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 i.

(Continued.)

I shuddered, for it was evident that the captain of the Nighshade, in his mad craving for drink, had abandoned all chance for life and had gone to face a master more awful even than Sir Gideon Marske—the master whom Sir Gideon himself served so well. The cuddy must have been two feet deep in water when Belcher reached the bottom of the stairs, but had he been able to stand up it would have been equally all over with him a minute later. A giant breaker surged over the side, sweeping the decks from stem to stern, and hurling Herzog on to me, clutching wildly for foothold. By God's grace, we both clung to the doorway till the flood sagged out again, but down below the cuddy must have been full of water. The captain had been drowned like a rat in a trap in the foul den which two nights ago, when he had forced me to sup with him, he had called his first-class saloon.

Thenceonward all our concern was for the shore, whence alone could come our help. On each side of the wheel-house was a round glaze port-hole, and at the landward one, clinging for dear life to a spoke of the wheel, I stationed myself. Herzog stood in the doorway, and our eyes strained towards the low cliffs of Totland, where we could make out people running to and fro like little black ants. I could understand how the summer visitors would be taking full advantage of such a spectacle as a shipwreck, which made no demand on their pockets—a gratuitous bit of excitement thrown in, as it were, by kind Providence, for their amusement without charge.

Ah, if those hurrying sightseers could have known the inner history of that shipwreck—that bound-up with it were an attempt to assassinate the Prime Minister; the escape, with which all England was ringing, of a prisoner on the verge of the scaffold; and the proofs of that prisoner's innocence—how their tongues would have wagged as they battled with the gale for points of vantage on cliff and beach.

It was at least a comfort to be certain that we were seen, without undergoing the slow agony of those who are wrecked at night, and know not whether their signals have been observed on shore. Nor would there be the delay, inseparable from the hours of darkness, in getting the lifeboat crew together. It was too far to distinguish individuals without the aid of glasses, but already we could make out signs of activity round the building where the brave blue and white boat was housed. Little had I thought, when I had watched her at a recent practice, how soon my life and my love, and my lover's life and honour, were to depend upon her prowess.

Herzog came close to me and made a speaking trumpet of his hands. "If Roger Marske has got over the clout I gave him last night, and has returned to Totland, he must be having a bad time,-' he shouted. "The flag the mate ran up will have told the coastguard the name of the steamer."

"If he is there he is praying for the ship to break up." I replied. "Thank God that Arthur, who must be watching us from that empty house, does not know."

Presently, after what seemed a year, but was in reality about half an hour, a gleam of white shot from the building on the beach, telling us the blessed news that the lifeboat had been launched and was on its way. It was only a fitful view we had of her after the rush down the slip, so enveloped were we in showers of spindrift, while now and again a huge wave, more hungry than the rest, would break right over us, nearly washing us from our foothold, and plunging the interior of the deck-house in darkness as of night.

"Why, what is it? She is not making for us at all!" I cried in sudden anguish, as a glimpse of the lifeboat showed her to be steering away from us diagonally—on a course that would take her out to sea.

Herzog gave me a quick glance, and produced a flask from one of his inexhaustible pockets. "Here, take a sip of this," he said almost roughly. "We can't have you breaking down. The lifeboat's all right. She's got to allow for the set of the tide."

His words, rather than the brandy, cheered me, but a minute later I think I owed my life and reason to that timely stimulant. For, with awful swiftness, I was called upon to witness a sight so appalling that I forgot the lessening of my own slender chances which it entailed. Herzog's forecast was verified. The steamer broke in two just aft of the bridge, the whole forepart collapsing into the seething surges, and carrying with it the two masts to which Captain Belcher's villainous crew were clinging. Above the howl of the tempest the one wild shriek of those poor lost souls resounded, and then the wind and the waves resumed their mastery of noise and violence. All that remained of the Nightshade was the stern, on which our battered wheel-house was perched.

"We are wedged tight in the shingle; we ought to hold out," was Herzog's only comment, but he belied the curt consolation of his words by the trouble in his eyes. I do not believe that he valued his own life at all, and that the gloom which settled on his usually impassive face was solely on my account. And he became restless, sometimes retaining his old station at the wave-washed door of the wheel-house, and sometimes joining me at the porthole.

Our position was now doubly precarious, on account of the wreckage with which we were surrounded, and which the sea used as a battering-ram against our frail refuge. The masts, denuded of their fruit of human lives, were tossed by each advancing breaker on to the bank, to be drawn back again by the suck of the backwash. More than once they struck the stern, causing it to tremble like a frightened horse, and though Herzog tried to comfort me by saying that the blows jammed us more firmly, I knew well that if the wheel-house itself were struck it would splinter into matchwood over our heads.

But at last the lifeboat drew near, so buried in blinding spray and in the troughs of the rollers that when she was visible at all she was but a blurred mass, indistinct as to all detail. She appeared first on the windward side, rowing parallel with the bank, in which her coxswain was evidently looking for an open channel, to that he might approach the remnant of the wreck in comparative shelter. And even as the boat passed he seemed to have found it, for she swerved suddenly, and vanished from our sight behind the sternmost end of the wheel-house, in which there was no port-hole to afford a view of her.

"She must have shaved our rudder and propeller," cried Herzog in unwonted excitement. "Come, my dear lady, your troubles will soon be over She'll round-to and hitch on to us on this side."

He made his way as fast as caution would permit to the other window, and was peering for the re-appearance of the lifeboat, when, at a scream from me he turned and faced the doorway. There, clutching the lintel to prevent himself from being swept away, stood Roger Marske, bareheaded and wearing the cork jacket of a lifeboatman.

The two men blinked at each other in the dim light, as though to be very sure, and then, with one accord and without a word on either side, sprang upon one another like tigers.

ARTHUR RIVINGTON'S NARRATIVE CONTINUED.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A Doubtful Friend:

I have to resume the thread of my own personal story at the point where, on the morning of my concealment by Herzog in the vacant house at Totland Bay, I was alarmed by the appearance of a man in a blue guernsey at the window of the drawing-room. It will be remembered that I was expecting Herzog to return with a supply of provisions, and that on drawing aside the blind I saw the stranger instead.

A moment's reflection showed that, as he had undoubtedly seen me before I dropped the window blind, no good could be done by refusing to speak to him. He would probably go and tell everyone he met that someone was living in the unoccupied house, with the result that I should be at once routed out by the agents or owner. So I raised the blind, opened the window, and beckoned to him. That I had no mistake in doing so was at once made plain by the credentials he presented—a basket of provisions and a note, which proved to be from Herzog.

"My dear friend," it ran, "R' M. is off to London by the first boat, and I must stick to him like a leech. The chase will in all likelihood lead me to that brave little lass of yours. So I send the best substitute I can find at short notice. I should not be disposed to trust him too far, but as all these Isle of Wight fishermen have smuggling blood in them, they have an hereditary antipathy to law and order. This chap has been told that you are an absconding debtor. His name is Peter Croal."

My visitor, when I finished reading, was regarding me out of the corner of his eye with a furitive benevolence that was by no means pleasing. It was as though he approved of me, not from personal attraction, but as a possible source of income. It was the sort of look that a certain class of cabmen bestows on a schoolboy who may be held good for an exorbitant fare.

"I am obliged to you for bringing me these things. Did my friend give you anything for doing so?" I said.

Mr. Peter Croal drew his sleeve across his mouth and looked thirsty. "In a manner of speaking, the gentleman did. Don't he say so in the letter?" was the tentative reply which made me distrust the man there and then.

"He doesn't mention the amount" I said, wishing to draw him out and verify my suspicions.

"Drat him for that!" retorted the fisherman, with a fine show of having been hardly treated. "The gentleman he give me the money for the grub and the liquor, and 'arf a crown for myself. 'But, Croal,' he says, 'that ain't anything like proper remuneration for a kind of secret job like this. I only gives you 'arf-a-crown because it's all the change I've got. I'll put it in this here note as t'other gent is to give you a sovereign."

I tendered the sum demanded out of the little store with which Herzog had supplied me in case a wider flight should be necessary, but I did not believe a word of the story. Herzog had, without doubt, adequately paid him, and this was only a try-on to make the most of the bit of luck that had come his way—the thin edge of the wedge of blackmail. If this was the spirit in which Mr. Peter Croal entered upon his trust I could foresee a heavy addition to my existing anxieties.

(To be continued.)

MINERS ENTOMBED.

Portsville, Pa., Jan. 24.—All hope of rescuing two miners who were entombed last night at Mount Hope colliery has been abandoned. A rush of coal imprisoned three miners in the colliery but after working for several hours one of the men was rescued. It is thought the other two were crushed to death.

"SWISS FOOD" FOR BREAKFAST.

"Swiss Food" is the best Breakfast Wheat Cereal. Contains all the nutrition of finest Wheat—15 cts packages.

David Walker, proprietor of the Walker House, Toronto, and one of the best known hotel men in Canada died in California yesterday.