THE DELUGE

By DAVID GRAHAM PHILLIPS, Author of "THE COST," etc.

XXXII.

"MY RIGHT EYE OFFENDS ME."

Next day Langdon's stocks wavered, going up a little, going down a little, closing at practically the same figures at which they had opened. Then I sprang my sensation—that Langdon and his particular clique, though they controlled the Textile Trust, did not own so much as one-fiftieth of its voting stock. True "captains of industry" that they were, they made their profits not out of dividends, but out of side schemes that absorbed about two-thirds of the earnings of the Trust, and out of gambling in its bonds and stocks. I said in conclusion:

"The largest owner of the stock is Walter G. Edmunds, of Chicago—an honest man. Send your voting proxies to him, and he can take the Textile company away from those now plundering it."

As the annual election of the Trust was only six weeks away, Langdon and his clique were in a panic. They rushed into the market and bought frantically, the public bidding against them. Langdon himself went to Chicago to reason with Edmunds—that is, to try to find out at what figure he could be bought. And so on, day after day, I faithfully reporting to the public the main occurrences behind the scenes. The Langdon attempt to regain control by purchases of stock failed. He and his allies made what must have been to them appalling sacrifices; but even at the high prices they offered, comparatively little of the stock appeared.

"I've caught them," said I to Joe—the first time, and the last, during that campaign that I indulged in a boast.

"If Edmunds sticks to you," replied cautious Joe.

But Edmunds did not. I do not know at what price he sold himself. Probably it was pitifully small; cupidity usually snatches the instant bait tickles its nose. But I do know that my faith in human nature got its severest shock.

Fortunately, Edmunds had held out, or, rather, Langdon had delayed approaching him, long enough for me to gain my main point. The uproar over the Textile Trust had become so great that the national department of commerce dared not refuse an investigation; and I straightway began to spread out in my daily letters the facts of the trust's enormous earnings and of the shameful sources of those earnings.

In the midst of the adulation, of the blares upon the trumpets of fame that saluted my waking and were wafted to me as I fell asleep at night—in the midst of all the turmoil, I was often in a great and brooding silence, longing for her, now with the imperious energy of passion, and now with the sad ache of love. What was she doing? What was she thinking? Now that Langdon had again played her false for the old price, with what eyes was she looking into the future?

Alva, settled in a West Side apartment not far from the ancestral white elephant, telephoned, asking me to come. I went, because she could and would give me news of Anita. But as I entered her little drawing-room, I said: "It was curiosity that brought me. I wished to see how you were installed."

"Isn't it nice and small?" cried she. "Billy and I haven't the slightest difficulty in finding each other—as people so often have in the big houses." And it was Billy this and Billy that, and what Billy said and thought and felt—and before they were married, she had called him William, and had declared "Billy" to be the most offensive combination of letters that ever fell from human lips.

"I needn't ask if you are happy," said I presently, with a dismal failure at looking cheerful. "I can't stay but a moment," I added, and if I had obeyed my feelings, I'd have risen up and taken myself and my pain away from surroundings as hateful to me as a summer sunrise in a death-chamber.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, in some confusion. "Then excuse me." And she hastened from the room.

I thought she had gone to order, or perhaps to bring, the t[illegible]. The long minutes dragged away until ten had passed. Hearing a rustling in the hall, I rose, intending to take leave the instant she appeared. The rustling stopped just outside. I waited a few seconds, cried: "Well, I'm off. Next time I want to be alone, I'll know where to come," and advanced to the door. It was not Alva hesitating there; it was Anita.

"I beg your pardon," said I, coldly.

If there had been room to pass I should have gone. What devil possessed me? Certainly in all our relations I had found her direct and frank, if anything, too frank. Doubtless it was the influence of my associations down town, where for so many months I had been dealing with the "short-card" crowd of high finance, who would hardly play the game straight even when that was the easy way to win. My long, steady stretch in that stealthy and sinuous company had put me in the state of mind in which it is impossible to credit any human being with a motive that is decent or an action that is not a dead-fall. Thus the obvious transformation in her made no impression on me. Her haughtiness, her coldness, were gone, and with them had gone all that had been least like her natural self, most like the repellent conventional pattern to which her mother and her associates had molded her. But I was saying to myself: "A trap! Langdon has gone back to his wife. She turns to me." And I loved her and hated her. "Never," thought I, "has she shown so poor an opinion of me as now."

"My uncle told me day before yesterday that it was not he but you," she said, lifting her eyes to mine. It is inconceivable to me now that I could have misread their honest story; yet I did.

"I had no idea your uncle's notion of honor was also eccentric," said I, with a satirical smile that made the blood rush to her face.

"That is unjust to him," she replied, earnestly.

"He says he made you no promise of secrecy. And he confessed to me only because he wished to convince me that he had good reason for his high opinion of you."

"Really!" said I, ironically. "And no doubt he found you open wide to conviction—now." This a subtlety to me. She came into the room and seated herself. "Won't you stop, please, for a moment longer?" she said. "I hope that, at, least, we can part without bitterness. I understand now that everything is over between us. A woman's vanity makes her belief that a man cares for her die hard. I am convinced now—I assure you, I am. I shall trouble you no more about the past. But I have the right to ask you to hear me when I say that Langdon came, and that I myself sent him away; sent him back to his wife."

"Touching self-sacrifice," said I, ironically.

"No," she replied. "I cannot claim any credit. I sent him away only because you and Alva had taught me how to judge him better. I do not despise him as do you; I know too well what has made him what he is. But I had to send him away."

My comment was an incredulous look and shrug. "I must be going," I said.

"You do not believe me?" she asked.

"In my place, would you believe?" replied I. "You say I have taught you. Well, you have taught me, too—for instance, that the years you've spent on your knees in the musty temple of conventionality before false gods have made you—fit only for the Langdon sort of thing. You can't learn how to stand erect, and your eyes cannot bear the light."

"I am sorry," she said, slowly, hesitatingly, "that your faith in me died just when I might, perhaps, have justified it. Ours has been a pitiful series of misunderstandings."

"A trap! A trap!" I was warning myself. "You've been a fool long enough, Blacklock." And aloud I said: "Well, Anita, the series is ended now. There's no longer any occasion for our lying or posing to each other. Any arrangements your uncle's lawyers suggest will be made."

I was bowing, to leave without shaking hands with her. But she would not have it so. "Please!" she said, stretching out her long, slender arm and offering me her hand.

What a devil possessed me that day! With every atom of me longing for her, I yet was able to take her hand and say, with a smile, that was, I doubt not, as mocking as my tone: "By all means let us be friends. And I trust you will not think me discourteous if I say that I shall feel safer in our friendship when we are both on neutral ground."

"'YOU DO NOT BELIEVE ME?' SHE ASKED."

As I was turning away, her look, my own heart, made me turn again. I caught her by the shoulders. I gazed into her eyes. "If I could only trust you, could only believe you!" I cried.

"You cared for me when I wasn't worth it," she said. "Now that I am more like what you once imagined me, you do not care."

Up between us rose Langdon's face—cynical, mocking, contemptuous. "Your heart is his! You told me so! Don't lie to me!" I exclaimed. And before she could reply, I was gone.

Out from under the spell of her presence, back among the tricksters and assassins, the traps and ambushes of Wall street, I believed again; believed firmly the promptings of the devil that possessed me. "She would have given you a brief fool's paradise," said that devil. "Then what a hideous awakening!" And I cursed the day when New York's insidious snobbishness had tempted my vanity into starting me on that degrading chase after "respectability."

"If she does not move to free herself soon," said I to myself, "I will put my own lawyer to work. My right eye offends me. I will pluck it out."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"WILD WEEK."

"The Seven" made their fatal move on Updegraff's advice, I suspect. But they would not have adopted his suggestion had it not been so exactly congenial to their own temper of arrogance and tyranny and contempt for the people who meekly, year after year, presented themselves for the shearing with fatuous bleats of enthusiasm.

"The Seven," of course, controlled directly, or indirectly, all but a few of the newspapers with which I had advertising contracts. They also controlled the main sources through which the press was supplied with news—and often and well they had used this control, and surprisingly cautious had they been not so to abuse it that the editors and the public would become suspicious. When my war was at its height, when I was beginning to congratulate myself that the huge magazines of "The Seven" were empty almost to the point at which they must sue for peace on my own terms, all in four days 43 of my 67 newspapers—and they the most important—notified me that they would no longer carry out their contracts to publish my daily letter. They gave as their reason, not the real one, fear of "The Seven," but fear that I would involve them in ruinous libel suits. I who had legal proof for every statement I made; I who was always careful to understate! Next, one press association after another ceased to send out my letter as news, though they had been doing so regularly for months. The public had grown tired of the "sensation," they said.

I countered with a telegram to one or more newspapers in every city and large town in the United States:

"'The Seven' are trying to cut the wires between the truth and the public. If you wish my daily letter, telegraph me direct and I will send it at my expense."

The response should have warned "The Seven." But it did not. Under their orders the telegraph companies refused to transmit the letter. I got an injunction. It was obeyed in typical, corrupt corporation fashion—they sent my matter, but so garbled that it was unintelligible. I appealed to the courts. In vain.

To me, it was clear as sun in cloudless noonday sky that there could be but one result of this insolent and despotic denial of my rights and the rights of the people, this public confession of the truth of my charges. I turned everything salable or mortgageable into cash, locked the cash up in my private vaults, and waited for the cataclysm.

Thursday—Friday—Saturday. Apparently all was tranquil; apparently the people accepted the Wall street theory that I was an "exploded sensation." "The Seven" began to preen themselves; the strain upon them to maintain prices, if no less than for three months past, was not notably greater; the crisis would pass, I and my exposures would be forgotten, the routine of reaping the harvests and leaving only the gleanings for the sowers would soon be placidly resumed.

Sunday. Roebuck, taken ill as he was passing the basket in the church of which he was the shining light, died at midnight—a beautiful, peaceful death, they say, with his daughter reading the Bible aloud, and his lips moving in prayer. Some hold that, had he lived, the tranquillity would have continued; but this is the view of those who cannot realize that the tide of affairs is no more controlled by the "great men" than is the river led down to the sea by its surface flotsam, by which we measure the speed and direction of its current. Under that terrific tension, which to the shallow seemed a calm, something had to give way. If the dam had not yielded where Roebuck stood guard, it must have yielded somewhere else, or might have gone all in one grand crash.

Monday. You know the story of the artist and his Statue of Grief—how he molded the features a hundred times, always failing, always getting an anticlimax, until at last in despair he gave up the impossible and finished the statue with a veil over the face. I have tried again and again to assemble words that would give some not too inadequate impression of that tremendous week in which, with a succession of explosions, each like the crack of doom, the financial structure that housed $0,000,000 of people burst, collapsed, was engulfed. I cannot. I must leave it to your memory or your imagination.

For years the financial leaders, crazed by the excess of power which the people had in ignorance and overconfidence and slovenly good-nature permitted them to acquire, had been tearing out the honest foundations on which alone so vast a structure can hope to rest solid and secure. They had been substituting rotten beams painted to look like stone and iron. The crash had to come! the sooner, the better—when a thing is wrong, each day's delay compounds the cost of righting it. So, with all the horrors of "Wild Week" in mind, all its physical and mental suffering, all its ruin and rioting and bloodshed, I still can insist that I am justly proud of my share in bringing it about. The blame and the shame are wholly upon those who made "Wild Week" necessary and inevitable.

In catastrophes, the cry is "Each for himself!" But in a cataclysm, the obvious wise selfishness is generosity, and the cry is: "Stand together, for, singly, we perish." This was a cataclysm. No one could save himself, except the few who, taking my often-urged advice and following my example, had entered the ark of ready money. Farmer and artisan and professional man and laborer owed merchant; merchant owed banker; banker owed depositor. No one could pay because no one could get what was due him or could realize upon his property. The endless chain of credit that binds together the whole of modern society had snapped in a thousand places. It must be repaired, instantly and securely. But how—and by whom?

(To be Continued.)

Life is like sea water; it never gets quite sweet until it is drawn up into heaven.—Richter.

HER MISTAKEN OPINION

By EFFIE W. MERRIMAN

Russell Maynard sat in his office chair, his elbows on his desk, his curly head supported by both hands and his eyes fixed on a dainty perfumed note spread out before him. He was reading it over and over, scarcely taking in the meaning of the words, which he already knew by heart. It had been brought to him with the early morning mail, and was in answer to one which he had slipped into Miriam Grant's hand the night before, when he helped her into her carriage after Mrs. Lee's party, and it was now nearly noon; yet that letter was the only one he had opened.

"You can never know, dear friend, what pain it gives me to write this," the words seemed to be traced in delicate lines of fire which were burning themselves into his brain, "for until I read your note asking me to be your wife, I did not realize how selfish I have been in striving to hold the friendship which has become so dear to me. I know that I have a deeper regard for you than for any other man of my acquaintance, but I do not love you. For hours I have tried to persuade myself that I do, but I cannot. I should be false to my womanhood were I to say anything else, and I should do you a cruel wrong were I to marry you, for I am not one who could make a man happy unless I could look up to him as being greater than myself.

"Russell, I wish we might still be friends; life will be very dull without your friendship (I know just how selfish I must appear), but if you cannot come as you have always come, without fostering the hope that we may be more nearly related, it will be better for us to see very little of each other. I am quite sure, dear friend, that I have read my heart correctly. Your sincere friend,

"MIRIAM GRANT."

"She means just what she says," thought poor Russell. "Miriam is not the sort of girl to play with a fellow's heart. She has thought this all out, and she cried—there are traces of tears on the paper. Oh, Miriam, Miriam! why couldn't you have loved me?" The strong man laid his forehead on the letter and his frame shook convulsively. A little hand was laid

"I Do Not Mean to Propose," Answeren Miriam.

timidly on his arm, and he started nervously, for he had thought he was alone.

"I've comed," said a soft voice in his ears.

Russell raised his head; his face was so white and drawn that the ragged little mite of humanity standing before him stared at him for a moment, half afraid.

"Well," said Russell, wearily, "what do you want?"

At the sound of his voice the boy lost his momentary fear, and his dirty face became beautiful with the great happiness which shone from the big brown eyes.

"I've comed ter live with yer, Don't yer member 'bout my bein' yer boy?"

"To live with me! My boy! What in thunder do you mean?"

Russell spoke petulantly. He loved children, and usually had a kind word for the most unpromising specimen of childhood; but to-day he was not in a mood to make himself agreeable, or to exercise patience.

"Yer said," the little waif cleared his throat and tried to force back the tears which were fast filling his eyes; "yer said as how I could live with yer an' be yer boy when gran'ther didn't want me no more." By this time the little body trembled so violently that the child dropped down on Russell's footstool.

"Ter-day they put gran'ther in a hole in the ground. They telled me as how he can't never git out, an' I must go to the poorhouse; but yer said—yer telled me I could be yer boy, so I comed right here."

Russell did not answer. He was staring in perplexity at his strange guest, and trying to recall the conversation to which he alluded.

"I guess yer don't 'member," said the little fellow, sadly. "But yer said it, an' then yer buyed apples o' gran'ther."

"Oh! Was it your grandfather who sold apples to me?"

"Uh-huh!"

"And he is dead?"

"The doctor said as how he was dead as a doornail, an'—an' he never said nothin' ter me when I telled him as how I was hungry."

The boy was crying now in a silent way that went straight to Russell's heart.

"Why not?" he thought. "It will give me something to occupy my mind. It may keep me from making quite a fool of myself. I have never had a great amount of respect for the men who die of unrequited affection," and he smiled sarcastically.

"Be yer goin' ter take me ter the poorhouse?"

"Not if you are a good boy. We're going to hunt up a new suit of clothes, as soon as I write a letter. Don't you think you could wash a little of the dirt from your face if I should show you where to find water?"

He led the way to the toilet room, then returned to his desk.

"Dear Miss Grant," he wrote. "We shall still be friends, but I cannot meet you on the old footing just yet, and so do not wonder if you do not see me for a little while. It is hard to bear—harder even than I thought it would be. If you never marry until you find someone nobler than yourself, I shall certainly not be obliged to bear the added burden of jealousy.

"Yours, etc.

"RUSSELL J. MAYNARD."

"It isn't at all satisfactory," said Russell, as he folded the note and put it into an envelope, "but I could do no better if I racked my brains for a week."

Nearly three months had passed and he had not yet summoned courage to visit Miriam Grant. She had spent part of the time with an old friend in a neighboring state, and since her return he had planned several times to call on her, but never felt himself quite strong enough to do so.

"I don't want to make a fool of myself," he thought. "It has never been my ambition to marry a wife who did not love me. If she can't, she can't, and I shall not beg for what is not given freely; but, oh, Miriam, if you—"

He stopped suddenly and began a romp with Dick.

"I found a lovely lady to-day, uncle," said Dick, finally.

"Where did you find her?"

"She rang the bell, and Mrs. Wilson was busy, so I opened the door. She said you must bring me to see her some day, and I said 'thank you; uncle will be pleased to.' Did I do it right?"

"Quite right," answered Russell, laughing. "You are learning very fast."

"I told her perhaps we would come to-night, and she said she should expect us; then she went home without seeing Mrs. Wilson at all."

"I don't know about allowing you to make engagements for me, young man," answered Russell, carelessly, as he took up the evening paper and settled himself comfortably.

"Can't we go just a few minutes?" pleaded Dic. "She was so pretty and so good, and I love her just awful."

"Mercy on me! Has it come to that so soon? What is the lady's name, may I ask?"

"Miss Grant. She said you knew where she lived."

"Miss—ahem—yes, I know! What did she say about my—your going to see her?"

Dick repeated the conversation, and was rewarded by being told that he might go to call on the pretty lady, and soon he was seated in a chair very close to her side, busily engaged with a picture book.

"How did you happen to do it?" asked Miriam of Russell, with a glance at the boy.

"I don't know, I'm sure," he answered, with a smile. "I had to make a fool of myself in some way, I think. My friends tell me that I couldn't have succeeded better."

"You haven't added to your reputation as a man of common sense and good judgment," answered Miriam, with a laugh.

"I am kept well posted in that direction; but really—I suppose you'd laugh at me for saying so—but the little chap makes such things quite easy to bear."

"Russell, why haven't you been to see me before? I felt hurt to think that I should be the last of all your friends to learn of your new acquisition."

"I haven't treated you fairly, but I—well, to tell the truth, I haven't yet arrived at the stage where I am willing to meet you simply as a friend."

"I am glad of it."

"What do you mean? Miriam—"

Russell hesitated, and his face became a shade paler. He did not want to make a fool of himself a second time, he thought, and he had been very sure that Miriam Grant returned his love.

"I do not mean to propose," answered Miriam, with blushing cheeks and laughing eyes, "but I have no objection to confessing that—"

"Confessing what?" Russell had her in his arms, and Dick was staring wide-eyed on such a scene as he had never before witnessed.

"That I was mistaken in you. I thought you an easy-going individual without much purpose, one who would be easily swayed by public opinion, and such a man, though very pleasant as an acquaintance, was not my ideal as a husband."

Russell and Miriam have been married several years, and Dick still lives with them. People who predicted all sorts of trouble now say that they are the oddest couple that ever lived, and it is fortunate that they married each other, for neither would have been happy with any one else, or made any one else happy.