

THE STORY OF A GREAT SECRET.

Millions of Mischief.

By HEADON HILL.

Author of "By a Hair's Breadth," "The Duke Decides," "A Race with Ruin," Etc., Etc.
"And some that smile have in their hearts, I fear, millions of mischief."—
Julius Caesar, Act IV., Scene 1.

(Continued.)

When the steamer ran alongside the pier at Bournemouth, Herzog lost no time in landing, and still wearing the air of a schoolboy out for a holiday, proposed refreshments at the hotel opposite the pier gates. As we stood in the bar I noticed Roger Marske studying the photographs in the window of the library, opposite. Herzog's eyes were on my face as I made the discovery, and he must have followed my gaze, but again he made no sign.

"Now for a tramp, and a whiff of the pine woods," he said when he had finished his last sandwich and emptied his glass. "You are scarcely looking as fit as a man ought with—what shall we call it?—an ordeal of the nerves ahead. A little physical exercise will do you good." As we left the hotel I saw nothing of Marske, who might, or might not, have gone into the library to purchase one of the views he had been admiring. We climbed on to the West Cliff, and so struck out at a brisk pace which, after a two-mile walk, took us out of the residential quarter into the seclusion of the Branksome Woods. Herzog was in his most discursive vein, telling humorous anecdotes about his former experiences as a Surveyor of Taxes—an occupation which he seemed to have thoroughly enjoyed.

"Bleeding 'em, my friend—bleeding 'em to the white—was good fun," I can tell you, and so was ferreting out their affairs and tripping up their evasions," he wheezed. "I loved it, but I should have loved it better if I could have diverted more of the plunder into my own pocket." Yet, though his reminiscences of prying into the incomes of needy old maids and struggling professional men were vigorously told, I was conscious all the time that he was trying, for purposes of his own, to keep me amused and distracted from surroundings. We were sitting on a fallen pine trunk at the edge of an oily, silent pool, when he suddenly broke off in the middle of one of his narratives, and pointed down the glade to where a glimpse of the sea was visible—turquoise blue behind the gloomy foreground.

"By George, my friend, but this spot has gripped me," he said, still apparently in his irresponsible mood. "Wait here a little while I go and blast over that blend of colors. I can trust you," here he laid his big forefinger alongside his bulbous nose, "not to run away."

He left me and sauntered down the glade, standing for a moment at the end of the vista, and then, somewhat to my surprise, disappeared among the trees to the right. I sat still, and for over a minute had been listlessly wondering how Janet

was faring at my mother's cottage, when a hand fell on my shoulder from behind.

"Shaking myself free, I glanced up quickly and met the mocking gaze of Roger Marske.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, and there was a note of triumph in the harsh tones of his voice. "Ah, I thought so."

"What did you think, and what do you mean by laying your hand on me?" I asked angrily, forgetting in my indignation that, in the eyes of the law, I had forfeited all right to resent anything, or even to speak as man to man.

I was to be quickly reminded, however. Marske broke into an unpleasant cackling laugh. "The same answer fits both your questions," he sneered. "I laid hands on you because I thought that you were disguised, and I wanted to have a look at you at close quarters. I perceive that I was right in my conjecture, and I have little doubt that I am right in another which I will venture to put forward."

"And that is?" I faltered. It is a degrading confession, but it had come to this, that I was actually longing for Herzog's presence.

"It is that you are Arthur Rivington—the escaped convict from Winchester," Roger Marske replied in sharp, staccato accents. And as he spoke he drew a little away from me and levelled a pistol at my head.

CHAPTER IX.

Herzog's Plans.

Strange to say with that shining tube pointed at me I thought less of my obviously imminent peril than of the inference I drew from Roger Marske's apparent intention to shoot me. It would be the natural course for him to take if he were indeed guilty of the crime for which I had been condemned. Utterly unsuspected of it as he was, he would be able to say that he had met the escaped convict in a lonely place, and, being attacked by him, had shot him in self-defence. So with the greatest plausibility would he rid himself once for all of the danger which, presuming his guilt, he would know to be threatening him so long as I was at large, and probably using my liberty to clear my character at the expense of the real murderer.

It flashed through my mind that I must be the victim of some utterly inexplicable plot, at which Herzog had connived, and that the Alphonse conspiracy was all moonshine, designed to draw me into the focus of Marske's revolver. Though why so much trouble should have been taken to confront me with that weapon when Mr. Billington was to have handed me on the morrow, I was at a loss to conjecture.

Suddenly, with relaxing his aim, Marske spoke.

"Why did you select 'Springhorse' at Totland, to stay at?" he asked.

I remembered that in words, at any rate, I had not admitted my identity, so I rode the high horse. "What the devil is that to you?" I tried to bluster, making a signal failure of it, I fear.

Marske scowled savagely at me. "My pretty fellow," he snarled, "I can answer the question for you, being equal to the simple addition sum of putting two and two together. You know Janet Chilmark, eh? She went off unexpectedly this morning on your business, eh?"

I made no reply, but my face must have told the tale, for I saw him steady his revolver to a surer aim, and I had given myself up for lost, when a well known voice close by rang in my ears—

"Lower your pistol, Mr. Marske, and drop it to the ground, or take the consequences. I have got you covered, you see."

Yes, the pistol wavered, and finally drooped from the level of my head, but the command was not wholly obeyed at once. Marske still clutching the weapon, holding it muzzle downwards, and glared unutterable things.

"Come, sir. I am not to be trifled with. I give you ten seconds to disarm yourself, or I will shoot you dead," came Herzog's smooth but peremptory threat.

This time the injunction was obeyed. Dropping the pistol on the carpet of pine needles, Marske broke into a tirade of abuse and self-justification. This man is an escaped murderer—a fact of which you must have full cognisance," he exclaimed furiously. "I suppose you are prepared to pay the full penalty for aiding and abetting him, and for preventing an honest citizen from recapturing him."

Relieved from the menace of Marske's weapon, I turned my head and saw Herzog, revolver in hand, advancing towards him from the trees at my right. My custodian's broad features were graver than I had seen them since the memorable interview when he had impressed his personality on me at the "Pilot's Rest," at Southampton.

"What is this nonsense about an escaped murderer?" he asked quietly. "The fellow is the notorious Rivington. I taxed him with it and he did not deny it," returned Marske sullenly.

"Then I must deny it for him; and, further, as you bring a very serious charge against myself I shall convince you that it is false," Herzog said, picking up the dropped pistol and putting it in his pocket. "If you will take a few steps with

me in this direction I have no doubt that I shall be able to disabuse your mind of the error which has so nearly got you into trouble."

I saw Roger Marske gnaw his moustache in impotent rage, but there was something in Herzog's suave urbanity that was not to be denied, and the two moved off together down the glade. So long as they were within earshot of me nothing was said between them, though Herzog busied himself with producing and unfolding a small document, which he seemed to pursue attentively. When they were some fifty yards away he began to talk in low tones, and at last he showed Marske the paper, without relaxing his grasp on it. Marske read it and then flung up his arms in a gesture that seemed to denote a combination of disgust and surrender. Then they turned and slowly retraced their steps to where I had resumed my seat on the pine trunk.

"My dear Martin," said Herzog as they approached, "the little misunderstanding 'is' at an end. Mr. Marske recognises his mistake and apologises to both of us for making it. We must make allowances for an honest citizen—that I think was the phrase—desirous of doing his duty by the community. Trop de zèle has led many people into equally untenable positions."

That Marske was really convinced it was impossible to believe. The muttered apology, in which the only audible words were the important ones "Doctor Barrables" and "Mr. Martin," was accompanied by the fierce grin of a man beaten at a game in which he had believed himself a winner. Then, slightly raising his hat, he turned on his heel and vanished among the pines.

Herzog seated himself on the trunk at my side, and inflated his broad chest with a long breath of the aromatic air.

"So much," he said, "for the theory that I had conceived. It was unfortunately correct, but I have been able to combat it with weapons which our enterprising friend could not suspect me of holding. Let me congratulate you, my noble captain, on a very soldierly attitude in front of a levelled weapon, which, by the way, I must not forget to return to that aggressive gentleman at the first opportunity."

I could not tell him that if my theory, or rather Janet's, about Roges Marske were correct, there would never be a safe opportunity for returning him his pistol, so far as I was concerned. That he had meant to kill me in cold blood I had no doubt, and I wondered that my astute companion made no reference to his obvious intention. He could hardly have failed to observe it, even if he had not overheard the conversation that preceded his dramatic interference.

That point caused me a good deal of uneasiness. If Herzog had heard Roger Marske taxing me with an acquaintance with Janet my chances of future communication with her would be reduced to a minimum. And, apart from his having overheard anything, what connecting link could there have been in Herzog's mind between Marske and myself? That he had deliberately brought me into the Branksome pine

woods, and there left me alone, knowing that Marske was following, I could not doubt. I had his own word for it that our expedition was intended to test a theory.

That theory unquestionably was that Marske suspected my identity, but how had Herzog detected the suspicion? By observing it, or by having ascertained that there was a reason why Marske should fear me?

Whichever was the true source of his action, it became at once apparent that Herzog meant me to attribute it to the former. "The unpleasant person must have spotted your disguise, and to avoid a repetition of such discoveries you had better discard those whiskers," he said, deftly detaching them. "Thanks to the newspaper reports of your flight to America you will not be searched for at present, and the absence of your moustache really makes all the necessary alteration."

"Unless I meet someone with whom I was acquainted," said I.

Herzog's eyes took on their harder expression. "Are you quite sure that you have not done so already?" he jerked out sharply.

I was sore troubled lest he alluded to my meeting with Janet the previous night. But no; as I remained silent he relieved my anxiety by thus explaining the question—

"You knew this fellow Marske before your conviction, eh?"

"Not at all. I never set eyes on him—never heard of him—till yesterday," I was able to answer truthfully.

Herzog relapsed into silence, gazing alternately at the distant peep of the sea and at the black tarn at our feet. Suddenly he picked up a stone and tossed it into the pool, frowning as he watched the circles widening from the central splash.

"Deep waters," I heard him mutter ruminatively. Then, jumping up, he changed his manner to frank friendliness again.

"Come, my noble captain," he said. "I am a selfish creature to keep you on a spot that must have such disagreeable associations. Besides, we shall have to hurry if we are to be in time to join our fellow-trippers on the boat back to the Wight."

HARCOURT NEWS.

Harcourt, Dec. 26.—Kirby B. Wathen, son of Stipendiary Magistrate, L. J. Wathen, has resigned his school on Salmon River, and will attend the Superior school here next term, seeking advance of license in Normal School next year.

Mr. and Mrs. Otty Bailey of Moncton, spent the holiday here, the guests of Mrs. L. J. Wathen.

Mr. Stavert, a theologian of Pine Hill College, Halifax, occupied the Presbyterian pulpits yesterday. He will remain several weeks. This charge has been vacant since the first of October.

William Hetherington of Montmorency, spent Christmas with his daughter in Campbellton. Mr. and Mrs. Barker spent Sunday with Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Dunn.

Nan Patterson, accused of the murder of "Caesar" Young, passed a gloomy Christmas in the Tombs at New York.

POLITICAL INFLUENCE.

That, Says Onlooker, Is the Reason the Liquor Law Is Not Enforced.

Onlooker, in the New Freeman, hands out this broadside to the provincial government, the liquor license commissioner and the public generally:—

"The License act has not come up to the expectation of those most concerned regarding the moral welfare of the community. Why? Because it has not been properly enforced. The fault lies within the jurisdiction of the Inspector, the Liquor License Commissioner, the city M. P.'s and the provincial government. The writer has no hesitation in stating that he does not believe that either Inspector Jones or any member of the provincial government desires to see the liquor law violated in this city. He believes, however, that the Liquor License Commissioners do not fully realize the necessity of acting as an independent body in administering the License act. They permit themselves to be too much under the influence of the city members of the provincial legislature. The M. P.'s have no desire to see the law violated, but, rather than run the risk of losing votes, they permit themselves to be 'pulled' in the interest of violators of the law, and in this way they are the cause of the greatest good that has become almost a dead letter. In saying this the writer does not wish to be understood as creating the impression that there are only a few men in the liquor business who observe the law not only in the spirit but to the very letter. Indeed, he believes that the great majority of the liquor dealers in the city of St. John strictly observe the law and that they like the most ardent temperance men are opposed to the violations of the law."

"What is the remedy? Make the Board of License Commissioners entirely independent of political influence, and in its personnel do not take into consideration the question of politics. It is not desired to mislead any reflection on the members of the present Board of Commissioners. It is believed that the gentlemen composing it, if not hampered in the way indicated, could administer the law in a manner that would be satisfactory to all those interested in the better government of the community."

"These views are commended to Premier Tweedie and his colleagues by one, who, although not a supporter, desires that they shall be treated fairly. If an experiment along these lines should show that the present commissioners are unfit for the proper performance of their duty, then they should be made to give place to better men, but it would be unfair to condemn them without their being given a proper chance."

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