

Complete Story.

Cressy's New Year's Rent.

A STORY OF A COLDER LAND.

Fred Hallowell was sitting at his desk in the "Gazette" office, looking listlessly out into the City Park where the biting wind was making the snowflakes dance madly around the leafless trees and in the empty fountain, and he was almost wishing that there would be so few engagements to cover as to allow him an afternoon in-doors to write "specials." The storm was the worst of the season, and as this was the last day of December, it looked as if the old year were going out with a tumultuous train of sleet and snow. But if he had seriously entertained any hopes of enjoying a quiet day, these were dispelled by an office-boy who summoned him to the city desk.

"Good morning, Mr Hallowell," said the city editor, cheerfully. "Here is a clipping from an afternoon paper which says that a French family in Houston-street has been dispossessed and is in want. Mr Wilson called my attention to it because he thinks, from the number given, the house belongs to old Q. C. Baggold. We don't like Baggold, you know, and if you find he is treating his tenants unfairly we can let you have all the space you want to show him up. At any rate, go over there and see what the trouble is: there is not much going on to-day."

Fred took the clipping and read it as he walked back to his desk. It was very short—five or six lines only—and the facts stated were about as the city editor had said. The young man got into his overcoat and wrapped himself up warmly, and in a few moments was himself battling against the little blizzard with the other pedestrians whom he had been watching in the City Park from the office windows.

When he reached Houston-street he travelled westward for several blocks, until he came into a very poor district crowded with dingy tenement-houses that leaned against one another in an uneven sort of way, as if they were tired of the sad kind of life they had been witnessing for so many years. The snow that had piled up on the window-sills and over the copings seemed to brighten up the general aspect of the quarter, because it filled in the cracks and chinks of material misery, and made the buildings look at least temporarily picturesque, just as paint and powder for a time may hide the traces of old age and sorrow. Fred found the number 179 painted on a piece of tin that had become bent and rusty from long service over a narrow doorway, and as he stood there comparing it with the number given in his clipping, a little girl with a shawl drawn tightly over her head and around her thin little shoulders, came out of the dark entrance and stopped on the door-sill for a moment, surprised, no doubt, at the sight of the tall, rosy-cheeked young man so warmly clad in a big woollen overcoat that you could have wrapped her up in several times, with goods left over to spare.

"Hello! little girl," said Fred, quickly. "Does Mr Cressy live here?" The child stared for a few seconds at the stranger, and then she answered, bashfully: "Yes, sir. But he has got to go away."

"But he hasn't gone yet?" continued Fred; and then noticing that the child, in her short calico skirt, was shivering from the cold, and that her feet were getting wet with the snow, he added, "Come inside a minute and tell me where I can find Mr Cressy."

The two stepped into the dark narrow hallway that ran through the house to the stairway in the rear, where a narrow window with a broken pane let in just enough light to prove

there was day outside. The little girl leaned against the wall, and looked up at the reporter as if she suspected him of having no good intentions toward the man for whom he was inquiring. Very few strangers ever came into that house to do good, she knew. Most of them came for money—rent money and sometimes they came, as a man had come for Mr Cressy, to tell him he must go.

"What floor does he live on?" asked Fred.

"On the fifth floor, sir," answered the child. "In the back, sir. But I think he is really going away, sir."

"Well, no matter about that," said Fred, smiling. "I will go up and see him. I hope he won't have to go out in the storm. It is not good for little girls to go out in the storm, either," he added. "Does your mamma know you are going out?"

"Oh, yes, sir!" She has sent me to the Sisters to try to get some medicine."

"Is she sick?" asked Fred, quickly.

"Yes, sir," continued the child.

"What floor does she live on? I will step in and see her."

"Oh, you'll see her! She's in the room, too."

"Then you are Mr Cressy's little girl?"

"Yes, sir."

So Fred patted her on the head and told her to hurry over to the Sisters, and gave her threepence to ride in the car; and then he opened the door for her, and as soon as she had left he felt his way back to the staircase and climbed to the fifth floor.

There he knocked upon a door, which was soon opened by a man apparently forty years of age, a man of slightly foreign appearance, with a careworn look, but with as honest a face as you could find anywhere.

"Is this Mr Cressy?" asked Fred.

"Yes, my name's Cressy," replied the man. He spoke with so slight an accent that it was hardly noticeable.

"I am a reporter from the 'Gazette,'" continued Fred.

"Oh!" said the man. "Come in," and as he spoke he looked somewhat embarrassed and anxious, for this was doubtless the first time he had had any dealings with a newspaper.

Lying on a bed in an alcove was a woman who looked very ill, and piled in a corner near the door were a couple of boxes and a few pieces of furniture. The stove had not yet been taken down, and some pale embers in it only just kept the chill off the atmosphere. Fred took off his hat, and led the man across the room toward the window.

"Have you been dispossessed?" he asked.

"Yes," said the man; "we must leave to-night."

"Why?" asked the reporter.

Cressy smiled in a ghastly sort of way.

"Because," he replied, "because I have not a cent to my name, sir, and the landlord has got it in for me—and I must go."

"Who is your landlord?" asked the reporter.

"Baggold—Q. C. Baggold, the shoe-man."

"How much do you owe?"

"Four pounds—two months' rent."

"Were you ever in arrears before?"

"Never."

"What's the trouble? Out of work?"

"Yes, sir, I have been. But I've got a job now, and I'll have money on the tenth of the month. But that is not it."

"What is it, then?" continued Fred.

"Well, I'll tell you. I don't want this in the paper, but I'll tell you. Baggold hates me. He knows the woman's sick, and he takes advantage

of my being him to drive me out. Do you want to know why? Well, I'll tell you. I worked for him for five years, sir, in his shoe factory. He brought me over from France to do the fine work. He had a lawsuit about six months ago, and he offered me £100 to lie for him on the stand. I would not do it, sir, and when they called me as a witness I told the truth, and that settled the case, and Baggold had to pay £2000, sir, for a sly game on a contract. Then he sent me off and I've been looking for a job, and I've got behind, and I'm just getting up again, and here he is sending me out into the snow! To-morrow is what we call at home, in France, the jour de l'an—the day of the New Year, sir, and it is a fête. And the little one here always looked forward to that day, sir, for a doll or for a few sweetmeats; but this time—I don't think she'll have a roof for her little head! I have not a place in the world to go to, sir, but to the police station, and there's the woman on her back."

Two big tears rolled down the man's cheeks. Fred felt a lump rising in his throat, and he knew that if he had had twenty dollars in his pocket he would have given it to Cressy. But he did not have £4, so he coughed vigorously and put on his hat quickly and said:

"Well, this is hard, Mr Cressy. I'll see what we can do. I must go up town for a while and then I'll come back and see you. Don't move out in this storm till the last minute."

As he rushed down the stairs he met the little girl coming back with a big blue bottle of something with a yellow label on it. He stopped and pulled a quarter out of his pocket, thrust it into the child's hand, and leaped on down the stairs, leaving the little girl more frightened than surprised as he dashed out into the snow.

He entered the first drug store he came to and looked up Q. C. Baggold's address in the directory. It was nearly four o'clock, and he argued the rich shoe manufacturer would be at his house. The address given in the directory was in a broad street in the fashionable quarter of the city. Half an hour later Fred was pulling at Mr Baggold's door-bell. The butler who answered the summons thought Mr Baggold was in, and took Fred's card after showing the young man into the parlour. This was a large, elegantly furnished room filled with costly ornaments, almost anyone of which, if offered for sale, would have brought the amount of Cressy's debt, or much more.

Presently Mr Baggold came into the room. He was a short man, with

a bald head and a sharp nose, and his small eyes were fixed very close to one another under a not very high forehead.

"I am a reporter from the 'Gazette,'" began Fred at once. "I have called to see you, Mr Baggold, about this man Cressy whom you have ordered to be dispossessed."

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Baggold, smiling. "My agent has told me something about this matter, but I hardly think it is of sufficient importance to be of interest to the readers of the 'Gazette.'"

"The readers of the 'Gazette,'" continued Fred, "are always interested in good deeds. Mr. Baggold, and especially when these are performed by rich men. I came here hoping you would disavow the action of your agent, and say that the Cressys might remain in the room."

"Nonsense!" replied Mr. Baggold. "I cannot interfere with my agent. I pay him to take care of my rents, and I can't be looking after fellows who won't pay. This man Cressy is in arrears, and he must get out."

"But his wife is sick," argued Fred. "Bah!" retorted the other. "That is an old excuse. These scoundrels try all sorts of dodges to cheat a man whom they think has money."

"This woman is actually sick, Mr. Baggold," said Fred, severely, "and to drive her out in a storm like this is positive cruelty."

"Cressy has had two weeks to find other quarters, and to-morrow is the first of the month. I can't keep him any longer."

"Yes, to-morrow is the great French fete-day, and you put Cressy in the street."

"My dear sir," returned the rich man, "I cannot allow sentiment to interfere with my business. If I did I should never collect rents in Houston-street. And, as I told you before, I do not see that this question is one to interest the public. It is purely a matter of my private business."

"Very true," replied Fred; "but I don't think it would look well in print."

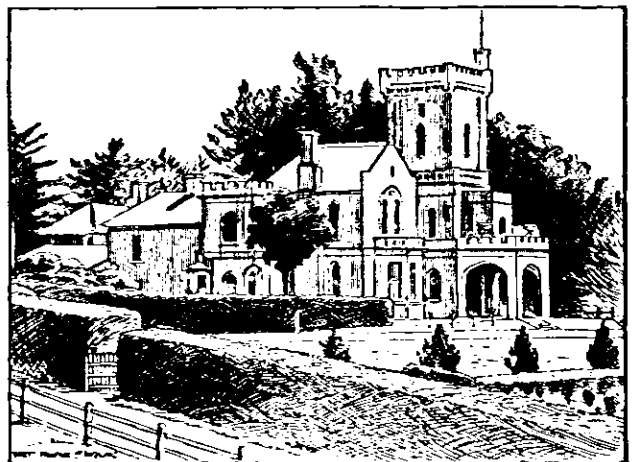
This statement seemed to startle Mr. Baggold a little, and Fred thought it made him feel uncomfortable. There was a brief silence, after which the rich man said:

"It would depend entirely upon how you put it in print. To tell you the truth, I am not at all in favour of these sensational articles that so many newspapers publish nowadays. Reporters often jump at conclusions before they are familiar with the facts of a case, and it makes things disagreeable for all concerned. Now, if you will only listen to me, sir, I think we can come to an un-

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