Back to Broadway

By George Randolph Chester

The mere fact that he was a many times millionaire and owned or controlled enough railroads to string almost twice across the continent did not help the far-famed E. H. Cash one bit in the present juncture. Indeed, his illustrious name was much more likely, if he ventured to use it, to get him into trouble than to aid him.

Impossible as it may seem, the illustrious ringmaster of the financial circus was without a cent, in a strange city, a distressingly immense distance from New York, and with absolutely no prospect of getting money unless he should earn it by manual labor, like any other homeless and penniless wanderer. Such an absurd condition was his own fault entirely, and due to two causes: his tremendous business energy and his equally notable personal carelessness.

Mr. Cash was supposed to have started upon a summer cruise in northern waters, and had ostensibly cut the cables from all his business affairs. At Quebec, however, some newspapers had been brought aboard, and in one of them he found an obscure four-line item which made him change his plans in a hurry.

"I am afraid I'll have to apply for a week's shore leave," he explained to his guests, a "stag" crowd. "You fellows don't need any help in entertaining yourselves, for you never get away from the poker table anyhow except to eat and sleep. You own the Petrel till I get back. Just lazy around wherever you like, and pick me up here a week from Monday morning, if you will."

As he hastily threw some necessities into a traveling bag, he noted that he needed a shave, but there was no time for it now. He had almost literally "jumped" into a plain traveling suit, and did not even stop to put on his watch. He found that he had enough cash on hand to pay for his transportation, berth and meals en route, and beyond that he had no worry, for his checkbook and papers were in his traveling bag.

Ashore, he caught his train with but brief minutes to spare, and was so absorbed in the deal he meant to put through that he was a hundred miles on his way before he missed his luggage, finding in place of it only the uncomfortable reflection that throughout his long 30-hour ride he would be deprived of a shave and clean linen.

He was not one given to worry, however, and when he had his final brushing up at his destination he mechanically handed a dollar to the porter; but after he had left the train he found to his dismay that he had only one solitary ten-cent piece in his pocket.

Five cents of that he used in carfare to the office of the man he had so hastily come all this distance to see, and the other five cents he used in riding back downtown. His man had been called from the city that morning, and would not be back for a week or more! Preoccupied with vexation, he walked into the nearest big hotel and scrawled his signature upon the register.

The clerk hesitated a moment, though merely out of habitual courtesy.

"Your luggage not arrived yet, Mr. —er—Cash?" he stumbled, puzzling over the register.

Mr. Cash smiled grimly and rubbed his unshaven chin.

"Lost en route," he replied.

"Very unfortunate," commented the clerk with rather a cold expression, his eyes resting casually upon the unshaven face and soiled linen. "The rules of the house, of course, require payment in advance."

The prospective guest frowned a bit haughtily.

"Cash is my name," he observed. "E. H. Cash—of New York."

"Quite so," agreed the clerk, still more coldly. "Some relation of the famous railroad operator, no doubt."

"I am that Cash," announced the other with a trace of anger, resenting the implied sneer.

"Wake up!" admonished the clerk, throwing off all his suavity. "You are asleep under the deck-awning of your yacht, the Petrel, Mr. Cash. You just steamed away from Quebec yesterday morning, bound for the Labrador coast, and are only dreaming that you are here." And before Mr. Cash's eyes he thrust a folded newspaper that had been lying at his elbow, pointing sternly to a paragraph.

"Yes, that was to have been true," said Cash, recognizing the reasonableness of the clerk's stand in the matter. "The yacht left there for a short cruise yesterday morning, with my friends aboard, but I took a run down here. I can tell you every man that was on the Petrel. There's Billy Edwards—"

"I know," the clerk interrupted him. "Here's the entire list of guests, which anybody could read. Now, drop it. In the first place, Cash has a mustache."

"The papers and their cartoonists are using the old photographs—they always do!" snapped Cash. "I have been without a mustache for over a year."

"Step out of the way!" snarled the clerk, pounding savagely upon a bell. "You're lucky I don't have you arrested."

Cash turned. The two or three men who had now come up behind him to register glared back at him in icy contempt, noting the unshaven face, the soiled collar and shirt front. For a moment he lost his poise, and a wild idea came to him of attempting to explain to these men. Even as the thought came, however, he realized the futility of it and walked out of the place, followed, too closely for comfort, by a broad shouldered porter. By the time he had gained the street he was fuming, but a blue-and-white sign a block away brought him back, with a comfortable jerk, to practical affairs. The sign betokened the location of a telegraph office, and as a happy haven of refuge he hurried to it.

"But, Really, I Can't Seem to Please You, Miss."

"Collect," he directed presently, handing in his telegram at the receiving window.

The girl in charge did not even glance at the telegram. She was looking at the man; at the unshaven face and the soiled collar.

"Are you located in the city?" she asked mechanically.

"No."

"Where are you stopping?"

"Nowhere as yet," he confessed, angry with himself that he felt a flush rising under the skin of his cheeks.

"We can send no telegrams for you collect without a deposit sufficient to insure payment," she advised him.

"Look at that telegram," he expostulated; "see to whom it is addressed, and by whom it is signed!"

Still without looking at it she shoved the yellow slip toward him.

"It don't make any difference who it is to or who it is from," she insisted. "I've got my orders." And she turned to the next customer.

He glared at her for a moment, but she remained entirely unaware of his existence, and, crumbling the telegram in his hand, he strode out with a set of emotions too varied and too much commingled to classify. An attempt at a near-by bank to draw upon his New York house of exchange came more nearly resulting in his arrest than any of the other experiments, and it was a very much stupefied man who trudged aimlessly up the street, as much a pauper in this city, where he could not think of a soul who knew him, as any tramp with whom he might brush elbows!

He turned into a dreary little park, where a few discouraged-looking trees fought to suck life from the stern gravel in which they were rooted. It was a most unattractive place, and the only thing that drew him unconsciously into it was the fact that here were benches upon which he might rest without being expected to pay for anything. He was tired and hot, and, appalling fact! hungry; moreover, he noted with aversion that every lounger upon every bench bore the same attitude of hopeless dejection as himself. He had a bad quarter of an hour, in which a great many of his impressions of the corresponding relations of human beings to each other underwent a radical change. For one thing, he began to estimate his actual value, considered merely as two hands and a brain, if thrown upon the immediate market, for it looked as if the great railroad king would have to hunt a job at unskilled labor.

As he sat dejectedly humped over, his elbows upon his knees and his hands clasped idly together, he noticed that a brown skirt—with a draggled bit of braid at the bottom—that twice had slowly passed him, now stopped directly in front of him. Naturally he glanced up and found a very good-looking girl gazing fixedly down at him. The moment she met his eyes her face lighted with a smile of delight, and she came toward him.

"I just knew it was Mr. Cash," she began vivaciously. "My! this is a long way from Broadway, isn't it?"

No sound had ever rung more agreeably in his ears than his own name pronounced at this moment. For the last couple of hours that magic word had completely lost its power, and he began to realize how few people knew him after all. It was with a sense of positive gratitude that he answered this girl, whom he could not place, but whose face seemed pleasingly familiar.

"Indeed it is," he assented, rising and removing his hat. "I expect I am stupid, but really I cannot seem to place you, Miss—"

"Bessie Williams, but you don't know the name," she returned. "I used to manicure you in the Hotel Belveigh, don't you remember? You've had your mustache shaved off, but, goodness! I'd know those hands with the mole on both little fingers if I found you down in Africa stained with walnut juice. I guess you'll think I've got a nerve for wedging in this way, but honest, anybody that was ever nice to me in little old New York looks like a long-lost brother!"

He remembered her perfectly now, and he smiled with amusement as he recalled her vivid personality. She was a girl who had struggled up from the most squalid section of the East side, and was noted on Broadway, not only for her own uncompromising rigidity of conduct, but for the number of other girls she had saved from "making fools of themselves." More especially, however, she was known for the picturesque slang which had clung to her as the only mark of her origin, and for the originality with which she used it. In the present juncture he was surprised to find her suddenly hesitate and show a bit of embarrassment.

"I feel somewhat in the cold myself," he admitted, to put her at ease. "What brings you out here so far?"

"I'm my own lemon," she replied, recovering her vivacity at once and rattling on with the greatest sangfroid, once she had plunged into the main topic. "Say, Mr. Cash, I'm going to be real open-faced with you about my troubles, because I know you don't make any mistakes in the dark and you don't keep the small change glued down. Every time I ever saw you there was a circle of tips rolling away from you in every direction, and once when a bell-hop got his leg broke I saw you peel off a fifty before anybody could ask if he had a mother. It's this way with me. I'm so stony broke that a ten-cent piece would look the size of the full moon coming up out of the water at Rockaway beach, and if you will just ship me back among the tall buildings I'll manicure the whole Cash family for a year!"

"I wish I could," he said sincerely, "but I haven't a penny upon which I can lay my hands. I'm as hard up as any loafer in this park."

"I beg your pardon," said Miss Williams with more dignity than he had expected to find in her. "I am very sorry that I made such a mistake." And she turned to go.

He could see that she was both hurt and mortified; that she had instantly come to the conclusion that he did not care to help her.

"Wait a minute," he called after her, his sympathies wonderfully quickened by his own disagreeable experience. "Come back here and sit down. I was perfectly honest when I said that I am in as much trouble as you are."

She was still incredulous, but he was so earnest in his insistence that she reluctantly came back and allowed him to seat her upon the bench beside him. He explained to her in careful detail precisely what had happened to him, and his unshaven face and soiled collar were sufficient corroboration. She laughed at his somberness when he had finished.

"Lovely!" she exclaimed with sparkling eyes. "For a minute I was afraid exchange had given me the wrong number, but I couldn't figure out how you'd joined the T. Wad family so quick. But now watch the blue trail of our gasoline. Come with your Aunt Bessie!"

She sprang to her feet and he arose uncertainly.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"To beat it before the banks close," she exultantly replied. "Before three o'clock we'll be looking over an assorted collection of time-tables, and I won't owe you a cent for my fare to New York and a new outfit from plume to patent leathers. Now, don't ask me how I'm going to do it, or I'll giggle myself to death over how easy it is."

She Went Right on Talking Into the Transmitter.

"If blind can lead blind I am very willing to be led," he laughingly observed as he caught step with her. "But you have not told me about your own troubles."

"Me!" she said with infinite disdain. "I fell a victim to my own fatal beauty and it gave me the brain storm all right. I dreamed I had a voice and a figure, and that if I just let the public know about them I'd have Patti forgotten and Melba retired on a pension. So I tried it, and 'The Belle of Broadway Company' Number Forty-Two quit here. That's all. There's only seven people in this town with pink nails and there's 42 girls to look after them. If I'd send to mother for a cent she'd have to borrow a jimmy and a dark lantern to get it; if I'd send to the boss barber at the Belveigh I'd get money so quick the edges would be scorched off when it got here, but I'd have to marry Jimmy when I got back, and while starving would be quicker, it wouldn't be so painful. And that starvation turn's no musical comedy, either. I've got a dinky little two-by-two room paid for until tomorrow night, and then it would have been little me to somebody's kitchen with a half-Nelson on a gas range. And I can't boil eggs."

They had crossed the little park by this time, and had stopped in front of one of those dingy-looking houses that have the perpetual smell of mildew in the front hall. She ushered him into a dim parlor embellished with six pieces of ragged plush furniture and a collection of atrocious wax flowers on the mantel under a glass globe, and then she tripped upstairs to the third floor. In a moment she hurried back with her suit case and a bowl of water. She threw up a blind and placed the bowl on a little table beside the window.

"First of all, you've got to look the part, so dip in your hand," she directed him as she opened the suit-case and produced her manicure set. She was silent only until she sat down. "When I get back to little old Broadway tomorrow night," she rattled on as she deftly and vigorously manicured him, "I'll promise never to get farther than four blocks away from the subway again as long as I live. I used to kick because I'd get called up to a room, as sure as death that the job would take an hour and a half, and that there'd be no tip, to manicure some waspy woman with her hair on the table and her complexion on the dresser, and her figure hanging up in a closet, and the rest of her beauty scattered on four chairs and the bed; but even that would be joy to me now. I've seen all of the country I want, and it's Bessie-sit-by-the-fire for me from this on! I'm willing to live the rest of my life with the 'L' trains rattling over my head; and when I die, if they'll just bury me any place on the Great White Way, I'll lie happy and still in my grave forever. Now you're done." A sour-visaged old lady had come to the door and glared at them, then walked away. "I don't owe her a cent, and she don't bite," observed the girl; "so just you sit here and look sassy till I get back."

She dried her manicure set and packed it in its roll of chamois and flannel and fine leather, put on her hat, and left him alone. In ten minutes she had returned, bearing a heavy package and jingling some coins in her hand.

"I got two dollars, one for the tools and one for my good looks," she joyously announced, "which is bright and cheerful when you remember that the tools only cost me 20 and the handsome face was a present. I gave a polite colored gentleman ten cents for these bricks, right out of his hod, so we've got a dollar-ninety to represent our capital."

"Bricks!" he repeated with a wondering glance at the bundle. "What on earth do you want with those?"

"To put in the suit case, so it won't go straight up when a bell-hop grabs it," she replied. "There's nothing in there now but an old waist that I couldn't get a cent on. Just think! I was going to hock that nice, ready-money-looking suit case the minute I got back to the room, if I hadn't met you! Now, you take this dollar-ninety. Right around the corner there's a ten-cent barber shop, and a gent's furnishing goods store right next door. You buy you one collar for 15 cents, one pair of cuffs for a quarter, one shave for ten cents, one shine for five cents, and a real extravagant-looking 15-cent cigar, but don't light the cigar. Have you got a clean handkerchief?" Fortunately he had. "Give it to me. Now, you bring back the dollar-thirty to spread around in tips; and hurry!"

When he returned, shaved and much refreshed, she had run a white thread through the hem of his handkerchief, and this she slipped up under his collar, tying it behind. So far as it was visible it looked like an immaculate white negligee shirt. She had him cut off his attached cuffs and don the clean ones.

"You look the part," she announced as she surveyed him with pride. "In a few jiffs I'll have a double extra sirloin for mine, please, but don't let me think about it or I'll faint."

Fifteen minutes later, his 15-cent cigar in fragrant evidence, he stood at the register of the best hotel in town—not the one to which he had gone before—but he did not sign himself "E. H. Cash." Instead he wrote:

O. H. Jones.
Miss Gertrude Jones.

"The two best suites you have," he ordered.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Jones," said the clerk deferentially, glancing at the respectable, brick-laden suit-case. "Anything you want sent up?"

"A boy with some telegraph blanks and a waiter."

Presently there came down from him a telegram marked "prepaid," and to be charged upon his bill. It was addressed to Henry Cruse of Henry Cruse & Co., bankers, New York, and read like this:

"Here incog. Jiggers, larruped, woolly. Wire $1,000 immediately to me as O. H. Jones, care Hotel Grace. Describe me, but waive other identification."

The telegram was unsigned, but the private code words in the body of the telegram were better than a signature. Having sent the wire, Mr. Cash knocked at the door of Miss Williams' reception room.

"Come in," cried a cheerful voice, and he opened the door.

She was at the telephone, and her eyes were sparkling as she nodded to him, but she went right on talking into the transmitter.

NEW IDEA OF EARTH'S AGE

Radium Has Caused Change in Scientist's Opoinions During the Past Five Years.

If such an authority as Prof. Arthur Holmes of the Imperial college, South Kensington, London, has any weight at all with people, the discovery of radium means that geologists must change their calculations materially as to the age of the earth if they wish to be taken seriously. He says, according to the New Press, it is a well known fact that if the proportion of radium in the interior of the earth is in any way equal to the radium in the rocks of the earth's surface the earth will not grow colder, as has always been taught, but it ought to be growing hotter. Calculations, however, show that the distribution of radium as it is found would be more than enough to keep the temperature of the earth stationary. Thorium and uranium also supply a great amount of heat and must be taken into account.

In order that the earth should be neither growing hotter nor cooling at a rate allowed by the radio-active elements as they disintegrate it is necessary, he says, to assume that the earth's store of radium be concentrated near the surface. The radio-active elements are found most abundantly in acid rocks, and their more basic associates are less rich. These acid rocks are characteristic of only the outermost zones of the crust, and there are many reasons for believing that with depth the nonacid rocks are predominant.

Earthquakes and similar terrestrial events have provided facts from which the condition of the earth's interior may be deduced with confidence. First, there is the crust zone, which has an approximate thickness of 30 miles. Then comes the stone zone, something under 100 miles thick, and, finally, the central iron core of the earth, with a density eight times greater than water. Meteorites contain radium, and Professors Strutt and Holmes say that these meteors contain the proof that no radium is found in the stone zone or inner core.

It is supposed that the earth began, of course, as a misty, nebulous mass and that it has become the great mass it is by the capture of meteors and greater masses floating in space during the ages. It is very unlikely that the earth was ever, as a whole, in a molten condition. It is surmised by several English savants that the internal heat probably arose in a great measure from the condensation of the mass as it grew.

The temperature would slowly rise until the fusion point of certain of the earth's constituents was reached. Then the pockets and tongues thus formed would tend to move away from the center, and the less heavy, stony substances would be squeezed outward relatively to a network of the heavier, rigid metals.

Surrounding the metallic core a thick zone of sandy rocks would be formed and the radio-active materials would be concentrated in the stony layers. When the oceans and the atmospheres were produced the sediment rocks appeared for the first time, and then came the earth's crust with the rocks that contain most of the radium and other radio-active elements. Before the advent of radium geologists did not recognize the difficulties presented by the peculiar makeup of the earth's crust. Radium did not create this difficulty, but it certainly emphasized it in the attention of scientists.

It can hardly be said that radium has given a blank check on the bank of time, for its discovery not only destroyed all the old measurements of the earth's heat, but it necessitated a new method for getting at it. Every kind of radio-active mineral, as well as radium, may be regarded as a self-contained hour glass; the radio-active emanations, such as helium, and residues such as lead, slowly accumulate at the expense of their ultimate parent uranium.

The geologist, who five years ago was embarrassed by the brevity of the time allowed to him for the evolution of the earth's crust, is now still more embarrassed by the overabundance of time that now confronts him. The recognition of radium means difficulties for the geologist and the absolute overthrow of every acknowledged theory as to the earth's age and development. The age of the earth, according to what happens to be radium, varies from 5,000,000,000 to 3,000,000,000 years, but what matters a few thousand million of years among geologists?