

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.)

CHAPTER XX.

Colonel Chilmark's Things.

Contrary to my expectations, Herzog made no reference, on our leaving "Ardmore," to the failure of the atropine tube to do its deadly work. Nor, when he did mention the matter as we were seated at breakfast next morning, did he indulge in the outburst of threats and reproaches that I had anticipated.

"Rather a warm time last night, what with one thing and another," he remarked, sipping his coffee and eyeing me askance.

"I know as soon as Carden saw me that I was recognized; and so, I think, did you," I replied.

"Yes, and took steps, as you may have observed, to stifle the explosion by exciting Lady Muriel's ardour at the proper moment," said Herzog. "Carden was on the point of denouncing you, was he not? Well, my timely hint to that charming girl that he must have been acquainted with the notorious fugitive set her going with a vengeance, eh?"

"It was very adroit," I was fain to admit. "Rebellious as I felt at being the catspaw of this scoundrel, it was impossible not to appreciate the cleverness of his shifts and expedients, and, after all, vile though his motive was, they were the only bulwarks between me and the scaffold—till Janet came back victorious."

"Adroit!" he repeated, chuckling. "That is more than you were, my friend. If by good fortune something hadn't gone wrong with the drug or the syringe, your awkwardness in dropping it would have created a serious situation for both of us. And I have never intended that our risks in this partnership should be equally balanced, you see."

I said nothing, but I was inwardly astonished that he made no charge against me of having withdrawn the poison from the tube. I could only attribute my immunity to his genuine relief that my treachery to him had been the means of saving him.

And then, after a pause, he spoke again, but his mood had changed from almost genial banter to savage cynicism. "See here, let us understand each other," he said, tapping his saucer with the spoon to punctuate his words. "With so many ardent female champions you are beginning to believe that you are really an innocent, ill-used individual, eh?"

"I pleaded 'Not Guilty' at my trial, and I have never taken that back," I said, with appropriate vagueness, for I dared not exasperate him with open defiance. But, my Heaven! how I looked forward to doing so when Janet had run "Danvers

Crane" to ground.

Herzog pushed his plate away, and, rising, lit a cigar, frowning at me the while. Never yet since our first meeting at the obscure hotel at Southampton had he displayed such open hostility to me, and never, strangely enough, had he shown greater indifference to the deadly design which was the sole reason of our being together. Not a word about any fresh attempt on Lord Alphonso's part; not a word about handing me over to justice; only a gibe and a scowl. The man had no nerves, but he was evidently irritated. He seemed to have lost grip somehow.

He walked to the window, puffing moodily at his cigar, till his attention was attracted by a telegraph messenger coming up the garden path. Muttering an exclamation, he went out to meet the boy at the front door, but almost immediately returned, looking blacker than ever.

"The wire is for Colonel Chilmark," he said. "Probably from his daughter to say that she is returning."

As he made the apparently trivial announcement that basilisk gaze of his tried to pierce my inmost thoughts, causing a recurrence of the never-satisfied fear that he had divined my connection with Janet.

"Was Colonel Chilmark expecting his daughter?" I asked with what carelessness I could command.

Herzog laughed his harshest. "People who stay at home are always expecting people who are away," was his enigmatic reply. And he added, with a sudden gust of impatience, "What do I know or care about these Chilmarks?"

The contents of the to me all-absorbing telegram were revealed sooner than I could have hoped by Mrs. Krance, when she bustled in to remove the breakfast things. She had just performed the same office in the sitting-room across the passage, and, after the manner of landladies, she proceeded to enlarge upon the affairs of the other lodgers.

The Colonel, by her showing, had just received a telegram from his daughter, informing him that as the house she had been to look at near Harrow would not suit their requirements, she proposed to remain in London for a day or two longer in order to view other houses within easy distance of town. As she would be very busy moving from place to place, as the house-agents might direct, her father was not to look for letters, but she would wire each day before starting on her search, so that he might know that she was all right.

I had much ado to compose my face while Mrs. Krance prattled out

this expanded version of the telegram. It was at once a relief and a disappointment. It showed that Janet had not come to any harm at the hands of Roger Marske, but it also pointed to her having so far failed in her effort to prove that he was the "Danvers Crane" of my sister's acquaintance. Reading between the lines, I discarded her prolonged house-hunt as a mere pretext for staying in London in the hope of meeting with better success. It might even be that she had struck a clue which she was following up.

Feeling, or, as I half feared, affecting to feel, no interest in Mrs. Krance's gossip, Herzog cut short her dissertation on the Colonel's loneliness, and proposed that we should go sight-seeing to Carisbrook Castle, and on the return journey leave the train at Yarmouth and come round to Totland Bay by the afternoon boat, calling there on its way from Lynnington. As he was not the man to take an academic interest in historic ruins, I suspected that he had some reason for being out of the place that day. Probably he did not wish to meet Lady Muriel or Ralph Gaddon. It was all one to me where I went, now that Janet had been heard of, and I gave a perfunctory assent.

From the moment of our starting to walk across the fields to Freshwater station, Herzog's mood changed to the airy philosopher's vein, characteristic of his lighter phase. He was the busy man out for a holiday again, determined to forget all preoccupations in the joy of fine weather, beautiful scenery, and nothing to do. Occasionally, during that brief lull in our drama, while we were, so to speak, off the stage, he almost degenerated into the cheapest of cheap trippers in the exuberance of his spirits. I was not deceived by all this. Five days in his company had taught me that when his sun appeared to be in the zenith there were storm clouds lurking on the horizon.

We "did" the ancient Castle in true tourist style, and I could imagine the sensations of the other tourists, who shared with us the voluble guide's description of the ill-fated monarch's attempt to squeeze through the bars of his prison window, if they had been told that the quiet listener rubbing shoulders with them had himself broken goal within the week. We inspected the donkey that works the treadmill over the well, visited the bowling green, climbed the crumbling keep, and then jolted back over the cruel island railway as far as Yarmouth, where, according to Herzog's programme, we left the train and sought the pier.

We had not much time to spare, for

the steamer was already alongside, discharging such of her passengers as were bound for Yarmouth and Freshwater. Those remaining on board to proceed to Totland were a comparatively small number, so that every one of them was visible to us as we took our places on the bridge deck. In those sad days the haunting dread of recognition had grown to be such a habit with me that I instinctively scanned our fellow passengers in detail. The last to come under my nervous scrutiny was Roger Marske, leaning with his back to us over the stern railing.

Herzog must have perceived him at the same moment, for he nudged my elbow and whispered: "Let us go down into the bar. I am sure of that fellow's attitude. He probably saw us come aboard, but the further we are from him the better."

I had no doubt in my own mind that Marske's attitude towards myself was a hostile one. His conduct when he shadowed us to the Brankesome pine woods, and was so unaccountably quiet by Herzog, had been an open declaration, not just now anything he might do or say to my detriment was a minor consideration with me. I was more glad to see him, there on the steamer, than if he had been my dearest friend. His presence on the boat was the second relief of my anxiety about Janet that I had experienced that day. He must have quitted London to return to the Isle of Wight a few hours after her telegram to her father had been despatched, the deduction being that if he had tried, he had failed to molest her, and that she was now pursuing her quest free from all danger of interference from that quarter.

So struck was I by Herzog's change from the bold front he had shown to Marske at our recent encounter, that when we were below I could not refrain from mentioning it. Instead of resenting my remark, as I had expected, he regarded me quite benevolently.

"This business, my friend, is teaching me what I had never thought to own—that I am not infallible," he said. "There is something going on that I do not understand, and had not provided for, and Mr. Roger Marske is at the bottom of it."

He was lighting one of his never-failing cigars as he concluded his sentence, and he paused, with the match flickering out, to shoot an unspoken and it seemed, beseeching question at me, from his troubled eyes. But I met it with blank indifference. It was not for me to make a confidant and an ally of the man who had me in the toils, for no better reason than that he was at loggerheads with as great a scoundrel as himself.

If his dumb appeal was a plea for enlightenment on the intervention of Janet and for an explanation of Roger Marske's enmity—well, he had come to the wrong source for both. I was not going to place a card in this ruthless player's hand simply to secure his allegiance against Marske who was not half such a load on my back as he was himself. My faith of winning through was pinned to Janet alone, so I answered him with a shrug, and he answered it with another. It was almost like a mutual understanding.

When the steamer bumped the land-

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ing-stage at Totland we remained below till all the passengers had cleared out, and then, as we walked up the pier, we had the satisfaction of seeing Roger Marske's tall form well ahead of us. I was glad that Lady Muriel had not come down to meet him, for even amidst my misery I had found a warm corner in my heart for young Ralph Carden's aspirations, and had I been a free agent I would have done my level best to back the boy's suit.

But the love affairs of Lady Muriel and young Carden were soon to be driven out of my head by matters more nearly concerning myself. We had reached our lodgings and entered our sitting-room, when Mrs. Krance, bristling with importance, followed us in and shut the door.

"A rare to-do yonder," she said, prodding her finger towards Colonel Chilmark's apartment. "He's had a wire this afternoon from the party at whose house Miss Janet was staying to say as the young lady hasn't been there since yesterday morning. She'd ordered dinner to be ready when she should come back from the

country last night, but she never came back at all." (To be continued.)

ST. GEORGE'S SOCIETY.

The annual meeting of St. George's Society will be held in the Orange hall tomorrow evening. Officers will be elected and other business transacted. T. Percy Bourne the treasurer will present the following statement of the work of the year:

Receipts.  
1904....  
Jan. 2—To balance from last statement ..... \$710 86  
General statement:  
Received from secretary for dues ..... 234 10  
Collection at service ..... 13 87  
Savings Bank account ..... 16 88

\$273 80  
Celebration account:  
Sale of tickets ..... 247 50

\$1,232 16  
Expenditures.  
1904:  
General account:  
By charity orders ..... \$168 81  
Rent of room ..... 25 00  
Printing and stationery.. 9 75  
Postage, etc. .... 11 91  
Sundries ..... 17 91

\$233 38  
Celebration account:  
By bills paid ..... 242 27  
Balance ..... 756 51

\$1,232.16  
Dominion Savings Bank ... 577 87  
Bank B. N. A. ... 159 29  
In hand ... 19 35

\$756 51

A typical southeast storm with the usual warm rain and heavy wind, passed swiftly over New England Saturday, and while the havoc was considerably less than in previous disturbances this winter, one vessel was lost, mariners injured in a wreck at Rye (N. H.), and shipping in Narragansett Bay, at Provincetown and Bar Harbor (Me.), suffered damage. Several shipping disasters are reported of vessels sunk and wrecked, but no lives were lost.

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