

Dr. Gilbert's Seven-Dollar Bill*

A Mysterious Bit of Paper and Its Strange Story

By Frank Lillie Pollock and J. D. Ellsworth

IT was a wet afternoon, and Mr. Francis Howland was walking, not on the slimy sidewalk, but on the rather more slimy pavement of the street. His umbrella was neatly folded and tucked under his left arm, and in the hollow of this arm nestled a brown paper parcel which he carefully kept in place with his right hand. The moisture had settled upon his glasses, causing him to step into puddles frequently, his hat was rapidly becoming saturated, and, as the sidewalks were packed with the usual rainy-day crowds, he was the object of much curiosity and even some ridicule.

His conduct was due, however, not to absent-mindedness, although Mr. Howland was a very absent-minded man. But he was a collector of rare china, and the delicate bit in the brown paper parcel, though bought at auction, was too precious to be sent home by messenger or express. That was why he dared not trust even himself to the jostling crowd upon the sidewalk and was hurrying toward the nearest cab-stand. When a cab was found he settled back on its cushions with a sigh of relief. At his own door he drew from his trousers pocket a roll of bills, handed the outside "two" to the driver, and waited impatiently for the change.

"Can't break that," said the cabby, and Mr. Howland, much annoyed, fumbled in his waistcoat pocket for the amount in silver.

When the china collector left his home next morning, his first stop was at the corner drug store, where he made a small purchase and again offered the outside bill of his roll. The clerk was about to make change, but after his first glance at the note he scrutinized it care-

fully and handed it back with the remark: "Sorry I can't change that;" adding, half apologetically, "never saw a seven-dollar bill before."

Although Mr. Howland had failed to examine the bill, he supposed it to be an ordinary two-dollar greenback, and he remembered positively having received it in change at the auction-room as a two. But now that he looked at it again it proved to be a seven. He had never given much attention to money as money, though he possessed a good deal of it, and while he had never before seen a seven-dollar bill, he was far from affirming that such a thing did not exist. In fact, it *did* exist, since he had it. Therefore, being thrifty in small matters, he congratulated himself upon being five dollars ahead. Thanking the drug clerk, he handed out another bill, and with a fortunate lapse into memory recalled his errand at the florist's. The violets were very fragrant that morning, and when he had selected a suitable bunch and produced his card to be sent with them, he proffered the seven-dollar bill in payment.

"I'll have to let that go till next time, Mr. Howland," said the florist after curiously examining the bill. Then he added in explanation, "I haven't the change this morning."

Though Howland was only a moderate smoker, he was impelled to enter a tobacconist's that particular morning and purchase a few cigars, without, however, getting rid of his seven-dollar bill. At the restaurant where he lunched at noon he again offered it, but was told by his favorite waiter that the fussy cashier refused to take it. That same afternoon it seemed convenient to re-

plenish his stock of stationery. When the seven-dollar bill was tendered in payment the dealer asked: "Haven't you the change, sir? I'm loaded up with large bills."

Now, Mr. Howland knew that he might insist on paying for his purchase as he chose, but he began to feel that he was handicapped by a certain ignorance on the subject of current issues—especially seven-dollar bills—which his vanity forbade him disclose. But he was all the more determined to pass that bill for its full face value, and next day he started out with that determination, instinctively avoiding the places where he was known. He found himself calling for all sorts of articles for which he had no use, but every time he handed out the troublesome bill it was politely refused with some familiar pretext. Finally it occurred to him to go to his friend Hall, the hatter. A silk hat would cost just seven dollars, and there would be no question of change involved. But one glance was enough for Hall who exclaimed, "Why, Howland, that thing's no earthly good—you've been taken in!" This came as an embarrassing shock to the collector who now remembered that the florist who pleaded a lack of change had plenty in his drawer and that others had offered equally poor excuses for not accepting the peculiar bill, which he now put away carefully in an inner pocket.

That night, in his own rooms, Howland got out a magnifying glass which he used for deciphering difficult marks on his china. Then he drew down the window-shades and took out the seven-dollar bill. Under the glass, while continuing to resemble in a general way a two-dollar silver certificate, the note showed some remarkable discrepancies. It had lost its crackle, but did not display signs of much handling, and the signatures were perfectly distinct. They were not different, but the same repeated—"W. P. Kendall,"—and beneath it the single word, "Treasurer." On the face was a tropical landscape, with a building in the foreground, the whole surrounded by a wreath of palms. There were two portraits on the back, beautifully ex-

ecuted. One was that of a middle-aged, full bearded man, and might represent any one of half a dozen past secretaries of the Treasury and still be unknown to Mr. Howland. The other face, equally strange to him, was the most striking he had ever seen. It was clean-shaven, handsome and full of character—one that could not be forgotten.

The fact that neither face was familiar to him did not surprise Howland. Few men can name half the portraits that have appeared on the national currency. But the china collector noticed that all the "sevens" on the bill, and they were numerous, were almost equally perfect "twos" when reversed, and that a monogram which appeared in several places, and which he had assumed to be "U. S." proved on closer examination to be "N. G." In fact, the whole lettering and numbering of the queer note was a jumble that meant nothing to him. He would have taken it to his banker for an explanation, but felt too much humiliated to acknowledge there that he had accepted worthless money. He therefore placed it with a sign in a cabinet of coins, and cast up an account which showed that, instead of being five dollars ahead, he had spent nearly four times that amount in trying to pass the thing.

While Mr. Howland made china his hobby, he was interested in all sorts of valuable curios, and several weeks after the incident of the seven-dollar bill he found in a Japanese store, where he had gone to look at some lacquer work, an ornament of the rarest sort. It was one of the picturesque lotus-flower lanterns of antique green bronze, the fretwork openings of which were lined with transparent red tissue in order to produce the peculiar Oriental sunset effect. The rarity and value of such a lantern is known to collectors, and Howland desired to buy it, provided it could be hung with effect in the entrance hall of his bachelor quarters. The dealer was very willing to show how it would look, and so an appointment was made

for the next evening. After the lotus lantern had been suspended by a black iron chain, the polite Oriental expressed such interest in the treasures of the apartment that the owner took pride in displaying them. The dealer, in passing to some rare Koro jars, glanced perfunctorily at the coin cabinet, and a startled look flashed across his sallow face.

Controlling himself, he inquired carelessly what value Mr. Howland placed upon that strange seven-dollar bill. Being told that it was valuable only as a curiosity, the Japanese, with a deferential air, offered to take it at twice its face value. Now, the collector, whose sole interest in the bill hitherto had been to get rid of it for seven dollars, had his conception of its value vastly increased upon being offered fourteen, and with that strange perversity of human nature which curio collectors largely share, refused to name a price, saying that his collection could not spare this rare and unique specimen.

It was at about this time that Mr. Howland received from his friend, Mr. Langley Stafford, of the Treasury Department at Washington, an invitation to visit the national capital to avail himself of the opportunity of a collector's lifetime. A foreign ambassador, having made himself obnoxious to this Government, had been recalled by his own, and all collectors will remember the excitement when it was announced that his art treasures would be offered at public sale. Buyers were gathering from all over the country, and Mr. Howland was delighted at the prospect. Before departing, and while packing some small, but particularly valuable articles for consignment to the safe-deposit vaults, he caught sight of the seven-dollar bill, and thinking that his Treasury friend would be just the person to throw light on its history, he placed it carefully in his pocket.

The auction took place in the handsome house lately occupied by the Embassy, and as Howland idled in the crowded rooms, waiting for the sale

of the articles of especial interest to himself, he noticed, standing by a window, a man whose face seemed familiar. His attention was withdrawn for a while, and then his eyes wandered back to the stranger, a man of about forty, clean-shaven, handsome and fashionably dressed. Howland felt certain that he had somewhere seen that strong, intellectual countenance, and as he puzzled over it the recollection flashed upon him. Cautiously taking from his pocket the seven-dollar bill he hurriedly examined it. One of the portraits upon its back was realized before him in the flesh! There could be no doubt about it. Beckoning to Stafford, Howland pointed out to him the smooth-faced man by the window, and then, pushing his friend into a curtained alcove, exhibited the bill.

Stafford was at once interested in the unmistakable identity of the portrait, but more excited at the bill itself, which he assured Howland was a very dangerous thing to have in his possession. He said it was undoubtedly his duty to telephone to the Secret Service Bureau for a detective, and asked Howland, meanwhile, to keep the stranger in sight. The timid china collector did not exactly relish being utilized as a Government spy. The man's face had made a rather favorable impression upon him and he half hoped that its owner would slip quietly away before the officials arrived. But Stafford was back in a few minutes and soon after was joined by the detective. At the invitation of the latter, the man by the window unhesitatingly joined the two in the alcove, and with the same equanimity consented to accompany them, hoping he would not be detained long from the sale, but expressing a perfect willingness to be of any service to the Government.

The quartet entered a carriage and were driven to the Treasury Building, where they were soon in the private office of the Chief of the Secret Service Division. He was not at his desk, but the official in charge heard the story and examined the seven-dollar

bill with much interest. He then suggested to the stranger that a full explanation might save much future trouble.

The suspected gentleman took the bill with some surprise, but with the same unruffled coolness. But as he scrutinized it his manner suffered a striking and unfavorable change. His face paled as he gazed intently at the note, which shook in his hands. For many minutes he turned it over and over, saying nothing, and apparently examining every portion minutely. It seemed as though he were trying to gain time and invent an explanation, and the officials exchanged significant glances. Even Howland felt his faith in the handsome stranger waver.

Presently the man emerged from his absorption, seemed to make an effort to collect himself, and then, facing the Government men, said calmly:

"You ask me for an explanation. I think an explanation is due me. I am Dr. Gilbert. Will you kindly tell me the reason for my arrest? I suppose it amounts to that."

"Not an arrest, exactly, but this counterfeit bears your portrait. An explanation from you is naturally expected."

"As for this peculiar bill," said the stranger deliberately, as he laid it down, "I never saw it before, nor anything at all like it. You say it is a counterfeit. A counterfeit bill, I believe, is an unauthorized imitation of the Government currency. No seven-dollar bill has ever been issued—to my knowledge—and therefore, in this case, there was nothing to counterfeit. You cannot suppose any one insane enough to manufacture such a thing as this with any expectation of profit? In fact, if I may venture to express an opinion, this is not an engraved or printed bill at all, but an original drawing, done entirely by hand. Moreover, there has been no attempt to imitate the essential features of a United States note. Neither the portraits nor the landscape are such as appear on any of our Government bills. More important than all, there are neither the words 'United

States' nor 'dollars,' nor even the dollar sign anywhere to be seen.

"As for my portrait, I do not deny that the likeness is perfect. What of that? Pictures of General Grant and other distinguished persons have appeared on counterfeit greenbacks without suspicion of complicity. If I had had anything to do with this bill, do you suppose I would have trademarked it with my face? And even if I had done these two incredible things, do you imagine I would have come here to Washington voluntarily to parade that face in the very headquarters of the Secret Service?"

The officials were dumfounded, for the stranger had made it very evident that a blunder had been committed which might react upon them with disastrous effect, if he had influence and choose to exert it. Before a suitable answer could be framed, the door swung open, the Chief of the Secret Service entered, and catching sight of the commanding figure of the stranger, advanced with extended hand, exclaiming:

"Ah, Doctor! Glad to see you. What can we do for you today?"

Responding cordially to the greeting, the Doctor replied:

"Why, your people here seem to think I can help them in a rather strange matter," and he pointed to the seven-dollar bill.

A short whispered conversation between the Chief and his subordinate was abruptly terminated by the former, who said to Dr. Gilbert, in a manner which in itself was a rebuke to the others:

"Well, Doctor, if we should chance to need your help in this matter, I know where to find you. Thank you very much for your goodness in coming now."

When the Doctor had nonchalantly left the office, Mr. Howland, whose interest in the seven-dollar bill was now greater than ever, asserted his ownership and asked that the curio, since it was no counterfeit, be restored to him. This the officials immediately refused,

(Continued on page 78.)



DR. GILBERT'S SEVEN-DOLLAR BILL. TM

(Continued from page 60.)

calling attention to the law which required them to seize everything in any way resembling United States coin or notes, whether or not intended to deceive, and emphasizing the point that it really had deceived so intelligent a person as himself.

Rather resentful at what he considered the brusque behavior of the Secret Service men, and telling Stafford he would meet him later at the sale, Howland left the Treasury Building in an unpleasant frame of mind. As he descended the outer steps he met the Doctor, strolling up and down, and making notes on the back of an envelope. Evidently he was in no guilty haste to leave the locality. Howland, rather dreading the ordeal, hastened to apologize for having been the cause of so unpleasant an incident. He was therefore agreeably surprised when the Doctor, refusing to listen to any

apologies, protested that he regarded their meeting as a most fortunate one. In fact, he was so cordial that the collector accepted an invitation to lunch with him on the following day. Not, however, until they exchanged cards did the Doctor say:

"I am convinced that there may be a fortune for both of us in this strange affair, but to satisfy you that it will be a legitimate one I want you first to know more about me. Enquire at any of these places," he went on, jotting down addresses on the back of his card. They included a couple of banks, the Smithsonian Institution and several men of national reputation resident in Washington. "If you are perfectly satisfied, meet me at the Arlington at one o'clock, but don't mention the seven-dollar bill till then. By the way, they kept it, I suppose? I thought so. Well, we will meet tomorrow."

This Thrilling Story will be concluded in the February Number of the Baseball Magazine.