Arlingtons and Kanes had passed over to the majority since the business was established, and now the reins were entirely in the hands of Mr. Walter Kane, bachelor.

Now, although Mr. Walter Kane was looked upon as a rich man by his friends and business associates, Mr. Kane knew better, and so did his chief clerk and book-keeper.

In fact things were coming to a crisis when, one morning, Mr. Walter Kane summoned his head man into the private office.

"How long can we hold out Oxtoby?"

"Certainly not more than thirty days, sir; perhaps not so long. There's a pile of paper falls due in about a month."

Five minutes later Mr. Kane was wending his way up a narrow and dirty staircase at the lower end of Greenwich street, and presently entered a little, dingy, cramped office as dirty and rusty as his own was light and airy. This was the headquarters of Messers. Isaacs & Hubbakuk, vessel-owners, speculators, bill-shavers, and general dabblers in aught that would bring fish to their net.

The door of Isaacs & Hubbakuk's inner sanctum being closed and bolted, Mr. Kane, without any preliminary remarks, handed his card to Mr. Isaacs and proceeded.

"My South American cargoes have usually been shipped here by the steamers of Rawley & Company; but if you, gentlemen, can see your way to making advances on cargoes I shall be happy to divide my business and give you a share of it. Just now I have a mixed cargo of sugar and indigo at Bahia, and upon that cargo I want an advance of \$60,000. Of course," added Mr. Kane, "I do not expect you to advance money until you receive the bills of lading from Bahia. You can learn all you wish about me from any one in the South American trade."

"We know your firm well, by reputation, Mr. Kane, and are pleased to make your personal acquaintance," said Mr. Isaacs. "We shall be most happy to make the advance you mention upon

the receipt of the bills of lading from Bahia.”

Mr. Walter Kane then boughed himself out and busied himself in his office until a very late hour that night. He seemed to be trying very persistently to write a signature which was evidently not his own. When he finally got it to suit him it read “*Roderigo Ciaro*.”

The next morning Mr. Kane instructed a junior clerk to address an envelope to Messrs. Isaacs & Hubbakuk. In this the merchant placed a forged bill of lading and sealed the cover. Then he wrote a long newsy letter to an old friend of his in Bahia—a sort of fellow who would do anything to oblige a friend and never think of asking questions—and among other things requested him to mail the enclosed letter on the day that the ship “Miriam,” Isaacs & Hubbakuk owners left Bahia.

Three weeks later the bill of lading for three thousand hogsheads of sugar and fifty barrels of indigo had been duly received at the office of Isaacs & Hubbakuk, Greenwich street, New York, and on the afternoon of the same day Mr. Isaacs wrote out a check for \$60,000 in favor of Arlington & Kane.

The “Miriam” arrived at New York two weeks after the mail which had brought the bills of lading, and the Captain reported a very light cargo.

“Light!” exclaimed, Mr. Isaacs.

“Why, man alive, what do you call a cargo. Didn’t you take all that sugar of Arlington & Kane’s aboard?”

“Sugar! Haven’t got a speck of sugar on the vessel.”

Investigation quickly followed, and, upon proceeding to Arlington & Kane’s office at Bowling Green, Mr. Isaacs was not long in learning the true state of affairs. Mr. Kane had gone suddenly, the day before, and had left no address, no instructions, no money, and no credit.

Half an hour later Julius Wells, the celebrated detective who had at one time or another been employed by half the bankers on Wall Street, was closeted with Isaacs & Hubbakuk in their Greenwich street office.

The whole affair was explained to Mr. Wells.

“The only thing that puzzles me,” said Mr. Isaacs, “is how he got our agent’s signature. Roderigo Ciaro corresponds with no one in New York but ourselves.”

“Bah! That was easy,” replied the detective. “You can bet that Kane did not cook this scheme in a hurry. He has had it in mind or months, and gone to some pains to specially secure Ciaro’s signature. Wrote him about some timid business matter, possibly.”

“Well, see here,” said Isaacs and Hubbakuk together. “We hate to lose sixty thousand clear cash,

but we will spend as much again to see that d——d sharper in Sing Sing. Spare no expense, Wells; draw on us for whatever is necessary.”



In the office of the well-appointed Queen’s Hotel at Montreal, sat two men. Both were well dressed and apparently men of refinement, both sat in huge rocking-chairs and leisurely smoked very delicately-flavored cigars.

“Like myself,” said the older of the two, who spoke with a strong, high-toned British accent, “you seem to have considerable leisure on your hands. Pardon me, but you are a Canadian, I presume?”

“Yes,” said the other in a very pleasant, lazy voice, “I *am* a Canadian. Like yourself, as you say, I have a good deal of leisure. There, I imagine, the resemblance between you and me ceases. For while you are an Englishman who can afford to “tour,” I am a poor broken down cuss, a failure in business, and with the narrowest of narrow pocketbooks. You are in Montreal because it suits you to stay here until you tire of the place; I am here because it is as much as I can do to pay my bill at the hotel and indulge in a cigar once in a while.”

The Englishman laughed a hearty British guffaw.

“My dear sir, I am afraid you paint your own picture in more somber colors than is necessary. Permit me to hand you my card and, as far as a name goes, introduce myself.”

The younger man took the pasteboard, upon which was printed, from a very fine copper plate –

“Sir William Harley.”

“Sorry I cannot reciprocate, Sir William,” said the Canadian. “Copper plates come too high, and I should have to forego a good many smokes to pay for a pack of such luxuries as cards. However, my name is Carleton – Robert Carleton, and I am pleased to meet so genial a gentleman as yourself.”

“Thanks. Now, see here. Carleton, take pity on a stranger, will you, and show me the sights. My family is up at Alexandria Bay with a lot of Toronto cousins of mine. I got tired of that amusement and came down here to go it alone— I mean by that, no petticoats, d’ye see? Lets’ go down to Quebec on the night boat and have a good time for forty-eight hours.”

“Impossible, my dear Sir William. I am not joking. I am simply too poor to indulge in anything of the kind.”

“Look here, Carleton, when I invite a man to be my guest, I don’t expect him to pay the bills. Will you come as a pure kindness to me— that’s all I ask?”

The Canadian demurred for a moment but at last consented to accompany the Englishman. They

started off by the boat that night, and instead of being gone forty-eight hours they were absent fourteen days. They took in all the points of interest on the river, did Quebec, the Sagueray, the Montmorenei Falls, and had a good time generally. Rare dinners and champagne suppers were frequent, and the jolly, middle-aged English baronet provided an exceedingly generous and genial host.

A couple of days after the two men returned to Montreal they were again seated in the office of the Queen's Hotel.

“Well, Carleton, my boy, in a week I shall embark from New York for home. I must go up to the island for my people and then start. Come up with me to the bay, will you, that's a good fellow. I've telegraphed for the steam yacht, which I chartered for the season, to be at the other end of the Lachine Canal this evening. We can have one more jolly time together as we run up the river. Now, don't refuse me.”

“Can't do it, Sir William; I've been indulging too much already.”

“Oh, pshaw! What difference will another night make to you? You can't plead other arrangements, you lazy rascal. Come up and be introduced to Lady Harley and my girls. There, if the old man isn't any inducement for a youngster like you, try the girls—two of them, and over in London they pass muster for fair lookers, I assure you. Come along.”

“Much obliged, but it cannot be. You have been so exceedingly kind that it hurts me to disappoint you, Sir William. Still I am compelled to decline your invitation.”

The Baronet looked vexed. He stroked his British whiskers and bit his lip.

“Why,” he asked at last. “Why are you compelled to decline. Will you tell me your reason?”

A curious smile played over the features of Robert Carleton, and something like a twinkle of sarcastic merriment was perceptible in his eye.

“If you wish, Sir William,” said he, “I will tell you. I have most thoroughly enjoyed being the honored guest of the English Baronet, Sir William Harley, in this fair Dominion of Canada; but I fancy I should decidedly *not* appreciate the pleasure of becoming the guest of Mr. Julius Wells at Alexandria Bay, which place I believe is in the State of New York! Is that reason sufficient? Good-bye, Sir William,” he added, as the quondam British aristocrat moved slowly away, biting his lip until it bled, — “remember me kindly to Messrs. Isaacs & Hubbakuk.”

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