

# A MASTER OF MEN

By E. P. OPPENHEIM

## CHAPTER XII.—(Continued.)

He raised her gently. He was very sorry for her indeed, and his tone was almost tender.

"My dear girl," he said, "please listen to me. So long as I am here you can come out every Saturday if you like, if it really helps you. I may be going away soon, but not just yet at any rate."

She was comforted, but his unresponsive tone vexed her. She was aching for his caresses, for a single note of endearment in his tone. He could have beaten her afterwards if he only had the strength to do so. But she was not a woman to be so easily moved. She was a woman of a certain extent susceptible to the charm of his close presence and half-smiling endearments. But with his return to mundane things the old madness was singing once more in his heart and through his blood. He drew away from her quietly.

"I wish," he said, "I could help you more permanently. I can't. You've got your work to do in life, and I've got mine. You've got to go, just now, to keep your head. It's hard work, but you'll do it. Life's an ugly sort of thing when we're on the downward slope. Come into the wood and I'll show you a woman's nest. The nest must be off. I've more work to do."

She followed him with dull footsteps. "Life's a cold sort of place when there's no one cares a snap of the fingers for you," she said. "I don't see as it matters much what becomes of me."

"Life seems very hard to all of us now and then," he answered easily. "We all have our bad streaks. You're in one now. Never mind! I always believe that life's arranged on the balancing system. You'll have your good time some day. There! Put your hand in and feel."

"Why, I can't get more than a finger in," she exclaimed.

"It's a tiny nest, isn't it?" he answered. "The young 'uns only flew a week or so ago. Listen."

A bird's long, sweetly drawn-out note rang softly through the silent wood. They held their breaths. Strome raised his finger.

"A nightingale," he murmured. "Lean against the gate. A nightingale sang to them, and the man and woman stood side by side. Around them, save for that sweet, sweet, sweet note, an unbroken silence. She crept closer to him. Her eyes were beautifully eloquent. In the half lights the poorness of her ill-made clothes, her pitiful little attempts at attractiveness, seemed to fade away. Only the girl herself, with her pale, passionate face, crept closer and closer to him. He was her one hope, her single ray of life."

She began to cry softly. He felt a little cold hand creep into his. He stole closer to him, and her head dropped upon his shoulder. He turned round with a start, and her heart sank like lead. There was no possibility of making what she read in his face. She knew that his thoughts had been away from her.

"I am going," she faltered, and would have hastened away, but that he caught her by the arm.

"Don't hurry," he said. "There will be a moon presently. Besides, you must have some supper."

"I don't want any supper," she answered, struggling with a great lump in her throat. "I want to go away—at once. Let me go!"

"But, my dear child, why do you look at me like that?" he exclaimed. "What have I done to vex you so?"

She broke away and hurried towards the cottage. He followed, but kept up with her with difficulty.

"It is getting colder," he said. "Would you like me to ride some of the way with you?"

"No! Give me my bicycle please."

He frowned at her. "Don't be silly child," he said. "What have I done to offend you?"

"Nothing!"

"When will you come out and see me again, then?"

She broke down. A flood of tears streamed down her face. He caught her in his arms, and she dabbed her eyes with a worn and wholly inefficient pocket-handkerchief. Strome stood by awkward and perplexed.

"Won't you tell me what the matter, Milly?" he asked. "Is there any fresh trouble you haven't told me of?"

She straightened herself, and she looked at him with eyes dilated—pale and ghost-like.

"No! Only I'm not coming here again. You don't want me. I'm only in the way of your thoughts about somebody or something else. I have been very foolish to come at all."

"You are foolish now to go away like this," he said.

"You don't care!"

"Of course I do!"

She clung to him to a forlorn hope. She leaned over her bicycle. Her face softened, her eyes besought him.

"You don't mean it. You were thinking just then of some one else. You started when I spoke to you."

He told a white lie, impelled to it by the pity which was in his heart. "No," he said, "I have been working practically day and night. Only a few hours ago I found what I wanted. Can you wonder that I am scarcely master of my thoughts?"

She was only half-convinced, but she was very willing to believe him.

Strome lingered by the gate, and presently the nightingale sang to him.

## CHAPTER XIII.

The three men sat side by side upon the wooden bench in stolid and evil silence. There was Syd King, a raring pot-house orator, Haynes, and Dobson, a heavy-browed thick-necked mechanic. The landlord didn't like the look of them, and his other customers seemed to prefer a distant seat. But they drank freely and paid for what they had, so their presence remained unchallenged. Yet they were an ugly trio.

The afternoon wore into evening. There was a purple flush on Dobson's face, an ugly glare in Syd King's eyes. Haynes put down his glass unsteadily.

"Enough, boys," he cried. "To work." They rose and passed unregarded into the cool, sweet evening. Syd King stood blinking for several moments. Haynes was trying to light a cigar with a match held several inches away from it. They climbed into the little pony trap, and Dobson seized the reins. With a burst of foul language they drove off. The place seemed purer for their departure.

Away from the inn their tongues were relaxed. They left the main road, and began to climb a steep country lane.

"Was I wrong in my opinion of you, Dobson?" "How far are you chaps going?" "He'll be awkward."

King drew in his breath with the hiss of a wild cat. "There's plenty of us, eh?" he asked. "I'd treat him as Pinner's boy did Dave Hare. That's the way to settle such a fellow."

Once for all, I say! There was a short, grim silence. Then they dogged the pony until it broke into a shambling trot. Dobson pointed with his whip.

"It's behind that hill," he said, "quietest spot round about here. There'll be no one to hear him. If so be as he's a troublemaker. Hand us a jimmy, King. We'll take one apiece after we forget."

King handed his own lovingly, an ugly murderous-looking weapon. "Better'n shooters," he murmured. "More quiet like, and yer can't miss. How much further, Joe?"

"A mile, Dobson answered. 'We'll hitch the pony to the gate up on the hill there. Let's 'ope he's got some liquor in the 'ouse. It'll be good work arguing."

"It's a blooming quiet 'ere, yer can't 'ear 'em miles. We ain't none so far off, either."

The little trap crept up the steep hill, the horse almost brilliant. The end of Haynes lit a pipe with trembling fingers, and Dobson picked a handful of bracken and waved it to keep off the flies. A hushed silence had fallen upon them. The end of their journey was at hand.

Strome lay on the short turf, smoking quietly, looking out upon the glittering night, with new eyes. Sphinx-like he gazed with an impassivity somewhat to be wondered at, for an hour ago he had finished his last rags. Those long, those long spells of work when day had become fused into the night and night into day, had left their mark upon him.

His eyes almost brilliant, the slight feverishness had flushed his cheeks. The man's sense of power had grown and deepened. For he had done great things. He had bent great forces to his will. He had succeeded where other men had failed.

He looked out into the world and tried to apprise himself rightly. He wanted to know where he stood. There was a place which he could claim. Where? How high up, how far could we? How far could we take him? Where was the value of his brains in the world's esteem? He tried to reckon these things up, and he found himself baffled. It was a kaleidoscopic misty wilderness into which he looked. He was trying to deal with his future from a wholly new point of view, and felt very much lost.

Those moments of introspective thought became moments of self-contempt. He regretted the change in him. The old ideals were unshaken, but they no longer held paramount sway. The gift of his brains to humanity, the betterment of his fellows, the inauguration of certain carefully conceived labor schemes no longer appealed to him with that wonderful enthusiasm with which he had once almost sacrificed his life. They were still dear to him, the end and aim of his practical efforts, but they were no longer all.

What had he, Enoch Strome, to do with his sense of triumph. Such madness, such a mad dream, such a mad dream, such a mad dream. He was transfused with the life of his own. And in his hand was the golden key.

Martinghoe passed by, clanging his bicycle bell, saw him from the road, and promptly dismounted.

"I'm coming in for a drink, Strome," he called out. "This hill gets steeper, or old age is upon me."

Strome walked to meet him. "Come in!"

They sat together for a few moments, and Martinghoe lit a pipe whilst he sipped his whiskey and was quite unconscious of the fact that he was being watched.

"You are idle tonight," he remarked, looking around. "No books, no modeling."

Strome took his pipe from his mouth. "Idle," he answered, "because my work is done."

Martinghoe nodded quickly, looked a question which Strome answered.

"Behind there," he said, jerking his head towards the shed, "is the fulfilment of many years' work. I have committed a sin. I am an inventor. Martinghoe, I intend I have made the Miracle Crane. It will do the work of a hundred-ay, of a thousand men. The lifting machinery of the world will be affected. It is the triumph of man's ingenuity over matter."

He broke off silently. Martinghoe was fascinated by the simple directness of his speech.

"Bravo!" he exclaimed. "I congratulate you. You are one of the world's benefactors."

Strome's face darkened. "I don't believe that," he said shortly. "It's an odd thing. Nature has made me an inventor against my own convictions. I hate machinery."

Martinghoe looked up puzzled, waiting for an explanation.

"Sometimes I believe that machinery has been the greatest curse ever let loose upon the class to which I belong," he continued. "It would be a pity if it were not. Machinery has done away with the craftsman; it has made a brainless parasite of the workingman. It's right enough! I mean that there are a few trades yet where machinery isn't employed. I'll wager with their hands, and are direct producers, even of a grade at least the quality of the work."

Watch 'em stream out of the great factories in Gaster—brutal mob of dirty, unsexed-looking creatures, with dull eyes and low foreheads, it's the brainless, mechanical work which has dulled the man in them. Machinery's made units of them, crushed their individuality, and their creation will be worse. We shall end with a mass of parasites little better than a horde of monkeys. God! I believe I'd do well to smash my machine into a thousand pieces."

"You forget," Martinghoe said, a little startled at this sudden outbreak, "that machinery has changed the production of nearly every staple article. The whole world reaps the benefit of that."

"Captain," Strome answered. "The world's flooded with cheap, ugly things, which debase our taste, and are generally useless. Tables and chairs, with legs that tumble off, cheap and pretentious, both of them. I tell you that if my invention were not pure engineering, I'd break it up this moment."

Martinghoe reluctantly. "You're a queer chap," he declared. "Come and smoke a pipe with me tomorrow. I must be off now. By the way, you haven't seen my sister, have you?"

"Not this evening," Strome answered. "Is she driving?"

"Riding," he said. "She's late for her, but she's coming. I hope to see you tomorrow, I hope."

He put on his hat and, having mounted his bicycle, rode off. Strome returned to his cottage to find the door of his shed open, and the shadow of a man lurking in the darkness.

He advanced quickly. As he passed the angle of the cottage, Syd King, with parted teeth and the grin of a wildcat, leaped stealthily out. Something dropped from his hand, and he uttered a screeching cry. With uplifted arms and a loud cry, Strome reeled and fell backwards. The three men bent over him, huddled together, and he uttered a screeching cry.

"You've killed him," the former murmured. "Good job, too," Dobson muttered.

## CHAPTER XIV.

A blow which would have killed a man of ordinary strength kept Strome senseless for about a minute. He lay on his back, his head on the ground, his eyes closed. He was not dead, but he was unconscious. He was not dead, but he was unconscious. He was not dead, but he was unconscious.

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"We shall not need it," she remarked. "The little man has run away. I am afraid this is going to hurt you, but it must be done."

It hurt so much that he fainted. She tore up a handkerchief and bound his wound skilfully. Then she forced some whiskey between his teeth. His countenance became more natural, and in a moment or two he opened his eyes. The touch of her cool fingers was delicious.

"You are better," she said to get away from him. "You can hear my man coming now."

She drew a silver whistle from her pocket and blew it. The groom, who saw signs of something unusual from the lane, dropped from his lame horse and came running up. She stroled over to where Dobson was still lying, and stood looking at him.

"I think this brute is going to die," she remarked carelessly. "Wildfire kicked him in the side."

Strome came to his feet. The groom arrived breathless. "John," she said, "you are to wait here till I can send a carriage for Mr. Strome. I don't want him to see any more of this. Here is the revolver. If Mr. Strome comes to, make him drink some more whiskey. Hold my stirrup."

"Very good, my lady."

"There's another of these creatures in the wood," she said, swinging slightly by the saddle. "I don't think he'll come back, but you'd better not leave Mr. Strome."

"Yes, my lady."

"What on earth are you talking about, Beatrice?" he exclaimed. "I was with Strome an hour ago, and he was all right. I don't see how he could be hurt."

"He's not hurt," she answered. "He's got a concussion of the brain pretty badly. I think he'll be all right, but he's got to be kept quiet. I'll go and get a doctor."

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nothing I would not attempt, nothing I would not do."

There was a sharp break in his voice, a mist before his eyes. Lady Malingcourt was studying the pattern of her lace parasol. Suddenly she closed it and looked up at him.

"Don't you think you had better postpone the rest—until after dinner?" she said quietly.

"No," he answered. "You and your brother, Lady Malingcourt, have been very kind to me. You have made me sometimes almost forget the difference between a mechanic such as I am and genteel people such as you. So I have dared to wonder whether the difference must be for ever."

(To be continued.)

# "EX-TEACHER" ON TEACHERS' SALARIES

Some Interesting and Pertinent Remarks Relative to the Attitude of the Chairman of the Trustees.

To the Editor of The Telegraph: Sir,—As a former teacher, I am interested in the discussion now going on as to teachers' salaries and have read the convincing and unvarnished letter of "Teacher," the pointed and vigorous article of the press in support of the same, and with some surprise the remarks of the chairman of the board, who is reported as follows:

"A communication from the St. John Teachers' Association asking for an increase of \$50 in the salary of every female teacher and subsequently \$25 a year, was received and referred to the teachers' committee."

"The chairman said that the association was under a misapprehension in presenting the application to the board. The city council was the body to petition. The board has been willing to encourage any movement towards higher salaries."

"He referred to the letter, signed Teacher, published in the press a few days ago, saying it was not broad enough. All female labor was poorly paid. He had made inquiries about town and found that 'Mr. Bullock said that he had never heard a criticism of the action of the board, when it increased salaries, by members of the council, but that he had been strong criticism for expense in connection with the building of elaborate school houses.'"

"When the chairman rates the work of the teacher with that of the typewriter in importance, he evidently considers he is giving expression to the 'broad' view. He should have gone a little further and compared teachers' pay with that of those engaged in domestic service and charwomen generally. In such work, the remuneration of the teachers comparatively would have appeared at even less advantage."

"St. John employs only first class teachers. Do first class typewriters only receive from \$5 to \$7 per week? Does the typewriter only pay his own typewriter that amount?"

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