

THE ST. JOHN EVENING TIMES, FRIDAY, JANUARY 27 1905.

THE STORY OF A GREAT SECRET.

Millions of Mischief.

By HEADON HILL.

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

(Continued.)

There was no repetition of the sound, betokening departure. It was merely the impatient shuffling of a foot, by someone baulked of his purpose. My visitor was still there, as was evidenced by a recurrence of the drumming on the window pane. And then, just as I was crossing the ink-black darkness of the room to open the window and end the suspense, I passed in concentration as the sound of my name—spoken in no hostile tone.

"Rivington! Are you there, Rivington?"

"Who is it?" I asked, breathless.

"It is I—Ralph Carden. You may safely open to me. I come as a friend," was the reply which caused me to undo the catch and admit the speaker. He stepped into the darkness of the room, but not before I had caught a glimpse of his face and his manner, and that it was really the young officer who had recognized me at Lord Alvington's.

"This will surprise you, after they say I treated you the other night," he said, when I had retaken the window. "The fact is that you really have Lady Muriel to thank for it."

"God bless her!" I rejoined. "What most surprises me is that you should have discovered that I was here."

"It was that that brought me—Muriel's instance," he replied, going on to explain briefly that Croal was the source of his information.

It appeared that after my sentence, but before my escape, Carden had been out sea-fishing in Croal's boat. All England was then talking of me and of my supposed crime, and in discussing the trial, Carden had mentioned that I had been at Woolwich with him for a short time. That day Croal had come to him and informed him that a man who might be the escaped convict was concealed in the vacant house on the cliff. As he was not sure, and had been paid to supply the mysterious hermit with food, he would be glad if Carden would contrive to get a look at him, so that if he proved to be Rivington he, Croal, might claim the reward. If not, there would be no harm done, and he could go on making a smaller profit by carrying provisions.

"Well," proceeded Carden, "this put me in a peculiar awkward position. I knew that you were Rivington, and guessed that something had occurred to make you go into close hiding. But I also knew how interested Muriel was in you on account of Miss Chilmark, and how staunchly she believed in your innocence. I—well, the fact is I have

reasons for wishing to stand well with Muriel—and I knew she would be furious if I were instrumental in your capture. So I went straight to her and told her what had happened, at the same time assuring her that there was no mistake about it—that you are the man supposed to be negating America. She is bent on helping you."

"Again God bless her," I said, adding, with an instinct for the real source of danger, "But what of Croal?"

"He is to come to see me to-morrow, when he expects to hear the result of my inspection, if I have been able to obtain one," Carden replied. "If I do as Muriel wishes, I shall have to act the casuist and tell him that I didn't recognize you."

All the time that he had been speaking to me I had been wishing that I could see his face, so as to better judge whether he believed in me himself, or was only inclined to befriended me for Lady Muriel's sake. That he was running a very great personal risk in doing so, entailed far more serious consequences than the wrecking of his professional career, was not to be denied. It was due to him to know all the facts of the case before he ran that risk, and I was also moved to full confidence by a frank desire to have one solitary human being's sympathy on the merits of the case. Lady Muriel's kindly interest was very sweet and touching, but I could not disguise from myself and that if she had not known Janet I should never have entered her thoughts. I craved for something more than sentiment—for the honest belief of an honest man.

"I should not wish you to act against your convictions on my behalf, but you will be better able to judge when you know the secret of my escape from Winchester," I said. "Then, if you choose to espouse my cause, you will at least do so with your eyes open."

And I told him everything, suppressing only, as in honour bound to the man whom I believed to be at the eleventh hour trying to serve me, the true name of Sir Gideon Marske's emissary. In my disclosure Herzog was called "Doctor Barrables," and so without any slip on my part, he remained to the end. From Ralph Carden's boyish point of view, Herzog did not seem to matter at all. All his ideas ran on Roger Marske, and the implication of him and his father in my life-tragedy.

"By Jove, Rivington," he exclaimed, as his hand sought and gripped mine in the darkness, "you have

convinced me now. I'll be square with you. When I came I was in Muriel's interests alone, but I'm in yours, and in those on that plucky girl of yours, now. What is best to be done? We seem to be in the thick of a business that will set England ablaze. Those blackguard Marskes! I am no diplomatist, but I saw that I could have taken no safer road to Ralph Carden's favor than by disclosing his rival's villainy. Had it not been for the hearty ring in his voice I should have discounted the value of his new-found trust, as being based solely on that rivalry; but there was no mistaking that the young soldier was an honest convert to my innocence—no matter if his hopes for Roger Marske's downfall had fattered the thought.

"But nothing has been proved against either of the Marskes," I pointed out. "Till Janet is found I am the only witness, and I am worse than useless. The moment I stepped out into the open to prefer a charge I should be hanged out of hand. And I could not even hope for post mortem rehabilitation, for I cannot expect the man, whom I must continue to call 'Doctor Barrables,' to come forward and implicate himself."

"I was struck by that fellow the other night," said Carden. "He sounded a strong man, but can you be sure that he is running straight in your interests? Is he really likely to produce Miss Chilmark, and any proofs she may have discovered, if he is lucky enough to discover her?"

"I would not trust him an inch unless our interests were identical," I replied.

"But as they happen to be so, I could have no more powerful support. I am convinced that the aim of his life is to get the Marskes on the hip, and I have even thought lately that he went into this business not only because he was compelled to, but with that end in view."

There was silence between us in the darkness, and I did not break it, for I knew that Carden was striving for a way to cut the Gordian knot.

"I give it up," he announced at length. "The first essential seems to be to baffle the inquisitive Croal, but as to the wider issue of how to save you in the event of recapture I am all at sea. If I go with a yarn like this to Lord Alvington, he will think I've been getting it up for Marske."

There was no gainsaying the force of that argument. With the wild improbability of the uncorroborated story, my advocate would start heavily handicapped, but the fact that he

was Roger Marske's rival would get him laughed out of court at once.

"I can only suggest," said I, "that you should submit the whole thing to Lady Muriel, and be guided by her. One woman's wit has gone far to help me already, and I am quite willing to trust that of another for this part of the tangle."

"By George, Rivington, but that's the line to take," Carden exclaimed enthusiastically. "I'll be off and try and catch her in the garden at 'Andmore' to-night. You must buck up, old man. Muriel will pull you through."

But when he had passed out of the window I smiled sadly to myself at the young man's ardour. How much of it was for me, and how much for the sweet collaboration which it entailed? I do not attempt to excuse my bitterness. Not many months before I myself had gone forth on any pretext to meet my own dear Janet, and now I was a branded fugitive with a price on my neck, and Janet—where was she?

My secret, too—the secret of my hiding-place, that alone stood between me and the gallows—had passed into the keeping of others. Well-affected they might be, and probably were in a silly, romantic sentimentality way, for which I was grateful; but I and my peril had not the first place in their efforts at aid. In Janet's true heart alone was I myself the real reason for a whole-souled sacrifice.

I repeat that I make no apology for this frame of mind, but it was the one in which I flung myself on the couch in the drawing-room of the empty house and snatched a fitful sleep.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

The Premier Takes Snuff.

I spent the morning of the next day in waiting and listening. I was filled with a premonition of impending disaster. I dreaded the advent of Croal, lest I should be unable to control my resentment at his treachery, and I was already apprehensive of the outcome of Lady Muriel's championship. I had hung my life on such a very slender peg—the discretion of an impulsive and affectionate girl. If she had made a slip in the advice she gave to Carden I might be called upon to surrender at any moment.

And if anything were wanting to depress me further the weather was enough to do it. By ten o'clock it was evident that Mr. Peter Croal's meteorological prediction was to be fulfilled. A sudden darkening of the room caused me to go up to peep from the attic window, and I saw that the western sky was heavily banked with advancing clouds. Then a stiff breeze sprang up, and before noon the storm knew was abroad in full majesty. A furious gale was tearing in past the Needles, driving straight up the Solent, and raising such a sea as is seldom seen on that protected coast. A mile or more off shore on the Shingle Bank the breakers were surging and leaping like savages, beating hungry for prey. The thundering crash of them reached me plainly between the gusts of wind.

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I went downstairs again, fearful even of the sound of my own footsteps, and I was wondering how soon Carden would bring me news, when a sharp double tap at the window caused me to hold my breath. Carden had come in stealthy fashion last night, and it was improbable that he would relax his precautions today. Mr. Peter Croal's tap had been more humble and indignant. A thrill shot through me as I thought that it might be Herzog, returned with Janet and the proofs of my innocence, and therefore careless of being overheard. On the other hand, that bold summons might mean the end of all things—the arrival of the police or prison warders.

If the latter, resistance or attempt of flight would be futile; so, with a desperate heart-cry that it might be the happy alternative, I wrenched aside the blind—to meet the gaze of neither Herzog nor the officers of the law.

(To be continued.)

P. MCINTOSH & SON'S "SWISS FOOD."

P. McIntosh & Son, Toronto, makers of "Swiss Food" report a large increase in sales, quality tells—its packages.

THE N. B. FARMERS. Storm Interfered With the Attendance at Association Meeting Yesterday Morning.—Interesting Discussions.

Fredericton, Jan. 26.—(Special).—The farmers and dairymen's association resumed work at ten o'clock this morning. The big snow storm of last night interfered somewhat with the attendance, not more than fifty delegates being present.

Geo. E. Fisher of Chatham presented the treasurer's report showing the receipts at \$126,04 and expenditures of \$111.37. He complained of the lack of interest the farmers were showing in the association as was evident by the fact that the membership had fallen off from 201 in 1898 to 103 in 1904. A committee composed of W. S. Tompkins, Howard Trueman and George Fisher was appointed to ascertain the cause of the decline in membership and suggest a remedy.

Henry Wilmot and W. S. Tompkins were appointed a finance committee, Senator W. Dell Perley of Wolsley, N. B. T. one of the founders of the organization was present and delivered an address. He gave a practical talk on farming conditions in the North-west and was listened to with much interest. He was surprised that the farmers of New Brunswick did not avail themselves of the sailings of winter port steamers from St. John and ship more produce to the old country. F. W. Broderick, of the seed division of the agricultural department at Ottawa, spoke on the improvement of seeds and Robert Robertson, manager of the Maritime experimental farm discussed the best methods of preparing soil for the successful crop growing.

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