

Moleburrow's Model
Judge Clark

“Here is a letter,” said Mr. Swasey to one of his clerks. “Put this fifty-dollar note in it, and seal and post it yourself.”

The employer turned away, and Henry Dade, after inclosing the money and sealing the letter, turned it over to attach a stamp. A quick flush mantled his cheek as his eye caught the address. It was that of Mr. Irvine, the father of the sweetheart he had left at home on coming to enter Mr. Swasey's service six months before.

Henry knew that by the same mail Kate Irvine would receive a letter, whose contents, he flattered himself, would meet with even a warmer welcome than those of its more richly freighted fellow-passenger.

Henry's and Kate's engagement was yet their own secret. Kate had no mother to tell it to; and her father, she knew, would never countenance the pretensions of a youth like Henry Dade, without wealth or influence.

“I shall come back before many years,” said Henry, proudly, the day he and Kate parted, “rich enough not be ashamed to tell your father of my love. We are young yet, and can afford to wait.”

Some days after the posting of the two letters Henry Dade was summoned to his employer's private office.

“I suppose, being his fellow-townsmen, you know Mr. Irvine, to whom I gave you a letter to mail the other day?” said Mr. Swasey.

“I—I do,” stammered Henry, reddening; a fact which did not escape the keen eyes of his questioner.

“His standing is good, I presume?”

“None better,” the young man hastened to answer.

“I have had some business with Mr. Irvine lately,” remarked Mr. Swasey, “and it's well, you know, to be informed touching people one has dealings with.”

Mr. Swasey then placed in Henry's hand an open letter, and a bank note.

“I have another remittance to make to Mr. Irvine,” he continued. “Please inclose the money as before, and mail the letter yourself.”

Henry bowed, and went to execute the commission.

Before a week had passed he was again called to the private room. This time Mr. Swasey's manner was severely stern.

"You vouched warmly the other day," he began, "for Mr. Irvine's reputation."

"I said there was none better, sir," said Henry, surprised and piqued at the manner in which the subject renewed.

"So much the worse for *you*," replied the other, meeting the young man's astonished look with a searching gaze. "But the banknotes remitted to Mr. Irvine have been sent back as counterfeit; and as you are so ready to answer for his probity, you will hardly suspect him of having returned spurious bills for genuine ones received."

"Certainly not."

"You enclosed the notes and posted the letters yourself?"

"I did."

"Perhaps you can account, then, for this mysterious transmutation of good money into bad?"

"Might there not have been a mistake as to the quality of the notes sent?" Henry ventured to inquire.

"Granting that to have been possible respecting the first," Mr. Swasey answered, "when that, or its substitute, was returned, I took pains to prevent a second mistake. Without questioning Mr. Irvine's word, I selected another note, undoubtedly genuine, on which I placed on a secret mark, taking care, that, like the first, it should reach the post-office through your hands. This morning Mr. Irvine returns the note as bad, which, he says, he received in my letter. It is not the one I gave you, and is a base counterfeit. [If] Mr. Irvine is the honest man you say, there [is] but one conclusion left."

The young clerk turned deathly pale.

"Surely you do not suspect—"

"*You?* —yes!"

Mr. Swasey touched the bell on his desk, and directed the attendant who entered to call an officer, and Henry Dade was consigned to a prison cell.

But the hardest blow was when Mr. Irvine appeared as a witness before the examining magistrate, and testified to receiving the counterfeit notes in the two letters which Henry could not deny had been sealed and posted by himself.

But one result could be expected. The prisoner was fully committed for trial.

Moleburrow, the home of the Irvines, and Henry Dade's native village, had its model young man. His name was Meshach Pike. He had risen, step by step, to the dignity of "keeping store," and, at last, to the rank of postmaster.

Kate Irvine had long been the object of his attentions, which he redoubled after the discovery of Henry Dade's misconduct.

As a rising man Mr. Pike was not likely to find disfavor in the eyes of heads of families. He even found especial favor in Mr. Irvine's sight; and if Kate had only been of the same mind the success of Mr. Pike's aspirations would soon have been a settled question.

One evening when Meshach Pike was making himself at home in Mr. Irvine's parlor, two visitors called. The appearance of one was greeted with expressions of surprise.

It was the other who spoke.

"Mr. Pike, I presume?"

That gentleman nodded.

"I have an unpleasant duty to perform," returned the first, laying his hand on Pike's shoulder.

The latter started in alarm.

"A novel mode of mail-robbing has come into vogue of late—that of opening money letters and replacing their contents with spurious notes. A decoy letter has been discovered to have been thus tampered with in your office, and as you have no clerks, there can be little doubt at whose door the guilt lies. There is equally little that this young man, here, who has been released on bail since the detection of your crime, is one of the victims of your fraud."

A search of Meshach Pike's person brought to light the identical note which Mr. Swasey had marked.

The detective took away his prisoner, and Henry Dade remained to complete the visit Meshach Pike had begun. Mr. Irvine received him kindly, Mr. Swasey has promoted him, and Kate thinks the engagement may soon be confided to her father.

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