

THE MESHES OF MISCHANCE BY GILBERT WINTLE

CHAPTER VI.—(Continued.)

Old though it seems to say so, Horace would have felt no compunction at all in warning any friends of his own against Carey, the undergraduate, but did very much dislike the thought of saying hard things about Carey the free-booter, whose acquaintance he had made between last Saturday night and Sunday morning. Still, Miss Smith was a very nice girl of course, Ned's infatuation was nothing, he knew Ned, Ned was like that with every fresh girl he met—still Miss Smith was a nice girl, and perhaps a hint to her brother the sailor, though he had had much time to give it in, still it could be managed—nothing about the later developments of friend Carey's genius of course, there was quite enough without that—but perhaps, after all, he was making a mountain out of a molehill, and there was nothing to warn about.

Not a quarter of a mile from Horace, and only about a mile from Ned, James Carey also was sleeping the sleep of the just—or, at any rate, a very good imitation of it. When he awoke, he found himself seeking his pillow, he had completed three hours' sleep at a piece of steel, with knowledge that he had earned his rest. The only person who had not slept at all that night was poor Maude Smith. Maude had been found to be awake and fretful, and imagining things. "Bad man turner's keys," "But 'fave's' keys" were all right, where they had been left, on the dressing table; so Tommy was shocked, but would not. Finally, as father had to be up early to catch his train and needed rest, Sister Maude took Tommy off to her own bed. But it was not the "bad man" had been forgotten, nettled-rash began to trouble; then came "Tommy," which had to be rubbed, then "bad man" again, and then Tommy was taken up, and wrapping him in a blanket, and so taking him on her lap in a chair, would he at last consent to go to bed.

CHAPTER VII. Mr. Green Has Visitors. Though it cannot be said that Horace's services on Tuesday were of much real value to the Anglo-Ruritanian, he nevertheless arrived punctually, and sat at his desk, with every appearance of diligence, even if his thoughts were elsewhere. After a while, however, he was as much as some of the other clerks were doing, and they intended to draw pay for it, Horace didn't. "Here, Wyndham had much longer and you pay to be checked, those clerks don't know what's coming to you today; hurry up, please." "Now, what's the matter with old Green?" missed Horace, without noticing however, "He's as crusty as the devil this morning." Old Green, not really old at all, was a sort of half-way man among the clerks, senior of the juniors, or junior of the seniors, which ever way you like to call it, and was in charge of the room in which Horace worked. Held in high esteem by the management, he was reputed the model of a steady-going, young business man should be. As poor Green is destined to enter this story but to leave it at once, and very tragically, we may say here that this esteem was not undeserved, for in the morning Green was really a model bank clerk. This failing, which was known to no one but himself, was that for which the Americans have invented a single, other expressive term, "dope." Red noses and morning sickness meet with sharp shifts of the afternoon poor Green's nerves were nerve; but sometimes—so often, think, as alarmist penny-a-liners would have us believe, still, often enough to give cause for serious anxiety to all who have at heart the welfare of our race—another, more insidious and far more terrible, enemy to health and efficiency takes their chance. This enemy is "dope," the morning phenomenon which is his opening parallel, the evening morphine pellet his final assault. Poor Green had been in the line, much ground, but was now alive, and the danger, fighting bravely the uphill fight, and, at last, on the high road to conquer him finally. He knew, if others did not, that he could easily have laid this testiness and querulousness, that was making him do bad work himself and be an annoyance to everyone else, a visit to the lavatory and application to the little glass tube, re-posing in his waistcoat pocket, and in half an hour he would be once more the clever, even-tempered, "good" old Green, that the others knew of old. But he would not; he had cost him weeks, nay months, of struggle to get to the end. But it would be that he was really beginning to get the upper hand of his enemy, and he would check it off short. It was a childish thing to do, and some of the fellows sneered. Horace, who was rather a dandy about his work, had in his desk a silver-mounted, dagger-shaped comb, thin paper knife and folding knife, with his name on it, that had formerly lain on his Oxford writing table. He now took it across to Green, whom he liked, and was sorry for saying— "Try this, Green, I keep it sharp myself."

at the place where our poor working legs have to toil all day. "Stop all day, you mean," laughed Canning. "Then, as if I recollect," said Canning. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Green, please don't think that I include you in that statement, but I know Hocking. Tell me, what is it a fact that you have to work him up and put him out every morning?" Green laughed, and he and Canning followed Hocking. But to gain access to the business records, the promissory notes, stated having recourse to old Sandy's keys and lantern. While those were being got ready, Canning toyed idly with the bottle, giving it a little twist, then steadying it again, and so on. There was not very much to see in the deserted rooms, undusted and forlorn, where the Anglo-Ruritanian's clerks did their daily task, and Green thought it rather silly on Hocking's part to have brought them down there. However, Canning pretended to be much impressed with the comfort of everything, and chaffed Hocking unmercifully about the contents of his desk, which he had not thought it worth while to confess, and which included amongst other items a private tumbler and a box of seditious powders.

When they had finished their inspection they returned upstairs, and Hocking, more chiefly about a wonderful new sensation which had been offered to Hocking, by the influence of a certain rich uncle, who had taken up which had left the office of the Anglo-Ruritanian, till Canning looking at the clock said— "I say, Hocking, old man, do you know that it's a quarter to ten? We mustn't overstay our welcome."

Of course Green, as host, protested that he was young, but Hocking and his friend rose to go. "No, no more whisky, thanks," said Canning, as Green hesitatingly was going to help him to a drink. But, as he was seconds afterwards, slipping his hand on his breast pocket of his coat, as if suddenly remembering something that he had thought he said— "Wait a minute, though, we will have a dech on deck, since you wish it; but I was going to try something I have here, and he produced a flask. "No," he continued, laughing. "I'm not in the wine trade, but I was watching in the Hotel-Ruritanian, and the manager of a disservice gave me a keg of his own private special; the sort of whisky you can't buy in any shop. Perhaps the King gets some like it, but no one else."

"Except Mr. Canning! What a beastly conceited boaster you are!" bawled Hocking. "Oh! he's all right, I expect," said Hocking. "A tough old Scotchman like that can stand anything." "Well, well, he'll hope so," Carey replied, smilingly. "I don't think of Hocking off with my coat, and to work!"

Pensioned Sergeant Alexander McAllister, late of the 42nd, was a tough old fellow, but he was a good man, and his thirty years of wearing cross belts and bandoliers had given him the fatal "army heart." That was the last sleep he would ever take on earth. "I hope I'm not expected to gulp down again, but not exactly peace and happiness, Green, laughing, "because I really couldn't do it."

"No," as a concession to the fact that he had drunk already, "I'll let you off with a half glass apiece," Canning replied. "Gentlemen, we're going to drink success to the office we're about to enter. Hocking, my boy, you can just stifle your modesty and drink to yourself. At the word three, down with it and no retreat; and if you don't have a look at the best part of the bottle that before. One, two, three!"

Canning and Hocking placed their empty glasses on the table, and with a little unsteady, opened his mouth, as if to say something, but it was closed, and he subsided into a chair. "I hope I'm not expected to gulp down again, but not exactly peace and happiness, Green, laughing, "because I really couldn't do it."

and Carey made the old man explain it very thoroughly, it was simple enough to work. The rule for the watchman was to strike his signal each hour, not necessarily at the exact moment of the clock striking, but thereabouts, not more than ten minutes before or after. So Carey, with Sanderson's permission, gave the ten o'clock signal at once. Then he asked where the outside indicator was situated, as he had to see the great red dot that was in the main thoroughfare, not at the back.

"Well, Hocking, we must be getting back, or my Green'll think we're lost. Thank you," this to McAllister. "It's awfully clever, I suppose you're going to have your coffee now?" "When Ah've done th' rounds, sir." And the old fellow stumped off, with his lantern.

"Hocking," said Carey, when they were once more in the sitting-room and the door shut, "the 'Fates' mean us to succeed tonight. Just fancy! If that old chap had taken his eyes without saying anything about that affair we should have been laid like raisins in a trap. But our luck held good, and now we've got to do it to the thought of the constable stopping outside here whenever he passed and listening, but now all we've got to do is to handle one an hour, and Robert'll give himself no trouble about the safety of the Anglo-Ruritanian. It just shows you how easily over-precision may defeat itself. By the way, did you notice that old boy's coffee cup?"

"No, what about it?" "It wasn't a cup at all, it was a basin, a bowl." "Nothing, except that I hope he doesn't go and wash it off before the stuff begins to work. He might get rather too much of it." They had about five minutes longer to wait; then came a crash, as if a piece of furniture being overturned. From the landing they saw McAllister rising on the floor, breathing heavily. His camp-stool lay on the floor; he had evidently been sitting on it, carelessly, and had placed there, unawares, was a pint earthenware basin—empty!

Hocking's green grave. He ran downstairs, three steps at a time, and looked closely at the recumbent figure. Then he turned to Hocking. "It's more than I ever meant him to take," he said. "But I don't know of anything that I can do now; I believe the coffee is in a stupor!" "Just then the prostrate figure moved its arm.

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