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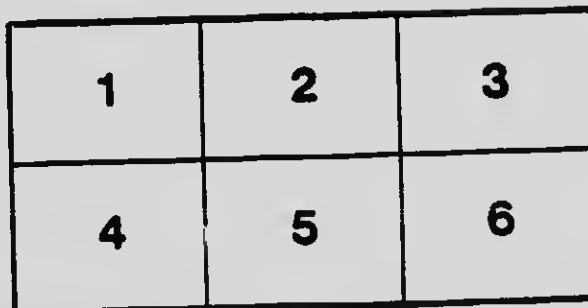
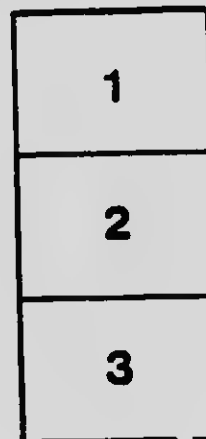
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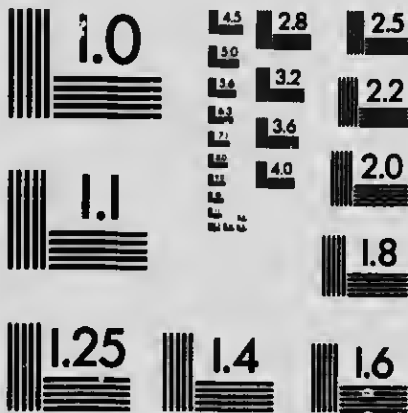
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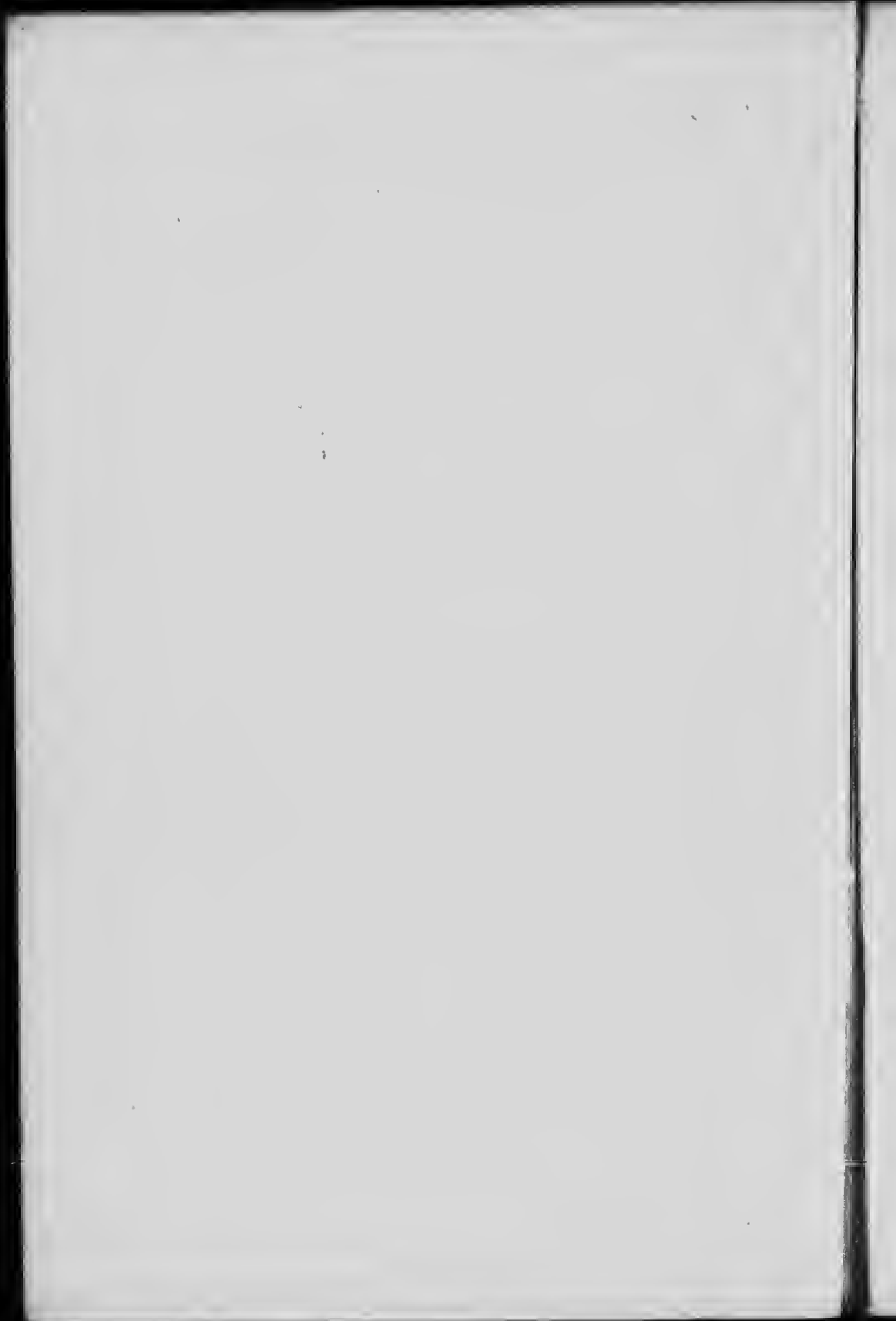
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To Hilda

from Roger.

Nov '09.



SWORD AND DRAGON

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Curly

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SWORD AND DRAGON

BY

ROGER POCOCK

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
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CHAPTER I

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PROLOGUE

"LAY him here," said the Railroad Magnate. At that the conductor protested.

249

"He ain't due to make your bed any cleaner."

"The sheets will wash. Now heave—very gently—so."

257

The fireman was swung upon the bed, all grime and blood, against snowy linen. Throwing up the blind from a window the President let the glory of the sunrise into the compartment, and by that light studied the patient's face. The two train servants stood back, breathing hard, one wiping the sweat from his face.

265

"That youngster hefts a good two hundred," he gasped.

277

The lad lay dreaming in that golden sunrise, of a world where there seemed to be no pain. As the train swung onward, lapsing into half sleep, or dreaming awake, his brain took note of the rumble of a culvert, the swing of a curve. "The five-mile tangent," he thought, "we're nearing Revolversburg. We'll turn her over to Jim at the round-house, then to the railroad hotel for a sleep."

287

The President sat on the edge of his bed and looked up at the conductor.

292

"Your pilot train was despatched," he said sbarply "one hour ahead of mine from Blunt?"

306

Balancing against the motion of the car the conductor gnawed at the tobacco which bulged his lean cheek.

"Yes, sir."

"Did you know why a pilot was sent ahead of my train?"

"Wall," the conductor drawled, "rock-slides ain't healthy, bush-fires is pizen, and——"

"Did you expect wreckers?"

"You ain't been a whole lot popular, Mr. Gault."

"Would the men of this Division expect the President of the Road to order a pilot?"

"We reckon that flies don't exactly browse on our President."

"Would railroad men of any Division or Line try to involve you, and that poor engineer, and this fireman, or the crew of this train in an attempt upon my life?"

"Wall, I guess that skunks of sorts has reckoned to murder you some, and he wasn't no tenderfoot who fixed them rails."

"Conductor, I want this matter clear. I can't believe that any railroad man wanting to murder me would risk the lives of his own comrades."

"That's a fact."

"And yet you say this wrecker was a practical railroad man?"

"He surely was. He knew his business so well that he was able to carry out the job single-handed. And, Mr. Gault, he didn't yearn to have witnesses around. No, this guy was practical, and a dam' smart man."

"Now I understand," said the President, "that without the slightest warning your engine came to a point on the Cape Horn Curve where the rails had been cut and pointed straight out over Grizzly Creek. The train must have made a straight leap into space, rolling over in the air."

"You air correct, sir."

"When you came to your senses you were lying in the creek?"

"The cold would have waked a corpse."

"And you lay half conscious."

"Waking up gradual."

"How far were you from the wrecked train?"

"A car-length. On the nigh side I could just make out this here brakesman caught at the feet by a brake-beam."

"His name?"

"Haraldson—young Brand Haraldson."

"What else could you see?"

"The lights of your train. It looked like a snake writhing down the loops from the Pass. Haraldson seen it too. He was moving around. I seen him strike a match. Then he got some waste from his pocket, set it alight, put it on the brake-beam which pinned his feet to the ground, and began piling on kindlings and sticks. I knew the boy would make good. That light would warn your train."

"But the risk?"

"He was burning himself to death. I seen him lie on his back, his arms reached out——"

"Making the figure of the Cross!"

"I reckon. The lad's face was turned towards the Pass, and I seen the light of the fire glint on his eyes until he put up his hands to stave off the heat."

"Go on," said the President, who held the brakesman's hand.

"It was then I seen the wrecker: a young, stout, fair man, but his head was turned away, and I saw no face. He had sprung sudden out of the dark into the glare. He was beating out the flames."

"To save the lad?"

"No, sir; to put out the signal so that your train would be piled on top of ours. Then Haraldson tried to stop him, and the wrecker swung a burning log to beat out the youngster's brains."

"While you lay still!"

"Not much! I'd pulled myself together by that time, staggered to my feet, climbed the bank, and rushed with a yell at that wrecker. He ran for all he was worth."

"What happened next?"

"Why, the next thing I knew your train hands were throwing water over me."

"I was there," said the President. "We found you lying on Haraldson's body, and a hard time we had to pull away the burning wreckage before it was too late."

"You understand, Mr. Gault, that this youngster——"

"Gave his body to the flames."

"He threw away his life to save your life, sir."

Brand opened his eyes. "And that's a lie," he muttered. "I signalled to save the train hands. Old Gault can go to hell!"

The President leaned forward, grasping the boy's rough hand in both his own.

"Rest, my dear lad," he whispered. "We'll soon have a doctor for you. Sleep, my dear lad, sleep."

Brand lay back exhausted, and presently, as though in a dream heard a deep voice speaking: "Hilda, do you hear, child? It's only heroes who tell all the truth."

Then in the dream Brand felt something fluttering near him, heard a little sob, and saw a young girl bending over him, her face full of pity, her eyes glittering with tears. But his brain measured the pulse of the rolling train, the jolts at the rail-lengths, the metre of the grade running onward and onward into silence.

CHAPTER II

ENTER TWO VAGRANTS

"IT is four o'clock, I hear the faint rustling of the wings of dawn—and it's dam' cold. The orb of day, sir, forsakes the Old World, leaving it to wallow in the gloom of monarchical tyranny, that it may shed its radiance upon this glorious hemisphere of freedom."

So rhapsodized the seediest of all tramps as he crawled feebly on to an empty packing-box against the wall of a shed. He seemed the more an object of compassion because his was a frock-coat that had become green with age, a fashionable top-hat which was masquerading as a smashed accordion. His trousers were such as could never have foreseen the evil day when they would be belted with a yard or so of dirty lamp-wick, his boots must have been invalidated and put out to grass when he adopted them; yet the man's bearing made a forlorn protest of respectability which even the foulest linen could not quite repudiate. He was weak with prolonged starvation, his jaws were rough with grey bristles, his alert eyes sunken away in shadows of tragic depth; yet the face was of lionlike strength, and a man has no small courage who can laugh when it would be a relief to die.

"Sir," he continued, arranging himself the while on his perch; "I have the pleasure of introducing you to New York, metropolis of a republican paradise, bounded

on the east by Feudal Ruin, on the west by the Slough of the Orient, on the south by the Tropic of Cancer, on the north by the Aurora Borealis. Behold, Mr. Brand Haraldson, the zinc cornices of the future capital of this planet, the chosen home of the eagle Freedom, head-quarters of the Trusts, of representative misgovernment, of the Tammany gang. Corrupt, you say? Rotten? Sir, it is Amurrican."

The tramp was shaken with prolonged coughing; he shivered miserably, but still must needs make valiant attempts to cheer his companion in disaster.

"We are not welcomed with the customary brass bands, the procession of free-born citizens, the champagne lunch; we are not pestered with interviewers; we have arrived from the Far West without trespassing upon Eastern hospitality; we have made our entry *incognito*, riding on the humble insecurity of the brake-beam, and now you look as glum as a fore-castle parrot in a den of deacons."

"Shut up," said Brand, roughly. "Here, you're shivering; take this." He wrenched off his tattered pilot jacket, which he spread with womanly tenderness over the other's knees. "Now, Colonel, don't be a fool."

"Sir," said the Colonel, "I am greatly obliged to you. And now, Brand, since I'm too cold to sleep, I will harrow up thy young soul with tales of impecuniosity and abortive vengeance. Do you know why I went to Revolversburg?"

Haraldson paid not the slightest attention, for he had turned his back upon the broken man, to gaze at the towering roofs of the metropolis that rose up stark against the dawn. Down under the quay the ebb tide was murmuring among the piles, long lines of lamps reached away along the water-front into the river mists,

the wintry air was still with a great silence, broken only by the swirl of the river and the Colonel's maundering voice.

"Ten years ago, a certain Railroad King was crossing the Rocky Mountains in his private car—now, I guess you ain't honouring me with your attention, but you shall presently, by thunder!—and the name of that aforesaid plutocrat was Michael Gault."

"What's that?" said Brand, turning sharply.

The Colonel chuckled. "Now, if that particular capitalist had been allowed his own way, he wouldn't have permitted a pilot train to be hauled out of bed to see his track clear, in which event the recording angel might have been called upon to 'write off' one plutocrat. It was the division superintendent who despatched the pilot engine, with a caboose for ballast, and orders to look out for the usual natural amenities of mountain travel, such as rock-slides, wash-outs, and bush-fires. There was a little unexpected hitch, the pilot went to kingdom come, and the plutocrat would have followed, but that a young fool of a fireman set the wreckage alight by way of a signal. Now the young fool aforesaid, who nearly burned himself to death to save Dives, was one Brand Ha——"

"That's enough," said Haraldson; "it's no business of yours."

"Young man, it's so much my business that I have just been to the Rocky Mountains to make enquiries."

"And that's why you thrust yourself into my company?"

"You air correct."

"What do you want to know?"

"Young man, that enterprising ego-maniac, who tried to murder Michael Gault, is now one of the leading men of New York City."

"Well?"

ENTER TWO VAGRANTS

"Sir, that man is the chief of a great private detective system—the 'Frailty.'"

"What—Doctor Clewston?"

"Yes, sir; Doctor Rex Clewston is a man of whom the United States is real proud."

"You say"—Brand's voice trembled with excitement—"that Doctor Rex Clewston was the wrecker who tried to murder Gault? Come, I'll put you to the test. If he is the man, I shall know him. Show me this man!"

But the Colonel laughed until he was seized with a paroxysm of coughing. "Show you—Rex Clewston!" He choked, gasped, laughed, wiping tears from his eyes with the back of his gloved hand. "I tell you, young man, that nobody has ever met Rex Clewston face to face. He suffers from ophthalmia—wears a green shade over his eyes; lives in darkened rooms; never goes out; doesn't admit one visitor in a week. Sir, I admire the modesty of your demands. Show you Rex Clewston!"

"Then," said Brand, turning indifferently away, "what can you know about him?"

"Know I know, sir! I was, until a few months ago, one of his ten chief officers, head of the Frailty Record Department, inventor and controller of his famous Exchange.

"What's that?' Say, where were you brung up? Were you raised on the moon, or some barbarian planet? Sir, I should admire!"

"I will expound. All information received by an up-to-date detective office is filed away for reference; because a bureau without records is like a groundling ape without a tail, unable to gesticulate, to admonish, to pervade the branches of the knowledge tree. But no one bureau can produce the pedigrees of all known criminals, or trot out the skeleton from every family closet; so that while the detective systems were busy

making enquiries one of another, the alert malefactor usually skipped out for foreign parts. Consequently, while I was keeper of Clewston's archives, I founded for him an exchange, connected by pneumatic tubes and telephone with every detective system in New York City. I was also connected by telegraph with all the police bureaus in the civilized world; so that if London wished news of an American swindler, we got the information quicker than lightning, and charged accordingly; or if the New York police must have facts which we couldn't supply, we enquired among the other private detective offices, and bought up what was wanted, before any one else had time to think about it. Our office never closed. If work had to be done in New York for other cities, we generally got the contract; and if anything important passed through our exchange we kept a copy, while all the other systems were left in the dark. That's how all the detective offices in the world became branches of Clewston's Bureau."

"Why," said Brand innocently, "it was enough to abolish crime."

"Sir, do you suppose we wanted to abolish crime? Do you imagine that police and detectives are filled with a passionate longing to make themselves unnecessary? A crime farm, young man, is the last development of agriculture. A fool cashier plunders a bank, the bank pays to have him pursued; then he is captured by a detective, and milked like a cow; or else, if he hasn't any plunder, delivered into the hands of justice; for honesty is the best policy of all, besides being good advertising. Yes, young man, the effete European enquiry office returns the plunder to the plundered; an ordinary American detective gets the cash for himself; but Clewston alone is smart enough to send out its officers to rustle on commission. A

Clewston detective knows that Clewston wants seventy per cent. of the spoil—and Clewston gets it. Profitable? Oh, that's only a drop in the Clewston bucket; because an American doesn't run the detective business for his health. Blackmail, sir, is the tribute which Vice pays to Knowledge; and yet they say that Vice doesn't pay! My dear young friend, Vice pays rather than get itself talked about—Vice pays through the nose; or who would believe in its kid gloves of virtue, its frock-coat of respectability, its silk hat of self-righteousness? Vice pays seventy per cent. of its plunder to stay out of gaol, twenty-five per cent. to keep up appearances. Vice is a fool! And I, sir—who gave Clewston his exchange, who organized his record office, who contributed more than any other man to his enormous power—I—look at what I am—an outcast, a tramp, a pariah!

The wretched man threw aside Brand's coat, scrambled down off the packing-case, and waved his long bony arms in frantic gesticulation. "Give me proof!" he wailed. "You're the only man who saw him at his devilish work! Give me proof of Clewston's identity as the wrecker of trains, the bungling assassin—give me the one proof, Haraldson, that it was his face you saw in the flames that night, and I will tear him down! I'll crush his jaws under my heel! I'll grind him to powder! Proof, I say! Proof! Proof!"

"Meanwhile," said Brand, "that's a coffee-stand starting up at the dock gates, and I made five cents last night by holding a horse. Stay here." Brand left his friend sunk in a sort of stupor, and groped his way among the railway sidings to the stall by the dock gates, where he bought some bread. On his return, after an absence of five minutes, he found a policeman hoisting the Colonel off his packing-case by the scruff of the neck.

"Let go," said Brand.

The constable turned about in surprise, but he let go.

"Now," said Brand, "you'll find a coffee fakir trading by the dock gates, and you'll get more out of him than you will from us."

The policeman looked at the loom of Brand's huge body against the dawn light; he cast an uneasy glance at the river behind him.

"Be jabbers!" he blustered, "I've a mind to arrist the both of yez." Then he swaggered away to blackmail the coffee fakir.

"Brand," quavered the Colonel, "our city police would puzzle any biologist, but you've studied natural history some."

"Here's your share of the bread." Brand handed his five-cent roll to the Colonel, then turned away, making dumb show as though he gnawed at some imaginary crust. He could hear his friend behind him eating ravenously.

"You're a slow feeder," he growled; "I've almost finished mine."

"Bread must be cheap now," mumbled the Colonel. "You got good weight for your money."

"That's so," said Brand heartily, drawing his belt in an inch; "I've had to loosen my belt. Say," he continued, "I'm going to leave you at sunrise. I have business to do in this place, work that will keep me all day, and by to-night I shall have money for both of us. Where shall I find you, Colonel?"

But the Colonel reached out his hands, and plucked feebly at Brand's sleeve. "Don't leave me," he pleaded; "don't desert me!"

For a moment he sat limp and helpless, his hands fallen at his sides, his eyes closed. Presently he felt the

crustier half of the roll, which he had set down as too hard for his teeth; his fingers closed upon it; he lifted one eyelid, and saw Brand's back turned upon him; he smuggled the crust into his own tail pocket, and allowed himself one little half grin of satisfaction. Then he rocked himself to and fro. "I can't bear it," he quavered. "Brand, I'm an old man now; I've no more fight left in me; Clewston will find me; his spies will follow me; they'll drag me before him; he knows everything; he has no mercy, and I'm doomed. Doomed! Doomed! Don't you hear, man? Doomed!"

"What have you done?" said Brand, harshly; "what makes you afraid of Clewston?"

"Done? Done?" he moaned; "what haven't I done?" Then came a harsh laugh. "So you think I'm going to give myself away?"

"Keep your mouth shut," said Brand, "and you'll do yourself no harm."

"You're right, young man; you're right. Say," he whispered, seizing Brand again by the sleeve; "you've been a true friend. Don't desert me now. Perhaps some day I may serve you. It's worth your while to stand by me. Don't be mad with me, Brand; don't mind what an old fool says. I'm no good to anybody now—I, Colonel Hiram W. Giggleswick, am played out."

The day was breaking now, the city rose in dim confusion against a primrose sky, waggons were rumbling along the cobbled pavements, labourers were whistling as they went to their work, an engine came floundering among the sidings, the dock gates were open, and the murmur of the ebb tide was no longer to be heard among the piers, for the great metropolis had awakened.

CHAPTER III

ENTER A PRINCESS

THE sun was shining fair, the bright spring day was young, with considerable promise of being too hot. Brand had an envelope in his hand, containing a letter of introduction, and directed to Messrs. Vanslyperken & Schneidam, Attorneys, at number thirty-four. Here was number thirty-four. Brand glanced at his envelope, then at the big shining brass plate of Messrs. Vanslyperken & Schneidam; but he waited before climbing the steps, because the inner doors swung open, and a lady client came out, who turned with a gracious good-day to the clerk, while she gathered up her skirts before descending into the dust of the streets.

The lady was young and fair, of a commanding presence, her face radiant with health, her small red lips pursed up, as though the lawyers had given her something very serious to think about. She was dressed as a professional nurse, in silvery grey, her bonnet sitting light as a feather amid the lustrous golden-brown hair. As she came down the steps Brand stood aside by the railings, staring so hard that she looked up to see what was the matter. He felt her glance at the gaping seams of his boots, his ragged overalls, his old pilot jacket, his flannel shirt that was ripped at the breast, showing the white skin, at the soft felt hat that sagged down over his eyes. He turned his face away, shifting uneasily, as

though he would try to escape ; then he heard her little quick breath of astonishment, as she stopped at the fourth step.

"Brand!" she whispered.

He shrank back a little, ashamed ; but he could not help looking up until their eyes met.

Her face was full of pity and sorrow. "My poor boy," she cried. "Has it—I'm so sorry—I mean I'm so glad to see you." She came down the steps ; and a thrill went through him as her gloved hand rested upon his arm. "Come in—come in out of the street. Fancy it being ten whole years since we met, and yet I knew you at the first glance. Mr. Schneidam will lend us his room ; it will be all right. Brand, I can't let you go away. You must come!"

Brand was too weak with hunger—too tired and ill—to offer much resistance ; so she drew him into the house, got leave from a little formal old lawyer, took him to a private consulting-room ; then whispered to somebody at the door, handing him money.

As to Brand, he threw down his hat on the floor. "Well," he growled, "I'm caught." But, from the expression of his face, as he collapsed on the edge of Mr. Schneidam's table, one would have supposed that he liked it.

His hostess closed the door, put Brand's hat on the window-sill, and came to him, stretching out both her hands with frank cordiality. The man received them with reverence.

"Caught!" she said gaily. "You bad boy, how dare you want to run away from me? But what brought you here to father's solicitors of all people?" He could not answer. "So you won't talk?" she laughed. "Never mind. I've got you to look at, anyway."

Somehow her little laugh of delight made it all come

back. That dream of ten years ago ; that month—too brief after the train wrecking—when Hilda Gault and her father had nursed him in the hotel at Revolversburg. What was he that these great people should have cared for him? What had he done that the Railroad King should become like a father to him—that Miss Gault should have sat by his bedside, to ease the pain through the night watches?

And then they had gone away, leaving him with the dream of his boyhood realized—an apprenticeship to his heart's profession of journalism, besides the sweet memory of all that they had been to him in his sickness. He—who had never known a father's love, a lady's gentleness—looked back upon that month of perfect happiness as a breath of heaven, that was to inspire all his life. And now—

"Do you remember," he said, "the night before you left Revolversburg, when that brute of a doctor first let me sit up to receive you? Your father was in one of his moods; said that the shock of the latest attempt on his life had made him feel kinder sick; he had not long to live."

"I remember," she said gravely. "He told me that day how you seemed to have become a second son to him. He loved you, Brand."

"Humph! a damaged fireman was a queer object for a Railroad King to fall in love with. That night, after you had gone home to bed, he told me how you and your—what do you call him, brother by adoption?"

"Marshall, you mean? He was in New York then. You never saw him, Brand."

"Yes, I remember, Marshall. That you and Marshall were no more his children than I was."

"He told you that—that we were only adopted children?"

"Yes ; not even relations. Just taken up like me, to fill the waste places of a lonely old life. Say, he must have been a very good man !"

Hilda bowed her head.

"He told me," continued Brand, "that I must try to get quit of Socialism and trades'-union prejudices ; and although he was a wicked plutocrat, I must think of him always as a father. Because, he said, in spite of my being a reprehensible young blackguard, he thought I had the foundations of manhood in me ; and as his own father, Patrick Gault, had risen from being a sailor before the mast, so I might rise to such a position that the United States would be proud of me."

"That's true," said Hilda ; "or coming true quicker than you think."

"He told me," continued Brand, in a wonderfully gentle voice, "that this last of many attempts to kill him, made him fearful as to your future. There was some enemy unknown to him—some blackguard bad enough to attack not only himself, but his child ; so that, after he was gone, you might still be in danger. Your money, he said, was entrusted to—what's his name—Marshall's care ; but Marshall was—well, too keen a business man to look after you, except as regards your property. Then he said that he had caused a big search with detectives as to the train-wrecking, which had failed to trace the wrecker ; but that if ever you were menaced again, in danger, in trouble, he would rather trust me to help you than even Marshall. He was right, it was true ; for when he trusted me, he placed you under a guardianship surer than the love of even a real brother."

She drew her hands away.

"If ever I heard that you were in trouble I was to bring a letter—this letter—to his solicitors, who would

deliver to me all the evidence as to train-wrecking, and money to continue the search."

"But," she protested, "I'm not in trouble; there was no need to deliver this."

"Look," he handed her the letter; "you will see that it was also to be presented if I were in trouble. That's why I came to-day."

She had begun reading the letter, when they were interrupted by the office boy, who came in bearing a tray. "Here's the soup, the squab, Miss, and some fruit; and that's the change."

"Hello," said Brand, "what's the meaning of this?"

"Why, you silly boy, do you think I can be a nurse and not know that you're famished?"

"Since when have you been a nurse? Why do you wear—"

"Come, eat," said Hilda, decisively; "we'll have time to talk afterwards."

He cast one longing eye at the tray. "That's all nonsense," he said; but presently, being persuaded to sacrifice all pretence of affluence, he sat down before the soup, and proceeded to scald his mouth.

Hilda walked over to the window, but she could hear him making a ravenous onslaught upon the meat and bread, and did not want him to see that there were tears in her eyes.

"How did you get here, Brand?"

"Walked most of the way. Wanted exercise." The bread was nearly all gone.

"Were you entirely ruined?"

"Why," he said, roughly, "what do you know about it? I haven't written since the beginning of the night."

"I've been watching you, Brand—that is, Marshall and I. We knew, from the time when father got you

on the staff of the *Revolversburg Democrat*, that you would turn out a very big man."

"Well," he mumbled, "I'm an afternoon's walk round the chest, and six foot four in my socks."

"I didn't mean that, Brand. Father once said that only a hero dares to tell all the truth."

"Doesn't pay," said Brand. "A few weeks of telling the truth have done for me. Three months ago I was owner and editor of the *Revolversburg Democrat*; now I'm a tramp. Doesn't pay."

"It does pay." She turned upon him, her eyes glowing with admiration. "It pays better than success, better than wealth, better than anything. When I read your wonderful editorials I knew that you'd be ruined; I knew that those wretched money-lenders, timber thieves, lying politicians, bad magistrates, hypocrites in high places, would get up and howl at you. I wasn't a bit surprised at your being shot, burnt out, driven out of the town, for why should you be better off than our Master, who died for the truth?"

He rose from the table, blushing scarlet. "Why, how did you find out?"

"Find out? Haven't you seen the papers?"

"Not for a month."

"You don't know how pleased the whole country is to hear of a journalist who dares to do his duty. Why, there were columns about you every day—'The Missing Hero'; 'Brand Haraldson, the modern Saint George.' Oh, don't you suppose it's praise; the papers have been laughing at you."

"What rubbish!" said Brand, scornfully. "The silly season is right early this year; but they'd sell their souls for copy." Then he chuckled. "I look like a celebrity, don't I?"

She sat down, loosening the buckle of her cloak, which

fell back from her shoulders. "And what's your next vocation—desperado in a Wild West show?"

"I suppose," Brand sat on the table again; "that if people won't have facts, I'd better try something else."

He sat on the table, swinging his long legs under him like a boy.

"Say," he said, "did you know that I'm a bruiser? Last fall I mauled the 'Frisco Tough till he didn't know who he was or where he belonged. It was bully."

"Brand, I'm ashamed of you!" Certainly she looked anything but ashamed of this young giant; but one must not judge even the prettiest woman by appearances.

Brand looked round at her with an expression of innocent surprise at her protest; perhaps he would still have invited Hilda to feel his biceps; but by her contracted brows it was evident that she was thinking about something else, so he contented himself with drawing up his right arm till the muscles stood rigid, then feeling them contentedly with his left fingers.

"Brand," said the woman, starting up in sudden excitement, "this won't do at all; you must have new clothes at once—a silk hat, boots, collar, shirt, everything. You must let me lend you some money." She moved rapidly to the door, opened it, and was sweeping out of the room before Brand could utter a syllable of protest.

Then he said, sullenly, "I won't."

She turned upon him in the doorway.

"You shall."

"These are quite good enough for scrapping."

"There's not going to be any 'scrapping.'"

"There is. Why——"

The door slammed, and Brand was alone.

He whistled softly, as men do when the eternal

feminine presents some new surprise, looked regretfully at the empty luncheon tray, went to the window, grabbed up his hat, and was about to escape from the house, when Hilda reappeared, counting a roll of ten-dollar bills.

"There," she thrust the money into his hands, "you mustn't be naughty; and," she gave him back her father's introduction, "you won't have any need to present this letter. Keep it until you're in trouble again. Meanwhile, go out, buy yourself a suit of town clothes, a proper outfit, have a bath, get shaved, lunch comfortably, then meet me at three o'clock."

"But I tell you——"

"Three o'clock at the front door of the *Avenger* block. Now, you'll be good, won't you, Brand, for father's sake?"

"You bet," said Brand.

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CHAPTER IV

ENTER THE GREAT PHILANTHROPIST

MARSHALL GAULT, adopted son and heir of the Railroad King, sat at his desk opening letters, dictating answers to a secretary, jotting down memoranda, occasionally giving orders through a speaking-tube, always lucid, direct, abrupt, doing his work with the concentrated attention of a powerful, healthy brain. Chiefs of departments ventured from time to time into his presence, fortunate if the master received their business without impaling them with a glance of his grey eyes; for Marshall Gault ruled the weak by terror as he governed the strong by force of character. His was a tremendous intellect, that seized upon facts, grouped them, grasped their whole import, used them swiftly, and perceived the entire results with unerring accuracy; a great administrative brain; the genius of the twentieth century, that had lifted him from the ranks of the dominant race, and stamped him master.

At Michael Gault's death Marshall had inherited money enough to buy a New York daily paper; in nine years he had made the *Avenger* the richest, the most independent, the most powerful journal in the New World. Other journalists, two or three of them, were politically strong enough at times to influence events at Washington; but Gault wielded a weapon that can only be handled by a man of genius—his

sublime indifference to money. All newspapers—at least in the United States—depend for their existence on advertising patronage, the number of copies they can sell regulating the value of their “space” to the advertiser. Now the newspaper manager knows well that many of his advertisers are swindlers whose patronage is a disgrace, yet he dare not expose the well-known iniquities of one lest the others be offended. So, while all the frauds of commerce were hushed up and advertised by most of the newspapers, Gault recklessly exposed and uprooted swindle after swindle, one victim a week, smashing fraudulent joint stock ventures, railway companies, banks, insurance offices, merchants, with ruthless impartiality, inspiring unbounded public confidence in his good faith. And yet his advertising columns were patronized by sound, honourable firms.

American newspapers depend somewhat on subsidies from political parties, but Gault seemed to launch his thunderbolts with equal impartiality into the political arena. And the people said, “Here at last is an honest newspaper!”

Many journals advertised with special editions, Sunday supplements, coupon “gifts” to subscribers, fiction by famous novelists, sensational special correspondence, financial, religious, domestic, and legal advice, but the *Avenger* was not to be outdone in becoming a universal provider and automatic bosom friend of the people.

Modern editors make their columns collecting agencies for charities, whereby the subscribers pay, that the newspaper may pose in the halo of sanctity, which is good advertising. Gault gave out of his own purse with such boundless liberality to beneficent institutions, charity, and all the churches, that he had become known as the great philanthropist.

To an Englishman indifference to gold appears an amiable eccentricity; to an American as a mental obliquity which passeth understanding. Marshall Gault was one of the most prominent personages in the Great Republic.

The *Avenger* building, almost southernmost of the skyscrapers, and overshadowed to the north by loftier buildings, was a structure of steel, faced with marble, that rose sixteen storeys above the pavement. Close beside it on the right was the dark, squat, ten-storey block of Dr. Rex Clewston's Frailty Investigation Bureau, in which Colonel Giggleswick claimed to have been an officer.

Mr. Gault's sub-basement was an engine-room; the basement contained the *Avenger's* printing works; the rooms about the vestibule were devoted to business management; twelve storeys were sublet; on the upper floors were the offices of the editorial staff; and the roof supported a little park, where the employes could refresh themselves with the sea-breeze, lager beer, and cutlets. A broad cornice projected from above the fifteenth floor, where, between the windows of Gault's office, stood plaster statues of Justice, Mercy, Faith, Hope, Love, all in an advanced stage of decay. These windows commanded a magnificent prospect, for beneath them, far on the left, the tongue of Manhattan Island tapered away down to the Battery, and beyond was the bay, all glittering under the noon sun, where the sails of schooners hung dark against the blue, and the smoke of liners drifted along the breeze, where the fishing-smacks dodged in the track of the ferries, and the yachts fluttered their ample jibs in the wind's eye; where launches dashed about cursing the helpless barges, and pilot-boats raced seaward in search of the home-coming ships.

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There, just visible from the cornice, stood bewildered Liberty, her bronze arm still bearing aloft the extinguished torch, as though she would warn fugitives from the Old World of Freedom come to grief. Poor Liberty has many exponents now, but none who can defend her against armed monarchies, armed plutocracies, armed anarchy; yet ever sanguine, she believes in men who, like Gault, have found "Honesty" a stirring war cry, "Justice" a flexible weapon, "Truth" an advertisement.

Gault's morning work was done, the secretary had just been dismissed, he had put aside the first of the evening papers, and for just a minute or two before luncheon was standing at one of the windows looking down the bay. The statue of Liberty loomed far away in the blue haze, the sun, just poised above the rays of her aureola, pointing with light her torch that had been snuffed out. Gault, as he stood there, knew that she was rusty, very decrepit; that the people who had grudged her a base to stand on cared little how soon she collapsed; that they loved the Shibboleth endeared to them by many an orator, while the fact—oh, the deuce take the fact! "The Eagle," said he, "of Liberty, Garrulity, and Rapacity abhors facts."

The great man turned away from the prospect with a sardonic smile, and was about to go to luncheon in his retiring-room when a page-boy threw open the door leading from the secretarial offices, and announced Miss Gault.

"Well," she said heartily, as she swept into the room, "I've dropped in for luncheon; how's the *Avenger* this morning? Why, what's the matter?"

Somehow this lady, by her gracious presence, put Mr. Gault to the test. He was not a gentleman. He replied, with a plaintive groan:

"That ass, Straight, is leaving me, and still I can't get a man fit to replace him."

"Very glad to hear it," said Hilda, as he helped her to remove her cloak; "I hoped you were going to have trouble about that, or I wouldn't have come to-day."

"Considerate," he grumbled, "very considerate. Had luncheon? No? Well, come, my dear, the chops are getting cold."

They entered the private room together, where Mr. Gault rang for an extra plate, before he showed her to a seat. Then they sat down at a table, laid with a severely simple luncheon, and a pile of newspapers.

"Marshall," said the lady, as she pulled off her gloves, "you can't think who's turned up. A fighting editor rained down to you out of the sky, all in rags, and so thin you could whistle through him. Now, who do you think?"

"I know what to expect," said Marshall, resignedly, while the servant was laying a place at the table; "always know what to expect from a woman."

"Of course you guess who I mean? No? Why, Brand Haraldson!" she cried triumphantly. But to her surprise he grunted.

"Don't you approve of him? Why, Marshall, he's the very man for you!"

Marshall eyed her sideways, as he listened to the footsteps of the retiring servant; then helped Hilda to a chop, and filled her goblet with iced water.

"Why," she cried impatiently, "you thought differently last week."

"Let's see," he snapped; "am I right in saying that Haraldson was the sucking knight-errant who rescued father and yourself from the wicked wrecker? It was most—may I say melodramatic?"

"Brand is a hero! Marshall, this is not like you; it's not worthy of you."

"Oh! a hero, is he? But——"

"Of course; you know you always thought so. Why, you devoted columns in the *Avenger* to quoting his editorials!"

"We did. It was almost providential; we were at our wits' end for 'copy.' But may I point out, my dear, that the journalist who gets himself into such very hot water, however saintly I suppose you'd call him, however picturesque a personality, however soul-inspiring, prophetic, and all that sort of thing, belongs rather to the plane of epic poetry, than to the sordid level ground of journalese? If I had a spare pedestal outside these windows, your hero might pose as a plaster impersonation of something abstract—Virtue say, or the Spirit of Chivalry, or a second-hand seraph; but, for goodness' sake, keep this bull out of my china store."

Hilda gazed ruefully at her chop, which was relapsing into a state of cold fat; she wanted to cry over her iridescent bubble, now broken—collapsed into soapy water.

The great man had glanced up under his eyebrows, curious at Hilda's dismay; suddenly his eyes shone like cold steel, his heavy jaw was set with resolution, and he had noted a fact for future reference; then he waited for her to look up uneasily under his prolonged stare.

She looked up, wondering at his face, which now glowed with serene benignity. His whole manner had changed to a grave gentleness. "How a woman hates being chaffed," he chuckled; "would it please you very much if I——"

She was silent.

He reached out his heavy hand with a caressing

gesture, from which Hilda instinctively shrank. Then he saw his mistake, and to reassure her withdrew his hand, leaning back from the table; but she rose, nevertheless, and began to draw on her gloves, not noting the return of that hard expression to the man's face.

"Of course, you must remember your business interests," she said, coldly.

He rose from his chair. "Hilda," his voice rang with sympathy, though his eyes were like steel, "you know I would do anything, sacrifice any interest to please you; but if I take to my arms this laughing-stock of the whole American Press, you can't imagine how my reputation will suffer. Of course, I understand your gratitude—he saved father's life and your own. I am grateful myself. I had intended to show it by getting for him a certain Government situation for which there are hundreds of applicants, but——"

Still she was drawing on her gloves; but coming forward he took one hand in his.

"You must understand that if I take this man into my service it is for your sake only."

She shrank from him visibly.

"After all," he continued, with a bitter laugh, "it would be a pity to disappoint your sweet charity. For your sake, since you wish it, I'll break this colt to harness. I suppose he's waiting outside, quivering on the ragged edge of expectation, eh? Well, you may send him to me."

Hilda took up her cloak. "I'll send him to you at once."

"Thank you," she continued, letting him help her with the cloak, which he did tenderly; then moved towards the door.

"Hilda!" She turned upon him, hard, cold, repellent. "You will remember," said Gault, "the favour is to you."

CHAPTER V

THE FIGHTING EDITORSHIP

BRAND was waiting in the vestibule, a little bewildered even in this refuge by the rush of metropolitan traffic, exciting the derisive wonder of errand-boys, porters, and nondescript loafers who lent their small support to the marble walls. He had clothed himself in a tweed suit several sizes too small, because the slop dealer had told him that for the moment their spring stock in giants was not yet unpacked, and a man with a nineteen-inch neck should order collars by the yard. One street arab wanted to be informed if it was cold up there, for every little body knows that a big body is safe prey for chaffing. An old flower woman had sold him a button-hole with such a smile as she could not spare for the vain little persons her usual customers; and a street harpist had a "quarter" for his music from the Western man who was used to Western ways. Brand shared Hilda's bounty with the poor, but his efforts upon his own person were so lamentable that when she discovered him her heart sank, and her greeting was a little groan of despair.

What would Marshall think of this giant Westerner, who dared to affront city usages in a suit too small for him, a soft hat, red necktie, and square-toed boots? Bristling with irritation after her late encounter, she was naturally indignant with Brand, the cause of all her

troubles. But on seeing her the offender hurriedly raised his hat.

"Guess I'm fixed up all right?" he asked, anxiously, blushing like a big school-boy; and his innocence completely disarmed Hilda.

"Good gracious," she laughed, "what scarecrow have you robbed? No, it's too late to repent, you must meet your fate as you are. Never mind, poor boy, I'll see to your education, but now——" She drew a card from her case, and wrote under her name, "Introducing Mr. Haraldson."

"Now this," he said, relieved at her smile of reassurance, "is real nice of you. I've been wondering how I should ever find you again in this endless town, and here's your address printed plain in the corner. But, say, you look pale; you're tired, let me——"

"Yes, Brand, I am a little—tired; you mustn't keep me." She handed to him a second card. "You'll find me at home to-morrow, say, at five. Now Marshall's waiting to see you, so take the express elevator to the sixteenth floor, then ask for Marshall Gault."

"Marshall Gault!" he exclaimed. "Why, you don't mean to say that Marshall Gault, of the *Avenger*, is your—your foster brother?"

"Our foster brother," said Hilda, nodding; "didn't you know? He wants to offer you work. Now, go along, or you'll be too late to see him. Good-bye." She extended her hand frankly. "Good luck to you."

She was gone. He stood bewildered in the great vestibule, wondering how he could have failed to connect the name. So Hilda's brother by adoption—her Marshall—was none other than the great philanthropist, Gault, of the *Avenger*!

He went up in the lift, but had to wait a long time in Marshall's ante-room, for great people are wont to

keep small people kicking their heels so that the fearful joy of expectation may be chilled with misgivings. Moreover, when he was at last admitted to the presence he found himself in a strong light; whereas Gault sat at his desk over against the windows, darkly visible—another trick of the petty trade of greatness.

Brand could see that the famous journalist was short of stature, clean-shaven, of middle age. He could feel the swift penetrating glance that sized him up, classified him, and labelled him like some new specimen of insect life. Irritated, exasperated by that scrutiny, he threw back his head disdainfully, and Gault, for the first time in his life, was out-stared.

“Miss Gault,” said Brand, “asked me to call.”

To which Marshall added with great politeness :

“Please, take a seat, Mr. ——, Mr. ——”

Brand deliberately crossed the room, and took a seat nearer the windows than Marshall. Now, he could see this man, who had a face like only one—the greatest genius that ever vexed the earth—Napoleon the Great. Where had he seen that face before? In a dream? In some picture? Somewhere—he could not be mistaken—he had seen this man. Perhaps, in some past life, for the memory filled him with a vague uneasiness—apprehension—dread.

“You have doubtless heard,” said Gault, “of my methods in journalism?”

“I have.”

“You are aware, then, of the responsibilities which attach to the Fighting Editor of the *Avenger*?”

“Yes.”

“What credentials have you from which I can reasonably hope that you are fit for such work?”

Brand looked him straight in the eyes. “None whatever.”

"You mean, I suppose, that the record of your journalistic freak at Revolversburg is common property?"

"You seem to have heard about it."

"I have." Mr. Gault's tone was almost unbearably offensive. "I was, I may say, amused by an ingenious infant, with the baby propensity for destruction." He smiled blandly. "The toys you played with were institutions that appeared to your dawning intelligence to be imperfect; so you licked off the paint; you battered and dismembered the dolls. You could not make such toys—a city council, the machinery of law and justice, a bank, a rival newspaper, and sundry mercantile houses. Yet, because these were displeasing, and you were strong, you smashed them, half-ruined the young city, and thought yourself ill-used because people resented your playfulness. You're a very amusing young man."

Gault chuckled inwardly as he watched the gathering storm of Brand's indignation. But Brand was stung to the quick.

"The bank," he growled, "had mortgaged the farmers, body and soul, until they shot themselves, or were left to starve in the road. The City Council and County Government were gangs of robbers, stealing the public funds. The drug store was killing more people than the saloons. The 'rival paper' was a dirty rag, blackmailing for advertisements, and kept alive by political subsidies; the deputies to the State Legislature and to Congress were timber thieves, land-grabbers, and political vermin set up to pull wires for a party 'Boss'; the judges were bribed; the police got fat by blackmailing gamblers and brothels; the sheriff was a notorious murderer; the only real law was Lynch Law; the only justice was hanging or burning by the Vigilance Committee. The institutions were 'imperfect.' I smashed them."

The great man chuckled. "Revolversburg must have been rather like New York. So now you want to disport yourself in the same way here, and I am to have the privilege of being burnt out, shot at, and generally disapproved of."

"Yet you sent for me?" said Brand.

"I did, Mr. Haraldson; and if we agree as to salary, I'll try you for a month as Fighting Editor under certain conditions; that is, I object to being made the principal performer in a wolf hunt, and I can't afford more than two hundred thousand a year for fighting libel suits. So when you write an article at my order, you will submit the same to my solicitor, who will forward it to me with a memorandum stating how much the victims will be able to get out of me by suit for damages. If you thunder judiciously, or if the game is worth paying for, the articles will be published; if not, they must be revised, or set aside. Now, young man, go and make terms with my business manager. Remember, you are not answerable to my editor-in-chief, but to me personally. Here"—he handed a memorandum to Brand—"is your authority. Then go to the Fighting Editor's office, and have a chat with your predecessor—Mr. Straight—who leaves me this evening. I may tell you that, although the *Avenger* is a morning paper, I find it more convenient that my Fighting Editor shall do his work in the daytime, so as to be under my direct personal control."

As Brand left the office, Gault touched an electric button, and, when a bell sounded, called down a speaking-tube: "Fighting Editor, send Mr. Straight to me at once."

A minute passed, during which Gault walked up and down the deep-piled carpet, his hands behind his back, his head bent, his eyes nearly closed.

When the door opened softly, and a tall, suave man, hatchet-faced with deep-set black eyes, glided into the room. No sound betrayed the suave man's entrance, yet Gault looked up, beckoning him without speaking to a chair; then sat down, clasping his heavy hands before him on the desk.

"Mr. Straight."

"Yes, sir."

"I have appointed your successor; his name is Brand Haraldson."

"What, sir, the——"

"Yes, the Revolversburg fool. You will find him in your office when you return. Your new position, as secretary of the Cyclone Explosives——"

The suave man smiled subtly.

"——will not hinder you from serving me. Instruct him in his duties, introduce him at your boarding-house, make friends with him. You may go."

CHAPTER VI

ENTER THE LATE FIGHTING EDITOR

HE was not a suave man who came to Brand in the Fighting Editor's office, not a subtle, soft-footed, furtive man, not at all the servile employee who had waited so respectfully upon Gault; for Richard Straight met his successor with a hearty grasp of the hand, a genuine smile, looking him frankly in the eyes. Brand liked him instinctively, felt completely at his ease, sat down, as he preferred to do on the edge of the office table, accepting a cigar with a sense of rest and content pleasantly contrasted with the feverish irritation of his meeting with the great man up-stairs.

They talked about baseball, then wrestling, which led to the feeling of Brand's muscle, and other vanities, until Straight suggested an adjournment to the roof garden, where the two men drank lager at a little table beside the parapet. The sound of the traffic came up like a roar of distant breakers; but a violet mist filled the streets, from which rose the roofs and towers like a confusion of innumerable reefs lashed by a phantom surf.

Near by was the golden dome of the *World* building, all glorious in the light of the declining sun; and, far above the smoke of the metropolis, the heaven was flecked with roseate sprays of cloud.

"I'm sick of all this," said Straight; "you've brought with you a whiff of the West, which makes me crazy to

get away where one can still try to respect mankind. Look at that ruck of them, four million people camped on and about this island of Manhattan; listen to the growl of them, all talking dollars, thinking dollars, praying to dollars six days out of the seven. Sunday they worship their fetish, thinking that if they wheedle enough it will go to sleep for the next six days that they intend to devote to the opposition. That's what it costs to be a man here—nausea."

"All bunkum," said Brand, looking away across the harbour towards the misty hills. "Say, Straight, there's the sea."

Straight looked at him wondering,

"I always thought," said Brand, "that it was blue; but this is pale green, and all sorts of colours, with mists drifting about, and there against the sun it's like silver."

"What, have you never seen it before?"

"Only in pictures. This beer is good too."

Straight stared. The man was a freak of nature.

"I haven't had any lately," said Brand. "Do you know Miss Gault?"

These changes of subject seemed rather sudden to Straight. "I've been introduced," he said, coldly; for he had little interest in his successor, much in his own affairs.

"Tell me about her."

"Oh, of course, everybody knows that she's worth two million dollars, sunk in the 'King' Line of steamers; but she's run down fifty per cent. in the matrimonial market since the mystery of the *Tsar* and the *Caliph*. What mystery? Well, you are out of it. Don't you know that two first-rate liners—each with a thousand or more people on board—have gone missing?"

"Yes," said Brand, thoughtfully, "I remember the

Tsar business last November—big gale or something. They found wreckage.”

Straight leaned his chair back against the parapet and puffed comfortably at his cigar, for everybody likes telling big news. “The *Caliph*, her sister ship, left New York twelve—thirteen days ago. She was reported three days out in fine weather; from her position, early as it is in the season, she was expected to break the eastward record.” He yawned, with finely affected indifference.

“Well?” said Brand.

“She’s posted ‘missing.’”

“But Miss Gault—I suppose the ships were insured?”

“They say not. You see, some of these very big companies run an insurance reserve on their own books.”

“Then they only lose the reserve—spend it to replace the losses?”

“Exactly, but the average passenger prefers a line that doesn’t lose two ships within five months. In the middle of last century we had an American transatlantic company, the Collins Line, consisting of three fine vessels, the *Arctic*, *Pacific*, and *Adriatic*. The *Arctic* and *Pacific* were wrecked, with fearful loss of life, and now they say that the *Adriatic* is a coaling-hulk at Gibraltar. Our American trade was wiped out. But you needn’t think that Miss Gault minds being ruined, for she’s notoriously a ‘crank.’”

Brand’s face hardened; he leaned forward, as though he would strike.

Straight began to find some amusement in this giant. “I mean,” he said, smiling subtly, “that she cares more for other people than she does for herself. I don’t suppose she spends a thousand a year on herself.”

“Where does the rest go?” Brand emptied his glass.

“Helping lame dogs over stiles.” Straight spoke

almost scornfully. "She lives, they say, in a common tenement in the East side, and talks Yiddish like a Jew hawker. Why once the 'regular' doctors had her hauled up for killing off her patients without professional aid."

"Surely she wasn't convicted?"

"She's too pretty, my boy, far too pretty!"

Brand sat for some time looking out to the sea and the liners.

"The Gaults," he said, "made their pile out of shipping."

"You bet," Straight answered. "There's good copy in that story too."

"Let's have your version."

"Well, the original Pat Gault was Dublin Irish, bolted from an orphanage, stowed away in a deep-sea ship out of Liverpool, and served before the mast until he happened to save the mate from sharks. The mate was drunk at the time, but when told about it afterwards, he said he was much obliged, and taught Pat what he knew of navigation. So Pat rose to be master of a Bristol clipper, and made his pile by small but consistent smuggling. He married, settled his wife here in New York, invested with his owners, and left a very tidy sum behind him. The eldest son, Michael, inheriting Pat's wisdom, together with his interest in the Bristol clippers, persuaded the other partners to go into steam, then, by craft and subtility, built up a solid railroad connection between New York and the West, and offered through rates for meat and grain between Chicago and Liverpool, which practically cornered the trade. Before he died he controlled railroad connections from here to the Pacific, and the crack line of Atlantic greyhounds. They called him a railroad king, so it was by way of compliment that his English partners rechristened their company as the 'King' Line. He never married—some Jinny ass

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had jilted him, I suppose--but when he wanted a child to carry on the succession, he shocked society by adopting a street arab aged five, the smartest paper boy and infant usurer on Broadway. By some extraordinary instinct he had caught a young genius, so there you have ability plus opportunity—in other words, Marshall Gault, of the *Avenger*."

"And who was Miss Gault?" Brand blushed.

"I'm not quite sure, but, according to the newspapers, she was hatched out of a brown paper parcel left casually on his doorstep, with a postman's knock, and a message that 'there was no answer.'"

This second slight cast upon Hilda was intolerable. Brand was furious, and reached out his long arms across the table as though he would crumple up the offender.

But Straight's serious eyes were untroubled, only a little sneering smile curled his lips. "Our New York journalists," he drawled, "are nothing if not imaginative."

Brand laughed, for it was a treat to find a weak man who never cringed when he got truculent, a jolly good fellow, who could not be frightened.

"Say, talking of journalists," Straight leaned back in his chair, looking at the giant with his eyes half closed, while the curious smile still flickered about his mouth, "how did Gault treat you just now?"

"Flayed me, dug in knives till I was sore all over, so that I wanted to chuck him out of the window, chaffed a little, flung orders at me like brickbats, then fired me out." He chuckled. "I thought philanthropists were mild as milk, but this one's a terror. I rather like him."

"He's not a bad sort," said Straight, "when you know him. He'll let you think for yourself, play your own game, and he's good pay."

"Why leave him, then?"

"To better myself, of course. Some parties down on the eighth floor have taken me on as secretary. You'll see their shingle up, the 'Cyclone Explosives.' By the way, Haraldson, if you should want help, look in any time, and I'll give you a few pointers."

Brand yawned.

"Look here," continued Straight, "I don't want to tire you, but Gault ordered me to put you up to the routine of your office."

Brand yawned again.

"My dear fellow," he said, "I haven't slept for forty-eight hours, and up to this morning I had nothing to eat for three days. Eight hours ago I was a tramp, a ragged, dirty, hungry, shivering hobs; my partner is waiting for me somewhere by the docks, and the only business I feel like now is to feed that poor devil."

"My dear Haraldson," said Straight, "if you told that to an average New Yorker, he would be seized of a sudden appointment up town. Take my advice, keep such things to yourself. Look here, can you be at your office at nine o'clock to-morrow? All right, I'll be there, and put you up to the ropes."

"Thanks," said Brand, heartily.

"By the way, Haraldson, have you arranged with any boarding-house? Gault told me I'd better take you to mine, which—if you don't mind my saying so—would save you the trouble of paying in advance."

"It was decent of Gault," said Brand, "to think of that—it's decent of you."

"Don't mention it. A friendless stranger here needs pilotage."

"Come along," he said, "it's getting on towards supper. Let's go and find the other tramp and give him a good square meal."

CHAPTER VII

AS REGARDS DYNAMITE

THE Colonel refreshed his fiery beak in a cool white napkin, while Brand and Straight exchanged glances of sympathy. But the veteran was regarding Straight with a glare of indignation from behind his improvised handkerchief.

"Sir," the voice was muffled, but the tone severe, "I am not a mere military colonel. To me there is nothing more repulsive than the massing of armed hordes for purposes of legalized massacre. I am a man of peace, I seek to mitigate the sufferings of the human race. I feel at this moment," he threw down the napkin, "that anything that tends to ameliorate"—he paused. "Brand, I deem that, after the excellent dinner which we have enjoyed, the refined conversation," he bowed, "that, in fact—a cigar—would——"

"Allow me, Colonel." Straight tendered his cigar-case.

"Sir," said the Colonel, blending an air of stately affability with his very close inspection of Straight's cigars, "I honour the delicacy of your perception."

He selected judiciously.

"Say," said Brand, ruminating over the conversation just closed; "both of you seem to think that this city is rotten to the core—I don't understand. I've heard say that, thanks to Inspector Mogrell, robbery is pretty nearly unknown."

Straight laughed. "That's so, but you must remember that your successful American criminals are not law-breakers. They're too smart for such clumsy trades as burglary.

"Not always," the Colonel retorted, as he accepted a match from Brand and lighted up; "I am reminded of a trifling episode, but—no—I am not desirous of talking this gentleman's legs off."

"Come on, out with it," said Brand. "Persuade him, Straight; the Colonel's yarns are worth hearing."

Straight persuaded.

"The matter relates," said the Colonel, "to the time when, as a militant revolutionary"—he filled his glass and drank, then filled again.

"A militant revolutionary!" said Straight. "Why, Colonel, I thought you were a man of peace."

"Sir, a man of peace may be an officer of the peace; in benighted Britain he may be a justice of the peace. You assume that I was inconsistent in observing the habits and customs of militant revolutionaries, and I would like you to inform me how such vermin may be studied, except from within the charmed circle of their society."

Straight turned to a passing waiter, and ordered coffee, for the Colonel needed quieting.

"Some years ago," continued the old man, "I was employed by a certain great private detective bureau, which," he nodded to Brand, "shall be nameless. A certain Irish gentleman engaged in our national American pursuit—office-seeking—was suddenly called away on business to Europe, and took with him—with that carelessness in business matters which so eminently distinguishes him—a parcel of French Rentes, belonging to a trusted friend of his in this city. The trusted friend made prompt inquiries at our bureau, and I was sent as

the supposed special correspondent of a certain newspaper to overtake the steamer in which the Irish gentleman had taken passage. A newspaper man—friendly neighbour of ours—had a fast motor launch, which was placed at my disposal; and by this means I caught up the Atlantic liner off Sandy Hook."

"But," said Brand, "what connection could the newspaper man have with your detective bureau?"

"It is," the Colonel retorted, "a peculiarity of many Americans that they render to each other in emergencies the most disinterested services—for a consideration."

"Pardon me," said Straight, "may I ask the name of this newspaper man?"

"You may," said the Colonel, blandly. "As I was saying, I managed in the assumed capacity of special correspondent of a New York journal to overtake the steamer, and was asked by the purser—as a special favour, for which I paid handsomely—to share the berth occupied by a certain Irish gentleman."

"The Irish gentleman was not cordial—appeared to resent my intrusion; but I have ever been distinguished for my strong sympathies with a noble but suffering people" (this in a high nasal drawl); "had, in fact, become some months before a member of——"

Suddenly the Colonel winced, drew in his feet under the chair, and, by the movement of his hands below the table-cloth, appeared to be caressing his shins. Straight's hand was occupied, too, feeling his upper and lower lips, as though he were considering the necessity of being shaved.

"Pardon my gout," said the Colonel, who had become white, even to his nose under Straight's inspection. "Fact is, that high living has played the deuce with my system."

He wiped his forehead with the much-abused napkin.

"As I was saying, anarchy, gentlemen, is egotism seated upon a tin-tack, anathematizing existing arrangements—reviling, promiscuous—then soothing itself with the doctrine that tin-tacks to sit upon must instantly be provided for all the rest of the human race. The Irish—did I say Irish?—I mean the German gentleman, developed his individuality all night, preaching Emancipation of the Slaves of Law, Liberation of the Race from the Bonds of Morality, Free Land, Free Drink, Free Love, Free Explosives, and Survival of the Egotist. Listen? Gentlemen, I became an enraptured disciple; I realized that I had found my panacea—that I was myself at last. I out-talked that German gentleman; I developed my ego, I discoursed of my symptoms, I made him listen until breakfast-time to the psychological history of my individuality—I permitted no pause for refreshments, but pulverized him with facts about my mother, my grandmother, and all my progenitors; and, finally, when he fell back into his bunk too far gone for luncheon, I indulged my personality with my usual matutinal cocktail.

"Sir, that German gentleman was piloting a select excursion of Anarchists upon a mission to disintegrate the politicians of Europe—to play Guy Fawkes with the parliaments of civilization, to set loose the egotists now in bondage, and to establish a millennial Utopia in which every individual should be his own limited liability company, his own autonomous government, his own egoarchy. In that earthly paradise every man was to keep his own private calendar: delivered from the tyranny which ordains the arbitrary tides, the movable feasts, and the periodical baseball matches; free to celebrate Christmas once a week; to requisition an eclipse; to turn night into day; to call black white; to make two and two into a baker's dozen. Every man

was to be his own law ; property was to be that which the egotist could grab and hold on to ; the Decalogue, the time-table, and all market prices were to be formally abrogated ; morality was to be consigned to the refuse heap of disused conventions. In due course, I was introduced to my new brethren of the cause—six of them all heartily sick of each other, and only too eager to explain their symptoms to me. Each had but one subject—himself ; each was an untiring exponent of his own maladies ; every one of them had been pronounced incurable, and glorified in it.

“One topic they had in common, a consignment of freight in the ship’s cargo, labelled as canned tomatoes. So long as the weather was calm they gloated over it ; but when the barometer went down, they were uneasy ; when the gale struck us, they met to gesticulate in whispers, too much scared even to be properly sea-sick ; when the storm became a young hurricane, they wilted into their berths. That night I was sleeping as usual with one eye open, and a bolster propped against the edge of the bunk to keep me from being pitched out ; and the German gentleman was being unwell at intervals in the lower pew, when our five fellow Anarchists, all in their night-clothes and sepulchral gloom, stole into the cabin. They aroused that German gentleman ; they stood him up on end ; they told him dot their hour vosh gome ; they shook him ; they tore their hair—that is, two of them did while the others watched enviously, unable to relieve their feelings—for they were bald. ‘Mein vrients,’ said the German gentleman in English, which is less risky than high Dutch for a sick man, ‘If your hour vos come, tage it, mage der mosht of id ; I vish you choy ! Go away ; I vill be indisbosed.’

“The ship gave a lurch, which pitched the whole gang into a corner except the German gentleman, who hung

on like a slumbering bat; then from under the heap of Anarchists came a muffled scream: 'Der gargo vos shifded. Oh, them tomadoes! we're toomed!'

"'Dot vas all righd,' said the German gentleman, upon which the baldest conspirator lurched into his arms and embraced him.

"'Zem domatoes!' he sobbed. 'Oh, zem domatoes! I sall vent mat!'

"'Hush,' said a long, lean Revolutionary, clinging to the wash-basin, while it discharged its limpid waters into his bosom. 'The Initiate is awake! We are betrayed! But, no, it matters not, he shall dam' well perish with us. My friends, let us be calm—let us remember the sublime Ravachol and be calm!'

"'Oh, zem domatoes! zem domatoes!'

"There was a rumble of shifted cargo under the deck.

"'Led us bray,' moaned the baldest conspirator, 'led us bray!'

"'You can if you like,' says the lean Revolutionist. 'I ain't that sort—I don't want to be blown to blazes not by a long chalk. I'm going to the Captain. I want to know how he reconciles his confounded responsibilities with the carrying around of dynamite labelled as "canned tomatoes."' "

"'But zubbosing zat ve vosh fount oud, we sall pe——'

"'Getting off better than you deserve, confound you. Besides, who says we're going to be caught? Tain't any skin off your hide if I charge some blasted outsider with being a blasted Anarchist. Come along, before we're blown into spring remnants.'

"He rushed out of the cabin, the rest after him; then the German gentleman in hot pursuit, crying: 'Nein! Nein!' down the gangway.

"As for me, I was pleased all to pieces at being alone

in the berth, because there was the German gentleman's baggage all lying around open-mouthed waiting to be inspected. I inspected all right, raked out the stolen bonds in a holy minute. Then I thought I might as well dress, so I dressed. Presently an officer came along to say that the Captain wanted me; but for the life of me I couldn't make out what was proceeding till I was shown into the chart room and accused by the whole gang of conspirators with being an Anarchist.

"I laughed—I had to.

"Says the Captain: 'This, sir, is no laughing matter; you are charged by these six gentlemen with having in this ship a number of cases of dynamite put up in tomato cans.'

"'That's all right, Cap.," says I; 'guess you've got a list of your freight; see who shipped these tomatoes and where they're consigned to.'

"But for the life of him the Captain couldn't find any such freight in the purser's schedule.

"'Now, Captain,' says I, 'look at this, and don't read it aloud.'

"He looked at my business card, saw that I was a detective, and said:

"'Well, I'm blown!'

"'You air,' says I, 'you air for a fact. Now I want to see you alone.'

"The conspirators were cleared out—told to go to bed.

"'Captain,' says I, 'this little fuss was a put-up job; it has given me the chance of recovering a parcel of French Rentes stolen in New York by one of these gentlemen. Lest the plunder should be recaptured before we get to Liverpool I want to place it in charge of the purser.'

"I got the purser's receipt, told the Captain that I

wanted this Anarchist business kept dark, then returned to my cabin.

"But inside I heard voices ; moreover, seeing that I hate to interrupt confidential communications, I lingered outside the door. And this is what I heard :

"'Mein broders, mein vrients,' said the German gentleman, 'gompose yourself, my dear, bray gompose yourself. I haf von gonnession to make mit you. Ven we depart of New Yorg, I vos incomplede, my dear, vith mein brebarations—mein derangements—I vos oud of order vith mein gontents. I haf not zhipped der tomatoes, mein broders—they vill be lefd oud—ain't it. Dot gonsignment of tomatoes vos remain'd beyont !'

"The baldest man sobbed on his neck, the lean conspirator swore ; they all embraced, they cried : 'Denk Heffen !' They declared him the greatest revolutionary, the wisest Individualist, the supreme Egoist of the age. Ravachol had not been martyred in vain, the blood of the heroes who had laid down their lives for the Cause blossomed in him, as a refulgent consummation which should yet deluge mankind with the sweets and spices of Freedom. As for me, when I returned to the bosom of my fellow-conspirators, I was greeted as a genius who had rescued them when on the eve of betrayal.

"Yes, sir, three hairy revolutionaries and three bald, retired to their bunks as jubilant as though each of them had discovered an entirely new symptom, resolved to send back for their belated infernal machines, to hurl tomato cans full of dynamite into many another innocent gathering of women and children, and at last to die in a blaze of publicity as befitted Egoarchs of the supreme Revolution.

"Before we parted at Liverpool I accepted the privilege of blowing up the House of Commons ; and I guess they trusted that I wouldn't make such a lament-

able hash of that business as the late G. Fawkes. As to the German gentleman, he was so much excited by my oratory that he never discovered how he could possibly have mislaid those Rentes. 'A dyling pequest,' he explained, 'from mein peloved barents.'

"Committed them for trial at Liverpool? My dear young sir, have you boiled your brains? Do you claim to be a digitated biped? Now, without evidence against them, what earthly advantage could these Anarchists be to the pollice? They couldn't use them, couldn't play with them, couldn't pawn them, nobody in his senses would buy them, they weren't fit for birthday presents, they weren't worth exhibiting, they wouldn't hire out."

"But the dynamite?"

"I warned the Customs to keep their eyes peeled for canned tomatoes; but as to the lunatics, they didn't know enough to be dangerous; and in gaol they would have preached through a thousand interviewers, filling the newspapers with the doctrine of indiscriminate massacre. No, sir, the Press is injurious enough with its appetite for divorce, the sweepings of the police courts, gambling tips, and promiscuous filth, without being made a pulpit for Anarchists."

"Colonel," said Straight, with delightful suavity, "are you an Englishman—I mean by descent?"

"Sir, are you wishful to insult me?"

"Not the least. The English have always been as glorious in war as they were eager for peace. Their archers, too, were famous in all the centuries for the length of their bows."

"Sir!" the Colonel bristled.

"Say, Brand"—Straight glanced at his watch—"I must introduce you to my landlady within fifteen minutes, or she'll have gone to bed."

He began to put on his overcoat.

"I guess," said Brand, "I'll sleep here. There are bedrooms right up-stairs, and the Colonel will be my guest for to-night. Say, Stralght, you'll be at the office at nine? Well, so long; I'm dog-tired."

Some time after Stralght's departure Brand and the Colonel had retired to their respective rooms; and Brand, already half-undressed, was seated on the edge of his bed reviewing the day's events in a gentle reverie, when suddenly an idea struck him, which caused an immediate invasion of the Colonel's room.

"Say," he exclaimed, then paused, for the old gentleman was discovered hastily concealing the imperfections of his toilet between the sheets.

"Well?"

"Colonel, have you heard of the *Tsar* and the *Caliph*?"

"I have, considerable."

"Do you think they carried tomatoes?"

"I shouldn't wonder, young man. Tomatoes are increasingly popular in benighted Europe."

CHAPTER VIII

ENTER THE PRIEST

OF course, a lady who is valued at two million dollars ought to be bored and live in a palace; for if she does not submit to social prescription, she must be mad; and the only difficulty about dealing with such a woman is that one cannot very well cut a millionairess. Even Haraldson was a little put out on finding that Miss Hilda lived in a dismal slum, which was odorous of beer, Polish Jews, and general frowsiness; that the address denoted a tenement house, draped copiously with the week's washing; and that the apartments were up five flights of grimy stairs.

When, at last, a little servant maid admitted him to a snug room—an oasis of neatness and cleanliness in the great wilderness of dirt—Brand discovered Hilda casting up accounts at her writing-table; and a woman, that sniffed, was rocking a baby that howled in an improvised cradle by the stove. There was no end of a row, for, besides these performers and the canary in full song outside the window, the maid began to rattle teacups in the adjacent kitchen, and beyond the thin party-wall was a piano in torment.

"Is that you, Brand?" said Hilda, without looking up. "Isn't that piano awful! But don't listen, and you won't hear it. What's fifty-seven and eighteen?"

"Seventy-five," said Brand promptly, wondering

meanwhile how women could consent to Directoire frocks when they could all dress as nurses and be beautiful.

"Thanks. And ninety-five make one-six-one; less thlrty-three is one-nine-four. Do be good, and comfort my slum baby—left on my hands last night, poor little fellow. Oh, dear me, these accounts! There"—she looked up with a hurried little laugh; "now I've a poor thing waiting for me in the surgery, but I'll soon be back again."

The sunlight, every ray of it, seemed to follow Hilda into the next room. During her absence Brand played with the slum baby, the which poor little ragged varmint took him entirely into confidence, danced up and down on his knee, crowing with delight as it clutched, with clammy paws, at his face.

The sniffing woman looked on at this with wondering disdain; but when Brand suggested that she seemed to have a very bad cold, big tears began to run down her cheeks. "Ef you please, sir," she sobbed, "it's me 'usbing, which 'es no sooner out of the Tombs to-day for arson, when he went for me with a flat-iron, sir; and when I 'owled, 'e called me a —, sir, which I ain't, and never was, if you please, sir, but a respectable woman, h'although I sez it as shouldn't, being come of a good family in the public-'ouse way down in 'Ampshire, and me own uncle a clergyman and fair broken-'earted with 'is w'ys."

"Good gracious," muttered Brand to himself, "is this Yiddish she's talking?"

"And it isn't true, sir, as I burnt the 'ouse, and turned Stite's evidence agen 'im, which I'd ought ter have, s'elp me; but as I says afore, I'm——"

"Now, Katie, no more tears; you must give this gentleman a rest."

The woman who sniffed relapsed into silence, for

Hilda with her attendant sunshine was coming in from her surgery, much amused at the game Brand was playing with the slum baby.

"Katie," said Hilda, at which the woman stood up, "come here." She came, wondering. "Up the street a little way there's a church. It's called the Church of the Redeemer, and the doors are always open. Go, dear, sit down there in one of the pews—nobody will trouble you—and rest until it's quite dark. Then come back to me. There, that's right."

The sniffing woman slouched out.

"Now," said Hilda, shutting the window and closing out all the noise of the city. "H'm, yes, turn round, the back has pleats, and the sleeves hang like felons, but still that suit is an improvement, you look almost decent. Now for tea. Barbara! Barbara! Tea at once!"

"Right y'are," cried Barbara from the kitchen, "it's coming in a howly minute."

"Why," asked Brand, as he watched the process, "do you wear that dress—some sisterhood?"

"No. I belong to a guild of working nurses. Each of us looks after a little district as a friend of the very poor. We wear this dress—not very homely, is it?—because we never could venture about the slums alone without some sort of uniform to protect us among the toughs."

Homely! was there ever a dress so becoming! As Brand looked at her bright, golden-brown hair, the radiant health of her face, strong regular features, deep blue eyes, and all the witchery of loving earnestness half-veiled under an outward gaiety, he felt that the slums might well be envied. Surely Hilda was the very loveliest woman in all the world.

"These toughs," he growled, "if they don't respect you—ought to be massacred."

"Don't be so fierce," said Hilda, "they all help me,

even the worst of them. Afraid? What's there to be afraid of? Why, do you know that once when a new roundsman was rude to me—a dozen toughs jumped on him, and they'd have 'kicked in his face'—that's the local etiquette—unless I had called them off. Yes, they do what I ask quite cheerfully, and it's so good-natured of them to allow me—even me—to interfere with all their traditional manners and customs. I don't allow them even the natural right of whipping their wives."

So she rocked the baby to sleep, talking the while to Brand of her work, her failures, her triumphs. Even before tea was brought in Brand felt that he had never had such a good time in all his life—it beat scrapping.

Over the tea-tray she began to draw him out, with all a woman's craft. How had he liked Dick Straight, and did he notice that man's wonderful black, searching eyes? No, Brand had not noticed that in particular.

And Marshall, was Marshall civil?

"Yes, civil as civil war; direct as a gun."

"So that's the business side of him! Ah, that is the side we women never see—the hypocrite! And the office?"

Now, provided that it is done with tact, every man likes to be "drawn," indeed, most men like it enough to throw impediments in the way and lengthen the dainty game, so Brand was reticent.

"Come," said Hilda at last, "tell me all about it."

"About what?"

"Your work, of course."

"Oh yes," he pulled out his pocket-book, "I got an advance of pay—that sets me square——"

She took the roll of bills without comment. "Well?"

"Say," he pointed through the muslin blinds at some flowers in pots that were balanced on the outer sill, "ain't you afraid of committing manslaughter?"

"Well?" she repeated. "Well? You were saying——"

"Oh, the work? Why, what earthly interest can that have for you? I dunno—Straight showed me so much of it this morning that it makes my head swim to think of it. Pigeon-holes, that's all—with crimes instead of pigeons, swindling in one, politics in the next, then murder, robbery, burglary, shop-lifting, lynching, wrecking, arson, kidnapping, resurrecting—all sorts of nasty sins I can't talk about; one sin to each pigeon-hole. Every day come heaps of papers, magazines, books, from which I have to cut out information to lie in the holes and get dusty; then there's the index to post up, and—there you are."

"But what do you do with it all?"

"Keep my mouth shut until the Boss sends down papers and witnesses about some dirty business that wants showing up. Then I look over what I have in the index, refer to the pigeon-holes, swallow all the information, write an article, send it to the solicitor to see if it's libel, and keep a copy on file. That's all there is to it—muzzled dog growls to order."

"But what an audience to growl to—after a mere *Revolversburg!*"

"That's all very fine, but what's the use of the growls when they're never published? Two-thirds of the pigeon-holes have copies of past editorials, most of them never printed. Straight says that the solicitor always advises silence—'not enough evidence,' 'not expedient at the present moment,' 'libel will cost more than it's worth'—muzzled dog told to shut up."

"So muzzled dog comes here to growl, eh? I like your growls, watch-dog, but what a mercy you're not allowed to ravage—you'd have us all in gaol! Have some more tea."

He looked at her across the tea-table, at all her de-

lightfulness, which made the blood race in his veins; was there ever such a woman?

"I don't want to ravage, I'd like to let the dirty people go their own dirty ways. I'm always sorry when I have to tear them out by the roots, because I'm not so all-fired good myself, and I hate spoiling their games. I pull up weeds to make room for more weeds, kill big dragons when I know that every drop of their blood breeds a little dragon. What is the use of destroying—I want to build, like you."

"I suppose we're both necessary, Brand." She turned away her face. "You pull the naughty people off their perches, I patch them up again to do some more mischief. Most of my folk are all patches, with only their sins to hold them together, poor things."

"Besides, that's not the worst," he interrupted her. Then, with sudden exasperation, "A whole lot of fools have been at me all day, wanting to interview me about Revolversburg. I'm up on the posters just like some popular murderer, and because I wouldn't be interviewed these reporters have columns of trash about me in all the papers. I'll smash the vermin when I get my chance."

"Dear me, dear me," said a gentle voice, just behind them. "My good young man, I can't have Miss Hilda tomyhawked or Revolversburged. It won't do, you must treat her with more consideration."

Hilda looked up, laughing. "He wasn't scalping me, Father Jared. It's quite safe. Now, you must let me introduce Mr. Haraldson, of Revolversburg."

"Quite unnecessary to introduce me; I knew the Dragon Slayer by what came out of his mouth—flames and reproaches. Well, Mr. Haraldson, after all that I've heard of you from Miss Gault, not to mention the newspapers, I am glad to welcome a very necessary man to New York."

So Brand found himself shaking hands with a little old Anglican clergyman, so frail that he might have been blown away, who looked up at him with a glance so searching that it seemed to recognize all his pet sins, so genial that it was a pleasure to be found out.

"Sit down, sir," said Brand, offering his chair.

"H'm, my coat, young man."

Brand helped him to take off his coat, and relieved him of hat and stick, while Hilda busied herself preparing fresh tea, so that, between the two, Father Jared was made quite comfortable. Brand settled himself on a stool beside the stove, looking up at the old man's face with some curiosity; for the Father seemed to have brought more sunshine than ever into the little room, and in his hazel eyes there was something that he had never seen before—the peace that passeth all understanding. It was a delicate, almost transparent, face, clean-shaven, seamed with the wrinkles of great age, the features perfectly regular, the wavy hair snow-white; and in the crows' feet about the eyes, the sensitive lines about the mouth, there was a suggestion of humour, spiritual beauty, the dignity of gentle blood, the majesty of a saintly life.

There was silence in the room; for the piano was at rest, and the band had gone away to distract the Bowery.

"Young scapegrace," said the priest, "I was about to make some enquiries after you. Dick Straight told me," he turned to Hilda, "that he wouldn't come to the boarding-house last night, because he was beguiled away by a dissipated old rascal, 'not a mere military colonel,' eh, sir?"

"I didn't know," Brand answered, "that Straight would have brought me to you." Somehow the priest seemed to be an old friend already.

"So, taking your own pet reprobate, you fled from worse evils that you knew not of! Well, I'm glad I've caught you; and you'll behave yourself in future on pain of—humph—that's neuralgia!"

The old man lay back in his chair with his eyes closed, and only by the little tremor of his clenched hands could anybody know that he was suffering. A look from Hilda warned Brand to be silent, and one could hear the clock ticking on the wall while she poured out her fresh tea.

"Come, Father," she roused him, "this will make you well."

"Thanks; you always know what's good for damaged humanity." He sipped eagerly with his spoon, and ate bread and butter, commenting on the slum baby while he tried to forget his pain. He seemed to succeed, for it was with a gay little laugh of relief that he set down the empty cup.

"Brand Haraldson," he muttered; "what an interesting name!"

"Interesting? Why interesting?"

"They always are, young man, when one learns to read them. Yours, like my name Nisted, is old Scandinavian. Although you're American and I'm English, we are both of Norse descent."

"But has my name any meaning?" asked Brand.

"That never occurred to me."

"Yes, Brand is a sword—sometimes a burning sword; maybe Excalibur, the sword of righteous government; maybe the falchion of Galahad—sword of the Spirit; maybe the two-edged flame of Him that rideth the red horse of war. Which shall it be, eh? Ah, you don't know yet; but, perhaps—who knows?"

"And what does 'Haraldson' mean?" asked Hilda, curiously.

“‘Haraldson’? Child of Harald, of the fair hair. You might well be descended from him. Yes, there’s a great deal in names—at least, to an old man’s fancy; but there, wind me up, put a nickel in the slot, and the old man lectures—has to, couldn’t help it if he tried—so beware!”

Hilda had bent down to close the damper of the stove, now she looked up. “Who was your father, Brand?”

“Or possibly,” suggested the priest, “he objects to this catechism.”

“Not at all; but I don’t know, sir. First thing I remember was sitting blubbering in a doorway; but a gentleman took me in out of the snow, and let me sleep on a buffalo-robe before the stove. He talked to me in Danish; but I can’t speak a word of it now.”

“What happened after that?”

“I was a bootblack in Chicago. I was about ten, and a hard citizen—I’m thirty now, I suppose. Then I got taken on in an engine-shop; used to go to night-school—I could lick the stuffing out of every boy there, teachers and all; but I smashed a preacher’s jaw, so they pitched me out. I was a wiper at the time, then firing the yard engine; but when I got to be about nineteen I was on the Pacific express—had the promise of the first vacant berth as engineer. That was the time I got smashed up, and met Miss Hilda.”

It seemed quite natural to Brand that he should confess his past misdeeds to this old gentleman, who could see through and through him anyway, so that concealment would be useless.

“I know that story, my son,” said Father Jared. “So my old friend, Michael Gault, had three children—Hilda, yourself, and Marshall—all from highways and hedges, even as our Master has ever chosen His servants.”

CHAPTER IX

A FIREBUG WOMAN

THE tenement where Hilda had rooms stands at the corner of N'th Street on one of the long thoroughfares extending northward into the residential districts. This avenue had been, until quite recently, a very citadel of respectability, but now its tail was profaned by the growth of the slums, and above N'th Street the panic-stricken houses were protesting themselves: "Desirable Residences," "Magnificent Building Sites," "Apartments for Single Gents," "To Let," "To Rent," "For Sale." All were hopelessly demoralized; some were being pulled down to make room for tenements; one or two had abandoned the last vestiges of their self-respect, and swarmed with Polish Jews. Up this desecrated avenue Father Jared conducted Brand to a house only three doors above Hilda's tenement—a doubled-breasted mansion, built for a semi-suburban residence by some old-time merchant. This was Mrs. Papps' boarding-house, as attested by the brass door-plate. Within, a bell was jangling that announced a quarter of an hour, during which the guests could gird up their loins for the supper-struggle; so there was time for Brand to be presented to Mrs. Papps, to be installed in a bedroom, and to wash his hands before the second bell brought an avalanche of boarders down the stairway.

Straight met Brand on the stairs with a cordial

welcome, explained that Father Jared had his meals in private, and warned him that there would be no supper left unless they made all possible haste to the basement. Well the boarders obeyed the national American admonition, "In haste shalt thou eat it;" for the Misses Papps were discovered rushing round the long table with cups of green tea, Mr. Papps stood at the head ladling hash with desperate energy, while every free citizen seized and devoured such hot biscuits, pickles, or other indigestibles as lay within reach.

Brand had little to say; not much to eat; but the other boarders were in like condition, since the human race allows no breathing time to Americans, and the poor wight who is led into conversation shall not get any pie. Within ten minutes of the rush for seats, most of the men had selected from the bowls of toothpicks, with which the long table was adorned, and there remained only the weaker, late, and more ruminative boarders.

When it was all over, the scramble, the gorge, the selection of a toothpick, and the escape, Brand followed Straight up-stairs, and ruminated over a pipe in his friend's bedroom.

The window was open wide, and the two men stood looking out upon the purple dusk of evening with stars glittering above, and electric arcs sizzling down in the shadowy street. The breath of the young summer was on their faces, the peace of evening stole in upon their souls, and they smoked with the silent solemnity of devotees.

"Down-stairs," said Straight, "there was a crowd of our abject boarders in the smoking-room, waiting to shake hands with the Revolversburg hero—the only American, except the lamented George Washington, who ever told the truth. Up-stairs lurks Father Jared in his web,

wanting the monstrosity all to himself for the evening—for supper." Then Straight looked sorrowfully at his victim. "Poor devil! the holy Father keeps their bones under the bed."

"Whose bones?"

"Gnawed bones of the men he has talked to death. And then you will be received into the ghostly circle of the true believers who are to reform mankind—a mighty tough crusade for the faithful, a mighty dull time coming for mankind."

"What's it all about though?"

"The Rising Sun desires to know what's it all about?"

Brand seized his persecutor by the nape of the neck.

"Leave go, you hulking brute!"

Brand laughed, and let go.

"Well?"

"It's all about whether this city shall be governed by the thieves or the prudes—whether the revenue shall be annexed for private use of the Mayor and Corporation, or whether we are to be so pure that the profane cyclist of both sexes shall be baggy from the ankles upwards, as in the holy city of Chicago. My lord, which camp do you choose, are you a thief or a prude?"

"What do you mean?"

"That all good prudes must belong to Father Jared's Club—it meets up-stairs; but first he will exact a solemn oath—'I denounce the Trusts. I swear to take in the *Daily Avenger!*' and so forth. I want to warn you, or you won't be able to make head or tail of Father Jared. He's a grand old crank, so you mustn't be surprised at what he says. You must embrace and renounce and abjure to his heart's content, you must ride all his hobbies—in fact, don't take him amiss if he prepares you for the club in a way you'd never expect.

Remember this, that with all his whims, the Father's a real live twentieth-century saint, that some of the greatest men in the country are proud to have him for a leader, and there are many of us who'd count it a privilege to fight anybody who isn't civil to him.

"Now the spider lurks ready in his web, so come along and be butchered."

* * * * *

At midnight Straight came in from the city and, knocking at Father Jared's door, found the old man enjoying a pipe with Brand.

"Come in, Dick," said he; "glad to see you, my son. This youngster is helping me to while away part of the long night—looks sleepy? Where have you been this evening?"

"Had a pretty good time," said Dick, "with my friend Captain Pat, of the police. He quite opened his heart when he found that I'd quit the fighting editorship."

He sat down in a cane-chair, rolled a cigarette, and lighted it with a spill at the stove.

"Who's Captain Pat?" asked Brand.

"Yes, Dick, tell Brand about our local politics," the old man chuckled. "That will open his eyes."

"Let's see—the police." Straight pulled at his pipe, ruminating. "Let's see. Enter Pat, a raw immigrant, just kicked out of the Irish Constabulary. His precious countrymen meet him at Castle Garden, explain how New York is run by the Tammany Gang, the Tammany Gang by Dr. Clewston—all for the benefit of wideawake Irish lads. They'll make him a millionaire if he joins the police, which is easy enough if one has friends in office. So a professional dummy is hired to pass Pat's examination, and the bribe for initiation is borrowed money. Once in the force, Pat is sent on his beat to

collect blackmail, three-fourths of it for the District Captain, one-fourth for himself. Pat clears himself of debt, and, being a steady young man, pays seven hundred dollars for promotion to Roundsman, three thousand for the rank of sergeant, fifteen thousand for his captaincy. Now Mrs. Pat has his pay for her pin money, while he keeps fast trotters, a yacht, a country house—Pat is a millionaire. Incredible? Oh, you don't know New York!

"Alas! blackmailing is not what it used to be, since Clewston came. The green-goods man always paid the police twelve thousand a year for a licence to circulate forged money, but now Clewston collects a second licence, and the green-goods man goes broke."

"Now," said the Father, "tell Brand about the City Fathers."

"Is Brand so ignorant? Well, the venerable Sachems of the Tammany Gang would scorn to deal in blackmail. They sit in receipt of bribes, sell tramway rights for so much cash, let contracts for a consideration to the highest bidder, handle the local rates, take care that the people's money shall not be wasted on drains or pavements—while Clewston's silence costs them a million a year."

Straight turned to Brand with a dry smile. "Beats Revolversburg, eh? By the way, Haraldson, your friend, Colonel Giggleswick, should be more cautious; Clewston's officers are not allowed to talk about his 'Dynamite Department.'"

"What?"

"Oh, that's only a side show in the Clewston menagerie. You should see——"

Brand started to his feet, and seizing Straight by the shoulder, glared down into his face. "Explain yourself—what do you mean?"

"Easy, man," Straight sneered. "I'm not made of wood, and I'm not Clewston—neither am I his flunkey, Colonel Giggleswick. The *Caliph* and the *Tsar* have been dynamited; the 'King Line' is probably doomed. You will remember that Miss Gault's money is in the 'King Line,' and you expressed," Straight chuckled, "some little interest in Miss Gault. Ask your Colonel why his late master, Rex Clewston, is interested in smashing the 'King Line' of steamers."

Brand collapsed into his chair again.

"Go on."

"Oh yes." Straight appeared to be very much amused. "Father Jared asked me to open your eyes a little. Well, New York, as I said, is run by Tammany, except occasionally, when the voters wake up—as in the case of the Tweed Gang—send their venerable rulers to penitentiary, and put the prudes in power. After all, the City Government only steals to the limits of its opportunities, but the State Government plays a larger game, also on behalf of the esteemed Clewston.

"As to Washington, but the federal capital is classic ground—named after the man who always told the truth—where puppet administrations are set up by the Trusts to pull the strings of national finance, to amuse the nation with foreign politics, while the departmental thieves plunder eighty million of fools. And this again is Dr. Clewston's meat."

The priest intervened.

"Come, Dick, you're going too far!"

"But not so far as Clewston."

Brand almost shoved the priest aside. "How is it Clewston's meat?"

"Because if public servants steal, whether in city, state, or republic, such public servants are the natural prey of any blackmailer strong enough to threaten."

The priest groaned. "And this is civilization!"

"Civilization?" Straight laughed bitterly. "The gods stage a comic opera—our civilization! From the repudiation of the Southern Banks after 1837 to this ghastly Clewston mystery of to-day, and chaos to-morrow—civilization! From Siberia to the Argentine a pack of lies—civilization!"

"Only a step to something better, my son."

"Then," cried Straight, "let us go on!"

"I am a mere alien," said the Father, "quite out of date, no doubt very funny and old-fashioned. Pardon me for not understanding how you Americans can be all that is good and beautiful personally, yet in your corporate capacity such villains."

"Because, sir," Straight answered affably, "we are so busy being good and beautiful that we must leave you foreigners to run our affairs. When we wake up and chuck out, for instance, all the alien Irish politicians, when our best men have leisure for politics, the human vote won't be sold in the open market—we shall be a Republic."

"I'm an American," Brand growled, "and I believe in the United States where the ablest men always get to the top. The politicians are able enough to run us. The Trust magnates are able enough to run the politicians. If there are reformers able enough to run the Trust magnates, well—let the strongest win."

"And," Straight sneered, "damn the moralities!"

"I side with Haraldson," said the priest, "for a strong king is forgiven all the vices; but a weak king cannot be redeemed by all the virtues."

Said Brand, "I judge by results. I see clean homes, the people well fed, well clothed, well schooled, hard-working, prosperous; the thriving industries, the increasing wealth, the rapid growth of the nation, the envy of foreign powers——"

"And," Straight interrupted, "the average man who used to be honest on Sundays, now works seven days of the week."

The priest sighed, but Brand was swift in retort: "I judge by results. I saw San Francisco burned, the suffering of the people, the way they stood the test; no man who has seen our people in trouble will ever doubt their greatness."

"It may be old-fashioned," said the priest, "to talk about the kind of honesty which stands even the test of prosperity. I look back——"

"To England, sir," Straight must needs interrupt. "You remember the days of her glory when the men were unselfish enough to bear arms, and the women to bear children. England was held up to us as an example then; and even now the Britisher has missions to everyone but himself. His first necessity is food, so he manufactures everything else under heaven. His second necessity is men, so he kills out the farmers and breeds cockneys. One week of social incompetence in England does more harm than a year of political wickedness here."

"Oh," ventured Father Jared. "But the Empire!"

Straight laughed in his grim, sardonic, bloodless way. "You speak, sir, of the healthy branches, I of the hollow trunk."

Brand chuckled then, "Straight almost tempts me, sir, to the defence of England."

"Why, you dear lads, if my country were attacked by any foreign power, you'd take up arms for her!"

"I believe," said Brand, glowing with enthusiasm, "that our Northern Race is the best thing the Almighty ever invented, if the world is to get anything done."

"I believe so, too," answered Straight. "Poor world!"

His long white fingers, from force of habit, were rolling a cigarette. That being their vocation in life they needed no instructions, nor did they venture to obtrude upon his train of thought as he sat brooding. "By the way, sir," he looked up presently to Father Jared, "how about our recruit?"

"He has taken the shilling," said the old man, "now he has only to be enlisted under the colours before——"

Straight, who had seemed to be paying not the slightest attention, now interrupted him: "Hush—listen!"

With his hand at his left ear he was leaning toward the door.

There was a slight jarring sound as of a piece of furniture being moved, then a soft heavy footfall across the floor above.

"Do you hear that, sir?"

"Yes, I've noticed the noise for some minutes. Cats, possibly! No? Dear me, who can be in the hall at this hour. Why, it's past one."

Straight opened the door softly, and went out, beckoning the others to follow; so with elaborate precautions of silence the three men stole up a flight of stairs to a lobby; whence, passing through an open doorway, they came into a large wooden hall, built upon the roof of the house. The place was dark and eerie, but a ray of moonlight, through one of the windows, made plain a dozen or so of trestle tables, a few score chairs, and beyond was a dais curtained. But to all this Brand paid little attention, for he noticed a strong smell of naphtha, and a thick white line that came out from under the curtains, and wound across the floor past the far side of the tables, to where a peculiar sniff came from some object crouched down in the

furthest corner. As the three men stood watching, their eyes gradually becoming accustomed to the darkness, the object in the corner appeared to be a woman on her knees twisting something in her hand that rustled like paper, which presently she added to the white line trailing away behind the tables. A ray of light shot across the darkness as she opened a lantern; then she looked about her nervously, sniffed, glanced along the train that she had made of twisted newspapers, and uttered a little sigh of satisfaction. Taking up the end of her fuse, she thrust it into the flame of the lantern, dropped it burning on the floor, and closed the "bullseye" with a sudden click as she rose to rush to the door. But when she saw three men barring her exit the woman shrieked, falling prone upon the floor.

"I couldn't 'elp it," she screamed, "it's me 'usbng as made me do it—'e's w'iting houtside—Mercy! Mercy!"

The flame she had lighted was writhing along the naphtha-soaked fuse; already it had crawled behind the tables, casting a red glare up against the roof; but Straight ran past the woman, and quenching the part which was burning, stamped out the embers with his heels. Then he turned on the lights.

Brand, shading his eyes from the sudden glare, looked down at the incendiary, and whistled softly. "Hello!" he cried, "it's the sniffing woman! I saw her to-day at Miss Gault's rooms."

"Yes, sir," moaned the woman; "you was the toff as nursed that biby. I know you've a kind 'art; don't be 'ard on me."

"And your 'usbng?" said Brand.

"Why," said Straight—coming out from behind the curtains—"she's got oil and kindlings piled up two feet high under the da's-table. There, look!"

"I didn't mean no 'arm," pleaded the woman. "I've burned 'undreds of plices—always from the tawp storey; so's I've never 'ad a life to awnser for. Don't tell me 'usbing, and I'll blow the 'ole gaff—'pon my loife, I will! But if 'e know'd 'e'd kill me."

"Get up off the floor," said Father Jared. "Don't be afraid, my good woman; for no harm shall come to you. Didn't calculate on a sleepless old man, with sharp ears—eh? There, sit down, and tell us all about it."

"I daresn't! I daresn't!" she cried. "If Clewston's catches me blowing of it, they'll murder me—they will!"

"What has Clewston to do with this?" growled Brand. "Come, speak up; or worse may happen. I guess you'll be with your 'usbing in the Tombs, if you don't confess."

"Hush! Brand," said the priest; "you only frighten her."

Indeed the woman needed quieting; but, under the old man's persuasion, was presently induced to talk.

"It was Clewston's 'tecs., sir, as made me give the naines of all our clients—people as warnts 'ouses burnt, for to get the insurance. The man as owns this 'ouse sends for me, and, sez 'e, 'I'll p'y you liberal if you makes it accidental enough; and there's a wi' along the 'ouse roofs from the tenement round the corner. I come that way."

"What, from where Miss Gault lives?"

The woman seemed reassured. She had stopped crying, and only occasionally sniffed.

"Yes, sir; and I went to Miss Gault this very di' to awsk 'er to sive me from this wicked work; but she only sends me to a church—as if the loikes of me were fit to go into a church, let alone pri! She'll

tell you it's true, she will, sir—every word I s'y; fer she's a 'oly ooman as ever was, and that good to us poor folk, you'd never believe; and——”

“I want to know,” said Brand, “what the Clewston detectives have to do with these crimes?”

“Nothing, sir; only onct they caught me doin' of it—unbeknownst to my man—and they says that if I didn't give up the nime of every gent as we burns 'ouses for, they'd 'ave me 'lectrocuted. So I 'as to give the nimes, and——”

“Doubtless,” said Straight, “the good detectives call upon the said 'gents' for half the insurance money. You're very innocent, Brand, me boy, or you'd know that our Clewston detectives are not here for their health.”

“Run away to bed, boys,” said Father Jared. “Leave me to deal with this poor woman. To-night we have done wonders for the great cause.”

“What, sir,” said Brand, “isn't this a matter for the police?”

“Police!” said Straight, scornfully. “If the police got hold of this, they'd break the insurance companies—they'd have half the city burnt—and Tammany would be enriched with the proceeds. If this woman has burnt a hundred or so houses, we'll see she burns no more.”

“Dick is quite right,” said Father Jared. “We'll see that she burns no more.”

Afterwards, while Brand was undressing, Straight strolled into his room.

“Do you know, Haraldson, what she means by her 'usbing'?”

“English dialects are beyond me,” said Brand. “Her husband, it sounded like.”

“Not a bit of it. When you've studied crime a little

longer, you'll understand thieves' argot. Husband or wife, as the case may be, is the slang for a secret society—the 'Dark and Secret Band of Firebugs!' Nice name, eh? It consists of incendiaries, and adjusters of big fire insurance companies; the first lot do the burning to order, the second report that it was accidental. No wonder the woman is scared. Why, one member, who was under suspicion of betraying their secrets, went raving mad with fright!"

"We're a great nation," sighed Brand, as he tumbled into bed. "Put out the light; I'm tired."

So it happened that this Firebug woman, as the incendiary got herself dubbed by Straight, seemed to come under Father Jared's influence—the more readily, because she had been a soldier's child at Aldershot, in the days when the Reverend Jared Nisted, V.C., was a chaplain of Her Majesty's forces in that camp. Warm was her gratitude to the little priest when he appointed her caretaker of the hall, a feeling reflected in his boots, which were now polished every morning, and almost reflected on his shiny old clothes, which had never been brushed before.

CHAPTER X

AN ANCIENT REPROBATE

WHO was this Dr. Rex Clewston, this mysterious recluse, chief of a huge detective system, the blackmailer to whom all crime rendered unwilling tribute, who held the Tammany Gang in his clutches, knew the secrets of the anarchists, and used incendiaries as his tools? Who was this improbable—nay, impossible—fiend, who had arisen to dominate society with such weapons?

Could it be true that the arch-criminal had been guilty of such clumsy work as train-wrecking? And if it was true, as the Colonel claimed, what motive had caused that bungling attempt of ten years ago to assassinate Michael Gault?

For some days Haraldson pondered upon this matter. He saw the large Frailty Investigation Offices next door to the *Avenger* building, and fell to contrasting Dr. Clewston with Marshall Gault, the monster genius of evil, with the power that worked for good.

And these two giants were peaceable neighbours! Brand, remembering the Colonel's dynamite story, strongly suspected that Gault's steam-launch had once actually been placed at Clewston's disposal, for the pursuit of an anarchist; yet it was natural enough that a good citizen should lend assistance to a detective, even though the latter were personally of dubious repute. The more Brand studied the *Avenger*, the more he

valued its disinterested truthfulness, its cleanliness, its courage. He had realized his ideal of a great newspaper; he felt ready to serve Mr. Gault with all his heart; but he could not understand how his new master could remain the amicable neighbour of Dr. Clewston.

Brand little knew the real Gault, the genius of expediency, the man who had bargained about him with Hilda. Had he distrusted either his master or his friend, Straight, Brand was fool enough to fight the pair of them, regardless of consequences; but now he was serving the one, trusting the other with a great-hearted loyalty that left no room for suspicion.

From the moment when the Colonel had suggested the possibility of discovering the would-be murderer of Michael Gault, Brand had been on his guard, lest by word or glance he should betray his intense excitement. Even apart from the chances of avenging Hilda and her father, he was burning to attack Dr. Clewston on general principles as a cowardly villain; but experience had taught him to keep his mouth shut; while the disclosures of the Colonel, of Straight, and of the incendiary, added strength to his first conviction, that the great blackmailer had somehow got to be destroyed.

His growing affection for Hilda, and the influence of Father Jared, ennobled this ambition; he felt that a mission was entrusted to him from above, that his life would be a very small price to pay for the subjugation of such a public enemy. There never was a more cheerful animal than Brand in these first days, when he undertook, all by himself, to do battle with principalities and powers of evil, of which he had no more conception than an average baby.

Of course, the archives of his office, and the library of crime which had been accumulated by previous fighting editors, were now exhaustively searched for any informa-

tion they might contain about Dr. Clewston ; but that gentleman only appeared in the records as a chief of detectives, to be admired for his promptitude and acumen in smelling out fugitive criminals. He was too big a fowl of prey to be trapped with bird-lime.

So Brand went to the Colonel for information, found his old friend in a certain bar-room by the docks, decoyed him away therefrom, gave him a good supper, then opened fire with the first of a volley of questions.

"Say, Colonel, you remember our first night in New York?"

"So, my young friend," said the Colonel, "after a week's flight into the blue empyrean, among silk-hatted cherubim and the rosy vapours that tint the upper crust of this terrestrial pie, you now condescend to alight upon the knowledge tree, to descend to facts, and to quaff the amber fluid"—he lifted his schooner of beer and drank therefrom—"with an ancient reprobate. Sir, the ancient reprobate takes you—in a sense strictly metaphorical and Pickwickian—to his paternal bosom.

"You have come to beg for the information which last week you so royally scorned, for the plain facts which will connect our friend Clewston with the train-wrecking. You rely upon the feelings which I cherish for one who—— What do you say? Sir, may I ask who is running this conversation? Interruption, sir, is the parent of reticence; but you are right to apologize, and I will bear no malice."

After this rebuke, the Colonel continued, as he once quaintly expressed it, to "preamble around" for about ten minutes, and Brand's impatience was but ill disguised by the time the old gentleman condescended to approach the story which he had been aching to deliver for a week.

"Ten years ago, long before I went into the detective

business, I got cleaned out over a little speculation in apes. They fetched a pretty considerable figure at the time, owing to the animal ring—a combination of dealers in wild beasts, freaks, and other properties required for dime museums and circuses. They'd run up the figures on apes, until they were rated higher in the market than school teachers and stenographers; they were asking the full value of an average scrub solicitor for an animal which I could supply in good condition at ten dollars. So I stocked an ape ranch in Florida; and, what with judicious importing and the natural increase, I calculated that I could produce any class of quadrumana, plain or coloured, at a rate which practically cornered the market. But I confess that, when I put up my patent monkey-proof wire fence, I hadn't calculated on the inspiring political atmosphere of a free republic; I had neglected to estimate the effect of an economic sociological environment upon a community of imported foreigners, and trades unionism among the quadrumana was—well, uncanny.

"When my hundred-monkey-power fence succumbed to a preconcerted attack of a thousand assailants, I concluded that it was about time for me to disperse. No wonder the people of Florida were displeased; for, after my live stock had eaten up three valuable young orange groves and the county town, they spread themselves impartially over the country, each species locating itself in some tract of bush from which it could study the surrounding agriculture. The State Legislature paid a monkey bounty of a dollar a tail, which doubled the taxes, demoralized all the young men, and didn't seem to discourage the enemy. Now, I guess you can't throw a stone in the street without hitting somebody who has lost money on Florida orange groves.

"As for me, the prospect was New York, or tar and

feathers; so I chose New York, pursued by battallions of sufferers, who wanted to make me pay for the alleged atrocities of my monkles. They had claims upon my estate, but, since I hadn't got any estate, I wished them joy. Then they wanted to take it out of my hide; life wasn't worth living. I was hunted to death. Yes, sir that's the literal fact; and the press reports of my funeral were so affecting that they made me weep.

"Even now, when I feel lonesome, I resort to Greenwood Cemetery, where I sit upon my tomb, brooding over my sins, and making those good resolutions which have been a comfort to me through years of variegated iniquity.

"The scheme was suggested by Simpson, who ran a waxwork show in the Bowery. He wanted my effigy for his gallery of distinguished criminals; which I sat for, on condition that he gave me a pale, hollow-eyed duplicate. When I told young Clewston, at the club, he was pleased all to pieces."

Brand uttered a sigh of relief, for at last he was coming to the point.

Whereupon the Colonel scowled, but continued—

"Now sir, ten years ago Dr. Clewston wasn't in the detective business. No, his name wasn't Clewston. At that time he was thirty years of age, owned and managed a large concern down town, had apartments in Madison Avenue, a yacht, and a hunting lodge in the Catskills. For purposes of argument his name then was—Jones.

"I wasn't a detective myself, I had not at that time acquired my present name and title. Jones was my personal friend, we were mutually concerned in one or two speculations 'on the Street'—so that when, because of the paltry animosity of certain parties from Florida, I was about to be incarcerated in a dungeon, I told him of my impending demise. Jones was so tickled at the

idea that he offered me the use of his yacht. I went on board with him plunged in the deepest woe, accompanied by my friend, my family physician, my effigy, materials for my coffin, and a small canoe.

"That night—it was dark as a wolf's mouth—Jones turned me adrift in the canoe, and waited until I got out of sight. Then he let out a wild yell of despair, chucked the effigy overboard, plunged in after it, and performed an heroic rescue. I will not dwell upon Jones's modesty in describing his own heroism to the reporters, the certificate of the deadness of the effigy by my family physician, the obsequies, the affecting Press notices—delicacy forbids! Yes, I called at his rooms a week later, and it was a touching reunion.

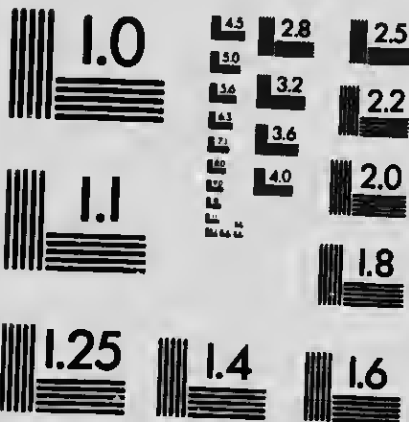
"But then Jones explained that since he had effected such a beautiful exit for me, it was now his turn. I must help him to disappear because he had a little adventure on hand—a love adventure, he said—which demanded caution. I must personate him, if you please, for two weeks or so at his hunting-lodge in the Catskills. Consent? You don't suppose I'd have Jones giving me away at the Club! Sir, my Imperfections are my private property—not for the diversion of the canaille; besides, being officially dead, I wasn't going to make an apparition of myself.

"It was my convenience to personate Mr. Jones. Made up to resemble him, dressed in his clothes, attended by his confidential valet, I resorted that night to the Catskill Mountains. Moreover, I obliged my friend by despatching thence some letters he entrusted to me informing his friends that he felt sick, and had gone to the hunting lodge for change of air. Sir, I flatter myself that I can maintain the dignity proper to an American gentleman, whether running a monkey-ranche, retiring from the tumult of the world, or officiat-



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ing as an alibi. I had a pretty good time at the lodge, alone with Nature, contemplating the infinitudes—besides which Jones is a remarkably good judge of liquor.

“And what was my reward for serving him? Did Jones fall upon my neck with tears of gratitude? Did he offer still to be my *alter ego*, which means my other twin? No, sir, he had the base ingratitude to produce a cheque which I had merely written out in his name to save him trouble—he charged me with forgery, and from that day to this has held me more or less in his power.”

“Confound you,” said Brand, angrily. “D’ye think you can put me off the track with a clumsy mass of lies—yes, lies? Forgery—pah, on your own showing you could have charged him with worse than that. You had but to open your mouth and his dirty secret love adventure would have been the talk of the country.”

“Brand, you are rude; but that I can afford to pass over. This forgery gave Clewston no hold—and what did first put me at his mercy is my private business. I am attempting to show you Clewston’s connection with the train-wrecking.”

“But all this rubbish has nothing to do with it!”

“No, unless my friend’s ‘dirty little love adventure,’ as you call it, was a dastardly attempt to murder Michael Gault. I shall betray Clewston’s alibi on the day that I can prove to the hilt that he went to the Rocky Mountains in order to make a fortune by the death of the Railroad King.

“What makes me suspect? Well, firstly, the date of his leaving New York was eight days before the train-wrecking, whereas the date of his return was the seventh day afterwards. Secondly, I discovered, three years ago, that Clewston had at that time been speculating in Michael Gault’s railroads to the tune of millions of

dollars. No, sir, not as Jones, not as Clewston, but under another name, through agents, and on the London market. Thirdly, the speculation was on the 'bear' side for such a fall in the stocks as would follow Gault's death.

"Now, Brand, I've told you plainly how I first got mixed up with this business.

"There's no need to go into details as to how Clewston's grip strengthened until he holds over me the very fear of death. I want to be free, you want to be avenged for the train-wrecking—I tell you that the day you bring me proof identifying Clewston as the train-wrecker, I will trust you with documents and witnesses to make good every word I have confessed as to his sham alibi."

"So," said Brand, with a sarcastic laugh, "you have something besides a disordered imagination."

"I tell you I have every proof except the identification of Clewston in the actual fact of the crime."

"I guess," said Brand, yawning, "I'll call on the gentleman."

"I guess," retorted the Colonel, "that the same day you'll call on the Recording Angel."

CHAPTER XI

THE PRICE OF ADMIRALTY

BRAND knew nothing about ships, but he had suggested dynamiting to the Colonel as the fate of the two lost liners. In this he was interested for Hilda's sake, although he never had the courage to allude to the subject or to her heavy loss, as a shareholder, in the King Line. He had read eagerly the accounts, from day to day, of the precautions taken before the *Maharajah* could be allowed to sail. The King Company refused to risk the lives of passengers or the carriage of uninsured freight, discharged the ship's domestics, and granted extra pay to the working crew. The mails were lashed to a raft, which could be set adrift in thirty seconds. The boats were loose on the davits, provisioned and watered for service. There was rigid scrutiny of every package shipped, of the bunker coal, of the ship's stores, and repeated examination of every compartment throughout the hull. The safety of the *Maharajah* was beyond all doubt, but the trade of the Line was ruined, and the loss of two uninsured first-rate liners within six months must surely have exhausted the last resources of capital and credit.

The *Maharajah* had sailed, and hour by hour came reports by wireless telegraph, while the press and the people waited. Brand, as fighting editor of the *Avenger*, wrote of the dynamiting of ships, reciting from office records the growth of this strange species of crime.

There was the old Bremerhaven case, almost forgotten, about a shipper despatching an infernal machine with his over-insured merchandise, which blew up while being lifted from the quay. In 1881 four infernal machines were found in the S.S. *Bavaria* at Liverpool, and no less than six in the S.S. *Malta*. On November 1st, 1892, the *City of Alexandria* was blown up and burnt off Cuba, with the loss of many lives; and in 1893 an abortive attempt was made to destroy the *City of Washington*, owned by the same American Company. In this instance the infernal machine, having failed to explode, was discovered at New York in one of many chests of tea—for it had been wrapped in a greasy paper, the rancid smell of which caused the opening of the package. In the same year explosives were found concealed in the cargo steamer *Tauric*, sister ship of the mysteriously-*Naronic*; and bombs were unearthed in the hold of sailing-vessel, the *Cyrus Wakefield*. In 1894 the French liner, *Equateur*, was partly blown up with an infernal machine while lying at a South American port. In 1895, during the docker's strike at New Orleans, sticks of dynamite were thrust into the cotton-bales on the levee—an act of as deliberate malice as the burning, by strikers, of seven British ships at Savannah.

Reviewing these and many later instances, Brand looked up from his work, and found Straight standing by the table. His long thin fingers were nervously folding and unfolding a slip of paper.

"Sit down," said Brand.

Straight sat by the table, leaning forward. "When," he asked, "can you go to Miss Gault?"

Brand stared, while the man took off his hat, then put it on again, most evidently nervous.

"Because," Straight stammered, "well, the betting's

always against an outsider—and yet—the dark horse may, perhaps, know the course from past experience.”

“What the devil do you mean?”

“That you’re a good fellow.” Straight leaned back, inspecting Brand through eyeglasses. “I like you, Haraldson; I’m disposed, that is if it don’t inconvenience me too much”—he took out the handkerchief from his breast pocket and flicked imaginary specks from his clothes—“to be of some service to you, and to Miss Gault.”

And all the while he was watching with deep quiet eyes, analyzing Brand’s surprise, weighing his wrath.

“No, I’m not prying into your business, but when we first met, I was amused at your nervousness in mentioning Miss Gault, your transparent innocence in being aroused by my chaff, your sudden flaming passion at the idea that I spoke of her slightly. You did not know your own secret until I probed it—you don’t recognize the diagnosis now—you’ll realize the truth for the first time as I tell you—that—you—love—Miss—Gault.”

Brand was conscious of being betrayed by an obvious blush, but he was bewildered by this man’s swift, unscrupulous, masterful assault upon the innermost citadel of his nature.

“Now,” continued Straight, with a little triumphant laugh, “I’ve brought home the charge, you stand convicted, you regard me as your enemy. But,” a sad little smile came to chase the laugh away, “I have not so many friends, Mr. Brand Haraldson, that I can afford to lose you, and so I will tell you why I have committed what any gentleman might consider an unpardonable outrage. I hardly claim to know Miss Gault myself; but I reverence her,” he raised his hat as he spoke, “as a gentleman to whom any contact with me would be a profanation. She is in danger, in what way I cannot,

dare not tell you ; but if you pay your addresses worthily enough, manfully enough, quickly enough, she may be drawn to you to her lasting advantage she may be saved from a fate such as I cannot think of without shivering. I speak that I may warn you to make haste, I speak in the hope that your manly and wholesome love may deliver her—and now——”

He stood up with quiet dignity, a smile on his lips, sadness unspeakable in his eyes. “Read that,” he said, handing the folded paper to this man who loved Miss Gault.

“Mrs. Marsden,” he read, “Letwiche berks god hel——”

“That message,” Straight explained, “has been forwarded. Mrs. Marsden’s husband was wireless operator on the *Maharajah*.”

“So Miss Gault is ruined?”

“Beggared!”

CHAPTER XII

TWO WAYS OF LOVE

BRAND found Hilda at rest after a hard day's work, enjoying the sunshine as it streamed through an open window, peaceful with a clear conscience and the knowledge that her hair was quite tidy. On seeing him, she called to Barbara for tea; then told him to sit down, and not to look so very serious a personage.

Brand sat down; and, taking the evening paper from his pocket, "There's bad news," he said; "I thought perhaps you——"

"Bad news?" she said, wearily; "what a nuisance! I wanted to be sure of a rest for once. What? Not the *Maharajah!*"

"Yes, the *Maharajah*. We don't know yet how many lives are lost."

"Thank you," said Hilda, gently; "it's real good of you to come. Excuse me a minute."

She went hurriedly to her bedroom door; then turned back. "No," she said, with a brave smile, "I'm not called upon to make any fuss. If the crew are saved, the rest doesn't matter—I'm not going—to—cry."

Brand looked out of the window. He knew that Hilda wanted to find her handkerchief—he felt her coming across the room—and when she sat down again by the tea-table he glowered at the newspaper, lest she should think that he was aware of red eyes,

and the little break in her voice when she last had spoken.

"I came here," he said gruffly to the newspaper, "because I remembered what your father said about your needing somebody. Makes me sort o' proud," this very gruffly indeed, "that the King's daughter's above making a big fuss because she's in trouble. The whole world belongs to the men who understand women—wish I did—only I'm a big hulking fool—I——" So he went on talking to give the lady time to recover, which was Brand's poor Western way of being polite.

But she interrupted his discourse. "That's right, Barbara, put it down here, and the cakes as near as you can to Mr. Haraldson. Now I want you to run down to the corner grocery, for we're out of lump sugar. Five pounds, Barbara, and then you can admire all the stores in the Bowery for half-an-hour."

Barbara sighed aloud in token of sympathy, but that did not prevent her "fixing herself" in the kitchen for an inordinate length of time in the hope that something more might be said worth hearing. The parlour was silent, however, until the loud slamming of the door announced Barbara's exit. Meanwhile both Hilda and her guest had finished tea.

"You needn't be troubled about me, Brand," said Hilda. "Of course the Line is ruined; and if father had lived to see that, it would have broken his heart. The ships were not insured; and hard times had reduced the reserve fund, so that there was only money enough to replace the *Tsar*. The *Caliph* swallowed up the year's dividend; and after her loss, of course, there was no passenger traffic—people were too much scared. I did hope to keep my railroad stock, but now," her lips quivered a little, "you say the *Maharajah's* gone, so the directors will have to make a call on the share-

holders. That takes all I have. Yes, I'm quite penniless now," she smiled. "So I won't have to subscribe to that hateful Pauper Factory—haven't got a cent left. Personal property? Oh yes, some frocks; a few things I picked up in Europe, a little jewellery," she chuckled, "enough to start a second-hand store."

"But," said Brand, "why didn't you sell out of the Line? Why don't you now?"

"Because that's what Marshall wanted." In plain American Hilda was giving herself away. "I mean—that is, of course, the rats always scuttle from a doomed ship, but since the days of the ever-glorious Pat, who founded the House, the Gaults belong to the King Line and I'm not inclined to be the first rat—so there!"

Brand wondered at this curious woman motive, a piece of chivalry that would not occur to a man.

"What does it matter anyway?" she continued. "I shall be just as useful, a real poor woman among the poor. No, you needn't waste sympathy on me, Brand; the pity is for the brave men drowned or thrown out of work by this attack upon the King Line—their wives, their children, the stock-holders, their families, their dependents—what is my trouble beside theirs?"

"But surely Marshall Gault won't see you——"

"Do you think," she cried angrily, "that I'll be beholden to him—or anybody! I'm an American girl—not made of butter. I expect that I can get work with the Medical Mission, and that's good enough for me. Did you know that I have a degree in medicine? Ah, Brand, I owe all this to Father Jared, who found me as useless as any woman in the Four Hundred, made me feel, oh, so small, and brought me here to patronize better people than I am, among these East-side tenements. Now I'm no longer a well-to-do crank who condescends to live among hard facts, but a free woman

strong and ready for service." She laughed gaily. "Dr. Hilda Gault, if you please—Medical Missionary!"

Brand got up in a hurry, almost upsetting the tea-service. "And now," he said triumphantly, "it's my turn."

"What do you mean?"

"What do I mean!" he gasped. "I—I—oh, I can't!"

It would not be fair to take her at a disadvantage, to use her grief in forwarding his love. She must be saved from absolute ruin first, given an income, free to choose her course, to take him or reject him as she pleased. And then, but not till then, he could speak of love.

"I'm off," he said breathless.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm going right away to your father's lawyers, Vanslyperken and what's-his-name. Why, I'm almost glad this has happened—gives me a chance to help. No, I tell you right now, it's no use arguing. Your father gave me the right to help you; besides, there may be money in it, so's you can go on working here your own way, instead of being dependent on any mission." He strode to the door.

She stood up. "Brand, I'm not in trouble—you mustn't——"

But Brand was gone.

Hilda ran to the head of the stairs, whence she could see his coat-tails vanishing; but, instead of calling to bring him back, she listened as he swung down the steps, three at a time, whistling triumphantly. She clasped her hands; she laughed a little; then stole away back to her rooms, very demure, locked herself in the bedroom, threw herself on the bed, and had a good cry.

So far it seemed quite easy; the change scarcely perceptible from poverty played at to poverty real. How

nice of him to come with his grand schemes, his boyish enthusiasm. Why, poverty was only a little price to pay for real friends like Brand and Father Jared.

"Let's see"—she sat up on the bed—"what was I crying for, anyway? Oh, yes—poverty. Whose poverty? Only mine. Then what am I crying about!"

She bathed her face, took down her hair, brushed it comfortably, bound it all up, then when Barbara called her, sat down to open the evening letters. One from Mrs. So-and-So, and would Miss Gault be kind enough to lend her . . . the landlord said . . . only a little temporary embarrassment, but still . . . Brave Mrs. So-and-So! Hilda knew well enough how the rent was only the pretence of a proud woman, that the money was to save a clean home from the invasion of a drunken husband. She had written out the usual cheque before she realized, with a sinking heart, that the Bank would dishonour her name. "Ruined"—"penniless"—mere words they had seemed, to be thrust aside with a courageous laugh, but now! She tore the cheque into little pieces, and took up another letter. From the baby-farm at Niagara, this, to judge by the postmark, a spidery scrawl from her dear old nurse, all about the slum children being reared at her charges in a paradise of cherries and red apples. Must these babies be sent back to the slums? Feeling so sick that her head began to swim, the cold perspiration to stand out upon her face, she took up the third letter. Her lawyers, Messrs. Vanslyperken and Schneidam, advised her with extreme regret that the bankers were solicitous as to her account, which was overdrawn to a quite unusual extent. They must advise moderation in the writing of further cheques, pending arrangements now being made, etc. A fourth letter from the matron of "God's Hostelry for the Dying," and would Miss Gault oblige with a remittance

for monthly pay of the staff, together with a check, for invoices hereto attached.

Hilda threw herself down upon the table in a passion of tears. Not her poverty, but theirs; not her sorrow, but the bitter trouble of the poor; not her hope of better things, but the hopes of all that had known no hope in the world—and the account was overdrawn, her account with the Almighty was overdrawn, the hour was come when all things must be rendered up.

She sank upon her knees, she laid her hands upon the evening letters. "Master, have mercy," she cried. "Don't take my work away."

Then her eyes rested upon a text which Father Jared had nailed upon the wall: "Lo, I will never leave thee, neither will I forsake thee."

And as she looked up through a mist of tears, seeing but dimly that promise written broad across the wall, a heavy footfall rang on the stairway—a truculent rough hand wrenched at the knocker of her door.

She rose, and fled to her bedroom. "Barbara!"

She heard the maid slopping out of the kitchen, opening the door. "Yes, sorr, come in; sit down, sorr. Lor, what's yer hurry? Miss Hilda!" tapping on the bedroom door, "ye're wanted by Misther Gault!"

Hilda came out presently to find the great man in possession of her sitting-room, like a bull on a bed of lilies, very much at his ease. Since he condescended to own the earth, he naturally had taken the easiest chair, disposing himself to ponderous advantage. No common-places on the weather, no sense of being her guest, or fear of intrusion smoothed the rough edge of this man's overture. He had come to discuss certain plans; he just refrained from mentioning that his time was worth many dollars a minute, and would she honour him with her attention. He was familiar, also; whereas Brand

had been almost too shy to speak—afraid of soiling the floor with muddy boots, the humble bearer of a tribute of flowers by way of palliation for coming. The flowers were on the table, filling the lamp-lit room with unwonted fragrance; but Marshall brought flowers of speech in well-balanced sentences—an atmosphere of ruthless power dominating her senses. His eyes were always upon her most uncomfortably; keen in the detection of red eyelids, in the embarrassment of every feminine artifice to veil distress. Yet he meant well; knowing every angle of that rough personality, she felt that he came out of kindness, and even with a certain tact refrained from even mentioning that she was in trouble. She liked to hear his large philanthropy as he unrolled great schemes of ably-planned benevolence; she took a well-feigned interest in anything that would divert his mind from her sore wounds.

And Marshall felt, with comfortable satisfaction, that he was dealing delicately with her trouble, when he came quite in an incidental manner to the pleasure it would be for him to take over her charities—only one hundred and ten thousand a year; after all, his manager might even, he thought, improve upon her hopelessly unbusinesslike methods.

“So you know?” she asked faintly, sitting up in the arm-chair to some desultory sewing which soothed her nerves, and kept her hands from revealing any emotion, lest self-command should fail.

“Yes, Hilda, I know; and I know how foolish all these plans of mine must be unless you help me.”

She looked stonily at the text on the wall. “Lo, I will never leave thee.” Was this the answer to her prayer? “Why did I pray?” she wondered. “Why couldn’t I keep my mouth shut?”

“Yes, I will help you,” she said, and the needle raced

viciously along a seam of linen. She knew that this man spoke from the very depths of his nature; coarse his ideas might be, but, weighing his words, testing them to the uttermost as he spoke, she knew that at last they rang true. Many times had he approached her; but now, with the unmistakable ring of love, he came to her in her trouble, not the king to the beggar, but the man to the woman.

"I have conquered the world," he said, quite humbly though; "it wasn't worth the trouble, or half the trouble. And now, I'm so hungry that I come to beg a crust. Have the poor taken all your love? Won't you throw me a crust?"

He took her hand in his own, and the very feel of him chilled her. Why should she be repelled? The greatest philanthropist in the world, not out of charity, but with genuine love for her—one of the richest men in America coming to a penniless girl, with surely no selfish motive—why should she be repelled? She was worn out, she was driven into a corner from whence there was no escape. Brand had brought flowers, and she had watered them; but now—

"I prayed; this is the answer." She took up the flowers very tenderly, and, opening the window, scattered them out into the night. "They make the room so close," she said pitifully; then returned, step by step, to her place.

"This is the answer."

She was fond of the man—had always thought of him as a sort of brother—was mightily proud of him, because all his colossal fortune was but the lever he used for doing good—"But I don't like him; I can't! And yet the baby-farm," she was thinking—and two big tears trickled slowly down. "God's Hostelry, and the work here."

"Lo, I will never leave thee, neither will I forsake thee."

"I am lonely," he went on, "so lonely—shut off from all the world by a wall of gold. I am not strong enough to stand all alone on the cold heights, with only God above, and mankind crying out underfoot. Together we could do such great things, like a new Adam and a new Eve, tending the garden, and making the earth to laugh with a great delight. And I love you, dear; I love you so much that all these words burn up with the heat of my breath, and nothing reaches you but ashes."

Yes, the text did not change, as Hilda had half expected; the words were still there, the answer written plain upon the wall. "Marshall," she said in utter weariness, "I'll do it."

Marshall sat still—motionless—not daring to speak; but into his eyes there came slowly the cold, clear light of triumph, of victory!

CHAPTER XIII

THE KING'S BEQUEST

THE office of Messrs. Vanslyperken and Schneidam was closed at four o'clock; at six o'clock, when Brand banged at the door, the whole place seemed to resound with echoes; and, inwardly cursing the lawyers for not keeping tobacconist hours, he had turned away in disgust, when the door-chain rattled from within, and a pompous voice demanded who was there.

"Why, surely," thought Brand, "I've seen this freak before."

The "freak" was a plump and stately lawyer of Dutch extraction, and bald, who regarded him through the door with hostile eyes. He looked like a turtle rampant.

"Dear me, why this is Mr. Haraldson!" The words were cordial.

"And you," said Brand, "are the gentleman I met once or twice at the boarding-house—but I didn't know that you belonged here!"

The Turtle drew himself up, his mouth and eyes ridiculously round.

"I," he puffed, "am Schneidam Tertius."

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Tertius."

"No! No! By Tertius I mean third of that name. Piet Schneidam, at your service; I'm too late for my wife's table uptown, so I'm quite at your service."

A look of pain came into the gentleman's face, because

Mrs. Schneidam Tertius, *née* Wallop, had taken him at unawares, to have and to hold, like a bear-trap. As to his dinner, well—absence is not all regret.

"Say," said Brand, "I've got business that won't wait; a letter of introduction from the late Michael Gault."

"Indeed! Indeed! I remember. Pray step in—now, this is most curious—this way, Mr. Haraldson. So you're *the* Mr. Haraldson for whom we hold prop—Step in, my dear sir, this way."

Once in the private office where Hilda had first entertained him, Brand presented his letter to the Turtle, who mounted round gold spectacles, and snapped gently as he read.

"Dear me, dear me," he looked up at Brand with open-mouthed astonishment, "accept my heartiest congratulations. You'll find the estate in admirable order, rents accumulating——"

"What the deuce——"

"Excuse me—the deuce—ha, ha!—just a moment while I open my——" He turned to the safe and laboriously worked out the combination of numerals on the dial—654, 391—'click'——

The door swung open, and the little lawyer hauled out of the safe two portly envelopes bound with red tape, sealed and endorsed.

"A pleasant surprise for you, Mr. Haraldson, a very pleasant surprise. But first you must open this." He presented a third sealed letter. "Which will explain the intentions of our lamented client."

"NEW YORK,

"9th Augu', 18—

"DEAR BRAND,—A year ago to-day you saved Hilda's life and my own. Now my days are numbered,

and before I go I am setting my house in order. Your boss of the *Revolversburg Democrat* reported to me in a letter, dated 27th ult., that you are manly, smart, learning very quickly, showing real talent in your chosen vocation of Journalism. Now, if I bequeath you a lot of money in my will it can only impair your self-reliance: but I cannot quit the world without some substantial testimony of my gratitude. Before we parted at *Revolversburg* I gave you a letter to my solicitors, to be presented if either Hilda or yourself were in trouble; and I know well that you will not have made use of it except in the gravest need. I will not, therefore, trouble you with long admonitions; for I trust you with all my heart, dear lad, and you are doubtless reading this in sore impatience. If you are in trouble, demand a package endorsed 'on behalf of Mr. Brand Haraldson,' which contains money.

"If Hilda is in any danger or sorrow caused by the renewal of attacks by that secret enemy who tried to murder us, ask for the package endorsed 'on behalf of Miss Gault.'

"And may the Almighty Father of us all descend upon you in blessing.

"Good-bye, my son. Perhaps in the next world we shall meet again.

"(Sd.) MICHAEL GAULT."

Hilda was in trouble, not by the attack of that old enemy—that, perhaps, mythical enemy; but ruined through the war levied by Anarchist or other scoundrels against the King Line. And yet, Brand wondered, might there not be some connection between Clewston, the attempted assassination of the King, and the dynamiting of the King's ships?

Mr. Schneidam was suddenly seized of an idea. "Mr.

Haraldson." he gasped, "may I ask, have you come here on business concerning Miss Gault? Pardon my question. I mean, Mr. Haraldson, that although I was absent at the time, my partner told me of your first meeting with Miss Gault at this office. You were introduced at the boarding-house by the Rev. Jared Nisted, who is her friend. In fact, we are extremely anxious about Miss Gault's affairs. Ah! I'd no right to speak of this; I am betraying her confidence. I beg you to forget that I spoke."

"There's no fear of that," cried Brand. "I know as well as you do that Miss Gault is ruined. I came here, because these papers concerning her may kinder help me to be useful, may help me to serve her."

Suddenly there flashed across Brand's mind the words that Straight had said.

"Miss Gault is in danger—in what way I cannot, dare not, tell you." The words rang now in his ears—"She is in danger! She is in danger!"

"Mr. Schneidam," Brand said—his broad hand on the little man's shoulder—"I demand the package endorsed 'On behalf of Miss Gault.' But the other, for me, contains money; so I demand that too, because I want the money for her, now that she's ruined."

"Mr. Haraldson"—the little man's voice was very husky—"I'm real glad to deliver these papers to you. Take them—ah! um!—and kindly favour me with a receipt."

"All right, Mr. Schneidam, make out your receipt; I'll sign anything you like." He was reading the endorsement of the package, "On behalf of Mr. Haraldson." He sat down opposite to the desk where the lawyer had begun scribbling. "This first." He ripped open the envelope, and spread out a large sealed document. "What's this, Mr. Schneidam? The stuff's

all words, words—'messuages,' 'hereditaments,'—what rubbish!"

"A deed of gift, Mr. Haraldson, conveying to you, and to your heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns, all——"

"What!"

"And sundry——"

"Come, talk white, Mr. Schneidam."

"A property in this city, valued ten years ago at one hundred thousand dollars—worth now, say, half as much again, and yielding, during the last four years, an income of fifteen thousand dollars. Besides that, the revenue of the past nine years has been invested in good securities, on your behalf, at the rate of three per cent. So that we, as your trustees, shall be able to hand over to you, after all deductions, about one hundred thousand dollars, besides the original gift—less certain commissions, taxes, and fees."

"What," cried Brand, "do you mean to say that I am worth fifteen thousand a year, and a hundred thousand besides?"

"I trust, my dear sir, that you will find the arrangements we have made on your behalf entirely acceptable."

"See here," said Brand, "Miss Gault tells me that she has been spending a thousand dollars a year on herself. Now that she has lost everything, and she won't accept money from me, I want you to fix up some arrangement by which she shall draw from this—her father's money—the sum of a thousand a year. Mind you, she mustn't know it comes from me."

"I understand," said the Lawyer; "we'll fix it somehow—a little legal fiction, eh? Well, well; all in good time."

"But she must have it at once."

"Impossible! You must prove your identity, Mr. Haraldson, before we can hand over a dollar."

"But my letter was enough. You gave me this document without any legal monkey-business."

"We had our instructions. Besides, nobody now living knows of these documents except you, my partner, and myself. I know of your instant recognition by Miss Gault and Mr. Marshall Gault; but the law, my dear sir!—the law!"

"Damn the law! See here; you know who I am—you have the security of this deed. Here, take it! On that security borrow a thousand dollars at once, and send it to Miss Gault."

"I think, Mr. Haraldson," the lawyer grinned, "my partner and I will discuss this matter between us; for Miss Gault's sake we should be sorry to allow any delay. Leave the matter to us. To-morrow we'll take your note of hand at three months, for a thousand at six per cent. How will that suit you, eh?"

"That's all right," said Brand, absently, "fix it your own way so that she gets the money. If I thought Miss Gault would take more than a thousand, the whole of this wealth would be better in her hands than mine." Then feeling that he wasted time until he could return to Miss Hilda's flat, he made a hurried departure.

Miss Gault was not at home. Then and for many days afterwards the maid dismissed Brand with excuses. Miss Gault was out, Miss Gault was not receiving, Miss Gault was sick, and gone away to Vermont. But in that first night, before any misgivings had chilled him, Brand spent the sleepless hours in his bedroom reading the papers bequeathed by Michael Gault.

The dawn was breaking before he finished his study of the second sealed package, which contained a document about the train-wrecking, left by the late Mr.

Gault in case fresh attacks upon Hilda should involve a further investigation of that crime. This was a memorandum of all that had transpired at an interview with Mr. Montagu, lately inspector in the New York police, and chief of the Detective Bureau.

It is only necessary here to give extracts:—

"With reference to an enquiry conducted on my behalf by Inspector George Montagu, of the New York Police Detective Bureau.

"Mr. Montagu absolutely refused to give me any written report whatever, as to the wrecking of the pilot train on 30th July last; neither would he tell me the names either of the criminal or the principal instigator."

And so on for ten weary pages of introduction, until there occurred a most astounding confession.

"Deeply as he deplored the necessity, he was compelled, he said, to inform me that the exigencies of the public service imperatively demanded his absolute silence as to the name and identity of the aforesaid instigator of the wrecking. Such vast interests are at stake, that any public prosecution involving the disclosure of this name would be nothing less than a national calamity. He has, however, advised this instigator in private, that any further attempt to do me injury will be met by his arrest and certain conviction, on a charge of inciting to felony, *in re* the death of Matt Fortescue, engineer of the pilot train."

By describing this instigator, according to a venerable legal fiction, as John Doe, the inspector was enabled to relate in full the circumstances attending the outrage.

"John Doe, then, is a speculator on the Stock Exchange, who knew that my sudden removal from the control of certain railroads would involve a sudden and complete collapse of public confidence in these

properties." All this the Colonel had said of Dr. Clewston! "There would be a large depreciation of shares, not really warranted by the financial condition of the said railroads; so, by buying the depreciated stock, he would profit by their ultimate recovery in the public esteem. When I say that the margin he expected to realize was not less than two million dollars, you will appreciate his motive in removing me. To avoid suspicion, John Doe had opened relations some time before, under an assumed name, with certain brokers in London. His opportunity came at the time when I had announced my intended departure for the Pacific coast, in the appearance upon the scene of one Peter Quiggle"—Was this the Colonel?—"an eccentric individual, who had done some extensive swindling in connection with an Ape Ranche in Florida."

Here followed an account of the Colonel's disastrous adventure in Florida, his flight, his whimsical exit from the world, and his relations with "John Doe," all fairly agreeing with the old man's version of the story.

But now Mr. Gault's memorandum plunged into an entirely fresh rendering of the events which followed. Here it was the Colonel who went west to the train-wrecking, subsidized heavily by "John Doe"; while the wicked instigator retired to his little place in the country, to deal very energetically indeed with the Colonel's creditors.

Next, Brand found that he need not trouble himself with the "reports" of the detectives, for these were but typewritten MSS., which had been so carefully edited by the department, that they afforded not the least clue as to the identity of the instigator. Indeed, their only value consisted in the fact that however "faked" to hide the truth from Michael Gault, these represented authentic documents now in the archives of the De-

Dr. n of tion ated the ex-lars, To me tain ime the one tric g in rous rom airly o an wed. ain- hile the the nself but ited clue only " to nted De-

ective Bureau. Undoubtedly, if Clewston could be identified as "Jones" *alias* "John Doe," and if the actual reports could be unearthed, they had only to be produced in Court to convict him of felony—but to get at them? If Clewston had been powerful enough to suppress the investigation ten years ago, he was fifty times stronger now. If he had not already procured the destruction of all evidence against him, the least enquiry would set the arch-detective on his guard. In vain Brand racked his brains for a solution to this new difficulty, and the evidence rose fantastic before him, a nightmare problem, a stone wall of obstruction, unsurmountable. Was the Colonel guilty, or Clewston?—Clewston, or the Colonel? The first sunlight pouring into Brand's room awakened him from a horrible dream, in which Clewston and the Colonel were wrecking a King steamer wherein he, enveloped in flames, was fighting with red incarnate Murder for Hilda's deliverance.

CHAPTER XIV

A POWER BEHIND THE THRONE

DURING his first few weeks in this big town, Brand had never tired of exploring the streets. Once escaped from the day's work and the boarding-house supper, his evenings had been spent in long rambles through the fashionable districts—that endless garden of little homes across the Brooklyn Bridge—or the cosmopolitan east side, where he had studied the natural history of "kids," "natives," "bowery boys," "heelers," "scrappin' gangs," "hoboes," "beats," "bums," "bruisers"—all very lively and good-natured after their kind. He had followed them into their lairs, where suspicion could only be disarmed by a setting-up of drinks, though his huge bulk and propensity for "scrapping" ensured something more than respect. Otherwise, his excursions had been solitary, because walking is accounted as madness by the eastern American; indeed, he wanted no company, for even Straight, the best fellow in the world, would always be talking—a flagrant interruption that to a man in love. About once in a week he had beguiled Hilda away for a stroll in Central Park or the Battery, and these had been red letter days because—but there is no need to explain such things as that. On Sundays she had taken him to church.

His accession to wealth made not the slightest difference to Brand, who knew that the family lawyers

must have a month or so in which to determine their stewardship. All else was changed from the day when he brought the bad news; Hilda was "out" when he called, the maid implacable.

The light of his life could scarcely be dimmed by that—some temporary wish for solitude to be wholly respected, or misunderstanding soon to be set to rights. The realization of love had changed the man to the very foundations of his nature. A few days ago his editorial work had been inspired by a barbarous delight in hard fighting; now he had forgotten how to fulminate. Called upon to deal with a certain famous conviction in the criminal courts, he sat down at his desk to denounce the malefactor, yet found himself writing sorrowfully about a society which had not given the poor black-guard a chance to be good, laws which fixed a great gulf between the nice woolly sheep made rich by pettifogging in Wall Street, and the unsavoury goats who got hard labour for being bad in the Bowery. The prisoner had committed a series of murders, so, of course, he must be executed for the encouragement of his kinsfolk of the Five Points—one tailor the less to be sweated by the wholesale merchant in Broadway, one tenant less for the rack-renter in Madison Avenue, one citizen less to be taxed, one voter less to be bribed, one soul the less to be damned at the rich man's gate. Of course this precious diatribe came back to the Fighting Editor with an indignation mark on the corner; Brand's ideals were no longer those of the *Avenger*. So he went home in the blues, thinking of all the big swindlers and their fraudulent business unmasked by his fighting editorship, only to make room for smarter villains warned as to their eleventh commandment, "Thou shalt not be found out." He seemed a sort of Fate, killing off the unfit to help on

the evolution of hardier malefactors, giving them scope to devour more widows' houses, the hint to make longer prayers.

Father Jared had work for him in the evening, because in those days Mrs. Papps brought all her anxieties to an end in bankruptcy. Since the boarders would not pay their bills a hairy alien sat in the kitchen, the silent representative of civil law. Then the priest signed some big documents, the alien went away to devour another bankrupt, the boarders packed up their trunks, migrating one by one to board elsewhere. Father Jared was tenant now on behalf of the Reformers' Club, a little speculation in souls, as the good man called it. Straight controlled the finances, Brand re-arranged the furniture, a porter was installed in the entry, Mrs. Papps resumed command as housekeeper, and the firebug woman began to scrub the floors. Perhaps the philanthropic committees did more harm than good, maybe the reformers, who met in the upper hall, had more of genial futility than actual usefulness; but if New York was foul beyond cleansing, and local politics were beyond the reach of honest endeavour, that was not the fault of the workers, nor of Father Jared. At least the club was a well-conducted place of rest and comfort, and the little dinners to be had in the basement rooms were a great relief after the miseries of a city boarding-house.

To Brand all this was faintly amusing, by no means important, as yet, while he was living a new and larger life. In the streets he judged all women to their disparagement by contrast with one; in the shop windows photographs of reigning beauties showed here Miss Hilda's eyes, there the sheen of her hair, or again the wee dimple which made her smile so full of witchery—yet all conceptions of human loveliness combined failed

utterly to express what he saw when he looked at herself. No camera has ever been in love. At times New York seemed only a dream city, humanity a mist of shiftless atoms, the reformation of mankind a waste of time. The endeavours, passions, strivings, failures, deaths of all the race might give some compassionate amusement to that last journalist, the Recording Angel; but to Haraldson these unrealities melted away before the central fact of time and space, his love. He dreamed that he was something in love with the Earth, that the Earth was in deadly peril by reason of a great Cloud, which, dragon-like, had jaws hot as the jaws of hell, that his love—the Earth—was to be devoured by that dragon Cloud. But he was only something hovering above, a helpless spirit full of terror. Then there was put into his hand a sword, a jagged blade of lightning double-edged, and a voice came to him, saying, "Be swift if you would save her from the Cloud, strike while there is yet time, strike!"

The dream was only a nightmare after all, when he woke up with a startled cry from his sleep a helpless mortal, now pledged to deliver a woman from some hidden danger. Had that danger been visible, tangible to be fought, he would have enjoyed the ordeal; but cool intrigue is poor solace to a man who likes fighting—war, with all its luxury of warmth to northern blood, was denied for months to come.

"Dr. Clewston," about as easy to call upon as the Aurora Borealis, had been involved in the train wrecking; suspicion pointed to his concern in the intrigue of the liberators, in the destruction of the King Line of steamers, in Miss Gault's impoverishment.

Who was this man, known to the Commonalty as Dr. Rex Clewston, whom the Colonel his enemy, and the police his pursuers, were both afraid to mention,

whose real name must needs be hidden behind a cloud of pseudonyms?

Brand could, perhaps, have pressed his enquiries upon Mr. Montagu, the retired Chief of the New York Detective Bureau; he could have asked tentative questions among his acquaintances; or, with the money now at his command, he could have engaged detectives, say from abroad; but happily for himself, this journalist had a very great talent for silence. He knew well enough that enquiry of any kind was likely enough to be reported to Clewston, whose suspicions would, at the present time, be inconvenient. If the enemy knew that he was being spied upon, the spy would be watched—and removed.

Brand had been relying upon the Colonel, but suppose the Colonel was, as attested by Inspector Montagu, only Clewston's catspaw in the train-wrecking? Brand did not think that the old gentleman's face resembled the one which he had seen ten years ago in the light of a burning train; still a mistake was possible, and, considering how awkward it would be if he were dealing with Clewston's agent, he was rather incautious to ask Colonel Giggleswick to dine with him at the Club. Inwardly doubtful as to whether he had done wisely in sending such an invitation, and expecting a poor old tramp, who would have been received with scant courtesy by the new porter, Brand awaited his guest at the front door.

Great was his amazement, then, when the Colonel came punctual to a minute, smoking a big cigar, arrayed in clean linen, frock-coat, light blue trousers, a single eyeglass, a glossy silk hat, a rosebud buttonhole, manners fit for a prince, and a smile of unusual calmness and benignity.

"How do, Brand?" this with the condescension of three fingers in a lavender kid glove, "doosed warm, eh?"

"That's so," Brand just saved himself from laughing, "doosed warm. Come in."

The Colonel came in, took the largest chair in the reception-room, put his legs tenderly to rest on a second, remarked that his bootmaker deserved boiling, flung away his cigar, then proceeded to chew tobacco with a lavish expectoration and profound gravity worthy of the Great Nation.

"Sir," he began, "you behold me in the attitude of a newly-built ship when first she greets her native element with a headlong plunge into the storm-lashed surf and raging billows of the deep."

Wondering what all this signified, Brand nodded. "Exactly so—I congratulate you. Broken a bottle or so to celebrate the launch, eh, Colonel?"

The Colonel ignored the suggestion with a fine scorn. "Sir," he continued, "I've patented at Washington an invention that, as a product of genius, entitles me to a monument in the Pantheon of the national glory. Wealth has been offered me by certain parties here in New York for the use of it, cash has been advanced as an earnest that the said parties mean business. Oh, by the way, can you oblige me with five dollars?"

Brand produced the money.

"I will write you a cheque in the morning—not at all." The Colonel, by this time, was transferring Brand's notes to his pocket. "Don't mention it, pray. Just remind me to-morrow—came out forgetting to bring small change. Dinner, eh? Well, well!" So, strutting and blustering, the Colonel followed to a private dining-room, where Brand did his utmost, with good entertainment and patient listening, to mellow his guest. After that to leave the Colonel alone was quite enough, for in due course, when cigars were alight, the old man began to revile Dr. Clewston.

"Colonel," Brand looked him directly in the eyes, "you're not playing straight!"

"Sir!"

A smooth approach would have set this able liar on guard, ready to slide gracefully out of difficulties, but Brand had no intention of being outwitted, and blunt directness rarely fails against a coward.

"Last time we talked, you wanted me to believe you in Clewston's power, because he could denounce you for forgery. That's not enough when you can prove his secret absence from home at the time of the train-wrecking, and that he had fixed things on the London Exchange to profit by the death of Michael Gault."

The Colonel was off guard. "Ah, well you see——"

"Mr. Peter Quiggle, tell the truth."

The Colonel cast a rapid glance at Brand's face; restraining a little half-frightened gasp, he studied the design of the wine-glasses, then laughed nervously.

"Young man, I perceive in you the glimmerings of human reason: but you mustn't flatter yourself upon being grown up. Had I lied to you in my account of the forgery, you would have found me out; you would have become distrustful." He looked at Brand quite frankly. "You know that I told the truth."

Brand struck back at hazard. "Only half the truth."

"Quite so. You got all that was good for you."

"I'll have the other half."

"If—what?"

Brand laughed. "If you please."

The Colonel bowed. "Then guess the other half."

"If you had been an honest man, Colonel Giggleswick *alias* Peter Quiggle"—the old man winced—"you would have let Clewston alone. Being a blackguard, you wanted afterwards to turn your knowledge of this man's crimes to your own advantage."

"I became chief of Clewston's Exchange Department—keeper of his records."

"You became a tramp—a starving, hopeless tramp."

"That's so," said the Colonel thoughtfully. "But I played a big game, and I guess I ain't through with it yet."

"At the present time you're thinking which game will pay best—Clewston's or mine."

"There you're wrong, infant. Shall I tell you some more about Clewston?"

"You may," said Brand indifferently, "if you like." This he knew was mere beating about the bush; but, for the moment, it might serve to throw the Colonel further off his guard.

"It's only politics: perhaps I'd better let you off."

Brand's curiosity was aroused.

"What, is Clewston in politics too?"

"Clewston's in everything American—he's the American disease; and when Posterity comes along to sample around and turn up its nose at the heritage of all the ages, Clewston will be found sitting on the tomb of the United States by way of an epitaph.

"You remember the great Independent President? Well, he went to Washington pledged to reform the Civil Service, the law of gravitation—everything but himself. Ever hear of the missionary who tried to reform the equator? Well, the missionary died of sunstroke, but the equator's doing business at the same old stand. Reform! Reform! They all cry out reform, and everything can be reformed—except the American politician. But it wasn't reform which bothered Clewston; he knew better. Did you ever see a mouse break into a corral full of elephants? Well, the mouse was the Independent President, bought into office by a Ring of Trusts; and the elephants were the general

business interests of the American people. Now, an elephant fears a mouse as a seventh day adventist fears the Judgment. The mouse was paralyzed with astonishment, the elephants were wild with fright ; and goodness knows what would have happened, but that one of the elephants happened to tread on the mouse—and that particular elephant was Dr. Clewston."

Brand yawned, knowing that once embarked on a tale the Colonel would finish it or perish.

"When the good Doctor sent me as his messenger to Washington, I surmised that I was afloat upon that tide which, unless nipped in the bud, leads on to something considerable. As for the President, he thought he was going to have me to play with—he wasn't. I went as Clewston's ambassador, and pulverized that President."

Brand interrupted. "Why didn't Clewston go himself?"

"Sir, have I not explained to you that the Doctor never condescends to see anybody?"

"What is this man—the Pope, the Emperor of China?"

The Colonel became sarcastic. "They're political back numbers, sir—vestiges of antiquity. This man is a living power."

Brand sneered. "You should write fairy tales."

"I wish you to understand, young man, that Clewston is not on the remnant counter to be pawed around by the female persuasion at nine cents a yard."

Brand sank into a condition of weary incredulity. "Go on."

"Well, I told the President to withdraw his objections with regard to a certain bill."

"What!"

"Otherwise," continued the Colonel blandly, "matters had been brought to Dr. Clewston's notice, the publication of which would be—say inconvenient."

"Well?"

"The President reconsidered the matter."

"You mean to say that Clewston blackmailed the President of the United States!"

"Somewhat."

"Bosh!—what crimes had he committed?"

"Oh, the President wasn't particularly harmful—for a politician; but if Clewston had published his whole pedigree I guess he'd have taken strychnine. You see, my friend, that if a man has cholera, and the doctor mistakes it for rheumatism, they just turn the preacher loose, and he's booked right through; but if a man has politics, there's no thoroughfare—even the camel despises him. What's a President, anyway? A marionette, sir, with the strings hanging around loose to be pulled by those who know how. You don't pull Clewston's strings—they're all inside; but the President, why, tweak his right hand and he'd sign a declaration of war with Great Britain herself—pull his nose and he'd bankrupt Wall Street—he'd do anything, everything he was told by a man who knew enough to force him. The President is an autocratic monarch, not in leading-strings like a Kaiser or a Tsar—he is irresponsible Power, and a rascally politician at that, generally like a woman with a past—ready to obey the first blackmailer who dares to demand and has the power to turn his threats into facts. I played my game for power and a grab at the root of all evil. It was fine while it lasted."

Brand saw his chance.

"And what do you play for now—for me or for Clewston?"

"For vengeance, young man, for vengeance."

Brand's time was come. Wriggle as this man might, escape was impossible. All this concerning the President might be a lie, but the Colonel's relations with Clewston

had been proved. What were such relations that would drive the weaker adversary to flight, destitution, the last degradations of cowardice?

"Why vengeance?" Brand stood over him relentless, implacable. "Why vengeance?"

"Haraldson, if you found a man being burned to death, I calculate you'd pull him out of the flames, but you'd ask first what it felt like—why vengeance!"

The drunkard's flush had left Colonel Giggleswick's face, which was now ghastly. He shifted in his chair with a glance of apprehension over one shoulder.

"There are no eavesdroppers here," said Brand; "why vengeance?"

And now of a sudden the journalist recognized in this man the restlessness, the irritable nerves, the fits of brooding, the haunted eyes that he had learned to know in the West as the signs, the marks, the ineffaceable brand which murder leaves behind. He looked the Colonel straight in the face.

"Drink some more wine—Clewston's hold over you is not forgery, what is it then—why vengeance?"

"Why should I give *you* a hold over me?"

"Because you know I shall take it otherwise. Do you think that you can keep that secret? Murder will out—it's written all over you, Colonel Giggleswick, it's branded on you. What a fool you were to commit yourself with Clewston! Come, I give you the choice, you poor old coward: which side do you take—Clewston's or mine?"

"Yours."

"My price is the truth. Tell me the whole story."

Again Brand's insight had helped to strike home, for the Colonel drank a tumbler of wine, then surrendered.

"I guess my ways were too casual, and I knew too much. When I get a few drinks into me, maybe I'm a

trifle promiscuous; and a man who knows Clewston's secrets might as well have galloping consumption, anyhow. I got careless; I knew that I had more information about Clewston than was good for my health; I felt that the end was coming. I'd lie awake nights drinking brandy, too scared to sleep; anyway, it was no surprise to me when, once in the dead of night, I heard a sort of footfall near my bed. I opened my eyes, and the electric light from the street lamps was shining in at the windows. I was dazzled a little; then I noticed something glimmering right close in front of me, long and curved like a line of steel, coming down swift as a flash. My arms had been outside of the bedding for fear of accident, so it was easy enough to grip that knife as it fell; to wrench it sharp out of a man's hands; to spring from the bed, and grab the brute by the throat; to fling him back shrieking against the wall, and plunge the long blade between his ribs. When the crowd broke in, I was at the wash-basin, scraping the blood off my clothes with the back of that knife; and the thing was lying in the corner all doubled up. I was tried, the judge, a tame one, belonging to Clewston. The knife proved to be a Malay creese of mine; the dead man an Italian—a member of the Mafia—whom I had once kicked out of my office for giving lip. My plea was self-defence, which I couldn't prove. But Clewston had over-reached himself for once. I told the interviewers that if I were condemned I should have some remarks to make. I'd have confessed everything, and dragged that fiend down to the Lower House; but Clewston saw what was good for him. Just as the judge began to sum up, a note was handed to him, and one to me. Mine was short, and to the point: 'My friend, you talk too much. The New York climate does not suit your health. Now, I discharge you. Go!'

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"The Judge summed up in my favour! Clewston had set me free!

"For six months I've been too much scared to show my face. Clewston is irritated because now that I know too much, he hasn't succeeded in killing me, either with knife or law. Yes, he'll attack when he gets a chance, but not through any legal process; and if I fail to trap him in the act, here is my last will and testament." He took a sealed envelope from his breast-pocket, which he thrust into Brand's fingers. "You shall open that, Haraldson, and avenge me!"

Brand looked at the Colonel's clothes, the moss-rose in his buttonhole, the eyeglass, then at the envelope in his hands. He was wondering how to draw out the rest of this history, and incredulity had so far served him well. "While you lay low, my friend, I might have believed all this. A man who knows that it is death to show his face in New York doesn't parade around Broadway unless he has some courage. You have none."

"No courage, eh? No courage? And is my invention nothing, that I should——"

"A dead inventor ain't of much account here, Colonel Giggleswick."

The old gentleman stood up, his eyes flashing, his voice tremulous.

"And what's the use of being alive, if I can't live? I'd rather be dead at once than live buried!"

"Very good." Brand turned the envelope between his fingers, thinking. "So, Colonel, you expect me to take you quite seriously, eh?"

"Sir, do you insinuate that I lie?"

"Not a bit of it; only I'm puzzled. You tell me, in all good faith, what you believe of a man who calls himself Clewston. Talk about somebody human, and I'm at home with the subject—I belong right there; but this

Clewston isn't human, he doesn't appeal to me on the grounds of human interest. Come, do you really expect a sane man to swallow this yarn? I don't want to rub your fur the wrong way—I don't want to hurt—fact is, I'm real sorry, because you are my friend, but say——” He left his chair again, and, bending over the old man, laid one hand gently upon his shoulder. “Colonel, wouldn't it be better to see a doctor?”

“Sir,” retorted the Colonel, with scornful solemnity; “you are a fool.”

“Perhaps you're right,” said Brand, “for I know less about Dr. Clewston than when you began to talk.”

CHAPTER XV

CHAINS

IN any new employment or unaccustomed phase of life, confronted by fresh problems, dealing with a business not reached by the steps of slow promotion, even the ablest men may be forgiven a little preliminary failure. Give a sailor the reins of a four-horse team and he goes hard a-starboard, says bad words, barely escapes the ditch with a wrench on the larboard tack, finds the other ditch agape with danger, lashes out with his whip, draws up the snorting leaders, then lets the creatures go their natural way, and in another hundred paces has mastered the art of driving. So had Brand plunged into that unknown metropolitan life, where the work was different from that he had learned in the West, where every circumstance became a problem, and the new bewildering atmosphere of love half blinded him. But, at last, when one evening Hilda consented to be taken to the Metropolitan Opera House, he felt of a sudden that love had cleared his senses, broadened his views, given him the grasp of affairs, and laid the city before him as a field for conquest.

And Hilda? She had been in bed for days with something which had a long Latin name, as the doctors claimed, though she knew it was worry. Knowing that she must tell Brand of her engagement, she could not bear to think of what must follow. He was such a nice

boy, he would take it so badly, it would break his heart; and yet, in common fairness, she must tell the truth. It was with the desperate resolve to delay no longer, with inward doubt as to her own courage, with an unconfessed half doubt as to her own feelings, that she consented at last to see him. How her resolves melted away into thin air when he was actually with her at the opera. All through the first act, she was brooding: "Must I really tell him? Must I really hold to Marshall's bargain? Suppose I tell Marshall that I—that I've changed my mind, ask him to let me off. Marshall would sneer a little at the 'mind' of a woman; he would not mention his side of the bargain—the taking over of all the charities—he would——" No, she could not ask favours of Marshall; she would rather die.

"Hilda," said Brand, as they waited between the acts, "I've been like a nine days' puppy; but something has opened my eyes at last, and now begins the play."

Hilda tried to quiet him a little. "You're much too energetic," she spoke severely; then, with a laugh, "for a nine days' puppy."

Now she was frightened, lest, being over well-behaved, he might venture upon dangerous topics. "And then begins the play; what play do you mean?"

"It's called the game of life. By George I feel so good." He rapped the white bosom of his shirt, threw out his chest, breathed deep: "I'm going to make 'em sit up."

"Hush! for goodness' sake be quiet, or they'll notice you."

For a moment he was silenced by the rebuke, for it would not do to let people think Miss Gault in noisy company. "Give me your hand," he whispered, "and I'll be good."

Her daintily-gloved fingers slid from his rough grasp,

for now he was behaving worse than ever. "What a boy you are, Brand," this condescending tone was sure to crush him; "will you never grow up?"

Afterwards, when the trouble came upon her, and thicker darkness as the days dragged on, Hilda remembered that gay evening at the opera. She thought of his face reflecting the passionate music of *Il Trovatore*, and how the good old barrel-organ tunes, so stale to her, were a revelation to him. How he enjoyed the "Anvil Chorus"—the weighty chords, the majestic melody, the ringing of the hammers.

"What a tune!" he had cried, while she silenced his loud applause, which so shocked the bored New Yorkers in stalls and boxes. Like the glowing iron on the anvil, he was being welded then in heart and soul, tempered for the mighty work to come; and her heart had gone out to him in his ignorant delight, his jovial courageous masterfulness. Hilda loved of a sudden, in a flood of gladness, this healthy, joyous young sinner, who knew how to be stirred, how to applaud, how to drink the full measure of a strong man's great delight. How could she shatter that cup just raised to his lips—his love, his life?

Nature has declared that a man shall be mighty, that a woman shall have love; that the man shall have mastery, and a maid shall have insight; that the two shall be glad together in their youth, shall cleave together in their age, and that death shall not set them asunder.

Was not this engagement with Marshall a treachery against Nature when, body and soul, she was bound to a man she hated? With millions of silken threads her heart clave to Brand, in full accordance with Nature's wisest law; and, with the iron chains of her honour, she was pledged to another man. She knew that, loving

Brand, she defied Nature in keeping her faith with Marshall Gault; and yet—and yet—she was bound. This meeting with Brand was dishonourable. People who are perfectly honourable will have no further sympathy for this bad woman.

They walked home together after the opera in silence, because their hearts were too busy for words. Ever afterwards, though neither had made a sign or ever spoken, the woman knew of the strong man fighting for her; so she depended upon his might, he on her love, according to the great commandment of love which has ruled the earth since woman became a living soul, and into man was breathed the breath of life.

Brand left her at the door of her flat with just a little longer pressure of the hand than usual, nothing more. She could see that his lips framed words which he dared not say, and, with a new-born delight of power over him, cut his hesitation short with a gay good-night. As for the man, he realized how absurd it was that she, so beautiful, should be in such a place, standing on the foul iron stairway between the grimy wall and the stark railing, the light from a gas-jet shining upon the silk of her cloak, the simplicity of her dress, the diamonds that sparkled against her white neck, the one brilliant star ablaze above her white forehead.

She took her latch-key from some mysterious pocket, and, with a manlike independence of gesture, opened the door of her rooms. How utterly absurd it was that a queen should live in the slums!

Alone in her sitting-room Hilda stood before the looking-glass. Her charity had never been cold pity, but rather the striving of a big heart after something worth loving. Now she was satisfied, the past had melted away like ice before the sunshine, her destiny lay not in narrow ways, but in the larger world of fullest

life. The blood raced in her veins, health, strength, courage, made her radiant, her face was flushed, her eyes alight, and she knew that the glass told a new delightful truth that she was very beautiful. She did not know how beautiful, the glass cannot tell the tale of all the fascination which bewilders men, the strong personality which makes a great-hearted woman lovely beyond all measure of regular features, or of perfect colour. Talk by the hour, write by the mile, but the gentlewoman to whom men will confess their sins as to a priest, who makes the dreadful blunders which one dare not judge, who moves in an aura of love, and leaves a memory behind her passing the perfume of violets, is not for the portrayal of man or mirror, nor can she be classified, labelled, and set on view by an inferior writer of books.

Said Hilda to the mirror: "You went to the opera to tell him—you haven't told him. You never looked so well in all your life. If you didn't want him to love you why did you wear this frock! He loves you more than ever now, and you——"

With a little sigh she turned away from the glass—conscious of being desperately wicked and half proud of it. She went slowly across the room to a table where Barbara—good soul—had left the spirit-lamp, a kettle, the teapot, even matches.

"Now, what does she think of me?" said Hilda—"for shame—she's set two cups!" She stored one of them away with its saucer in the cupboard. And then she saw a letter in the tray—address type-written—surely some wretched bill. "Shall I open it? No, to-morrow will do for that." So she sat down and opened the letter.

"MY DEAR HILDA,—Do you think it was quite kind of you to deny me the privilege of attending you to-

night at the Metropolitan Opera House? I enclose the card for my box, which is at your disposal during the season.

"Yours ever,

"MARSHALL GAULT."

Any fool would have known that such a letter must enrage and humiliate, but then Gault was a fool, tactless in every matter relating to women.

Her face became very white as she read, her eyes glittered angrily while she tore the ticket to shreds, then she picked up the envelope—the type-written envelope. "He couldn't even address that himself—not even that." She tore up the envelope, also the letter, she scorched her fingers trying to burn the scraps.

"I forgot him, for one night I forgot him—and his spies."

Sweeping into her bedroom she took from her jewel-case a plain gold chain bracelet, which, with a vicious snap, she fastened upon her wrist. "I shall not forget him again."

CHAPTER XVI

THE SIEGE PERILOUS

HARALDSON went on his way inspired with love to fight for all that was best worth gaining in the world. His past seemed like an engraving, a grey thing on paper, his present charged with light, blazing with colour. Had he been blind before that all things should stand out now in vividly contrasted hues?

For three days he worked as he never had worked before, his editorials became the talk of the town, yet dissatisfied, filled with a restless sense of wasted time, he counted the hours lost until he could speak with Hilda. On the fourth night Straight dragged him to a gathering of the Reformers' Club, held in the room on the roof.

"There's going to be fun," said Straight, "our reformers are wild with news. Come on, old fellow, or there'll not be a chair to sit in."

The place was already crowded when they came in—the great big room with a wooden roof like a school-house, and a dais curtained off at the upper end, doubtless for entertainments. The lights flared down upon circles of unpretentious men, leaders all, the organizers and administrators in every phase of social and political reform. They came to the club because they were private friends of Father Jared, who saw no difference between the washed and the unwashed, but welcomed

millionaire and proletarian, jurist and anarchist, prelate and infidel alike. Foul water as well as clear reflects the sun, and it must be a dirty character which had no gleam in response to the little pastor who treated every man he met as a recruit for the army of angels. Brought together by Father Jared, the Salvationist and the Dominican friar found that they had in common with the Anti-Trust attorney and the Socialist orator a love for humanity which constrained them to meet as brothers. "Most of them," was Straight's comment, "have bats in the belfry. But you just wait and see our dear old Leader conducting a business meeting. He's the cream of the whole joke." The hum of conversation waxed louder than usual, men were gathering here and there in larger groups, words passed from one to another which were received with bursts of indignant comment.

"But what's the matter?" said Brand.

"Matter enough," was the answer. "You'll hear all that's good for you in a minute."

Taking chairs in a corner, Straight ordered two schooners of beer, which an attendant brought in haste, because the Club Secretary was not a man to be kept waiting. And since nothing would move his chum to speak unless he chose, Brand began to ask with a new interest as to who were the men who sat at neighbouring tables. How different Straight seemed to Brand in these last few weeks, since love had opened his eyes to the facts of life. This dry, sardonic man with the bitter tongue might gibe and sneer and gibe for all Brand cared, for now he could see underneath, this deep buried gentleness which the quivering sensitiveness of a shy nature had masked with a visor of ice.

"Look," he was saying, "what a gang of cranks! Who are they? Well, that elderly youth rescues sorrowful women, and the stout party next to him is

X——," one of the greatest American statesmen ; "and yonder's Senator Y——, desperately astonished by the news, to judge by the cock of his ear. The tonsured party, debauching himself with a goblet of ice-water, is a Romanist Missionary. The gesticulating sufferer with a schooner of beer is a slum cobbler Socialist. That man coming in is Captain Baxendale. When he was skipper of a ferry on North River he got run into, sinking—blocked up the hole with his own body while the mate ran for shallow water. He nearly froze to death, but they didn't lose a single passenger. Here's Dr. Schmitt, the Nurses' Friend, they call him. Well, Doctor, how's things? Let me introduce Mr. Haraldson. Here, Willie," this to an imp in waiting, "beer for the Doctor. Quick, you young monkey. Cigar, Doctor?"

Brand shook hands with the physician, who sat down beside them, and talked in private with Straight.

"Well," said the Doctor, presently, "what do you think of our Club?"

"Pleased all to pieces," Brand answered heartily. "I've seen a few societies out West—Knights of Labour, Knights of Pythias, Nobles of the Mystic Shrine—all regalias, sounding titles, and big subscriptions, but this——"

"Hello," said Straight, "here comes the Father at last—wild as a loon, and the sub-committee raging at heel."

"Who's that?" asked Brand.

"Pederson, the Socialist. He's chief stereotyper on the *Avenger*—has an awful wife—hence the ragginess of the beard."

Father Jared gave a series of short orders, which cleared out the waiters and set a guard at the door. Then he took the chair, and rapped on a table for silence.

"Gentlemen," the roar of talk died suddenly away to a murmur, "Mr. Pederson wants to say a few words to this meeting."

"Citizens," Pederson spoke in a harsh, raucous voice, and the manner current among Socialists of the ranks.

"Fellow citizens, some weeks ago I was deputed by this Club to make inquiry as to a series of awful disasters on the high seas—the mysterious disappearance of British transatlantic liners, each worth a thousand lives, each representing a triumph of human labour, each bearing an enormous load of mails, merchandise, and specie. Since I began my work, it has become public knowledge that these disasters arise from no natural cause, that the *Tsar*, the *Caliph*, the *Maharajah*, have come to their death by human agency—that they have been blown up in mid-ocean with dynamite. I come, as a Socialist, to vindicate the American people."

So far the man had spoken quietly, the audience listened with some impatience.

"The facts!" they cried. "The facts!"

Now Pederson straightened his bent back, looked directly at his audience, and, with a sudden burst of rage, forgot the mannerisms of a committee. "Capitalism," he roared, "stand out for judgment! I accuse a capitalist of this city with speculating in massacre, with dealing on the Exchange in human blood!"

"Order! Order! Chair!"

"I will explain. You yell shame at me for denouncing one of your sainted capitalists. I make that accusation—I have proved it up to the hilt. A New York speculator has been, for months before these massacres, selling out stock of the King Line, both here and in London, selling in secret, while the Press was busy booming British shipping—bulling prices that such sales as his might be made to greater advantage. At the

same time this man was buying in secret also at Berlin, Paris, in London, and New York, stocks of the German, French, and American transatlantic lines. I have had detectives at work ; I have placed their evidence in charge of a sub-committee of this Club ; I have——”

“Name the capitalist ! Name the man !”

“The name is a household word among you, a word for infamy, a proverb for daring crime ; but what is the use of it to you who are not Socialists to avenge mankind ? This capitalist is Doctor Rex Clewston !”

Senator Schultz stood up. “Mr. Chairman, I haven't the advantage of being a Socialist, being only a muddle-headed attorney. It appears that the Club appointed a committee to investigate certain statements made by the orator who has just challenged a wicked plutocracy to stand up for judgment. May we be favoured with the report of the actual committee ?”

Father Jared rose. “I believe,” he said, “that I'm supposed to report for the sub-committee on Mr. Pederson's statements.” He produced from a pocket in his cassock a sheaf of papers. “Here is the Report, and now,” his voice shook with emotion, “am I a visionary ? Are there no wrongs to redress, no enemies of our Master in high places ? A body in decay breeds worms—a city dragons. Have you not seen the glitter of their scales ? Have you not beheld strange shapes writhing through the darkness ? The dragons are in your streets, burrowing the foundations of your houses, devouring women as in the ancient days—not dragons mythical but actual, bred of a foul corruption. Come, who will slay these dragons ? I told you once of the siege perilous at King Arthur's table, the seat in which no man might sit save in defiance of Satan and instant fear of hell. If this,” the priest laid his hands upon a chair, “if this were the siege perilous, who is there here

that dare to sit in it? What man is there living to-day who will face the devil's viceroy, Dr. Rev. Clewston, who will encounter this dragon, and deliver the city from his power?"

Straight, as Honorary Secretary of the Club, supposed to record its proceedings, had scribbled vigorously at first, then paused to scratch his head. "Mr. Chairman," he protested, "as the wretched scribe who must record your proceedings, I gather that an oration by Mr. Pederson precludes a secretarial report from the Chairman, on certain documents of unknown contents, which have been taken as read. It appears that Dr. Clewston, having been in his absence judged guilty of being a worm, it is the sense of the meeting that——"

"See here," Brand started to his feet, "you just quit sneering at Father Jared."

Straight sat down, grinning.

"Gentlemen," Brand faced the meeting, "I don't aim to interfere, and I know no more about meetings than a wet hen knows about rain, but I'm riding for Marshall Gault, your Reform nominee for President of the United States. I'm fighting editor of the *Avenger*, and I reckon that Clewston ain't due to fold his hands and expire because we talk. It seems," he walked over to the dais, climbed upon the platform, and took up Father Jared's sheaf of papers, "it seems that we've facts to deal with, and if they're to be used it's best to shove the cartridge into a gun. Here's the ammunition, the *Avenger's* the gun, Clewston's the target, and—if you don't mind"—Brand sat down in the chair which Father Jared described as the Siege Perilous—"I'm the gunner, the man behind the gun."

CHAPTER XVII

THE DRAGON AWAKES

ON the following morning Brand, in the course of a little walk before breakfast, was enjoying with keen delight the Midsummer sunshine, the twitter of the birds, and the glorious fresh wind in Central Park. A buggy was approaching in the drive; and Brand highly approved of the chestnut horse with its showy action and arched neck, until detecting signs of a check rein, he looked up indignantly at the elderly fop who was driving. The elderly fop reined the horse up with a jerk, saluted with his whip, then, to Brand's astonishment, actually hailed him.

"How do, Brand!" quoth the fop. "Jump in and come for a ride."

"By all the powers!" said Brand. "Why, it's the Colonel!"

"Jump in, young man."

"On one condition," said Brand, patting the horse's neck. "This," he slipped the check-rein from its hook, "is an infernal shame."

The Colonel scowled haughtily, flicked the horse, and drove on, thinking to leave Brand behind; but the giant swung himself lightly into the buggy with a compliment on the chestnut trotter that would have appeased a machine-gun.

"Sir," said the Colonel, stiffly, "some people presume to take liberties."

"What odds, in a free country?" was the retort. "Colonel, you're a rustler from away back—tell me all about it."

The Colonel was appeased. "You will remember that I made some remarks about my interest in a certain patent. May I ask, sir, if you have remarked the advertisement of the Alarm Syndicate?"

"Yes," Brand grinned. "Practical joke, eh?"

"Quite so. We have offices in the Safe Deposit Block on Broadway, our stock is all subscribed, orders are pouring in, our first group of stations will be complete in a month. We're going to run medical practice on fire brigade lines—no, not for the repair of damaged firemen. People, you see, are taken suddenly sick, run over by a tram, seized with spasms or a fish-bone, over-excited by an abrupt and pernicious telegram—doctor asleep miles off—patient chokes to death—family wave out of the windows and scream murder. Now, we have fixed things so that they can phone.

"We have also telephone arrangements so that our nearest physician can be summoned instantly by any telephone subscriber in New York city.

"Meanwhile, our doctor on duty in the precinct lies on a lounge—lounge rigged up in a motor, chauffeur awake in his seat, doors opening to the street. Alarm connects up local circuit, flicks the chauffeur, flings open the doors, knocks the lounge into a seat, wakes the doctor, lights the lamps, revealing the patient's address plain on the dashboard. Doctor has time to yawn before he drives up in three flicks and a jerk, and the patient's done for."

"A great scheme!" Brand laughed.

"A great scheme, sir? You're just right, and this is only the preliminary flicker to scare the doctors out of their professional slumber; fact is, that we shall depend

for success on a little persecution from the regular profession. Persecution, sir, is a great comfort, if taken in a proper spirit; martyrdom is the cream of advertisement."

Brand seized the reins, for the Colonel, in his eloquence, was charging down upon the general public, which scattered as from a runaway fire-engine.

"We hope, by the end of the year, to have sold patent rights for a hundred cities, foreign patent rights for every State in Europe, to have an alarm doctor for every precinct in the city, special solicitors to collect the fees owing to us for medical attendance, and mourners to attend all funerals. You will observe—there." They were approaching a little garage where workmen were decorating the front with a large brass plate. "That is one of our depôts. Here"—they dashed up to the doors—"we will inspect Alarm Station number five hundred and two, our first."

"Homicide seems to be your way of attracting attention," said Brand, remembering sundry peaceful citizens frightened out of their wits by the Colonel's driving.

Brand had a hunger pain, but the old gentleman was embarked upon a course of turgid pomposity no more to be stayed than the Mississippi; and the stream of words rolled on until after half-an-hour the victim revolted with an imperative demand for breakfast before he would listen to another detail of electro-galvanic physicians, or fire-brigade assaults upon the sick.

So they two drove down Broadway, when Brand, thrusting in a word edgewise, found his chance to switch off the monologue into a fresh train of ideas.

"Colonel—about Clewston—I——"

"Well, sir, what about Clewston? D——n Clewston!"
The Colonel hated interruptions.

"I want to know"—Brand was desperate—"Clewston's real name; that is, if he has a real name. Or is he one of your myths?"

"Sir, you will doubtless continue wanting to know for some considerable time. It's now about three months since we arrived in this city, and if you had one spark of intelligence you'd have guessed from my many hints who Clewston is. Until you do guess you will not have betrayed sufficient intelligence to make it safe for me to confide in you."

They were crossing Madison Square, after half-a-dozen narrow escapes from collision with motors; for the Colonel was driving now in jags "quite quietly," with the police in pursuit.

"Put me down," said Brand roughly. "I've done with you."

"Now, Brand"—they dashed into the full tide of roaring Broadway—"don't you get up on your ear. If it were safe to speak, I'd tell you who Clewston is. I'd have told you long ago, but, with your savage temper, the knowledge would cost you your life. Wait till we get where there's some breakfast, and I'll give you a few pointers, sonny; for here it ain't safe to discourse."

A few minutes later, while a loafer was holding the chestnut horse, and the Colonel and Brand were taking their coffee and rolls in a quiet restaurant, the old gentleman whispered a few remarks across the table.

"Ten years ago, the man Jones, whose real name I cannot—dare not—tell you, for whom I did the alibi business at the time of the train-wrecking, was thirty years old, five foot seven in height, wore a black moustache and imperial, dressed fashionably, had clear grey eyes, was thick-set and stout as a bull. At that time Clewston—I mean the original Dr. Rex Clewston—was

an old man, with a white whisker, weak eyes, and a shaky voice. I'd seen considerable of old man Clewston.

"When I first joined Clewston's as a detective, the white whisker was still flourishing, the eyes were still hidden with a green shade; but the shaky voice had become full, strong, and young."

"You mean——"

The Colonel was silent for a few minutes, frowning at a waiter, who would linger near the table. Then he sent the waiter for more coffee.

"I mean"—for emphasis the Colonel was rapping Brand's sleeve with a tea spoon—"that the original Clewston sold out, and retired to the pastoral delights of a damp cottage, a hen run, and a mossy well full of microbes. Frugal habits had old man Clewston—they carried him off. I mean that my young friend Jones had bought the Clewston business—the name, the goodwill, the whisker, the eye-shade, the habit of seclusion, and a discarded housekeeper. They say that the woman is his principal fetish—a witch—and has actually married him. I guess he richly deserves her. Anyway, from the time he acquired the witch, Clewston's power began to grow, year after year, until now our mutual friend is the strongest man in the New World. Theatrical, this eye-shade and whisker business? Yes; but Clewston plays his melodrama with real weapons—aye, and real blood."

"More lies, more lies! he's a wholesale dealer in them," was Brand's conclusion.

The Colonel did not say anything about the letter from Clewston that lay like a leaden weight against his heart. He could not confess to Brand that the fear of death was upon him while he talked; that as a squirrel is drawn to a rattlesnake, he must obey Clewston's

summons within twelve hours. Yesterday he might have run away; to-day he dared not.

That evening, when the clocks were striking ten, Colonel Giggleswick made his way down Broadway.

Very squat and black was the Frailty Investigation building beside the gigantic house of Gault's *Avenger*; and yet it rose ten storeys from the ground, and Dr. Rex Clewston's office, on the top floor, was more than a hundred feet above the pavement. As the Colonel went up in the lift, he noted the various departments with a horrible sense of familiarity: "Purity Guild"—a ruthless system of espial upon bogus philanthropists, baby-farmers, rack-renters, private asylums, pawnbrokers, and sweaters—not very lucrative. "City Branch"—gets up bogus companies to trap promoters, brokers, professional directors, and financial journalists—decidedly remunerative. "Private Enquiries"—an office that buys up lists of clients from opium joints, druggists, gambling hells, and other worse haunts of the self-indulgent; invests in information supplied by shady doctors, lawyers and journalists; controls the professional incendiary, buys from detectives the names of shoplifters, observes the criminal records of the police—all fruitful sources of blackmail which have established a veritable reign of terror in New York. "Political Branch"—handles the bogus companies gotten up in the City Department; studies the past opinions and frailties of municipal, state, and federal politicians. "Law Branch"—keeps records of courts, controls unjust judges and magistrates—a department deeply versed in unsavoury litigation. "Labour Branch"—bleeds the secret societies which permeate the American Commonwealth, controls the Trades Unions, being head-quarters of many campaigns of Labour against Capital. "Exchange Bureau"—by which, thanks to the Colonel, the Frailty Investigation

became the central detective system of the civilized world. "Library"—a department of secret archives. "Private"—a barrack for the staff of detectives.

So the Colonel alighted from the lift at the outer door of the Executive Office, and, sending in his card, waited until eleven p.m. for an interview with Dr. Clewston. That was a bad hour for the Colonel, a very bad hour; indeed the messenger who was sent for him at the end of it found the poor old gentleman limp and trembling, scarcely able to follow him as he staggered down a passage, wiping the cold perspiration from his face. At the last door the Colonel hung back.

"Wait a moment, can't you?" he cried. "I want to——"

But the messenger flung a door open, and the Colonel found himself tottering into a great dark room. On the left side were heavy draperies drawn across the windows; on the right was a door leading to those mysterious regions where Dr. Clewston was supposed to be tended by his witch; in front a huge painting of Justice set in a deep gold frame, and before it a desk, where a reading-lamp, covered with a green cardboard shade, threw its light upon Clewston's desk. That awful personage was seated behind the table, his long white beard revealed in the light, his face almost invisible in the shadow, his eyes concealed by such a shade as old men wear when they are nearly blind. The Colonel was not asked to sit down; the door behind him swung to, leaving him alone with his fate; he stood supporting himself on his cane, rocking to and fro as though he would fall.

"So," said Dr. Clewston, "I have once more the honour of your company, Peter Quiggle, *alias* Giggleswick. What curious names you choose, my venerable friend!"

The Colonel moaned feebly.

"I have sent for you that I may have the pleasure of seeing the first man who has disobeyed me. I must say you don't look very formidable. But I have business with you. This ex-fireman, ex-editor, ex-tramp, your friend Haraldson, last night attended a meeting of lunatics. In such company Mr. Haraldson"—here the great man laughed—"made a declaration of war against me. A reasoning being would have reserved his ammunition and kept his mouth shut. Unless somebody saves Mr. Haraldson from his follies, Gault will be wanting a new fighting editor."

The Colonel fell back against the door by which he had entered, and, in his terror, gave signs of collapse.

"Your friend," continued Dr. Clewston, "is very young; and his infancy should protect him, but that he is becoming a nuisance."

The Colonel sank upon his knees, moaning pitifully.

"Very pathetic," said Dr. Clewston. "Lay your hoary locks on the carpet. You are, however, wasting my time with gyrations better fitted for the variety stage. Your serio-comic friend has certain documents in his possession, delivered to him by Messrs. Vanslyperken and Schneidam, solicitors; also some papers which you entrusted to him at your last interview on"—Dr. Clewston glanced at some memoranda—"Tuesday week, at eleven p.m. Bring these to me, and I will allow him to leave the city; get them without his knowledge, either of the theft, or of this interview, and I may be reconciled to your living out the rest of your dotage, say in Europe; refuse, and—but I need not trouble you with particulars. Get up and out of this room—you make me sick with your slobbering."

The Colonel uttered a loud cry.

"Out with you," said Dr. Clewston. "I'm busy."

And he returned to his writing.

CHAPTER XVIII

TREACHERY

BRAND and Straight were on their way to work, for, since the latter's office—the Cyclone Explosives—was in the *Avenger* building, the two always walked down Broadway together, enjoying half-an-hour of mutual silence and smoke, as became chums.

"By the way," said Straight, who must needs be talking, "what was the Colonel doing in your den last night?"

Brand awoke from a reverie about Hilda, and flicking the ashes from his cigar :

"In my den last night? I didn't have any visitors."

"Why, you're dreaming. I was working pretty late at the office, and when I got home, after midnight, there was Colonel Giggleswick squatted on the doorstep, catching a cold. Of course, I thought he was drunk, told him he ought to be ashamed of himself, go home to bed, and all that sort of thing ; but the poor beggar only smelt of whisky, he was as sober as I was, and, if you please, crying. Asked him what was the trouble, but he got up stiff as a ramrod, would be greatly obliged if I'd mind my own business ; and, if I'd only take up his card to you, I should have an old man's blessing, which, in a more reverential age, had been the prize to which youth aspired, for which standards had been carried to victory, and glorious institutions had —. Well, I let

the old buffer in with my latchkey, showed him up to the door of your room, and left you to rebuke him. The disreputable old night-bird; I guess you cussed him for waking you?"

"Oh, yes," said Brand, with a queer little gasp. "I quoted the western bull-punchers to him. Queer old cock! Say, Straight," Brand pulled up short, "I've got to go back right away—forgotten something. I'll look in at your office during the afternoon."

He did not notice Straight's whistle of condensed astonishment; in the innocence of his heart, it never occurred to Brand that he had confessed entire ignorance of the Colonel's visit. One would have supposed that a man of sense, a man of business, engaged in a dangerous intrigue, would have been more cautious; yet Brand, at the outset of his adventure, was constantly betraying himself. But the Colonel, neither honest nor inexperienced, made grave mistakes—talking aloud of things not safe to whisper; and now, compelled to rob Brand of the documents demanded, on pain of death, by Clewston, he had allowed Straight to see him almost in the act. Straight, too, ought to have been wise as the serpent; yet he had countenanced Father Jared in the acceptance of a confessed incendiary and spy for service as caretaker at the Club. Clewston, of all men living, should have been discreet; yet his train-wrecking had been the clumsiest felony, while his method of involving the Colonel in the crime of murder had shown absolute blindness as to the deeper motives and incentives of a revengeful enemy. Brand could not intrigue in cold blood; but neither Straight, the Colonel, nor Clewston were beyond criticism. Seldom, in fact, except in dire need, does a civilized man revert to the cunning of savagery; crimes, in this world, are the joint product of passion and incompetence; the detection of crime is

entrusted to men whose senses—through civilization—are degraded by artificial habits until they seem wholly obtuse, with neither scent nor taste, hearing, or even sight. So far, for the beginning in cold blood; afterwards, under stress of mortal danger, Clewston, his assailant, and their allies, learned to fight in silence.

So Brand, getting back to his room, discovered that, while he had slept heavily, as big men need to sleep, the Colonel, given access to his room by Straight, had broken open his desk, rummaged the papers therein, and here on the floor were two matches that had been burnt during the search. The documents relating to the King's legacy were intact; Hilda's glove, that Brand had captured, was tossed aside; but the Colonel's last will and testament, together with Michael Gault's memoranda concerning the train-wrecking were gone—stolen.

So the Colonel was a thief; and the papers that had been taken were those of Michael Gault's bequest that compromised him, that charged him with being Clewston's agent for the murder of the "King." Brand sat on his rumpled bed and swore.

"How did the Colonel find out about these papers?"

But it was time for Brand to be at his office; the sniffing woman, too, was at the door, waiting to "do" his room; so he put the remaining documents in his pocket, kissed the glove, which he hid in the secure recesses of his pocket-book, closed his desk—the lock was broken now—and departed, with his straw hat on the back of his head, hands in his pockets, eyes gleaming with temper.

Arriving at his office half-an-hour late, he unlocked the door as usual, walked in, and, to his amazement, discovered Gault inspecting the pigeon-hole library.

"Well, sir,"—Mr. Gault turned to Brand with an

ominous smile—"I hope that my office hours are not interfering too much with your private leisure?"

Brand hung up his hat on a peg.

"Sorry I'm late, sir; just found out that I have been robbed."

"Indeed!" Mr. Gault sat down at Brand's desk.

"That is ingenious! Most of my clerks excuse themselves with toothache, or the death of an aunt; so your originality is acceptable."

Brand flushed. He was not used to being called a liar.

"I have been examining the state of your records, which is tolerable. But where are the last books on criminology?"

"I read them at home, sir. I have sent in reviews up to date."

"So I observe, Mr. Haraldson; in fact, the whole of your routine work is that of an enthusiast. Would you like a boy to assist you?"

"My letter index *is* all behind, sir. I'm a fool at correspondence and accounts; but I'm going to master that myself, and a boy would make me lazy."

"Very good. And now, Mr. Haraldson"—this with a sudden flash of the grey eyes—"what the devil do you mean by sending in this trash for publication?"

Brand glanced at the "copy" which Mr. Gault took up from his desk—an article he had volunteered yesterday on the dynamiting of ships. Since the bankruptcy of the King Line, two other great English companies had begun to suffer. Of the Mountain Line, the *St. Elias* had perished with six hundred people; and even now the newsboys cried in the streets of the *Giant* liner blown up on the Mersey bar. There could no longer be any doubt as to the meaning of this awful slaughter; for English trans-atlantic shipping had fallen in the market

until its shares were waste paper, while American, French, and German liners had seized the trade. Who was there at secret war with England? What but the gang of murderers that once attempted to massacre the swarm of passengers crossing London Bridge, sent packages of dynamite to be thumped about in the cloak-rooms at the Metropolitan termini, and tried with infernal machines to blow up half the public buildings in the British capital?

There had been, Brand wrote, a long truce for the overtures of a Parliamentary leader "with his hand upon the throttle-valve of crime"; ten more years of mixed politics; now the truce was expired, and the liberators of Ireland, wise with prolonged experience, appeared to be making use once more of the Great Republic as a base of operations against her mother country. The traditions of politicians who began the war with filibustering expeditions against Canada, who influenced the United States Government to hamper the Canadians in the suppression of the first Riel rebellion, who showed the capacity of the Irish for self-government by agrarian crime in Ireland and Irish civic misrule in America, seemed now to be carried out to sea, but with more than Irish competence. Hitherto Irish-American politicians had been so grossly dishonest that the crimes of their dupes had been intended mainly as advertising—a mere display of activity to please the subscribing Irish-American public. Now it seemed that some man of executive genius controlled the movement for Ireland's liberation; and the Republic could no longer ignore these atrociously malignant assaults delivered against the subjects, the property, and the national prestige of a Friendly Power. The Fighting Editor had not a drop of British blood in his veins; but, as an American and as a man, he objected to such

methods of warfare. So when Gault took him to task for his editorial, Brand was astonished.

"Why, sir," he protested, "there's not a decent paper in the country but has said the same thing!"

"Who is conducting the *Avenger*, you or I? Then what right have you, Mr. Haraldson, to put forth this sensational gush as *my* opinion? Don't you know that the Irish party here has no ambition except embézzlement—a gang too fatuous to do real mischief? These Liberators, poor fools, are only the tools, the jackals of a speculator. If you want his name, he's my next-door neighbour here, that devil Clewston."

"I can produce the proofs!" said Brand.

"Take good care of them," was the answer.

He tore the editorial to shreds, threw the remains into the waste-paper basket, and walked to the door.

"If, Mr. Haraldson, I ever catch you writing for the *Avenger* except at my instance—you know what to expect."

So Brand was left alone, stupefied. Was this the greatest philanthropist in the world! Was this the power for good that he had hoped to move against Dr. Clewston!

If the Colonel was a thief, what was Marshall Gault?

An hour later orders came from "the boss" that he should write an article inveighing against British misrule in Ireland, and protesting against the absurd attempt of the American press to fasten the charge of dynamiting ships upon the Irish patriots. If Brand had been the usual slave journalist who betrays his gods to order, that article would have been written. As it was Mr. Gault was met with a direct refusal, at which an evil look came into his eyes; yet for his own purposes he held his peace, nor could Brand conjecture why he was allowed to remain in the service of an

employer whom he had openly dared to defy. All that day he brooded over the matter in the intervals of his work. He had insulted Gault, yet nothing happened except a suggestion that he was irritable with overwork, and had better take a three days' holiday to recover his temper.

Should he send in his resignation, falling back upon the King's bequest? No, Brand knew that he was worth more than his salary to Gault. He would remain while he could in a position that might help him to fight Clewston—aye, and perhaps the "boss" might value him the more for being a man and not a tame liar. And maybe, after all, the "boss" knew more than he did about Irish politics—perhaps he had been rather a cub to set himself up against the great journalist; still it was with miserable misgivings that he went down the lift after office hours to discuss this matter with Straight.

Here was Straight's room with lettering on the glass panel, "Cyclone Explosives Syndicate. Secretary." Brand walked in to find the room empty; the door that led to the General Manager's office was closed; Straight's hat and coat hung on their peg behind a screen; behind the screen, too, was a basin for washing, a towel, a mirror. Brand had neglected to wash his hands up-stairs, he would do so now, in order to be ready to leave with Straight, when the latter came out from seeing the General Manager. And while he was still behind the screen, splashing at the basin, somebody came in and spoke.

"Is Mистер Straight here? Ah, there y'are and alone. Well, soor, we've made a real foine job av it, and they've sint me around for the money."

Brand was thinking about Gault—he hardly listened—doubtless his coat-tail, projecting from behind the screen,

might have been Straight's, for the Irishman closed the door softly and went on talking.

"It's just the natest consignment we've slnt to Davy Jones. Hurrah for ould Ireland! and we thinks as you'd ought to projuce something extry thls toime."

Brand came out from behind the screen, drying his hands with the towel; and seeing him, the Irishman let out a scream of terror, shrinking against the door, clutching back at the panels with outstretched hands.

"So," said Brand, "a nice lot you are. Couldn't you keep your dirty mouth shut till you saw who I was?"

"Plaze, soor—av ye plaze, sorr, I didn't mane what I sald at all, at all—it's just chaffing you I was. Oh, howly mither av——"

"Shut up," said Brand, drawing his damp hand across his forehead, "you've said enough and more than enough."

He looked at this agent of the Irish liberators for the sinking of British ships—a little bit of a man, a boy rather, scarce twenty years of age, a sailor, as one could tell by the way he wore his clothes. Then suddenly an idea flashed across his brain. "You poor little devil—what if Mr. Straight knew that you said this to a stranger!"

The boy's very lips were white, his eyes seemed starting from his head.

"Oh, Gawd, sorr, don't ye tell Mister Straight!"

"Stop that squealing then. Clear out of this right now, or I'll tell him—and he'll kill you!"

The boy touched his upper and lower lip. "Nire!" he cried. "Don't ye tell on a poor boy."

"Nire!" answered Brand, for he recognized a sign and a password. "You understand that if any mortal soul finds out that you've given the show away, you've not an hour to live."

He took the boy by the shoulders, pitched him aside, opened the door, thrust him out, listened to his staggering footsteps along the passage. Then he sat down in Straight's office chair, but he could not rest. His throat was dry; he went to the pitcher of iced water behind the screen and drank; he crossed to the windows and threw them wide open; then back to the chair, resting his elbows on the desk, covering his face with his hands.

Straight, his own friend, secretary of the Liberators! "Cyclone Explosives," there it was on the letter heads, painted on the safe, written up on the windows, on the door—everywhere. The Colonel was a thief; Gault, the great philanthropist, in sympathy with the Liberators; Straight their secretary! Then Brand looked up, and lifted his hands towards the evening light that streamed in from above the city.

"Whom shall I trust now?"

Again he lay back in the chair brooding, his eyes cold, his white teeth gnawing at his lips. "Silence!" he muttered. "Silence! Silence!"

Then he heard a key turned in the door behind him, and Straight was coming out from the manager's room.

"Hello, Brand, how long have you been here?"

"A minute or two," said Brand quietly; "been with your manager?"

"No," said Straight, "I was round at one of the other offices." He went to the basin behind the screen, where he took off his coat and began to wash.

But Brand turned cautiously in his seat, so that he could see into the manager's room. He knew that the windows were in the right wall; he saw that there was no door either in front where the building ended, or on the left towards the lobby. Straight could not have been in that room when the boy screamed; there was

no apparent way out of it except into this office, and yet Straight had not heard!

"Been washing, I see," said Straight, with his dripping hands held out; "but you needn't have left my towel on the floor."

"Don't chatter," was Brand's rough answer; "I've got a headache."

"Coming home?" asked Straight.

Brand walked to the door. "Home? No. I want to be alone."

And he went out. Alone we were born, alone must live, alone shall die.

CHAPTER XIX

THE DRAWING OF THE SWORD

THAT evening Brand went to the head-quarter offices of the Alarm Syndicate, where he sent up his card to the General Manager, Colonel Giggleswick. The messenger returned, saying that the Colonel was out ; but Brand brushed the youngster aside, walked up-stairs, found the General Manager's room, and went straight in. Colonel Giggleswick was reading his evening paper.

"Well," said Brand, perching himself on the corner of the table, "how's things?"

The Colonel went on reading the paper. Brand began to grin.

"Colonel, what do you think of the documents you stole two nights ago from my room?"

The old man still continued to read ; but the newspaper was shaking in his hands.

"Playing possum?" suggested Brand.

The Colonel looked slowly round, laying the paper on his knees. "You are trespassing, sir. If you don't leave this room, I shall send for the police."

"Good," said Brand, "to give yourself up on my charge of burglary."

"And this," cried the Colonel, "is your gratitude! Last night I saved your life, Haraldson."

"Thanks," Brand yawned, "much obliged. I'll trouble you for my papers."

"They're safe," sneered the Colonel, "out of the reach of a fool."

"Out of your reach, eh?"

"Yes," said the Colonel, "in the hands of Dr. Clewston."

"That's bad, Colonel—for you."

"Brand, yester eve Clewston sent for me to point out that you were such an idiot that, by loud talking in public places, you had placed yourself at his mercy. Until he understood the real state of affairs he actually threatened me for listening to your vapourings."

"And you, Colonel?"

"I defied him!"

"I wish I'd been there," Brand chuckled. "It must have been gorgeous!"

"Clewston told me that only on one condition would he allow you to live. I must get those papers from you lest you should compromise yourself by using them."

"So you came," suggested Brand, "and asked me to give them up."

"If I had not been dealing with a blockhead that would have been my policy."

"Colonel," said Brand, "you are too chivalrous by half. You've such trust in Clewston that you've put yourself right between his teeth. He had no hold over you for the forgery; he was too cute to rake up that murder; but now he can prove you guilty of the train-wrecking, he can have you sentenced to death for the killing of Matt Fortescue, engineer of the pilot. Your evidence against him? What's the use of that! You're a forger, a murderer, a burglar, but at least you're chivalrous."

The Colonel's face had become livid while Brand spoke, now he staggered across the room, took liquor

and a glass from a corner cupboard, drank a big dram, then reeled back to his place.

"What have I done!" he moaned. "My G—d, what have I done!"

"Just put the rope round your neck," said Brand, pitifully, "you're not hanged—yet. Those documents were only memoranda, but if Clewston gets hold of the original documents you're past praying for."

"The originals?" cried the Colonel, starting from his seat.

"Yes, the original reports of the detectives engaged for Michael Gault—who thought that it was you who wrecked the train."

"Where are they?" The Colonel seized Brand by the shoulders. "Quick—where are they?"

"Hands off," said Brand, coolly, thrusting the Colonel away. "The police head-quarters are on Mulberry Street; I guess the papers are in the archives of the Detective Bureau—that is unless Clewston gets there before you."

"He can't get there yet; he won't get my letter until the police office is closed for the night. Brand, I know the man who has the keys—for a thousand dollars I could get the use of them."

"That's all right, give him a cheque."

"My name ain't worth it."

"If I find the money, can you guarantee that the news is kept from Clewston?"

The Colonel hesitated.

"Then," said Brand, "when you bribe the man, say that if he doesn't keep his mouth shut, Clewston, your boss, will have him fired out of his job for corrupt practices."

"That'll fetch him—I'll explain that I'm doing this—may I say for a wealthy friend?"

There was a sneer in the Colonel's tone, but Brand, without comment, went to the writing-table and scribbled out a cheque.

"What name?"

The Colonel gave the officer's name.

"Take that." Brand handed to him his cheque with the ink still wet; but, when the Colonel would have used blotting paper, interrupted him. "Come," he said, roughly, "no copying—leave it to dry."

Colonel Giggleswick grinned.

"Well, Mr. Millionaire, considering your salary, you know how to save money."

"Or make it speculating," was the reply, "or inherit from a maiden aunt, or borrow it, or steal it—but that's my business. Now don't stand grinning, away with you to Mulberry Street, and look sharp. Clewston may be trying the same game."

"But," the Colonel objected, "I——"

"Off with you, Colonel. What! do you expect me to compound your felonies for love? Get out of this."

Brand knew the Colonel so well by this time that he tracked the gentleman to the Police Bureau, waited outside during negotiations, and, on their successful completion, greeted him at the doorstep.

"Now, Colonel, hand over."

"I had an awful time," quavered the old fox; "let's liquor first."

"Hand over the papers," said Brand.

But the Colonel was too sharp for him. Drawing off suddenly he ran to a sewer grating under the kerb, held the heavy package between the bars, and looked up at Brand.

"Young man, I guess your missing papers didn't exactly *flaunt* Clewston's real name, and I've told you that it ain't safe for you to know. I see that these

originals give the thing dead away. Now, if you move, they go into the sewers; but if you promise on your honour not to read them without my consent I'll leave them in your box at the safe deposit."

"Colonel, if you drop those papers, you die!"

"My friend," the Colonel spoke with real dignity, "my life ain't worth taking. I've faced considerable risks to save yours."

Brand bit his lip, for he had used his last argument, and the Colonel was master of the situation.

"I promise not to read that paper. Will that please you? All right then. Come along, Colonel. It's your funeral if we're attacked on our way home. We'll have a drink."

"Take these beastly papers," said the Colonel, hoarsely. "I'm not so strong as I was. But for—— sake don't read them. Don't open them. On your word of honour!"

"All right. On my word of honour."

Brand was tired out, and the clocks were striking eleven; yet there was much to do, work that sickened him to think of, but which must be done. Clewston's action had followed so swiftly upon Brand's defiance at the Club, that there could be no doubt that a spy had been present. Was Straight the spy? With his whole heart Brand loathed the idea; but yet this thing must be tested, for that night there was a session of the members, and a man who would fight with Dr. Clewston must not waste a chance. He went to the safe deposit, placed the documents in his locker, conducted the Colonel up-stairs to the offices of the Alarm Syndicate, then proceeded alone to his Club.

Brand had some hope that Clewston's spy might be a mere eavesdropper; so, with cautious movements, he began to examine the upper lobby. Here the large

door opened into the hall, yonder a small entrance evidently communicated with the roofs, for it was by this that the incendiary had found her way across the leads from Hilda's tenement. But there was a third door which he knew to be that of a little ante-room; and through this Brand ventured. The place was dark, but on the further side was a small arch with two steps in it, leading up to the dais that was shut off by curtains from the main hall. This raised platform occupied a recess, but the curtains made the place almost as dark as the ante-room. Brand could hear somebody speaking in the hall—the voice was that of Straight, the subject "Municipal Reform." It made Brand sick to hear Straight preaching about Reform.

He struck a match, turned on the ante-room lamp, and so cast a glare of light into the recess, revealing a woman crouched down on the dais steps, turning about with startled eyes, rising hastily to shrink back against the further wall—the Incendiary!

Silently Brand beckoned to her, and presently, with hesitating step, she came to him, shading her eyes from the glare. He pointed to the lobby, and the woman shrank past him along the wall; whence, following still without a word, he motioned her along the passage, down the stairs, flight after flight, to the lower hall; where he opened the front door, drove her out into the night, and stood waiting on the doorstep until she was swallowed up in the haze of the street lamps. Then, relieved in his heart, he went back to the hall on the roof.

Straight had just finished speaking; another member was commending the brethren to renewed vigilance, renewed caution, renewed secrecy. Bowing to Father Jared, Brand went to Straight, and bent over him. "Come out," he whispered, "I want you on business."

Straight followed to Brand's room, and asked, cheerfully, why his friend was so solemn.

"I suppose," said Brand, "that I ought to congratulate you on the sinking of the *Tsar*, the *Caliph*, the *Maharajah*, the *St. Elias*, and this Giant liner; the killing of a few thousand people, the bankruptcy of the King Line, the ruin of the British transatlantic trade."

"As you please," said Straight, who was, if anything, cooler than usual.

"I've taken twenty-four hours before I could bring myself to speak with such a thing as you. I still feel sick. Don't you think that you had better stop these murders?"

"At your suggestion?" Straight took a cigarette from his case and lighted it.

"Yes—at my suggestion."

Straight sat down in Brand's easy-chair, crossing his legs.

"And why?"

"Because," said Brand, with a hot light in his eyes, "I have found out what all these idiotic experts have failed to see."

"Very obliging, I'm sure, to take such an interest."

"I guess," was the retort, "the British Government will be interested too."

"Dear me, what a waste of postage; you'd better address the moon, or the signs of the zodiac."

"You're counting on the delay of the mails," said Brand, angrily. "I'll cable."

"Most of them cable. It's a standing joke at Westminster."

"Straight," he cried, "are you made of steel?"

"Yes." Straight smiled. "They're taking out a patent," he pointed with his thin forefinger, "up yonder. I'm a sample; and the steel-made man will meet a

long-felt want. But, seriously, Brand, there's no need to set yourself in an uproar. We have stopped the massacres—for the present. Now, Brand——”

“Mr. Haraldson, if you please.”

Straight gave vent to a weary little sigh.

“Well, Mister Haraldson, take my advice. Correspond as much as you please with the British Government ; but if you value your life, don't talk in this city. You see, people disappear, their friends miss them, the Mulberry Street officers are sympathetic, the newspapers put in a two-inch ‘par.,’ and a few weeks afterwards the harbour police, or some fisherman, find something—that has to be covered up. Remember, as you have pointed out, we are no longer friends ; so if you mention what you have said to anybody else, I cannot be responsible for your safety.”

“I shall do as I please,” said Brand. “Good-evening.”

Even now it pained him to look at Straight's face, so wan was it—so terribly sad. There seemed a little more grey in his hair than usual ; the lines about his mouth were deepened, as though from suffering.

“One moment, Mr. Haraldson.” Straight rose, throwing away the stump of his cigarette. “This discovery has been a severe shock to you, for which I am very sorry. Since it's just possible that you have made a mistake, even now you had better reserve your judgment. Soon—very soon, I hope—we shall resume our acquaintance under new conditions, your eyes will be opened, and we shall be allies in the cause that is dearest to your heart. May I remind you of a former meeting, when I had the honour to warn you of dangers surrounding a certain lady? You do not yet realize her peril !”

“What do you mean, sir?”

"She is engaged to marry Marshall Gault within six months."

Brand turned white as a ghost. "To marry—Marshall Gault? Well, what of that? If she is pleased to marry, she has the right."

"She is not pleased to marry, but compelled."

"Compelled!"

"She has sacrificed her life because she was penniless, and all her good work ruined otherwise. She has been sold—the price was the welfare of her poor, her sick, her little children in the *crèche*, the dying in God's Hostelry.

"And one last word, Mr. Haraldson. You are fighting Rex Clewston. Take care! From what little I know of him—the most powerful, the most unscrupulous man in the New World—it was scarcely wise to tempt him with an open challenge. He may have had spies within hearing for all I know. Though he is crowded off the narrow sidewalk of honesty, he walks, when he can, in the broad highway of Law—economical of crime, sparing of slaughter, because it does not pay. But if your enquiries inconvenience him, he may, in a fit of irritation, brush you aside. That is all I have to say—take care!"

CHAPTER XX

THE DRAGON'S SHADOW

THE freshness of the summer was all gone, the roses were dead, not one shower fell to save the withering grass, to refresh the dusty trees, and clear the air of its impurities. The poor were suffocating in their tenements, or spending the weary, feverish nights upon their house-roofs; the business men had taken long ago to linen clothes, palm-leaf fans, ice-cream, soda, anything that could mitigate the sweltering heat of the city; the rich had fled to the seaside, where they wasted the useless hours after their kind. Hundreds of old women and old men were dropping off their perches for lack of air.

From the time when the engagement was made public between Miss Hilda and Mr. Gault, a forlorn dignity kept Brand aloof. Of course the philanthropist was a better man than himself, with means to finance the lady's injudicious heaven-blessed charities, but no woman in her senses would marry Gault for love—one does not wed a Public Institution.

Father Jared, who knew everything, and didn't believe in keeping cats in bags, almost admitted that Miss Hilda's engagement was not to the man she loved, but being pressed, could "say no more without committing a breach of confidence."

One by one the few stars in Brand's heaven had been

eclipsed. He had no hero-worship left for the philanthropist who let Clewston live. Knowing the black guilt of the Liberators, Brand saw no creature on earth so vile as Richard Stralght, their secretary, who posed as a Reformer. It was in defiance of all reason that in his good nature he still trusted Giggleswick, who was Clewston's jackal. Soured by loss of all he really cared for in the world, he saw the aged and heroic priest as nothing better than a mischief-making gossip.

"I think, Brand," the Father explained, "that all of us try to be good, and would succeed if it were not so difficult. Those of us who meet the fewest sinners are perhaps the hardest judges, but God knows every sinner, and pardons all."

A new atmosphere of treachery compelled, in Brand, the latent qualities of caution and secrecy. His evening walks had a purpose now—search for the Irish sailor who belonged to the wrecking-gang of the Liberators. His office work, his reading at night, his growing habit of observation, were making him an expert criminologist. At the Colonel's request he had indulged in a telephone for his bedroom, so as to be able to communicate with the old gentleman's office in Broadway. At the Safe Deposit he had a strong box filling rapidly with memoranda likely to be of use, together with the unopened documents from the Detective Bureau, lately obtained through the Colonel; the deeds of his property, the Colonel's will, and other matters too valuable to be left at Clewston's mercy. He posted his letters himself, and, lest the replies should be tampered with, rented a box at the General Post-office. If he went out on business, Clewston's spies found Brand a difficult subject to shadow. Knowing well the danger of his enquiries, he left with the lawyers papers to be published in the event of his death, which made it inexpedient to remove

him. His blunt, cordial boyishness of manner was only a mask now to hide the strong passions of his manhood.

He had found the old man in his bare whitewashed room, poring over some ancient book by lamp-light, but glad to put his reading aside.

"I'm beaten," said Brand; "I'm thrashed. I trusted Gault, and he sides with the Liberators; I trusted Stralght, the treacherous cur; I even trusted Giggleswick a little."

Then it seemed to the priest, who was very old and wise, that all this was for the testing of manhood.

"So far," said Brand, "I've proved that Clewston wrecked that train, that Clewston wrecked the ships, that he sent Michael Gault to his grave, that he reduced Michael Gault's daughter almost to beggary, that he threw her into the arms of a man she hates. Now, I've her honour and her life to guard, I'm pledged to smash Clewston, and when I've saved Miss Gault she shall marry the man she likes, whoever he is."

"It all seems incredible, fantastic." The priest looked dreamily at the crucifix opposite, and for a minute his lips moved as though he were speaking.

"It is not incredible," said Brand, "that Clewston's a blackguard, it's something more than fantasy that Miss Gault is in trouble. What I want is to find out the names of the men who care for her—union is strength."

"I, for one, will gladly serve," the priest chuckled, "in Miss Hilda's body-guard, but, as for the others who care for her, I have no right to betray her secrets—at least, until I gain permission. She was with me to-day in bitter trouble, far worse than yours, Brand, although she bears it so bravely. Last night I dreamed of her in Clewston's power, the dragon's silent, treacherous coils winding slowly about her—and you her deliverer, a

latter-day St. George. And yet the dragon seems to have no motive."

"The motive," said Brand, "is making money on 'Change by speculating in human blood.'"

"Then why," asked the priest, "should he attack this lady?"

"Do you doubt the fact?"

"If it is a fact, Brand, you are in horrible danger."

For some minutes Brand sat brooding over the Father's words; then he was awakened from his reverie by the persistent ringing of an electric bell.

"What's that?" he cried abruptly. "Listen!"

"I hear nothing."

The bell was still ringing. "It must be my telephone," said Brand. "I got one for the Colonel's sake, so that in case Clewston attacked him he could ring me up. And that's the bell!"

CHAPTER XXI

FIRST BLOOD

BRAND ran to his room across the passage, closed the door, gave the answering signal at his telephone, put the receiver to his ear.

"Is that you, Colonel?"

"Yes, I'm Colonel Giggleswick. I want you."

This was curious—a secret signal had been arranged between them, so that strangers might be within hearing at either end of the line, yet not understand what was said.

"What's that?" said Brand. "Speak louder."

"Come quick, Brand, I'm in danger." This was not the Colonel's manner of speaking.

"Louder!" said Brand. "I can't hear."

"I tell you I'm in danger; come quick!"

This was not the Colonel's voice.

"All right!" answered Brand. "Keep your hair on, I'm coming. Where are you?"

"Come here, to my office," was the reply, but Brand knew that the real Colonel, his clerks being women, would have described the place as a hen-roost.

Brand glanced at his watch, and saw that it was just eleven o'clock.

"All right! Coming."

Brand hung the receiver in its place, went to his desk, took out a revolver, loaded it, and put it into his pocket. Then he returned to Father Jared's room.

"Say, Father," he said, "are you very tired? No? Can you come with me in a cab to the Colonel's office? Thank you, sir—I'll show you some fun."

"What kind of fun?" said the priest. "I'm an old man for rough kinds of fun."

"Yes, sir, but I've found out that the little cross you wear is only given for valour; and I want a reliable witness whatever happens."

There was a keen light in the old man's eyes, he stood up and took his hat from a peg.

"So there's going to be a little excitement? Dear me, to think how lazy I'm getting; quite a tame little old man, eh, who hasn't seen anything exciting for years and years. Come along, Brand, don't keep me waiting."

Brand ran down to the Avenue and found a taxi, in which he and Father Jared drove to the Safe Deposit building on Broadway. Up-stairs, in the offices of the Alarm Syndicate, sat Colonel Giggleswick all alone, smoking busily over a great pretence of correspondence.

"Glad to see you. Most reverend sir, I am proud."

"Well, Colonel"—Brand was helping the priest to take off his coat—"what's the matter with you?"

"Matter, young man; matter is dirt out of place."

Brand shut the door. "Then why did you ring me up?"

"I—ring you up?"

Brand and the priest exchanged glances.

"However"—the Colonel was jubilant—"I reckon that as an ill wind has blown somebody good, and I'm that somebody, let's lubricate."

"With all my heart," said Brand.

But, as Father Jared seemed hardly to understand, the Colonel explained the nature of "lubrication" by taking a bottle and glasses out of a cupboard in his

desk. "Reverend sir, this dew was collected on the Grampians. I hope that you do not look with disfavour upon the Dew of Grampians?"

The priest bowed. "I am too old a campaigner," he said, "to object to dew."

"Nature has ordained"—the Colonel was busy placing the ingredients on his desk—"that it should be taken with a little lemon, some sugar, and water discreetly blended. You light that oil stove, Brand, and fill the saucepan. This prescription should always be taken warm."

There was a little oil stove on the floor in front of the "register," so Brand drew up his chair within easy reach, opened it, turned up the wick, and taking a match from his breeches pocket, struck it, and bent down, shading the light with his hands. The match went out before it reached the wick, so he struck a second, which also went out. The others, looking on, were amused at his awkwardness, as, considerably nettled, he struck a third match. This he assured himself was burning well; his hands protected the flame from any possible draught, and yet scarcely had he lowered it to the level of his knees when the light burned low and expired.

"If I didn't feel so drowsy," the priest yawned, "I should go to the child's assistance."

"If I were in the mines——" The Colonel assumed that manner of instruction which foreboded a yarn.

"I've been in the mines too," Brand interrupted vindictively, "and," he struck another match, which expired at a level with his knees, "if I were in the mines now I should call this choke-damp."

The priest, lying low in his chair, yawned drowsily.

"Carbon dioxyde," said the Colonel, "can be tested. It combines with lime, the net result of which is chalk.

I have some lime water here"—he took a bottle from a shelf beside him—"I use it medicinally." Pouring some into a tumbler, he placed it on the floor, drawing down the electric desk light to see more plainly. The water had become turbid like milk. "How did choke-damp get into this room?" he pondered. "It always lies low as it can, being heavy; you can't see it, or feel it, or smell it. It isn't exactly poisonous; but if you take a full breath of the stuff, out you go like a match—happy hunting-grounds for one. Unless we had thought of punch, unless we had tried to light a stove on the floor, we should have died without being any the wiser. Lemons, sugar, bland electric light, three dead bodies, and the whiskey untasted! The situation is chock full of pathos."

"Shut up," said Brand; open the windows, you old fool. Hello, Father Jared! Father Jared!"

The priest had fallen asleep.

"Wake up—wake up!" Brand shook him violently, then lifting him up, chair and all, on top of the table, well beyond reach of the gas, with some trouble he restored the old man to consciousness.

"Why," said Colonel Giggleswick, struggling with the windows, "what's the matter with this confounded sash?"

The window could not be moved.

"Huh!" he sniffed disdainfully, "I smell Clewston. Let's see—how has Clewston poured the gas into this——"

"Shut up," said Brand. "And turn off the register."

The Colonel went hurriedly to the register used in winter for ventilating the office with hot air, turned off the tap, and, in bending down, was well-nigh suffocated.

Meanwhile, Brand had taken up the oil stove, which he placed on the table and lighted.

"It will be a warning," he said, "if this goes out. Now, how shall we get help? Colonel, ring up your Alarm doctor.

"That's all very well"—the Colonel, flurried and anxious, was testing the signals—"but the wires are cut."

Brand tried the door, which would not open, then he put his shoulder to it, and smashed the lock.

"I think," he said, "we'd better clear out of this."

Neither the Colonel nor Father Jared dissenting, the three moved cautiously to the stairhead. Somebody had turned out all the lights; here and there, while they listened, there seemed to be men breathing, and the air felt alive with danger.

"I'm going back," said the Colonel, "that whiskey——"

"Stop!" cried Father Jared, too late to withhold Colonel Giggleswick. That greedy old fool had just regained the door of his office when something stirred in the darkness—there was a struggle, a heavy fall, and the presence of a man running for the upper stairs.

Rushing along the passage, Brand came upon Colonel Giggleswick lying insensible. He lifted him breast-high for fear of the outflow of gas.

"Is he dead?" whispered the priest.

"Don't know. Here take his revolver; I have mine. We'll have to risk gas on the stairs. Are you ready, sir?"

Brand took up the Colonel in his arms, and, carrying him, followed the priest down the stairways until they gained the street door.

"I think," said Father Jared, "we'll take him home."

CHAPTER XXII

'THE BLADE OF THE SWORD'

"The blade of the sword alone is no longer sufficient, he must have the cross welded to it for a handle."—NORDAU.

THAT Brand had courage is not especially praiseworthy, because a man of his strength, stature, and health has no right whatever to be a coward. That he had behaved like a gentleman is not especially praiseworthy, because no man has a right to be a cad. That he was modest is not especially praiseworthy, because a man of superb physical beauty has no need of any sustaining vanity. That he did not now go headlong to the devil, is very much indeed to his credit. So long as things go well, a man has no special occasion to be bad, but when everything goes wrong, there are passions and desires turned loose which prey upon his vitals like fiends. Every healthy man has superfluous energies devised by Nature to get him into mischief; to keep him within the bounds of reason he must be amused; and when he happens to be in torment the usual toys are impatiently cast aside. A little boy who has tooth-ache is not to be charmed with even the largest tin soldiers; to keep him interested he must be taken to call on the dentist, and even before he sees the brass-plate on the front-door, the pain will mysteriously vanish. A big man with a broken heart cannot be patched up with a box of cigars and a new necktie, but

must needs be given excitement, or his misdirected energies will bring him to rack and ruin. In those days of his trouble Brand could not work, he would not eat, nothing short of morphia procured him an hour of sleep. The Club was intolerable, for there lay Colonel Giggleswick, in Father Jared's room, raving. Neither had he satisfaction from any silent serenading of Miss Hilda's tenement, because she, poor soul, was away at her baby-farm near Niagara. Had he known that she loved him, Brand might have passed the time tolerably wretched; but he did not know that she loved him.

Under the like circumstances, a Latin develops a taste for homicide, a Saxon for getting drunk. Very good and respectable folk, who suffer no temptations, have little sympathy with the poor wretch who is driven, by despair, into a mania for letting blood, still less sympathy for the brute who makes a beast of himself with liquor. They wonder vaguely what satisfaction there is in drunkenness; they never tried the sensation, knowing nothing, perhaps, of the ceaseless craving for excitement, the urgent necessity for letting off steam at all hazards. The disgusting fact remains that Brand got drunk, and would have done so again and again, but that his astonished and horrified inside commenced a policy of revenge, of forcible retaliation conducive to penitence. Besides that, a feeling that Miss Hilda would be displeased, led his thoughts into safer channels, so the mania for excitement was satisfied in other and wiser ways. Brand challenged privately a well-known English bruiser, the Battersea Chicken, after which encounter he realized that getting drunk is very bad for an athlete, repented in bitter humiliation, and went in for a severe course of training. Boxing, riding, swimming, sculling, running, a lean diet, and a sore conscience, did more for him now than the distractions of the public

bar-rooms. It is only by losing one's way that one learns the comfortable satisfaction of keeping straight.

Though Brand had lost his friends he still had acquaintances, who, to confess the plain truth, thought him rather an ass. Writing pungent articles had failed to train him in small talk, he was too self-contained for jesting, too slow of thought to butter his ideas over the thin bread of discourse. When little people tried to chaff him, to disturb this great calm self-reliance he would smile gently, looking far away over their eyes as though they were not present; if this angered them to rudeness they got their heads punched, with an apology afterwards. This gentlest and best-tempered of men was never roused beyond a momentary irritation, but anybody who provoked him once would ever afterwards behave with distant caution.

When his acquaintances were in trouble he would lend money with lavish credulity, but when they tried to make friends on the strength of their gratitude they found it like flirting with a monument. Very few men and only one woman were ever allowed to suspect the tremendous passions blazing behind the mask—his love, his desperate craving for excitement, his never slumbering ambition to wage war against the evils of the age.

Yet, as a big dog will sometimes make friends with a very little dog, Brand became fond of Jimmy, night editor of the *Avenger*. Once, in the small hours of the morning, he found a pocket edition of a man defending himself very pluckily against a drunken bully who had jostled him in Broadway. Brand wiped up the pavement with the bully, introduced himself to the small man, and, as they were both bound southward, walked with him to the office, discovering on the way that they were colleagues on the staff of the *Avenger*. It was Jimmy's duty to take charge of the Editorial Department from

two o'clock in the morning, when the staff began to disperse, until noon, when they began to reassemble; and during the lonely watches that little journalist was very glad of human company. Often after that first meeting Brand would sit on the editorial table wishing earnestly for the sleep that would not come; Jimmy, perched on the official chair, would play his guitar, singing sorrowful love songs until, like David before Saul, this minstrelsy brought a sense of rest, a quietude, a yawn or two, then the big man's retirement to a sofa, where he would snore like an ocean liner in a fog.

But one night, six weeks after the time of his dismissal by Miss Gault, when Brand began to realize some pleasure in life, when the Colonel was at last pronounced convalescent, the little Editor discovered that the dark cloud was passing away, that a better hour was coming for his friend. So in his joy the minstrel struck up a more dismal ballad than usual, for his was a temperament which luxuriates in a sense of wretchedness, and loves the clouds of life, for the contrast of their silver lining.

“Went my love this way?
Here is her track in the snow;
My dainty love went heedlessly,
She trod this down quite needlessly.
Here was my life laid low:
My heart was in her way.

Went my love alone?
Nay, for one walked by her side.
My dainty love went lightly by,
My dainty love went merrily:
Here where the path is wide,
And I am all alone.”

And having sung the hopeless little ballad, Jimmy laid down his guitar with a sigh.

“Have you got it bad?” asked Brand, compassionately.

“Love? I was never in love in my life.”

Brand sighed.

"Only," continued Jimmy, "I feel that way sometimes."

"So do I," said Brand.

The little man looked wistfully up at the big man's face. "Who is Jimmy," he said, "that he should fall in love—Jimmy, with two sisters to keep comfortable on nothing and a-half a month? Suppose I fell in love with a woman, suppose she took me by surprise and married me, what on earth should I do with her, eh? I couldn't put her out to grass, or lend her to a museum, or send her to a home for lost dogs. And one of my sisters is very ill," said Jimmy piteously. "While she lives the doctor's bill runs on quite smoothly, and the grocery man appreciates my poems. But if she dies I shall have to pay the doctor and the grocery man, and the Reformed Funeral man will have nothing to say to a minor poet. They'll all want cash! Besides," Jimmy was strumming gently on the guitar, "if I fell in love she would sleep all night, and I must sleep all day—a sort of Box and Cox arrangement. A night editor is not masculine or feminine, but a mere *It*, with two sisters and a taste for writing bad poetry. Now, if I were an hulking blackguard like you——"

"You'd wish yourself a Jimmy again," said Brand.

"But it seems impossible that anybody so big and strong——"

"Should be tied by the leg with a beastly chain," growled Brand.

"But—what is the chain? I hope you don't mind my asking."

"A chain of cold facts, Jimmy, cold, hard facts."

"Then break it."

"I don't know how—I'm in love—the lady won't have me—engaged to another man, and loves somebody else." Brand got off the table, yawned, stretched himself, took

up his hat and stick. "It's no use talking," he said. "I'm going home to bed."

Brand felt, as he walked homeward through the silent moonlight of the city, that in some indefinable way the chain of his trouble was at a breaking strain. Not that he was resigned to a lost love and a wrecked ambition, but rather conscious that he was upon the eve of some great change. There is no introspection in giants, or self-consciousness in men of tremendous strength. Brand rather felt than thought; rather guided himself by intuition than by reason. Physical training had brought this thing about, that he was ready when the moment came for action—readier than ever he had been; and even in his worst hours he had scarcely relaxed his struggle with immense difficulties. While Father Jared was harsh with him, disappointed because Brand seemed to have abandoned his ambition to unmask and overthrow Dr. Clewston, the priest little knew of the work being done in secret, the untiring vigilance which was slowly piecing together such scanty information as could be had. Brand had picked up a young Belfast emigrant, half-starved in the streets, won his gratitude by timely help, set him to worm his way into the fraternity of the Liberators; and now he was privy to the affairs of the outer circles. He had answered the advertisement of a disengaged detective, late of Scotland Yard, brought him out to America, and was using the man's services to outwit Clewston's spies. He found the sniffing woman—the incendiary—now discharged from spying in Clewston's interest, and sent her away into the country that she might enjoy a holiday away from her "usbing," until he had need of her. But all this helped him little in his war against the great adversary; indeed, it was an incident apparently quite foreign to the quest that led at last to the issue of this adventure.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE FIRST REVELATION

"I DEEM he is not worthy to live at all who, for any fear or danger of death, shunneth his country's service, and his own honour." So read Father Jared from a book, and paused to ponder over the words, with his eyes shining upon Haraldson. The priest was sitting by the Colonel's bedside, and had been reading for hours that he might lull his convalescent patient to sleep, while Brand leaned against the window, listening.

"Sir," said the Colonel, feebly oracular, "the man who wrote them words had ought to have been an American."

"I guess," retorted Brand, scornfully, "that we have orators who'd strain their necks if they talked down to the European level of thought."

"But," the priest spoke in sorrow, "they may yet shun their country's service and their own honour. Sir Humphrey Gilbert wanted, for England's sake, to find the North-west passage to the Indies; he wrote this essay; then, to prove his doctrine true, victualled a little squadron, and sailed into unknown seas. One of his ships, a mere fishing smack of ten tons burden, leaked: so, to hearten her crew, he joined them. There was a great gale; the smack was perishing; the larger flagship came within call, fearing for the Admiral's safety. Her people saw Gilbert sitting in the after-part of the ship, a Bible outspread on his knees. 'Never

fear, my masters,' he called to them. 'Heaven is as near by water as by land.' Heaven was nearer to the gallant gentleman who died that night for his country's service and his own stainless honour."

"And I," said Brand, 'jitterly, "ain't worthy even to die."

"It is six weeks to-day," retorted the priest, "since you crossed swords with the enemy."

Brand had long been conscious of some mystery in connection with the *Avenger* building. He had, as described above, arrived one morning, unlocked his office door, and found Mr. Gault within, overhauling his papers. Upbraiding the "elevator boy" for not warning him, he had discovered that neither in the lift nor on the stairs had Mr. Gault been seen that day. Brand put a private lock on the door; yet, scarcely a month later, the same thing happened again.

Moreover, this was but part of the puzzle. Late in the autumn, he found one morning, on his desk, a pencil which bore the unmistakable whittled marks which Dick Straight used to cut in idle moments. That pencil could only have come from Straight's room.

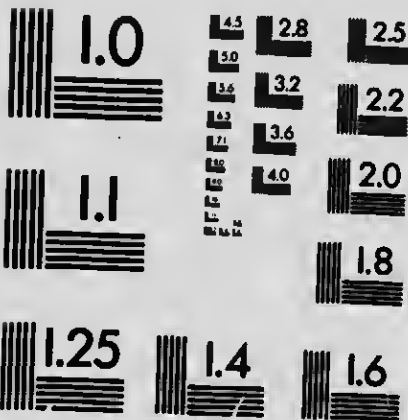
Then Brand remembered how once, in that office of the Cyclone Explosives, he had frightened Larry Byrne until he screamed. Presently, Straight had come out of the manager's room, claiming to have been in certain offices beyond. And yet there was visibly no second door to the manager's room. Straight had not heard the scream, of that Brand was certain. Was there then some secret access to the room?

Now Brand, beginning to put the puzzle together, found that, two floors above his office was Gault's private sanctum, and immediately below, on the eighth storey, the manager's office of the Cyclone Explosives Syn-



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dicatc. Between these three rooms there must be a secret way. Chimneys were out of the question, but in that side of the building rose a ventilator shaft, by which air was obtained for the hot blast, which, circulating through the rooms and corridors, kept the place warm in winter.

Brand fell to examining his pigeon-hole library, directly behind which was the wall of that brickwork shaft. For hours, after his day's work was over, he remained locked up in his office, feeling every inch of the woodwork, until, at eight o'clock in the evening, his patience was rewarded by the discovery of the neatly varnished button, pretending to be a knot, in the side of a pigeon-hole. When he pressed that spring, a whole section of the library swung gently out like a door, revealing the open void of the great shaft, wherein two steel cables went down out of sight into thick darkness.

He began pulling upon one of these cables, which yielded a little, then upon the other, which also moved freely, yet in absolute silence. Both were evidently parts of one line depending from a wheel; so, doubtless, at the lower ends there were weighted platforms, each adjusted to carry a man, who could raise or lower himself by controlling the free end of the cable. Determined to find out the whole of this secret, Brand withdrew the key from the office door, so that if he should need he could enter again from the corridor; also he assured himself of being able to re-enter his room from the shaft. Then he made fast the lighted candle to the brim of his felt hat, turned out the office light, and, stepping on to the narrow platform overhanging the shaft, he closed the door behind him.

First, he explored upwards, drawing both lines together, and climbing as upon a single rope, until he saw, dimly,

a wheel, from which they depended, and alighted upon a little platform, such as the one he had left. From this, through a small hole in a panel, he could peer into Gault's withdrawing-room on the sixteenth floor. Again, he cautiously committed himself to the wires, this time clinging with his knees and one elbow, while he laid hold of the right-hand line to govern his movements. Thus, very slowly, he descended into the abyss, soiling his hands and clothes with the dry blacklead which served instead of oil to lubricate them, fearing only lest the smooth mineral now encrusting his skin should cause his hold to slip, and plunge him to instant destruction.

Fifty feet below the level of his office Brand swung himself on to a third platform similar to the others, but on the opposite side of the shaft. The cables swung back to the perpendicular, where they hung vibrating noiselessly, while the man fell to examining the recess in which he stood, not connected with the *Avenger* building at all, but with the Frailty Investigation Offices, occupied by Dr. Clewston. On either side were wall ends of plain brick, but the back was of fine white canvas, and at the bottom of it he found a leather strap, evidently a handle. Stooping down, he pulled at the strap, lifted it, and the panel with it, to the height of his own head, whereby he discovered that he was standing within a picture-frame. Before him was a large room, dimly lighted with a single heavily-shaded reading lamp. On the right were heavy window curtains, directly in front a door; and on the left an open portière. The carpet was soft, and sombre in colour; the furniture massive, the ceiling painted; the whole place dim, gloomy, and magnificent. But to all this Brand paid little attention, because his gaze was fixed upon a man who sat at the writing-table, the

lamplight shining upon his silvery beard, the face hidden by an eye-shade, such as people wear who are nearly blind. Somehow, the master-detective and his surroundings conveyed to Brand a strong sense of the unreal—the theatrical—perhaps, the ultra-human. And this was Dr. Rex Clewston? Brand could see the name painted on the safe yonder in golden characters; this was Dr. Rex Clewston looking up, startled by the sudden intrusion, rising from his seat with a sharp exclamation.

“Well, sir!” Brand wondered vaguely where he had heard that deep resonant voice; then, with an astonishment akin to terror, saw the whole man change from a bearing of alert strength to one of extreme old age. “What the devil do you mean, sir, by this intrusion?” The voice had become harsh. “How dare you trespass here?”

For a moment Brand felt his veins like ice, a cold sweat broke out upon his face, everything swam dark before his eyes; then his brain cleared, he became hot with rage, and with a yell of fury leapt into the room.

“Who are you, Dr. Rex Clewston? I want to know who you are—I’ve come to see you—the real Clewston—without your damned theatrical properties and overdone acting, you devil!”

Rushing at his enemy, he seized him by the beard, but that came away in his hand, and he flung it aside. Again, while Clewston stumbled back against the chair, Brand sprang forward, wrenching away the eye-shade from his brows.

But the face he had unmasked, transfigured with rage, was so awful that Brand shrank away, reeling back towards the frame through which he had entered—knowing Dr. Clewston at last!

Brand clutched at the sides of the frame lest he

should fall, because Clewston's face seemed to burn—incarnate murder—red in a glare of flames, while all the world reeled like a blazing wheel.

Again he seemed to behold a flaming brand hang threatening above him, as though it would crash down upon his head.

"Murderer!" he yelled. "Murderer!"

Yet even as he watched him the face of the train-wrecker resolved itself into the icy-cold mask of Marshall Gault, whose hand was raised, not threatening, but to warn, while a clear incisive voice ordered him to be silent.

His brain was overwrought, he felt as though he were going mad; he knew that unless he controlled himself he was in fearful peril; so he compelled himself to withdraw his gaze from Gault, his eyes wandering vaguely down to something that his enemy had snatched from the table. It was a glove, Hilda's glove, that Brand once stole from her, that the Colonel had thrown aside when he came as a robber, that had since disappeared. Marshall Gault had the glove, and Hilda was at his mercy!

So this was Hilda's danger of which Brand had been warned on the day of his coming to New York, this the origin of her financial ruin, this the secret of her engagement to a man she did not love, this the dragon of Father Jared's dream!

"Not dragons mythical but actual," he had cried, "bred of a foul corruption. . . . What man is there living to-day who will face the devil's viceroy, Dr. Rex Clewston . . . who will encounter this dragon to deliver the city from his power?"

Then about Hilda he had said:

"There is some fearful mystery—and when that is cleared away we shall see how to fight."

And of this man he had said :

"A man with brains enough to understand Cæsar, could have mastered Cæsar."

Brand looked at his adversary, knowing him body and soul, forecasting his motives, foreseeing his actions—this almost superhuman genius who posed and posed like an actor. The air was clearing now!

"Good evening, Mr. Haraldson!" Mr. Gault seemed to purr like a cat—or a jaguar. "This visit is an unexpected honour. Come, pull down the picture, for there's a cold draught."

Brand pulled down the canvas by its strap, seeing now that the painting he had displaced for his entrance was an enormous figure of Justice.

He turned to Mr. Gault.

"You devil, how dare you sit face to face with that great angel! Aren't you afraid of his sword?"

"That," said Mr. Gault, calmly, "is for spies. But come, I don't care to argue with you; sit down, Mr. Haraldson. Will you accept a cigar? I have business with you."

Brand roughly pushed aside the box that was tendered to him, then changed his mind and took a cigar. Mr. Gault did the same. "Let us," said Brand, "exchange cigars." The insinuation of foul play was insulting, but Mr. Gault laughed.

"With all my heart."

Brand struck a match, but threw it down without using it. His adversary lighted up, and began to smoke. Having recovered from the first shock of his astonishment, Brand had made up his mind to learn all he could, to say no more than was necessary. Despite his rage he was conscious of admiration for a cool courageous enemy. It never occurred to him that he ought to kill a man only half his size.

"Mr. Haraldson, when you first came to New York I made a grave mistake. I laughed at you when I should have got rid of you."

Brand growled.

"Now, your cautiousness in bringing a witness when you rescued the Colonel, your wisdom in removing that firebug woman, your discretion in employing detectives from the Old World, your acumen in leaving with your solicitors papers which for some months have made it inexpedient to attack you—all this compels me to take your absurdities quite seriously. I may mention, however, that I now control both your detectives, and these"—Mr. Gault produced some papers from a drawer—"are the documents which you left with your lawyers. I can now remove you without further trouble, indeed my arrangements will be complete in half-an-hour. Meanwhile, let me make what are probably your last moments on earth as pleasant as possible."

He went to a sideboard, from which he produced tumblers and a bottle of champagne, set these on the writing-table, opened the bottle, filled both glasses, and offered Brand his choice.

"Thanks," Brand growled, "which you like."

Mr. Gault smiled, and took up one of the glasses.

"May the next world be more acceptable to you!" he drank.

To which toast Brand responded with a harsh laugh, before proposing another.

"To your destruction!"

"And now, Mr. Haraldson, may I ask why you are trying to destroy me?"

"Firstly," replied Brand, "because you're a parricide. Your train-wrecking was clumsy, but the shock killed Michael Gault, the man who had raised you from the gutter."

"And secondly?"

"Because you're trying to force Miss Gault to marry you against her will."

"And thirdly?"

"Because your Liberators have murdered thousands of innocent people."

"Anything more?"

"Yes, because you're such a damned villain that you pollute the earth."

"We are candid," Mr. Gault smiled. "As to the first and second indictments, I must really beg you to mind your own business. If I have erred, my Maker shall judge me—but no man living. As regards the Liberators, I don't mind confessing, Mr. Haraldson, that, with my whole heart, I detest them. If I obey their orders, it is because they trapped me; indeed, it is to get myself out of their clutches that I would like to ask your help."

"Then you politely called me a damned villain," Mr. Gault laughed. "So I pollute the earth! Well—well!" There was a twinkle of fun in the grey eyes. "Now you shall carry an errand for me to Hades—my messengers are always welcomed there for the sake of their news. Tell the Infernal authorities that the Tammany Gang now pays me a million dollars a year—mind you deliver this correctly. Swindlers pay me about two million dollars a year, other sinners one and a-half millions a year; miscellaneous dividends, from my investments, five and a-half millions a year—total income, ten million dollars. And then there is the profit from speculation—one cannot reorganize the world without capital. My personal outlay is insignificant, my annual investments four millions a year, my gifts to art, galleries, gymnasia, polytechnics, baths, universities, churches, together with my charities, constitute an expenditure, mainly secret, of six million dollars a year. Since I have begun to

govern the community, crime, swindling, jobbery, and corruption have ceased to be profitable—I am taxing sin to death—I am giving the revenues of sin for the highest uses of mankind. That is my message for Hell—see to it. So I am carrion, Mr. Haraldson, polluting the earth; so you are my judge, deciding the mighty issues of Right and Wrong; so you are the executioner appointed from heaven to slay me.”

“You are going to set up as an archangel?” asked Brand, sarcastically.

“Mr. Haraldson, let us both try to put aside our personal feelings; hate each other we do to our utmost capacity, yet we may have interests in common, and private spite must not be allowed to interfere with the service of mankind. Now to proceed—you have done me the honour to serve on the staff of the *Avenger*, in the position of Blackmailing Editor.”

Brand started as though he had been struck in the face, but he knew now that Mr. Gault was merely speaking the truth.

“You have also busied yourself with my affairs in this ‘Clewston’ detective business. You now know how the combination of absolute secrecy and absolute publicity works: the Frailty Investigation in one building, the *Avenger* in another. The one is the central detective system of the world, to which all others are mere branches; the other—the *Avenger*—is a stock exchange bulletin to control prices, to levy blackmail, a financial tool. It is not a real newspaper, there are no real newspapers—tell you this in Hades—since I have controlled the news associations. If a telegram is adverse to my interests it does not appear. I am the real censor of the Press; I am the master of all crime; the City Government obeys me; the State Legislature is my spittoon; the Executive at Washington is my flunkey,

and in a few more years I shall be president of the Associated Trusts which will control the industries of the Republic, the whole energy of the population."

Gault rose and stretched out his arms, looking down at his enemy through half-closed eyes.

"I am the master of the New World. Will you die, Haraldson, when you can be my partner?"

Brand opened his mouth to defy him, but Mr. Gault transfixed him with those cruel grey eyes. Then he sat down, resting his elbow on the desk, his face on his hand, still staring as though he would hypnotize his victim; and, somehow, Brand felt all his senses lulled to quietude.

"For years, Mr. Haraldson, I have waited for a man with the courage to defy me as you have. In mind and body, in ability, in manliness, you are superb. Look you, I am a very ambitious man; I am greater than most of the world's idols—they know all this in Hades—my only peers, Alexander, Cæsar, Napoleon; yet I want more power, for I am barely forty years of age, with all the world before me. I have the New World, I want to own the British Empire; because, with Anglo-Saxondom at my feet, I can abolish war, do vast benefit to the human race, take, at one leap, a century of progress. It would be nice to grind these Irish Liberators under heel, eh?"

"Well, look at England; more rotten than even the United States, but absolutely blind except to her neighbours' sins." The eyes of the great visionary were alight now with enthusiasm. "Already, I could compel many of its greatest personages to obey my orders; but I want a machine in London, another Frailty Investigation, another *Avenger*, if I can only get a man to run them. Such a man would make himself, in a few years, master of the British Empire, master of Europe.

Together, we can utterly abolish crime, call down from heaven the millennium of peace. Come, Haraldson, for the good of mankind for the liberation of the earth from the chains of sin, I offer you the throne of the Old World."

"Thanks." Brand pitched Mr. Gault's cigar across the room. "You say that your power is founded upon sin, that all sin pays tribute to you; therefore, you want me to help you to found a new empire of sin. Now, when you've frightened everybody into being good, there'll be no people to obey your orders, or pay for your silence, so there won't be any power or any revenue left, and you climb down. The object of your ambition is to abolish yourself."

"You don't understand. I——"

"Excuse me, Mr. Gault, I'm speaking. You have invited me to become your partner in crime, parricide, murderer, sham philanthropist, master of sin, modern embodiment of the devil! You are trying to force Miss Hilda to marry you, and you threaten to kill me if I don't become your accomplice: the King of the New World can't buy a decent woman's love or a man's friendship!

"Now I may say, right now," Brand rose to his feet, "that I don't expect to be able to save Miss Gault, I don't calculate to get out of this house alive; but I should like, before I die,"—he lifted his tumbler of champagne—"to express,"—he dashed it into Gault's face—"to express my opinion of you."

So saying, Brand opened his clasp-knife, ripped the picture of Justice from side to side, from top to bottom, dashed through the torn canvas, drew the thin steel cables together, and began to climb hand over hand up the shaft. "Why didn't I kill him?" he thought, sick with misgiving. "Of course, I ought to have killed him.

He'll kill me now, and serve me right for a damned fool!
Why didn't I kill?"

For a moment Gault stood helpless, his face cut with the broken glass, his eyes smarting with the golden wine; then, wiping away the wine and the blood with his handkerchief, he followed Brand through the picture. His face was white, his eyes were glittering with rage, yet were his hands steady, his whole body strong with perfect self-control. Brand had gone out of sight swarming up the wires, but Gault was in no hurry; his movements were slow, almost leisurely, as he put on a pair of wash-leather gloves, took from a peg within the picture-frame a pair of large steel shears, fitted them upon one of the cables, and, with all his force, drew the handles together.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE SECOND REVELATION

A TREMENDOUS crash shook the building as the severed end of the cable fell with its weighted platform down the shaft. Brand found one of the lines colling like a spring against his legs, while, running up between his hands, it cut them to the bone; but realizing the extremity of his peril, he threw his weight upon this ascending cable, and so arrested his fall. Now, his body being heavier than the platform on the other end of the line, he sank slowly down through the darkness until he saw his enemy black against the lamplight of the big office, striking at him again and again with the knife which Brand had dropped after cutting his way through the picture.

Gault aimed behind the left shoulder-blade at his heart, but, as Brand swung helpless, his body turned, so that the blow glanced harmless from the rib roots near his spine. Again Gault struck, plunging the blade-hilt deep into the muscle of his left arm. The third blow missed. Looking up to laugh at Gault's failure, Brand saw the great shears reached out again to cut the line. Looking down horrified he descried the white edge of a fourth recess some feet below, and jumped as the cable broke. It caught his back with a staggering blow. The long coil of steel was swishing down the shaft, then came a resounding crash in the depths. He felt the

recess with his fingers, searching the door which he knew must communicate with the offices of the Irish Liberators. At the same moment came an hysterical laugh of triumph from Gault overhead—the lamplight vanished, the shaft was left in darkness. Then the panel swung open, revealing a lighted room, and Dick Straight holding out his hand in welcome.

“Poor devil,” said the Secretary of the Liberators. “Calling on Mr. Gault after hours? You’ve made enough row between you. Badly hurt? You must let me help you, old fellow.”

“Help me?” Brand, half mad with pain, was leaning back now against some bookshelves in the office, his elbows dripping blood, his strength slowly ebbing away. “I want no help from you.”

“So you want to fight?” Straight laughed at him. “Maxim guns at ten paces, eh?”

Brand made no answer, but watched with a dull curiosity while Straight took a blank visiting-card from his pocket-book, and scribbled upon it with a fountain pen. “Look at that,” he whispered.

Brand’s eyes were swimming, he had to shade them with his hand before he could read—yet he felt impelled to know what had been written.

“I see. Great——!”

“Hush!” Straight whispered. “It’s not safe to speak. You understand?”

“I understand.”

Straight put the card to his mouth, licked off the wet ink, struck a match, burned the writing to its last vestiges, crumbled the ashes to powder, and scattered that.

“Brand,”—his voice had a ring of emotion now—“have we any need of machine-guns?”

“Forgive me, Dick. I’ll stand by you while I live. You will forgive me, old fellow?”

Brand extended his hand.

"Put her there, Dick. Hadn't I better get back into the shaft? Ain't you afraid?"

"No, Brand; not more than usual." Straight smiled. "Danger and I are partners."

"By all the powers, Dick, you're——"

"That's all right," said Straight, hurriedly; "but I won't shake hands, old fellow—you're all bloody."

Brand looked at his hands, which were terribly cut. He saw the blood dripping quickly from his left elbow; already it was making a little dark pool on the floor.

"You're not losing strength?" Straight spoke anxiously. "Does Gault know that you're still alive?"

"Yes, knows I'm in this room."

"Then if you're caught here, we're both past praying for. Gault will take ten minutes, at least, to have the building surrounded. Do you see that door?"

They were in the General Manager's room, and the door was that of the Secretarial office, locked.

"Put your shoulder to it," said Straight. "I have the key; but, for my sake, you must make believe to break your way out."

Brand put his gigantic shoulder against the panels, and the lock yielded as to a battering-ram. Straight turned out the lights, and followed into the Secretarial office, where he took his hat.

"Now the door to the passage!"

Brand having smashed this also to splinters, Straight drew him back.

"Hark!" he whispered, "they're ringing for the elevator already. Back with you. I'll get you into the shaft. There's an iron ladder down the side, and these keys will let you through some doors at the bottom into the upper basement." Straight had stripped off Brand's coat, and hastily bound the wounds with a

couple of handkerchiefs. "The dripping of that blood would leave a trail; it must be stopped. You lie in wait near the basement entrance, until I get the hall-porter called away; then make a bolt for it to the Comet Saloon, where you can give the Liberator sign, and wait for me. On with your coat, quick!"

When the searchers came, Straight was discovered in his office, newly horrified by the discovery of broken doors, blood-stains, and chairs capsized. "See here!" he cried; "whoever this was, he couldn't have escaped by the main stairway, because you came that way. Try the back windows!"

While his retreat was thus covered, Brand escaped down the iron ladders fixed to the side of the shaft; and at the bottom, using Straight's keys, found his way through a cupboard into an empty office, from which he gained the corridors of the upper basement.

By this time Straight had drawn the search party away into a maze of streets, taking with him the porter who guarded the basement door. So Brand, too weak with loss of blood to suffer much, found his way, somehow, to the Comet Saloon, where, making the sign of the Liberator, he was well cared for. The landlord took him to a bedroom, bound up the serious gashes in his back, left arm, and hands, gave him a big drink, and even in spite of that the bleeding ceased.

At one o'clock in the morning, Straight came to Brand's room. So, with wonderful surprises in store for both of them, the two men began to speak of their adventure.

"Incredible enough to be true," pondered Straight, when Brand had finished his story. "Dr. Clewston and Gault the same man! This is all new; and, if I hadn't exhausted the faculty of wonder, I suppose I should be excited.

"Well, I've often thought that if the devil had an incarnation, he would come as a great philanthropist. Marshall Gault from ten o'clock till five, is Dr. Clewston from five o'clock till midnight. I should think the devil had most satisfaction out of those mornings. Sired by corrupted capital out of brutalized labour—King of the New World, scourge of the race—he is a revelation."

"Well," said Brand, raising himself painfully in the bed; "I guess you're a second revelation. To think what a confounded fool I've been, quarrelling with you. My dear fellow, I love a brave man. And you're so deuced cool about it—secretary of the Liberators and," his voice dropped to a whisper, "secret agent of the British Government."

"On a small scale I live, like Clewston-Gault, a double life, you see; it's dirty work," said Straight, wearily; "filthy work, because some of these Liberators are patriots, and I spy upon them. It makes me feel so old, so vile. I fancy sometimes that women shrink from me by instinct, even the dogs don't like me. Yet I should have found out nothing for the Home Office unless I had served Gault by sneaking into the Club, pumping poor old Father Jared, and betraying all the Reformers. Of course, I have persuaded Gault that they are harmless lunatics; but, still— And you, I was ordered by Gault to lead you into temptation, to drag you down into the mire until he found his chance to use or destroy you. For that service," Straight laughed, "my pay was to be twenty thousand dollars. He offered me ten thousand to get you into his clutches; so I raised him, or he would never have believed in me. Shall I betray you for money? Shall I play Judas? It's a big stake, twenty thousand dollars."

Brand stared, for this kind of chaff had much too keen an edge.

"But," continued the spy, "your friendship is a better card to play—my ace of trumps—while Gault thinks we are enemies."

A minute ago Straight had been bowed down, ashamed; then his raillery struck like a rapier thrust; now he shook with excitement.

"You don't know Dick Straight, you're much too big and stupid to understand. Ever see a python, torpid with cold, lift his head at daybreak to face the sun? Ever see him live as lightning in the noon-heat? That's me—that's the real me—been asleep, torpid; but I see daylight now, the hot time's coming for my kill, and Marshall Gault's my meat!" His eyes danced with delight. "I'm going to trust you absolutely, to use you for all you're worth. Why, how solemn you look. How should you know the fun there is in this spy business? Intrigue is the most glorious sport in the world, stalking grizzlies would be tame compared with it; Bengal tigers are kittens compared with the game I hunt for my — You're not scared, are you?"

"No," said Brand, smiling. "But you're a Chinese puzzle of a man; your sudden changes take away one's breath."

Straight glared into his eyes.

"You trust me?"

"Some." Brand grasped his hand. "We shall not trust by halves."

"Well, listen till I trust you with my life."

Straight went on tiptoe to the door, which he opened suddenly for a rapid survey of the passage; then, returning satisfied, drew his chair close to the bedside.

"Now you know why I never read novels—they are so tame compared with my daily life. Sometimes, Brand, I fear that I shall go mad; but the strain is part of the business, and excitement is more fun than

drinking, anyway. But imagine what it was for me to see those ships going to their death when I didn't even know how the infernal machines were taken on board of them. Gault took care that I shouldn't find out how my explosives were applied. Until I knew that my warnings were useless to the Government, I hardly dared communicate with the Home Office because I was watched; when I knew that any day some diplomatic fuddling might put these devils on to my track. Then," his voice dropped, "you quarrelled with me, Brand, the only man I ever hoped to trust—my one friend, except Father Jared; and I was left all alone. I wouldn't have cared if I'd only had the Liberators to deal with—I know them through and through, and despise them; only with Gault for a leader are they dangerous. The Union Jack is nothing to you; but I'm Canadian, Brand, and it was breaking my heart to see the destruction of our Imperial British commerce, with all those innocent people sent to Davy Jones, when I couldn't raise a hand to save them. When the Giant liner blew up on the Mersey bar, of course I realized why infernal machines had never been found in the ships, so I got the divers to tell me how they used to fix torpedoes, with a clock-work regulator, against the keels—yes, here in New York, and now my department will see that this particular method is put a stop to. Each machine was shaped so as to offer very little resistance; it was not fastened at all, but held to the ship by suction; the air between being pumped out, leaving a vacuum. No, not dynamite—that explodes downwards; they use a new explosive, the 'Cyclone,' and our office handles the patent, so as to make it without exciting suspicion. The Mersey explosion must have been caused by a torpedo, which had failed to go off until it touched ground on the bar; but, then, not one machine

in six ever did succeed—most of them being swept off by the sea.” He laid his hand nervously on Brand’s wrist. “How you abused me! Of course, after the Mersey business, the murders had to stop for a while, but the trouble is that the Liberators have a new invention—Gault’s—which will be even more difficult to deal with; and they’re going to attack every British liner that passes the Suez Canal. Of course my business is to discourage these gentlemen—the deuce knows how, I don’t—but the uncertainty is part of the fun. Now, as to Gault’s share in this business. He joined the Liberators to make use of their secrets, and learned of the intended attack on British shipping, which he opposed as long as he dared, saying that it was so atrocious that it would throw all public sympathy on the English side. Then came the question of Miss Gault, and, mind you, he honestly loves her.”

Brand ground his teeth.

“So long as she thought of him only as a sort of brother, she liked him well enough, for, remember, they were brought up together. But, when Gault made love, she shrank from him by instinct, at which coyness Gault lost his temper. To compel her to be dependent upon him he beggared her. I saw it all when he suddenly began to approve of the destruction of shipping, to transform the Liberator organization, from being a mere machine for getting money out of Irish pockets, into a powerful, efficient, and really dangerous society. That’s when he put me in as secretary. Throwing the weight of his genius into the Councils, he recommended that the King Line should be first attacked, and I found him secretly investing millions of dollars in American and German lines, so as to profit by their coming prosperity. Then you came, Brand, you were evidently so dangerous because of your knowledge as regards the train-wrecking,

that you were taken into our death-trap building, where it would be easy to disarm or destroy you. When you were made Fighting Editor the drama began to get exciting, so I watched like a cat. To get you on to the *Avenger* staff, which Gault intended anyway, I believe Miss Gault placed herself under an obligation to our charming friend. Well, to make a long story short, she was ruined by the bankruptcy of the King Line, and all her magnificent charities must have come to an end—poor little orphan children sent back to stew in the slums; cripples, blind men, widows, all sorts of helpless folk left to starve. Her heart was with them; for their sakes she sold herself to the man she hates—yes, he took over her list of charities on condition that she should marry him. The date is fixed. December the third; less than a month, Brand, and she will be his wife!

“Oh, this is horrible!” Brand’s face had become ghastly, his eyes seemed starting from his head. “Straight, if we can’t smash this man by fair means, I shall murder him.”

“And I,” said Straight, “must destroy the Liberators before their plans are perfected for the new campaign. We are allies, Brand; together we must fight this last, big battle. Say”—he turned suddenly to his friend—“excuse my asking, old chap—do you ever pray? I don’t mean kneeling down and making a fuss, but just praying inside.”

Brand was uneasy. “Yes. Sometimes—that is—occasionally.”

“Let’s ask for help then.”

* * * * *

Afterwards both men were quieter, the nervous tension was gone, and Straight began smoking—at which Brand

was envious, being too badly wounded to enjoy the gentle herb.

"How are we to fight?" he said presently; "I'm too played out to think."

"How? By a merciful dispensation we have two days to consider. To-morrow is Sunday, Monday is a public holiday, so the Fighting Editor won't be wanted, but by Tuesday morning you must be well enough to get back to your office."

"How can I go on being Fighting Editor now?"

"You must." Being a confirmed cigarette smoker, Straight never could keep his hand steady. Now it shook palpably. "Don't lose your nerve. The position will be useful. No, Gault won't fire you out—because while you're on his staff he still has you under his thumb."

"That's comforting!"

"Let's face the facts," said Straight. "We two nobodies are at war with the biggest scoundrel of the new century; you, for the sake of Miss Gault; I for England. Probably neither of us will be alive next week; but then, who knows?" he laughed; "maybe after death we shall be shoulder to shoulder again fighting with devils. Well," he got up and yawned, "there's no need for us to be melodramatic about it. You'd better get to sleep; I'll away home to think out our plan of campaign."

CHAPTER XXV

THE THIRD REVELATION

TWO days Brand lay helpless. These flesh wounds were only an irritation, though his hands were lacerated, and his left arm was stiff and swollen; but the loss of blood was more serious, indeed the doctor threatened him with a month's confinement. Few doctors realize the temperament to which idleness is worse than useless. The very circumstance of danger, to a brave man, is better than any tonic known to the faculty. When the medicine man called on Monday evening he found the patient gone.

Brand was dining heartily at the time on beef and beer, while he chafed against the waste of ten minutes, for there was work to be done more urgent even than "feeding the brute." He knew he was weak; he was in pain; but the big heart was thumping under his ribs, every nerve tingled with the thrill of excitement; for to-night he had a trump card to play in the mighty game of life; to-morrow—damn to-morrow!

He drove to the Club, laboured up the steep stairs to the Colonel's room, and burst in upon the old gentleman with scant ceremony.

"Colonel," he gasped, sinking breathless upon the bed, "get up and hustle—here you've been loafing around for months with a cracked skull; but it's time to quit right now—the fight's begun."

"Wall," said the Colonel, briskly, "I'm right glad to see you, although you've no more manners than an Apache. We thought you'd gone under."

"No, sir," was the retort, "not while Clewston is Gault, and Gault's alive."

"So the time has come," the Colonel caressed his nose, which, since his convalescence, was rapidly regaining its fine quality as a danger signal. "We shall tear the everlasting hair and feathers out of the dodgasted Gum Pot! May I remark, young man, that you've paid for your information?"

"One dig in the ribs, one scratch in the arm, two hands mussed up," said Brand, "it was cheap at that."

"The quotations are high on scarecrows."

"What do you mean?" Brand flushed.

"That, considering your state of repair, you seem to fancy yourself. Of all ghastly wrecks! Well, tell me how it happened, and we'll get to business."

Brand told his story, omitting all that related to Straight.

"Wall," said the Colonel. "Supposing that when you came to New York like a new-born pup I'd told you Clewston's real name—supposing that you had known five months ago that Gault was the train-wrecker, guilty of murdering the man who'd adopted him as his son."

Brand's face hardened. "I'd have gone for him."

"And he would have gone for you—why, I'd never have found your body. Now, you have learned how to fight, so that we can wrestle with the Devil to some purpose; indeed, I may remark right here that I'm proud of you, Brand—real proud of you.

"Do you remember"—he burst out laughing—"when I stole those documents from your room—to save you from being too previous? Gault required of me whatever papers I'd given you on pain of—you know what.

Of course, I wasn't such a dodgasted idiot. A ruse saved one package—my last will and testament—some information which will still enable you to carry on the campaign in the event of my death.

"Now, sir, when I also obtained for you the original detective reports as to the train-wrecking, which you're free to read now, it was only necessary for you to identify Clewston as the criminal. But there, you were in daily contact with the gentleman himself, yet you never recognized him."

"That's so." Brand was crestfallen. "I only knew him at last, when his face got murderous."

"Now," cried the Colonel, "the chain of proofs is complete; we'll turn on law enough to swamp him."

"You talk like a fool, Colonel. The law isn't good enough."

"You're right. But if I only knew how to use it, I have a better weapon—my will. When I was in the Clewston service, I succeeded in getting copies made of every important document I could lay hands upon. I collected the information for my own use, to blackmail Clewston."

"How much information is there?"

"Details of every important transaction for seven years, ending twelve months ago, when I got the sack."

"And I," said Brand, "have in my office the editorials written to extort blackmail during all that time."

"Then," answered the Colonel, "I can give you the amount of the blackmail in every case."

Brand muttered to himself: "This is a third revelation."

The weapon was placed in his hand for slaying the Dragon!

"What's that?" asked the Colonel sharply. Brand woke up. "Does Gault know? Young man, I used to think I could bluff, but Gault could bluff too, so I never

dared use these papers. They're at the Safe Deposit, and not a soul knows of their existence."

"Colonel." Brand rose shaking with excitement. "There's another side of this man's life: a friend of mine has all the evidence. It's not safe to talk about a weapon against him almost too dangerous to use; but that, together with the detail of the Frailty-Avenger machine, makes us strong enough to fight; and, in reserve, we have the train-wrecking. Are you wishful to go back to work to-morrow?"

"I guess so."

For a moment Brand stood thinking, his eyes on the Colonel, who disliked being stared at, and became fretful. He worked his rocking-chair, swaying like some grave parrot on its loop, while the shadow of his nose swept the wall.

"What do you want?"

"Colonel, you say that you don't see your way to using these records. I do. I'm going to smash Mr. Clewston-Gault."

The Colonel sneered. "And may I ask how?"

"Colonel, I want you to understand right now that I'm running this show—you will take my orders without question at a fixed salary."

The Colonel stared.

"Well, of all the con—founded——"

"That's all right." Brand filled and lit his pipe, thinking rapidly the while. "Colonel," he continued, blowing away rings of blue smoke, "have you any comments to make?"

"N-no—that is——"

"First as to money," said Brand, ignoring the Colonel's bewilderment—"Michael Gault left me wealth. Tonight I shall arrange a transfer of money to your credit. Who do you bank with?"

Although the Colonel was by this time fairly stupefied he managed to gasp out the name.

"All right." Brand lay down on the old gentleman's bed, blowing rings of smoke to the ceiling. "Let's see. We want a safe place where we can do some type-setting. By the way, your Alarm Syndicate Offices are in the Safe Deposit Block on Broadway. The third floor is vacant, eh? The second floor is a big Insurance office. With the Insurance people below and the Alarm Syndicate overhead, that third floor of the Safe Deposit building would be an ugly place to attack, even for Gault. Sit up at the table, Colonel, write a letter resigning the General Management of the Alarm Syndicate. Of course, you stay on the Board and keep your partnership. Don't growl, Colonel, I want your services. Now, for the renting of the third floor. Offer the same terms as you pay for the Alarm Syndicate—say you want it for additional offices, and will take possession to-morrow, paying first month in advance."

The Colonel, after some demur, obeyed orders.

Meanwhile Brand was thinking; indeed, by the time the letter was finished his plans had crystallized.

"We want men," he said; "make a note of this. Brown's Wild West Show is breaking up—doesn't pay—hire six of the smartest cowboys, dress them in store clothes, give 'em big pay—but nothing in advance; and by supper time have barracks ready for them on the premises.

"After supper divide them into watches, four hours on duty and eight off, and put two on guard as door porters at front and rear. You must—through the Linotype Company—engage three compositors, and hire from them a type-setting machine, also a hand press, and a plant for formes and paper pulls. I'll give you details of that." He wrote a memorandum. "The compositors you

will divide like the cowboys into three eight-hour watches, so that the work shall go on day and night. The Linotype Company must arrange to supply a mechanic with repair kit, and deliver the entire plant at once with gas-engine complete, installed under expert direction. We shall need three competent journalists and a boy—I'll send them to you. Are you noting this? All right. You must go to a labour bureau for a man cook and chore boy.

"How many does that make? Sixteen men and yourself. Buy as many revolvers with ammunition. Arm only the cowboys, stowing the other hardware out of sight.

"I guess the floor has water laid on, lavatories, steam heat, and electric light, eh? Get a telephone put in, and connect another with the Alarm office above. Hire a safe and an electric cooking outfit, also a wood stove for emergencies.

"All the food, rations of twenty men for two months, must be delivered before sundown in sealed packages—nothing bought afterwards. Why? Because otherwise Gault will be monkeying around with croton oil or strychnine. Get candles too, for he'll cut off your light, and an extra water connection with the Alarm offices, for he'll plug up your pipes. Do your washing on the premises, or he'll poison the clothes with arsenic; have portable fire-engines, or he'll burn you out. You must have enough cases of type to dispense with the linotype in case Gault cuts off the gas power.

"Now, as to supplies—make out written orders for everything you want. Leave these orders with the merchants, and anything not on hand before sundown won't be paid for.

"Now, above all things, don't parade the fact that you've got a secret. If people ask questions, you're

preparing a big electric-cookery book, say in the interests of electric supply companies. You're an enthusiast experimenting on your staff to see how quick the diet kills under test conditions. If you're molested, let out a rumour that the coal and kitchen range people are hostile to electric cookery. But I needn't bother you with details as to lying—you're a genius, Colonel."

"Thanks."

"Be sure you have all your memoranda from the safe deposit vaults as soon as you have posted the guards. Give the men champagne, cigars, everything they can want to eat, drink, smoke, or chew. The guards must be ordered to discourage anybody from attempting to enter or leave the premises. See that no man stands near the windows, or we shall find signalling done by spies. Keep the registers and ventilators shut off for fear of choke-damp. The responsibility rests with you to run that office as a besieged garrison; but I shall have spies patrolling outside to watch both you and your men. Each man is to be promised a bonus—a thousand dollars, and double for officers if we succeed."

"But," said the Colonel, feebly, "what are your plans, young man?"

"To set in type every scrap of information we have about Marshall Gault."

"But how are you going to get it printed?"

"That," said Brand, calmly, "you will leave to me. I shall unmask Mr. Clewston-Gault, circulating a million copies of the exposure before he knows what I'm up to. I shall let in the daylight on him."

"Meanwhile, I must away to my banker at once. Look out for spies. So long, Colonel."

Brand went out, the Colonel looking vaguely at the door that had closed upon the new Haraldson—the idealist become a man of action.

Then the door swung open again, and Brand appeared changed, translated, his eyes ablaze with excitement. Bending down over his chair, he spoke rapidly in whispers.

"Quick—rouse up—spies in the passage! They can't have heard our talk; but I have an idea—we'll make use of them—I'm going to pretend we've quarrelled."

"Look here!" Snatching from its peg a beauteous frock coat, Brand rent that garment from neck to tail, at which the Colonel shrieked with genuine rage and grief. "You would write to Clewston, would you?" Brand grabbed a stick and committed a most dastardly assault, raining his torrent of blows upon the bed. "Shriek!" he whispered, "scream your darnedest!" Then aloud, "Don't say you haven't, because you did, and I'm going to kick your tail through your hat" (whack, shriek, whack, whimpers and moans). "So you refuse, eh?" (loud whacks). "Get out of your room, eh?" (sound as of beating out of brains). "I'll stamp on your stomach as much as I please, you splay-footed, bleary-eyed sot!" (hysterical screeches). "Come out from under that, and I'll teach you cookery" (bed dragged round the floor, smashing of crockery, dull thuds and moans). "There," Brand wiped his forehead, "I reckon that will do," and he flung out of the doorway, leaving the Colonel a huddled ruin laughing convulsively on the floor.

* * * * *

But Hilda, all this time since her return from Niagara? Ah, well, there is no need to pry into the squalid, frowsy tenement where, every day, suffering makes despair a commonplace—death a release. Perhaps, after all, the poor thing was no worse off than most of her neighbours. The engagement ring glittered on her finger; she was sewing the wedding dress—and the people of the slums were envious!

CHAPTER XXVI

THE PLAN OF CAMPAIGN

THERE are shadows in every big city: tracking frivolous husbands, erring wives, "trusted" bank officials, political fugitives, alike in Pall Mall, the Champs Elysée, Under den Linden, the Nevski Prospekt, and Broadway. These shadows are sharp-eyed boys, casual women, unobservant, loitering, aimless men—anybody one meets, in fact, unless he looks like a detective. They say that their work is fearfully exhausting, because the eyes must be constantly fixed upon one moving spot, until the head swims, and the knees are shaking with utter weariness; that two weeks of it will wear out the strongest man; and that the subject of attention generally goes out of his way to add to the difficulties of the pursuit. Haraldson, towering head and shoulders above the crowd, had been at first delightfully easy to shadow, but now he was a very demon of cunning.

When he left the Club it was all he could do to crawl to the nearest corner of Broadway; so, before venturing any further, he drank several cups of beef-tea at a convenient saloon. With a renewed strength, and a bright idea in his head, he went to an hotel. Formally, he registered his name, paying for a bed in advance; went up in the lift, locked himself in his room, kept the light burning while he rested; then turned it out as though he were retiring for the night. Ten minutes afterwards

he crept down the servants' stairs to a back door, by which he gained the streets. Before midnight he was back in bed again.

Had the detectives discovered Brand's visit to the banker that night, the Colonel's immediate appearance as a capitalist would have been explained, and short shrift would Gault have given; but there was little guidance for the enemy in the report that Mr. Haraldson slept at such and such an hotel after a furious row with old Giggleswick.

On Tuesday morning the journalist went back to work again as usual.

"Walk right in," quoth the front door, "you'll never get out again."

"Don't mind me," said the lift, "I'm going to collapse and smash you."

"Needn't be alarmed," explained the office, "I'm only a death-trap."

Ignorance had been bliss on Saturday, but it was torture on Tuesday. Everything was what it did not appear to be, as in some fantastic dream; Gault was Clewston; the Secretary of the Liberators was a British secret agent; the Colonel, most helpless-seeming of mortals, had furnished weapons to fight the dragon; the office of the great philanthropist was a charnel-house full of nasty bones; the fighting editorship an instrument of blackmail; the lunch at two p.m. would probably be seasoned with strychnine. Brand himself had become, since Saturday, an invalid, racked with pain, and weak with loss of blood. But business went on as usual, with all its petty circumstance and detail; the great machine of journalism ground out, in the ordinary routine, its facts, flippancies, falsehoods, for the use, the beguilement, and the deception of an innumerable public. Locking himself into the office, Brand opened the secret door,

laced some copper wire to and fro across the recess, then connected up the ends thereof to the electric-light circuit. Afterwards he went to work at an editorial, whistling some dismal air he had heard at a funeral. During the day some spy would be sent up the shaft to murder him, who would touch the electrified wires in the recess. To Brand this idea was worse than the pain of his wound ; he was whistling the Dead March in *Saul*.

Once, during the afternoon, he looked up from his work, disturbed by what sounded like a muffled scream, followed, presently, by a dull thud, far away down in the earth. He went on writing, but the music rang in his head ; "slow, sad, severe ; men's sobs and the roar of guns ; soft wailing flutes, and measured roll of drums."

There were tears in the man's eyes ; he could not write any more ; what mockery it was to perpetrate grave columns about the guidance by civilization of barbarous powers, the gentle influences of Christianity in the moonlit Orient, the loosing of the bonds of slavery from the neck of Islam.

May Allah save the East from the sins of the West !

The article had to be botched up somehow ; it was ; and Brand had half the afternoon left to gather up such documents as were likely to be of service. The Fighting Editor felt, in his heart, that treachery to his employer had become a virtue ; so he crammed a valise and his pockets, until his depredations had left the machinery of blackmail stripped, incapable of further mischief. He chuckled to himself when he locked the door behind him, and rang for the lift, which would save him the trouble of the stairways. When the cage came up, he stepped into it ; and the boy was closing the door before descending, when somebody came hurriedly along the passage, beckoning the youngster to wait.

"Go on," said Brand. "What are you waiting for ?"

"It's Mr. Straight," said the boy.

At the same moment the Secretary of the Liberators appeared; but, instead of entering the lift, he defied Brand to come out of it, if he dared, and fight.

Brand came out.

"Now," said Straight, when the trellis door was closed, and the cage gone down to answer a call from below. "Quick, down the stairs if you value your life, but not to the Club. Why? I can't explain; I daren't be seen with you. Meet me at eleven o'clock in Wall Street. There," Straight thrust him towards the stairs, "now, for heaven's sake, go! And at the tenth floor take the back elevator."

So saying, Straight fled for the roof garden, leaving Brand, somewhat weak at the knees, to find his way cautiously out of the death-trap, and into the partial security of lighted streets.

Despite the cold rain and biting wind, at ten o'clock he was in Broadway, watching the bustle of preparation in the premises on the third floor of the Safe Deposit block. The morning mail having brought Colonel Giggleswick a note from the banker, all day he must have been rushing about the city after men, provisions, machinery, furniture, for now everything seemed in an advanced stage of preparation. Brand saw, while he stood there, the arrival of the journalists he had engaged early that morning; blinds were being fitted in the windows; waggons were being unloaded at the door. So, with his heart at ease, he took a car to the foot of Broadway; and, having by one of his ruses shaken off any possible follower, strolled to Wall Street, where, presently, Straight joined him on the stroke of eleven.

Brand laid his hand on Straight's shoulder, leaning somewhat heavily, as they turned their steps down past the Treasury towards a street of office buildings now

closed and deserted for the night. Here, by keeping a sharp look-out, they might safely talk.

"Well, Dick," he said, cheerfully, "have you thought out your plan of campaign?" He was frightened by the loudness of his voice, which seemed to rumble along the glistening wet pavement, to resound from the lofty buildings.

"No," Straight looked up at the giant's tired face, "the brains are in your head, not mine, for your escapes to-day were almost miraculous. Gault is tearing his hair."

"Hush," whispered Brand, "speak lower."

Straight's voice sank to a murmur. "He's all right as to the man who fell down the shaft, for even if the body is found at the outfall of the sewers it won't be recognized—Gault knows his business. He's rather relieved, too, that you were not killed before leaving the building, because in the streets an act of revenge for your performances as Fighting Editor will be so much more plausible. But, Brand, this is very serious, your row with the Colonel—can't you patch it up somehow?"

"What does the old gentleman say?" was Brand's grave comment.

"Irreconcilable—why, he's furious! He says that in all his life he never cherished a rattlesnake in his bosom, but it turned and rent him; besides, the Upas blight of your ingratitude has flooded his soul with woe. He didn't explain exactly how you'd arranged that, but the whole Club was awed."

Brand laughed aloud. "And did he talk electric cookery?"

"My dear fellow, he nearly talked us to death."

"That's all right, he's found time anyway to obey my orders. This is the plan of campaign."

So Brand explained all that had happened since their

Saturday meeting, ending with a plaintive comment upon the general situation. "Look here, Dick, what's the use of being boss of a large electric-cookery outfit, tenant of a swell suite of offices on Broadway, commander-in-chief of six cowpunchers, six compositors, two journalists, foreman, cook, and cook's devil, laundryman, not to mention something more than a mere military Colonel—and yet I daren't show my nose inside the door! Here are my pockets and this valise stuffed with papers I've stolen from the office, which I can't carry about and daren't leave anywhere. How on earth shall I send them to the Colonel?"

"There are all the Alarm Doctors at your service. Little Johnson, for instance, belongs to the Club."

"Do you know any of Johnson's patients?"

"Father Jared pays the little man a monthly salary to attend his poor. Give me the papers, Brand, we've got an 'underground railroad' now such as Gault will never discover."

Brand transferred his load to Straight without further comment; then they two resumed their conversation, pacing up and down the deserted street.

"Look here, old chap," Straight drew Brand's arm within his own; "to-night I've so arranged matters that our meeting is safe; but you must remember that we're still supposed to be enemies, so the less we see of each other the better."

They parted for a minute or two while a belated clerk was hurrying towards Brooklyn Bridge; then joined company again, standing so that one could look up, the other down, the street.

"If we are discovered in company the childish trustfulness of the Liberators is gone, I shall have to skip the country, and you'd better say your prayers. It's only as avowed enemies that you, the Colonel, and I can

succeed in this game ; while all the forces of society are against us. I have been waiting so many years for this chance that I'm terrified lest any imprudence should put our enemies on their guard ; yet I have much to tell you that's too important to leave unsaid. You see now how hopeless it would have been for me to use any ordinary weapons against the Liberators. At present the Home Office is in despair ; so I must act for England as though I were alone, taking all the responsibility, because you see the interference of a headless, tailless, bungling Department of State would be certainly fatal. Publicity is the weapon I have always longed to handle, a sudden blaze of light before which the Liberators will melt away like a shadow. Secrecy is their power ; if the public knew their methods, their personal frailty, their wickedness, their incapacity, there would be no subscriptions of money to steal, no secret support by politicians who value their influence, no toleration by the Press—they would be hunted like wolves."

Straight paused to light a cigarette, then continued—

"Brand, the immediate results will be frightful, a commercial panic, which will involve millions of people ; but the disease cannot be cured with half measures, and after the cataclysm this poor old world will be wiser, healthier, cleaner, brave as ever to face the problems of the future. It will take me a week, Brand, to prepare my screed about Gault ; the Colonel will need quite a few days to set it in type ; and, meanwhile, I want you to be as circumspect as a shop-litter. Take no steps to communicate either with me or with the Colonel ; do nothing but guard your own life—which, I can assure you, will need all your power. Take the swimmer's advice, keep the talking end out of the water, because the Colonel and you, Brand, will need more than the nine lives of a cat."

"I guess if Gault knew it," said Brand, with a grim chuckle, "he runs a bigger risk than I do."

"Don't interrupt me, old fellow, I must get away from here before we're caught talking. To-day Gault sent for me to say that these idiotic Liberators are suspicious as to my loyalty. He told me that I must remove their doubts by hunting down the man who had been trespassing in the lodge-room of the Council. I objected, telling him plainly I was a secretary, not an assassin; to which he replied that out of consideration for my feelings he had made all necessary arrangements for your removal as a dangerous enemy of Irish liberty. 'If,' he continued, 'Haraldson is alive to-morrow you will be called upon, Mr. Straight, to prove your more than doubtful loyalty. I'll see he does not leave his work until after dusk; you will have him shot down the moment that he reaches the street; your men will then scatter, and if any of them are captured, I pledge my word that they shall not be dealt with by the law.'

"Now, Brand, I've warned you fairly that I shall have a gang of my blackguards to murder you when you leave the office to-morrow night. You know the back-door by which you escaped on Saturday—the one between the stereo-room and press-room in the basement? I'll forget about that. All right, old fellow, the day after to-morrow—I'll try and arrange an appointment. Meanwhile, take care that you don't sleep two nights running at the same hotel. Good-night. Oh, stay—I forgot—have you any firearms on you?"

"A revolver," said Brand. "Why?"

"Then give it to me."

Brand gave it to him.

"If Gault's men catch you producing a weapon for self-defence, they'll accuse you of assault with intent to kill—which means a long sentence—and you'll be in

gaol at the moment when everything depends upon your freedom. Promise me to carry no weapons."

"Right," Brand chuckled. "I'll use my fists all the more freely—good-night."

"Mind, though, not too freely."

So they shook hands and parted.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE HORRORS OF WAR

WHEN Brand came down the stairways on Wednesday evening, thanks to Straight's warning, he had no idea of going out by the front door to be shot down as soon as he gained the street; but as he crossed the vestibule to gain the basement stairs, the tune he was whistling was cut short at the very top note, for just at the corner of the lift entrance he met Mr. Gault face to face.

What on earth could the Boss be doing here?

"Good-evening," said Mr. Gault, smiling at Brand's evident surprise; "you're late leaving your work."

"Seems to me," replied Brand roughly, "that you're late too. Dr. Clewston must be waiting for you."

"He can wait. I want to speak with you, Mr. Haraldson. Come this way."

Brand followed into the *Avenger* Enquiries Office, now deserted for the night, and there Mr. Gault turned on the lights, asking his visitor to be seated, while, thrusting his hat back on his head, he leant against the public counter, nervously tracing patterns on the oilcloth with the ferrule of his umbrella. Maybe, there were moments when even Napoleon the Great forgot to pose.

Brand took off his hat, and sat down on a bench opposite, within easy reach of the door. He was in

terrible pain, for the wound in his shoulder always became troublesome at sundown; indeed, what little sleep he had enjoyed these last few nights was arranged for him by a druggist.

"Mr. Haraldson," said the great man with a gentleness of voice and manner that astonished Brand, "this is a most pitiful business."

"It is—for some people."

"I mean for you. I suppose, Mr. Haraldson, that, as the world judges, I must be a very bad man." He stood erect, his eyes dreaming, his face changed. "My contemporaries weigh me in their tiny scales, not seeing the necessities of despotism; but a hundred years hence, looking back upon the true perspective of history, people will realize how expedient my life-work was. Armed war produced all former conquerors; Industrial Individualism has its ultimate development in me; and after me, Christian Altruism will produce one more, mighty enough to set his heel upon my head. Christianity found the many politically slaves of the few; to-day the many are industrially slaves of the few; very soon all men shall be free. And I look for the supreme genius of the morrow, who shall break the chains of mankind."

For a moment Brand sat thinking. "This is too high falutin," he said, "for a plain man like me; but, if it eases your mind, go on."

Mr. Gault, with an impatient gesture, continued speaking. "There is one more point, Mr. Haraldson, that I should like to mention. You referred the other night to an attempt made some years ago against the life of Mr. Michael Gault." He looked up, and fastened his gaze upon Brand. "Will you believe me if I assure you that a dreadful mistake was made? I am not inclined"—he spoke haughtily—"to explain the hostility then existing between Michael Gault—and the wrecker,

but had Miss Gault's presence in that train been suspected, no attack would have been made—at the time."

"I think better of you for that," said Brand cordially, "but why apologize to me?"

Gault drew himself up. "I make no apologies," he said; "but your fighting is so magnificent, Mr. Haraldson, that I am anxious to treat you with consideration. Duels are not the less deadly for their punctilio."

Brand laughed. "Any more confessions? I want my supper."

"I think, Mr. Haraldson, that you won't require any. I only detained you because my arrangements were not complete for your demise. There is a deputation from the Liberators waiting for you outside; but I found that, owing to the deliberate disobedience of one of my secretaries, there were no men guarding the back door or posted to intercept you by the shaft. I must beg you to excuse the omission."

Brand had become very white; for a moment he was concerned lest Gault should discover his terror; but the next words of his enemy made him so angry that he forgot to be frightened.

"Mr. Haraldson, isn't it time for you to surrender? Because you have profited by two or three almost miraculous escapes, you cannot suppose it possible to survive always. Have you any weapons to fight such power as mine? Deserted by your supposed friend, Straight, also by that ridiculous Colonel; alone, without allies, except an absurd little preacher, without wealth, without influence, how can you possibly overthrow me? Come, accept my mercy, freely offered to a brave but vanquished opponent. I offer you your life, your liberty, all the money you want, if you will accept a mere banishment."

"Phew!" Brand mopped his face with a handkerchief. "This room is stuffy—let's go outside."

"My car is waiting at the door. Come down to the pavement, Mr. Haraldson. I have only to raise my hand as a signal and you go free. Will you come?"

"To the door of your car," said Brand, "but you needn't raise your hand unless I tell you."

Gault hesitated. "No treachery?"

Brand laughed. "What chance should I have with a New York jury if I murdered the great philanthropist?"

Brand opened the door for his adversary, and followed him closely through the vestibule. Mr. Gault held open the swinging glass door that led to the street, Brand acknowledging the courtesy with a bow. There across the glistening wet pavement was Gault's closed car, the chauffeur in his seat, the footman at the door, and on either hand were little groups of men barring the sidewalk, evidently the Liberators awaiting Mr. Gault's signal to attack. The night was raw with blustering wind and rain.

"Mr. Gault," said Brand, "send away that flunkey."

The footman, offended, strode off and mounted the box.

"Mr. Gault," Brand spoke in a very low tone, "get in out of the rain. I'll shut the door for you—don't lift your hand until I ask your mercy."

Mr. Gault got into the car, grasping a revolver in his overcoat pocket for fear of treachery.

"Drive Mr. Gault home," cried Brand to the chauffeur; then, instead of closing the door, he jumped into the car as it moved off, and flung his arm round his adversary with a great hug lest he should attempt to draw a weapon.

The Liberators, expecting Gault to drive away leaving Brand on the pavement, hung back astounded

—for their chance was gone. They could not fire now without risking the life of their own master.

“Mr. Gault,” Brand whispered, “we’ll die together.”

Mr. Gault bit his lip, but he could not help laughing.

“The ruse was clever,” he said. Then, turning to a man who ran beside the carriage, he gave a sharp order. “Follow!”

The man shouted to the chauffeur and fell back.

Already they were in Broadway, on either side the lighted offices, and the electric arcs sizzling blue over dodging, dripping umbrellas of crowds of passengers.

“Give up your weapon,” said Brand.

“Certainly,” was the reply. “It would not pay me to shoot you before witnesses. There’s a revolver in my left pocket.”

Brand released Mr. Gault, seized the revolver, and, remembering Straight’s warning not to commit himself by carrying one, stuffed it behind the cushions of the seat. He looked out, his hand ready on the door-latch, until he saw a policeman, one of the forty burly giants of the Broadway Squad. Then he yelled so that in astonishment the chauffeur stopped.

“Help! Help! They’re trying to murder Mr. Marshall Gault.” He leaped out of the carriage, then rushing at the constable, seized him by the shoulder. A gust of wind seemed to sweep his words abroad. “Protect Mr. Gault!” he cried, “till I bring assistance.”

There was a sharp report, and Brand felt a bullet whistle through his hair, then another shot shattered an electric-light globe overhead.

The policeman swung round aghast, but Brand was gone, had butted through the crowd into a store—through it like a flash, and out into the street beyond, followed by a confused rabble of people. Straight was already calling off his Liberators. If they shot Brand now, he

explained, they need expect no mercy from the boss. At the street corner there was a police station ; and to this Brand ran, splashing up the puddles with the crowd at his heels.

"Rouse out!" he yelled, as he burst into the office, "they're assaulting Marshall Gault on Broadway!"

"Is that so?" The sergeant-in-charge started from his desk.

"I guess he's right," gasped a breathless citizen, who had distanced the rest in pursuit

"Take your men quick!" Brand sank exhausted on to a bench. "I'll follow in a moment. Look here, I'm wounded. These others will show you the way."

In a moment the station was deserted ; and Brand, staggering feebly out at the door, made his way through back alleys, mile after mile it seemed, before he gained the overhead railroad. How he got up the stairs he never knew, for the forgotten wound in his shoulder burst open, and already his strength was rapidly ebbing. His last memory was being helped by a conductor to board an up-town train. "The nearest hospital," he moaned, and fell senseless.

* * * * *

"Put her into the Round House, Jim. She jumped it like a bird—killed Matt Fortescue though—her fifth man. So long, Jim—guess I'm to be the next. Be good to her."

Brand opened his eyes to find a woman bending over him. "What, you here! Oh, you're only—I—thought——"

He could not say another word, for he felt sick, horribly sick.

"Oh, there's no fear," the night nurse was speaking to two porters ; "it's only the chloroform."

The men went away with the empty stretcher, protesting that they would have preferred an elephant to carry.

The nurse was about the bed, and Brand liked the cool flutter of her dress.

"Say," he whispered; "nurse!"

"Lie still," was the gentle answer; "you'll be better presently." She was won by Brand's comeliness.

"It's gone off. I thought I'd be sick. I want to talk. I'll be quite good, nurse. Can you send a message to my friends? They don't know about this."

The nurse sat down in a chair by the bed. "Who to? I'll write a note if you like."

"Thank you. I thought at first you were my own girl—you've eyes like hers, nurse. Call up Nisted, 780 — Avenue. Tell him Haraldson wants him."

He could hear the scribble of a pencil on paper.

"Thank you," he muttered, "I'm sleepy."

* * * * *

The house-surgeon was sitting by the bed when Brand woke up. He looked at the smug, swarthy, blackavised man, disliked, distrusted him, closed his eyes to shut out the sight of him.

"Well, Number Four, when did you get that wound?"

"Saturday."

The surgeon noted the fact. "How were you wounded?"

"Sharpening a pencil."

"All right, Number Four. I'll see you in the morning. Nurse, do you know his name? I never saw such a magnificent animal. I wonder what he can lift when he's in training?"

"I couldn't lift your cheek," said Brand, wrathfully.

"Humph—he'll do, nurse. What did you say his name is?"

"Mr. Brand Haraldson," answered the nurse.

"What, the Fighting Editor from the Wild West? Say, Mr. Haraldson," the surgeon became polite all of a sudden, "anything I can do for you?"

"Yes," said Brand, "leave me alone."

* * * * *

"Well, how's Number Four?"

Brand woke up with a start, rubbed his eyes, and opened them upon a large hospital ward. A flurry of autumnal snow had drifted against the windows during the morning, but the sashes were double, the air was warm, the place was cheerful with growing plants and flowers. The patients were silent now that the house-surgeon was making his morning visit; burly men who had just stopped growling about not being allowed to smoke, and small men who had been pleading with the nurses for more breakfast. Only one or two, half immersed in "cradles" or stiff with splints, lay groaning; indeed, with few exceptions, these "surgical cases" were much less to be pitied than the overworked nurses who attended them.

Brand snuggled his chin, all bristly for want of a shave, in the delicious clean sheets; and, with something of his boyishness come back began to chaff the blackvised surgeon.

"Number Four, eh? Do you know, doc., that there's a store down town where they sell manners?"

"Come, none of your lip;" the surgeon grinned. "How's his temperature, nurse? Going up, eh! Well, we must see to this. I guess I'll dress him."

But even while he was consulting a chart that hung over the bed a porter came to him with a visiting card.

"Hullo, Mr. Fighting Editor, your 'boss' wants to see me. I'd better go down—some arrangement for your comfort, I guess."

"Yes," Brand's eyes contracted with thought, "for my comfort!"

Now that the surgeon was gone, a hum of conversation pervaded the ward, and the nurse moved away to attend another patient.

"For my comfort," he was thinking. "And here am I waiting the butcher's convenience like a sheep." For half-an-hour or so he lay brooding. "At least," he concluded, "I'm game for the last fight."

They say that the spirit of a murdered man is earth-bound. Perhaps in the ruin of Brand's ambition there lay this one consolation that after death the work might be fulfilled in dreadful vengeance on his Master's enemy. And so this brave man waited in perfect faith for the end.

No earthly aid could come, all that seemed past; but what does life matter, after all, to the great spirits ready for service in this world or the next? So, when the house-surgeon came back, Brand greeted him—as he had greeted that other death last night, or any danger in times past—with the confident laugh of a man, the grace of a gentleman. He saw that the surgeon had brought instruments; he knew why. What a cur the thing was to murder a helpless man in his bed, protected by the sanctity of the profession, armed with weapons more sure, more deadly, than the sword.

"Well," said Brand, scanning the man's smug face with ill-concealed contempt. "I guess the boss is scared as to my fate?"

"He was until I reassured him." The surgeon's laugh had a sinister sound for Brand. "He says you got wounded trying to save his life. Last night you

protected him again with," the surgeon smiled, "'a zeal which outran your discretion'; but he's real glad that you're safe."

Brand was amused at this, for he had left his enemy in a curious dilemma; since, either Mr. Gault must repudiate his story, and explain why the Fighting Editor had been shot at on leaving the carriage, or he must, accepting the lie for his own, confess to having enemies daring enough to attack in the public streets. Certainly, Brand's explanation was expedient; for, if Gault's trusted servant was so faithful, the murder could be safely done, then safely mourned, amid the commiseration of Gotham.

The outlook was bad for Brand, with this surgeon, instructed by the great philanthropist as to his safety. He began talking against time—

"Say, doctor, what did the boss say about that business last night? Was there any attack?"

"Attack? No, of course not. Why, after you were shot at, Mr. Gault was escorted home to his club by a posse of police and ten thousand citizens. You should see the morning papers; why, they're just crazy about it. You're the hero of the day."

"What about that big swindle case? Yesterday we heard of nothing else. I wrote a screed myself in the *Avenger*."

"Out of sight; plumb forgotten. But come," he turned to his attendant, "I'll dress this case, nurse."

"Hold on a minute, doc. How long will it be before I'm fixed up for business?"

"That depends." The surgeon began to cut loose the bandages from Brand's shoulder.

"Say, doc., do you know your necktie's all crooked?"

"That's bunkum; turn over a little. I want to take off this——"

Brand rolled flat on his back. "Suppose I refuse, doctor?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, doctor, that if you take off that bandage the blood will spurt worse than last night."

"Nonsense. Come, you've got to obey orders."

"Suppose I don't."

"Then—out you go into the street."

"That's all right, doctor; fetch your ambulance."

The doctor became sarcastic.

"I guess you know more about surgery than I do."

"I guess," Brand spoke almost in a whisper, "I know considerable more about crime." So saying, he made the sign of the Liberators, at which the surgeon's face became set.

"Do you know what happens in Sing-Sing to doctors guilty of criminal malpractice? Did you ever hear tell of electrocution?"

The surgeon rallied in desperation. "By —, if you say another word, sir, I'll have you fired out of doors this instant. Will you submit to the regulations, or will you not?"

"I tell you I'll leave the hospital."

"You shall when it's safe to move you."

So there was no escape.

Brand looked up and down the ward. Yes, he must submit.

"Come," said the surgeon, roughly; "must I use force?"

The door swung open; a gentleman, attended by two nurses, entered the ward—a member of the Reformers' Club, Dr. Schmitt, honorary surgeon for the week, a director of the hospital. Help had come at last.

"Well?" said the house-surgeon.

"Go to the devil!" cried Brand.

The surgeon, with a growl, rose from his chair; and, starting to bring the porters who would compel obedience, met Dr. Schmitt face to face.

"A mutinous patient," he cried. "I've been insulted." So he launched into a storm of invective and protest.

Now Brand, seeing that all eyes were fixed upon the two doctors, snatched away the set of instruments, hiding them in the bed.

"What's this?" Dr. Schmitt came and sat down in the chair by the bedside. "My dear Mr. Haraldson, I'm sorry to see you in this plight; but why defy our hospital regulations? Dr. O'Brien tells me that——"

"My instruments!" cried Dr. O'Brien. "He's a thief; he's stolen my instruments!"

Dr. Schmitt rose from the chair. "Mr. O'Brien, as a director of this hospital, I must beg you to restrain yourself. Such language to a patient is really unpardonable."

"But my instruments; they were on the bed!"

"Mr. O'Brien, you will retire; and do not re-enter this ward until you can control your temper."

"Curse you! The curse of —— on you!"

So saying, the Irishman turned on his heel, and went down the ward muttering. At the door he looked back to fling at Brand some fearful anathema; then, thrusting a nurse out of his way, went out.

Dr. Schmitt mopped his face with a handkerchief.

"What does this mean, Mr. Haraldson?"

"Sit down, doctor; now draw up close, so that no one can overhear me. Do you remember what I undertook at the club?"

"About Clewston?"

"Yes. I am at war with Rex Clewston—come nearer—Clewston is Marshall Gault!"

"Impossible!"

"On Saturday he stabbed me. Last night he set

the Liberators to murder me ; you saw it in the morning papers ? ”

“ But—— ”

“ A different version, eh ? Mine is the truth. I escaped again ; but the wound opened, so I was brought here. Mr. Clewston-Gault has just called ; told the surgeon to see to my comfort. Wasn't he considerate ? ”

“ But surely Mr. O'Brien—— ”

“ Is a member of the Liberators. I made their sign when I refused to let him touch me. He knew the sign ; but, like a fool, tried to bluster. When he went to you, I hid his instruments in the bed ; here they are for you to have examined. I guess they're poisoned, or he wouldn't have made all that fuss. ”

“ This is horrible, horrible ! ”

“ Isn't there some poison he could put into my wound that would make it worse ? I've heard tell of criminal malpractice. ”

“ Yes, ” Dr. Schmitt fell to pondering ; “ there are micro-organisms—septicæmia, or, still more horrible, septæmia. Only, except in a neglected wound, they would cause suspicion. ”

“ Mine is a neglected wound. ”

“ I'll have this tested ; give me the instruments. ”

“ Here you are ! ” Brand delivered up his spoil. “ But I've not done. Mr. Clewston-Gault daren't let me live, especially after this ; he'll use poison, I know the gentleman too well to doubt. Nothing can save me if I stay in a public hospital ; so I must be where I can test my food on a dog before I eat any. ”

“ Nonsense ! ”

“ I want to be fired out for a mutinous patient. ”

“ But where can you go ? ”

“ To the Club ; although I'd hate to have Father Jared mixed up in this. ”

"I have it," said Dr. Schmitt. "Since, with these absurd notions in your head, you will never get well, I'll have you expelled," he clasped the patient's hand; "and my home is at your service."

So ended the hospital experience of House-Surgeon O'Brien, who is supposed to have migrated to the Western States.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MOBILIZING

WHEN Brand had sent the police to the rescue of Mr. Gault, he would hardly have escaped the gang of men assembling, but that Straight called them off to a neighbouring saloon, where he explained that, having roused the whole city, they had better disperse to their homes. If any of them were caught, he said, assaulting the fugitive, the Boss was hardly in a position now to shield them from the law. He himself, unable to trace Brand, returned to the Club, where he made some pretence of going to roost.

At midnight he called at Father Jared's room, found the priest in bed, but sleepless, and proceeded to give him an hour's entertainment, which resulted in a prolonged bout of prayer and insomnia. Cautiously, little by little, he unfolded the mystery of the Cyclone Explosives Syndicate, his secretaryship of the Liberators, his secret connection with the British Government.

"I knew of the secretaryship," said the priest, "yes, long ago. Brand told me. But I didn't know," he clasped Straight's hand, "that you were serving my country."

"You knew me as your country's enemy? And yet to Christianity such as yours it made no difference!"

"None whatever, Dick."

"Ab, sir, I've always felt a cowardly sneak thrusting

myself upon you. A man who does my work profanes the company of good men. I—I'll go away."

"Sit down, Dick. I was only sorry that you should have known me so long, yet never trusted me."

"Father, for twenty years I have led this double life. I should have been shot in the first week if I had not held my tongue. You don't despise me?"

"Who am I that I should judge! But now you must give me your whole confidence. Trust me, and go on with your story."

So Straight told Father Jared how "Dr. Clewston" was Marshall Gault in disguise; he related the tragedy of the train-wrecking; the story of the fall of the King Line; the price that Miss Hilda had paid for the sake of her poor; her present peril as Gault's affianced wife. And, as he poured out revelation upon revelation he saw how the priest was moved, he knew what a faithful ally he was winning for the quest of Miss Hilda's rescue, for the campaign against this visionary—this King of the New World. So he spoke of Gault's panic methods of attack, of Brand's plan, the Colonel's cooperation, his own enthusiasm.

"Look here," he said angrily, producing a letter received that day from London, "the Home Office has sacked me from the service for incompetence in not preventing, at all hazards, the loss of our Transatlantic trade. Ah, well, I am a free man now, safe from their blundering officialdom. We'll show them how to fight—Brand, the Colonel, and I."

"And I," said the priest soberly. "Why have you left me out? Am I so old, so useless, that I am not to be allowed to strike one blow?"

"No, Father, not that; but we have kept you out of danger until now because it would be a poor campaign that risked the general's life in the first skirmishing."

The compliment was deftly administered.

"We want you to take command."

The priest was irritated. "Words, man, words—slighting words at that. So I am to carry the bâton, and parade the cocked hat while you do the fighting."

"I run the attack upon the Liberators, the Colonel is preparing our weapons, Brand is to lead the assault; but we three are supposed to be at mutual enmity; we dare not be seen talking to one another, or caught writing letters. It is only through you that we can keep communications open. So take command."

"Dick," the priest relented, "I'm sorry I spoke like that. Of course, you selfish youngsters claim all the fighting; but I shall find work enough without that. Tell me how I can help."

"Well, first," said Straight cheerfully, "may I smoke? Thank you, sir." He lit a cigarette. "You can call on Brand, because Gault would be suspicious if you kept away; you can send letters to the Colonel through your little friend Thompson, who, as Alarm Doctor, has access to the Safe Deposit block.

"Now, as to the Colonel. Of course, the electric-cookery business is good enough to gull the public, but it's too stupid to blind a man like Gault. So far, his delicate attentions have been bestowed upon Brand, because the Colonel seems to him hardly worth interfering with; but sooner or later, Gault, for want of something better to do, will amuse himself at the expense of our printing works. We must surround the building with guards.

"Observed? Oh, there are plenty of loafers in Broadway, so five, more or less, makes no difference. Of course, it would be fatal to trust the City Police, or any private detectives. Five men on duty with three reliefs makes fifteen; four in barracks for emergencies and one

captain brings the number to twenty. Can you provide so many?"

"I'll call out my Knights Errant, ask twenty volunteers, and you shall have a hundred and fifty to select from."

"I must not appear, sir," said Straight. "Take care that there are no spies in the lobby. Who shall be captain?"

"Old John Baxendale," said the priest, "the man who saved a sinking ferry by plugging the leak with his body is just the kind of captain that my boys will trust."

"And I too. Will he accept two hundred a month?"

"He'll work for love, Dick, but some of our guard will want money to keep themselves."

"I don't want men for love, sir; they must be paid so that we can boss them around. Offer Baxendale two hundred, and the rest a hundred a month."

"But the money, Dick. I haven't a dollar."

"I have," said Straight. "When I was Fighting Editor before Brand came, I was in a position to know where to speculate; made about fifty thousand in the last three months. If we succeed I can do without my savings," he sighed, then pretending it was a yawn, "if we fail, well, I won't need money any more."

The priest frowned, for he disliked this kind of talk. As he once observed to Brand: "If I were a life insurance agent I should choose for my prey the man who croaks on death."

"Father," said Straight, "you think in the Middle Ages—I live there."

"What do you mean, Dick?"

For answer Straight took off his coat, waistcoat, and linen shirt, disclosing underneath these a tunic of chain

mail. "Looks sensational, doesn't it? You dislike this worse than my remark about death. But see here, Father—and here—and here," he pointed out dents in the rings, "these are bullet marks, which I value more than medals. No, it's not steel, but a bronze chilled by one of the new processes, proof against anything short of the latest military rifles. Of course it's too uncomfortable except on occasions like yesterday, but I prefer discomfort to—the other thing. And now"—he sat down again, a queer figure for the opening years of the twentieth century—"I want to explain one other matter. Brand thinks it very bad luck to be lying wounded in hospital when he wants to be out on the rampage; but the truth is that nothing better could have happened. Matters were getting a little strained at the office. Indeed I had been planning an arrangement for getting him out of the way until the time comes for action. Of course he thinks this collapse a fatal disaster."

"That," said the priest, "is natural."

The clock had long ago struck two, it was now inwardly perturbed with its arrangements for striking three, and Straight wondered how long he would take to summon up courage for a matter which must be submitted to the priest.

"I can't sleep these nights," he said, wearily.

Father Jared looked up from the Bible, which he had been pretending to read while he prayed.

"Nor I," was his answer. "This is no time for sleep. It seems almost providential that now when our matter is coming to a crisis, everything points to a pending declaration of war by the whole reform party. The reform papers this morning say that we lack only one element of success—a leader."

Straight laughed ironically. "A leader? We have scores—the follower is the extinct species now-a-days.

The papers are hanging out straws to test the wind, which blows towards Saint Clewston-Gault.

"As to Miss Gault," continued the spy, "you see her avoidance of Brand is invaluable because it keeps her out of mischief until we can strike. The trouble is that she will go and make friends because he's wounded."

"And why not?" said the priest, sternly. "Why keep them apart?"

"You misjudge me, sir!"

"No, I do not misjudge. You love Miss Gault; but, Dick, ever since you made that confession to me, I have felt, without knowing why, that there was an impassable barrier between you two. To-night I know at last what that barrier is; why instinctively she always shrank from you. Be brave, man, England claims no half allegiance of you, she must have all or none. Until Gault and his Liberators are entirely overthrown neither you nor Brand have any right to love, or hope to marry. Face the facts, man—which of you has Hilda chosen?"

Straight hid his face.

"Poor lad, I can't bear to see you tortured. You are the bravest man of all my knights; I am very old, yet have not seen courage like yours on earth; you must not fail us now.

"You need much strength to be loyal to England, and still Brand's faithful friend, even though he has robbed you of all you hoped for in the world."

"Father," the man spoke hurriedly in a broken voice, "again I say you've misjudged me. I don't want to stand between them—I know I'm a beastly coward, but not so bad as that. I must ask you not to let them meet, because if they meet now they never will again; they'll never live to see Gault smashed, because he'll kill them. To save them, keep them apart, and so long as they remain apart we have Gault off his guard."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE DRAGON AT PLAY

HARALDSON had fallen among thieves, or worse, when that good Samaritan, Dr. Schmitt, found him by the wayside of life, and took him to a little paradise called home. The home of Dr. Schmitt in Brooklyn was American in its exquisite cleanness and refinement, his wife was American in her personal beauty, her charm of character, her unquestioned rule over a perfectly ordered household. Her children were American, too, in their independence, their joyous impudence, alert intellect, unconscious loveliness—and of such is the Kingdom of Heaven. As to Mrs. Schmitt's domestic servants, they evidently hailed from the other place.

To the day of his death Haraldson will never forget how kind these people were to him in his suffering.

He was not lonely; rather Dr. Schmitt became anxious because of the too numerous friends whom the patient insisted on seeing—to wit, good old Mrs. Papps from the Club loaded with night-shirts, handkerchiefs, and a thing called a "jell," which the Schmitts furtively destroyed. Mr. Papps came, stealing a brief half-hour from his endless errands, a number of the Club members, and all the *Avenger* staff, particularly the night editor, Brand's ever-faithful ally. Messrs. Vanslyperken and and Schneidam called with flowers sent by their wives, in fact, to his astonishment, Brand found that in six months he had made enough friends for a lifetime.

Every morning, too, came Father Jared ; except when he was receiving friends his day was passed with the children of the house, who thought that he had been invented expressly for their amusement ; all night he slept the sleep of the just. From hour to hour he bore the pain of "healthy granulation," as the doctor called it, seeming to enjoy this as part of the game ; gained strength with every meal ; insisted on "taking exercise" with long walks up and down his room contrary to orders ; in fact, Brand was at once the worst and the best of patients, because he disobeyed orders on general principles, while he got well at a rate which confounded all established rule or precedent in such cases made and provided.

Nothing happened worth noting, since Mr. Gault was evidently disgusted at the clumsiness of mere agents in a matter which required his close personal attention.

Long before he was well, Mr. Haraldson demanded clothes, and, from Mr. Schneidam, an ample supply of pocket-money. Still he was not satisfied ; but must have five quires of quarto paper, pencils, and a writing-board, to play with in default of the children, who had gone out of town with their mother. All the second week he was busy writing ; then, on the sixteenth morning of his illness, Father Jared carried away the manuscript for delivery, per Alarm Doctor express, to Colonel Giggleswick—a complete narrative of Brand's inquiries *in re* Mr. Clewston-Gault.

What with Brand, Straight, the Colonel, and Captain Baxendale's corps of guards, the good old priest was nearly run off his legs ; but still, in the afternoons, would find time to take tea with the least exacting of mortals, Miss Hilda Gault. He had told her everything ; and she, poor soul, lived now in a state of suspense to which

any torture would have been preferable. Rather than excite suspicion, she received Gault's advances with many signs of favour, led him to believe that she was reconciled to her impending marriage, and managed, during a voluntary luncheon at the *Avenger* office, to get the wedding postponed from December 3rd to December 10th, on the plea that her dressmaker would not be ready.

On the 10th of December she was to be married to Mr. Gault ; there could be no further excuses for delay ; she was too brave to endanger her friends by cries for help ; she could not run away, because she was in honour bound to keep the compact made for the sake of her poor. She could not see Brand, because she was supposed to have finally dismissed him on her engagement. Gault's ring was tight upon her finger, and could not be taken off.

While she despaired, the priest was sanguine ; but what hope was there that Brand, lying in bed helpless, could overthrow his tremendous enemy within fifteen days ?

Such hope as had fluttered into existence while the priest was with her, gave place, in his absence, to quiet, confirmed despair. Yet she would, at least, enjoy what little consolation there was to be had in a visit to the hospital, where Brand had been lying after the last fight. The nurses knew her well ; because her perhaps misguided charity had been extended, not to the institutions, or to the patients, but to the neglected ladies who spent their best years slaving in the wards. Hilda had sent easy-chairs for these white slaves to rest in, novels and magazines to amuse them, many little comforts to brighten their lives ; indeed, every hospital in New York was full of friends who loved her. So she received a warm welcome at the institution where Brand had been

an inmate ; and, after a perfunctory call on the matron, was carried away by a score of nurses to their own parlour, where they gave her tea. Of course, they all talked "nineteen to the dozen," entertaining their guest with endless "shop," and all the gossip—how the matron was a tyrannous, spiteful old cat ; what the home sister said when she snubbed the cook ; why the last new "pro." dosed a poor patient with carbolic ; when Nurse Kunz would bring the new house-surgeon up to the scratch.

Hilda felt quite happy for a time ; but, when the talk fell back upon the iniquities of the late house-surgeon, she listened with strained attention. The nurse who had been present on the occasion of the big man's mutiny was put forward to tell her tale, and very shy she was in the presence of the benefactress, having but little experience yet of great town ladies. She would rather have talked of her father's brindled cow, the "coallies," as she called her father's dogs, or the beautiful vineyards on the Niagara River, where she had been "raised," the thousand-dollar team of chestnut roadsters, and all the dear delights of the place called home. Hilda went with her to a bedroom up-stairs, a bare, small attic in the mansard roof, praised the old folks' photographs—such stiff, angular caricatures to admire—and, in due time, her patience was so far rewarded that the little woman forgot to be afraid. What exquisite flowers are "raised" on those homely farms, what shy, sweet maids sent to the cruel cities to be bruised ! Yet it is only in the crowded forest that the great trees grow. And the city lady, always ready to forget her own sorrows in bearing the burdens of others, found that the country maid was fretting about some silly young person of the other sex, who had done something foolish after his kind. Hilda's heart seemed broken past repair, the

maid's was only damaged ; what could be more natural than to send the poor child back to her nursing comforted, refreshed, strengthened by the winning of a great strong friend ? Hilda had no time to ask about Brand's wound ; but perhaps it was better so, since, if she gained an inkling of the truth, the story of Gault's desperate crime, attempted against a sick man, would have been fearful news to brood over during the last preparations for marriage. Even a brave woman's endurance has its limits.

For two weeks nothing had happened worthy of more than passing mention, only the still air was lurid with distant lightning, men's minds were darkened with forebodings, the shadow of coming events hung dark over the western metropolis. On the Stock Exchange there was uneasiness without apparent cause, rumours ran wild in the market, the most daring speculators were superstitious enough to hedge, prices rose only to suddenly fall, hopes leaped up to die, the sea of human endeavour was troubled. Mr. Gault, looking down from the windows of his office, imagined that his present peace was like the calm of the vortex ; that the cyclone had only reeled away to bend upon its course and strike again. From what quarter of the compass would it fall—how was the peril to be met ? In some indefinable way he supposed that the recent tempest had affected his power ; that the chains of his authority were loosening ; that acquaintances were falling away, satellites flaunting brave airs of independence. The lonely man was more alone than ever—who, with all his gigantic power could not win a decent woman's love or a man's friendship ; but somehow his very solitude invested him with a certain majesty. Of course, it is very wicked to set up as a demi-god—the paths of Tamarlane and Alaric are strewn with corpses—but Gault was not

bloody, as conquerors go, he was above the stage accessories of empire, the tawdry, gore-stained properties of Old World usurpers. There was a certain divinity that hedged this king who reigned unrecognized, unknown, grim, strong, infernal, a master of men by force of genius.

Hilda had left him after luncheon ; he felt lonely now—he wanted to amuse himself for once. Human souls were his toys, too fragile most of them—who was there for an hour's sport, game enough to be diverting? He went down to the eighth floor, and called on Dick Straight of the Liberators.

The suave man received him with just a lifting of one eyebrow, by way of astonishment at this unprecedented event. What did Gault want? What devilry possessed him now?

The great man accepted a chair, he actually condescended to select a cigar. "Hope I'm not disturbing you, Mr. Straight?"

"By no means." Straight sat down at his desk, a curious smile curling his thin lips, while with his long white fingers he began to play with the lid of an inkstand in front of him. "It is a great honour, sir, for you to call on me!"

As Mr. Gault lighted his cigar very carefully, and as he put the smoking match into an ash-tray, his heavy jaws were relaxed with an unusually amiable smile.

"Mr. Straight," he said with much suavity, "you will perhaps remember the day when you left my Fighting Editorship for the dull grind of the Cyclone Explosives' Secretariat."

"A matter," suggested Straight, "concerning"—he fiddled with the inkstand, "Mr. Haraldson, I think?"

"Yes. I suggested, if you remember, that he should be subjected to certain moral tests."

"In fact corrupted, until you could use him as your tool."

"Quite so."

"For which service you offered twenty thousand dollars?"

"Although one would think, Mr. Straight, that the consideration is a mere bagatelle, not worthy of your gracious acceptance."

Mr. Straight poised the inkstand between finger and thumb, as though weighing it; at which the great man became irritable.

"For goodness' sake," he growled, "stop fiddling."

"Forgive me," said Straight, "I'm so sorry I annoyed you." He went on fiddling. "You will remember that some time ago I told you, sir, that I had by my first endeavour excited so much suspicion—I was careless—that Mr. Haraldson refused any further dealings with me. Two weeks ago, after he discovered the ventilator shaft, I—assisted by our men and following your explicit directions—made an attempt upon his life, which failed."

"Because," said Mr. Gault, blandly, "at the one moment, near the police station, when he was in your power you suddenly drew off your forces."

"Certainly. Since you had by that time accepted my pursuit of Mr. Haraldson as directed against you, any further attempt meant capital punishment for me. The consideration was to be in cash—not electrocution."

Mr. Gault bowed. "I am deeply touched, Mr. Straight, by this expression of your confidence in my good faith."

"Thank you, sir, don't mention it"—he put down the inkstand to roll and light a cigarette. "On that occasion I saved his life; now to be frank, it was his discovery of my connection with the Liberators—an accident—which had made him my enemy. By saving his life I made

him my friend again, and he now," Straight smiled, "has the utmost confidence in me. You will remember that my original instructions were to prove myself his friend, then at some critical moment to break his heart with my personal treachery."

"Well?"

"I am about to do so."

"How?"

"That, sir, I will explain, but first I must remind you that my motive is hard cash. I have made fifty thousand dollars by speculation while I have been in your service. I want more in order to retire from this Liberator business, which is too risky. I have a fancy for South Africa. Now twenty thousand would be useful; but I think this matter might be better arranged. Of course, you are aware that Colonel Giggleswick, with all his pretended hostility to Haraldson, is actually his servant."

"Eh?"

"Is actually his servant, paid to set up type for a pamphlet to be published, laying bare the secret motives and methods of the *Avenger*."

"Of course."

"Your present methods of attack are ridiculed by both Haraldson and the Colonel. You are playing into their hands."

"Thanks. What do you suggest?"

"To suspend the work. My charge will be one hundred thousand."

"Indeed. What are your plans?"

"Is my service as their trusted friend and counsellor worth the money?"

"It is. You say you fancy South Africa? A good country—a very good country."

"Well, as to my plans—first, on behalf of the Colonel.

Do you know anything about the 'Dark and Secret Band of Firebugs'?"

Gault smiled.

"I've heard of them."

"Some of their methods of arson are very clever."

"You want to try them on the Colonel?"

"What do you think, sir?"

"Hum!"

"And as to Haraldson; you are especially desirous, Mr. Gault, that Mr. Haraldson should not be present on the 3rd of December next?"

"As to that, my marriage is postponed until December 10th, but you guess my wishes exactly."

Straight smiled with an upward glance of his deep eyes.

"The day after to-morrow, that is the 27th instant, the Giant liner *Goliah* sails for Europe. On board of her we have placed an infernal machine of the new design, for a practical test in view of the intended destruction of all British shipping that passes the Suez Canal."

He spoke slowly, incisively.

"Lower your voice," said Mr. Gault.

Straight leaned forward. "Suppose," he said, "that I send Mr. Haraldson as a passenger by the *Goliah*?"

"But how? He distrusts you, surely."

"Suppose that Mr. Haraldson were to hear of Miss Gault's departure for Europe?"

"He would no more believe your story than I do. It's too thin, Mr. Straight. Besides, leaving on the 25th for Liverpool, he could be back in New York by the 10th."

"If he survives," said Straight. "Meanwhile, Mr. Haraldson, being your rival," he sneered, "naturally believes that she hates you—expects her to run away."

"You have been indicating as much?"

"I have."

"Ingenious—very ingenious. Mr. Straight, you will place me under a lasting obligation."

Thus Mr. Gault enjoyed his hour's diversion with a human soul.

CHAPTER XXX

THE DRAGON'S VICTORY

BRAND was asleep; deep in the dreamless rest that comes before the dawn; about as hard to awake as living man could be; utterly oblivious of the little pebbles that from time to time rattled against the window. It was only when a larger stone shattered the glass that he awakened with a start, sat up in bed, felt the keen winter wind streaming into the room, and dimly realized that something had gone wrong. Throwing the quilt about his shoulders he got up to examine the broken pane, stumbled upon a stone, at which he swore, came near cutting his bare feet with broken glass, raised the sash and leant out, to enquire of the elements generally what the deuce was the matter.

"Whist!" came a rich whisper from the garden. "Hope I ain't disthurbing you, sorr, but the first pebbles was too small, your honour—the last was the laste bit too cumbersome. Are ye wakin', Mr. Haraldson?"

"Who the devil are you?"

"It's me, sorr—lastewise Larry Byrne that's spaking to ye—with a letter from Mr. Straight if ye'll jist come down to the door—and whist, or ye'll be wakin' the house entirely."

"I'll come down," said Brand. So closing the window

he dressed hurriedly and descended the echoing stairways. As it happened Dr. Schmitt was away watching by the bedside of a friend; his son was in the back room fast asleep, the servants up in the attic dreaming it was time for the alarm clock. Brand opened the front door an inch or so on the chain and looked out cautiously, fearing treachery. Outside there was a porch, from whence there could be seen nothing save rain and windy darkness, except where the east was just chilled with the grey of dawn.

"Where are you, Larry?"

"Here, sorr, and this"—a letter was thrust in through the opening—"from Mr. Straight, marked 'immediate, wid haste.'"

"24th November, 190—.

"DEAR BRAND,—Can you trust me absolutely? A plot has been concocted to decoy you on board the *Goliah*, which leaves to-morrow before noon for Liverpool. If you refuse to go nothing can save me, if you consent all will be well for both of us. Larry Byrne, who bears this note, will tell you the rest. Take passage as John G. Richardson, and trust me. To leave the ship before she sails will be suicide.

"Yours in perfect good faith,

"RICHARD STRAIGHT."

"Av ye plaze, sorr," Larry broke in. "I've an illigant carriage in the strate, and will ye be plazed, says Mither Straight, to come quick, because the ship is laving first thing in the morning."

"Let her lave then," said Brand, glaring at the messenger with no little suspicion. Then he looked towards the dimly glimmering lamps of a carriage drawn up outside the gate. "What's your news?"

"Only, sorr, that Miss Gault has been kidnapped overnight by the 'boss,' and she's aboard the *Goliah* that's clearing for Liverpool at the flood. Ye should have axed me that first to save time, sorr, but if ye stand talkin', sorra bit of stamer ye'll catch at all."

"Can I trust Straight?" Brand was wondering. "Yes—absolutely, for if he is true all goes well, and if he fails the game is at an end." He felt his clothes. Yes, he had money in his pocket, so that was all right. He scribbled a note for Dr. Schmitt, which he left in the hall. Dressed in a suit of grey tweed that, since his wound, hung loose as though rigged on a towel-horse, a cloth cap, slippers, and the collar of his night-shirt by way of adornment, he came out into the wintry night, shut the front door behind him, and departed for Europe.

"Larry, you imp," said Brand, when the carriage began to rumble down the street, "why this sudden anxiety for my sake?"

"Sure, sorr, didn't yez let me out of that scrape in Mr. Straight's office?"

"It's more than you deserved, you little blackguard."

"Sure you never let on to Misther Sthraight when I gave the Liberators dead away in his office."

"Well, Larry, I bear no grudges; but if there's any treachery in this business I'll plug you full of holes."

Larry grinned, and for some time there was silence in the carriage.

"Sorr," said Larry, at last, "Mr. Sthraight told me to say to yez that ye must go on board and ax the purser if a passage has been taken for Miss Gault. If her name's on the list ye must secure a berth at once under the name of John G. Richardson."

The day broke as the carriage was climbing the long approaches of the Brooklyn Bridge. Grey and colossal

rose the towers ahead, toward which the cables sprang upwards into thin air; below was the river splashed here and there with lights; beyond the city black against a rainy violet-coloured sky. From the top of the bridge one could see the metropolis ranging away for miles on either hand, and in the midst of it the glare of a burning house.

"Say, Larry, what's that fire?"

"Only the Safety Deposit block," was the indifferent answer; at which Brand lay back in the seat, his hands deep in his pockets, the cap down over his eyes.

So Gault had destroyed his type-setting works at last! After all, what did it matter?—himself exiled, the Colonel burnt out, Gault more powerful than ever. Was Straight's unexplained stratagem some poor forlorn device to save his life now that there was nothing left to hope for?

Nothing matters much—conquerors, like Gault, rise up out of the crowd, do a little mischief or even a little good, then the wheels roll over them, and Time drives on. World-capitals rise up amid the crowd of cities—Babylon, Rome, London, New York, and the next place afterwards; but men will be grubbing for their ruins in ploughed fields—presently. Planets come to their fruition like this earth, or the one before or the one after, bearing humanities, animal, or vegetable, or maybe spiritual, to sin, to be forgiven, then to die in their sin. Celestial clouds float by in the great darkness, condensing into stars countless as rain-drops, only to burn out and dry up into wreaths of dust. Perhaps the whole business may be worthy of a line in the Master's day book—probably not. What does it all matter?

Yet for a moment there is something which we all want in our loneliness—love; and Brand loved Hilda Gault. But would she be in the ship?

When he got on board the great steamer, the purser told him that, although Miss Gault had not yet come on board, her name appeared on his list of passengers. As Mr. Richardson he booked a first-class passage for Liverpool.

"Mr. John G. Richardson?" asked the purser.

Brand glanced at his letter.

"I guess so."

He was turning away.

"Your change?" said the purser, shifting wearily at his desk.

"Much obliged." Brand pocketed the money. "I'd forgotten."

"Will you be shown to your berth? Any instructions as to luggage?" The purser yawned sleepily, for he had worked all night.

"Luggage?" said Brand, absently; "what's luggage?" The word was new to him. "Oh, you mean baggage; yes, mine's following. Berth? I'm busy now—I'll come back." He turned to Larry. "Now, imp, take me where I can sit down and watch the people arriving."

"Right amidships, sorr, on the hurricane deck. Ye can see the gangway from there, plain as me face."

The Irish sailor led, Brand following up a gorgeously-appointed stairway, and through a gallery overlooking the dining-room. Above was a dome of stained glass; below, among the tables, sat cheerful passengers comforting forlorn groups of their friends. Here there was peace; but all the stairs and gangways of this floating hotel swarmed with stewards carrying portmanteaux, deck-chairs, rugs; bewildered people asking silly questions, bored officers resenting the inquisition; women crying, right in everybody's way; while the air was filled with a babel of advice about sea-sickness, farewells, messages, and frantic mourning over

effects mislaid. But, at last, Brand was conducted to the comparative quietude of the smoking-room, where a few hardened travellers waited peaceably for the end ; and there Larry would have the big man rest, while he himself braved the rain and the cold wind, watching arrivals.

Brand looked down at the quaint little sailor man with his merry, greenish grey eyes almost hidden by a peaked officer's cap—his alert ferret-like face half ambushed by the turned-up collar of his pilot jacket. Could he be trusted? No.

"Larry. I may as well have 'luggage,' as that man called it." He took out his pocket-book and jotted down some memoranda ; then, tearing out the leaf, "Take this to a general outfitter—the stores are open by now—and tell him to send a man with a few overcoats to choose from, and these things of the sizes I've noted, in a valise. I'll pay on delivery."

Larry hesitated. "Sure, sorr, I'll be wanting money for a carriage, or it's too late I'll be entoirely." He did not intend to return, but expected a tip for his services.

"Little man," said Brand, "trot along, or you'll be too late to get your pay for this morning's work."

Larry went, grumbling ; and Brand made his way out on the hurricane deck, where he found shelter under the lee of a boat, whence he might watch the gangways for Hilda's coming. The trouble of the past few weeks had made him patient, and yet—and yet. One must needs have courage waiting while Fate dawdles over her loom, weaving slow, indolent shuttles of life and death through the lax warp of Time.

Brand read Straight's letter again—knew by certain marks arranged between them that it was no forgery. No doubt as to his friend's good faith ever entered his mind ; but now that he had time to think, the story of

Miss Gault's supposed abduction seemed more and more absurd. Larry had talked airily, as though in his master's confidence, the purser who had shown him the passenger list might have been instructed to do so; if Gault had really planned kidnapping he would have had the decency to send Barbara, the maid, in attendance; and, above all, Miss Gault had not come on board. As a ruse to decoy him away, the story seemed plausible enough. Who had designed such a ruse? Certainly not Straight, but very possibly Gault. Was Gault at the bottom of this intrigue, with Straight for an unwilling agent?

So for hours Brand stood watching the gangway—waiting, wondering. Despite the partial shelter, he was chilled by the wintry wind, and not a little wet with the occasional gusts of rain. More than one friendly fellow-passenger lounged by, suggesting to him that a cap, a light tweed suit, and slippers was hardly the costume for such a blustering day; and even people at the wharf-shed doors would comment from time to time upon such reckless defiance of the weather. Brand heard little of that—cared nothing; but his wounds were hurting desperately; he could scarcely think, while more than ever it seemed of vital necessity for him to understand what had happened.

At last the ship vibrated to the blast of a steam siren, warning all whom this might concern that the warps would be cast off in thirty minutes. The stewards were busy sending visitors ashore and receiving belated passengers; the wharf men were at their stations awaiting orders; the captain and pilot were gravely pacing the bridge; the ensign fluttered from the head of its staff; the gangways were being hauled down; chains were drawn across the wharf-house doors to keep back the crowd.

Brand realized at last that Straight must have con-

spired with Gault for his removal from the city; yet never thought it possible that his friend could be treacherous. Gault's motive must be to get rid of him; yet, if there was plenty of time for a return voyage from Liverpool before the marriage, Gault evidently intended that he should not return!

Away among the sidings on the water front a yard engine bustled up and down with its clanging bell; beyond was the little shed beside which, on the night of his coming to New York, Brand had first been sounded by the Colonel as to the prospects of war with Clewston. Was this to be the end of his hopes, his great ambition, his all-mastering love? Above the towering roofs of the city, in a haze of smoke against the low-driving clouds, shone the golden dome of the *World*, the needle spire of the *Tribune*, and in rear of these, the house of the *Avenger*, shadowed by still taller buildings, a cluster shouldering the sky, dominating the Metropolis. And so the time had come to say good-bye to all this—to go away defeated, broken.

There was the crowd in the wharf-shed of men who idly lounged, of women who cried—some exchanging last greetings with their friends on board, others staring indifferently at the long line of faces which lined the rails. At the dock gates stood Larry Bryne, in the midst of a group of men who chewed, spat, swore, while he boasted joyfully, pointing his finger, with a derisive laugh, at Brand. These loafers—these low-browed Irish loafers—Brand knew them well. Straight said in his letter that to leave the *Goliah* would be suicide; now he knew why. What brought these men to speed the parting ship? Maybe, they had formerly sauntered down out of curiosity to say good-bye to the *Tsar*, the *Caliph*, the *Maharajah*. Was the *Goliah* doomed? Could she be saved?

A sudden gust of wind caught the great ensign at the stern, which fluttered tremulous, as though it loved the wind's caress ; the captain laid his hand upon a lever, causing a bell to tingle down in the engine-room ; for the last time the great steam siren roared ; the mates fore and aft were directing the release of the warps ; then the people surged through the sheds to the wharf-end, where hundreds gathered, cheering as the " Giant " Liner glided slowly past them out of the slip into the Channel, and began to thread her course down the Bay.

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CHAPTER XXXI

ON THE HIGH SEAS

THE *Goliath* was one of the six hundred or so of smart steamers entered at the British Admiralty as available for transport in the event of war; she was more especially one of the several first-rate liners which, within forty-eight hours, could be transformed into cruisers; in length and tonnage she excelled the old *Great Eastern*; as regards engines, she was many times as powerful; her officers and crew were trained men of the Naval Reserve; and good reason they had to be proud of the largest, swiftest merchant craft on the high seas. Her smoke stacks might have been designed for railway tunnels, her saloons would have graced a royal palace; her engines were so mighty that their vibration caused a malady worse than sea-sickness; her coal consumption was so prodigious that she never even thought of paying a dividend—verily a most glorious triumph of engineering!

And, surely, her purser was the very pattern of courtesy, in that no sooner was the big ship clear of the dock on that morning of November 25th, than, remembering how an acquaintance had entrusted with him a message of great urgency, he left his momentous business for the delivery of a letter, sealed in a yellow envelope, to Mr. John G. Richardson.

This gentleman was found in the smoking-room,

shivering with a newly-caught cold, which he had just been persuaded to treat with a dose of brandy. Perhaps the letter was even better medicine, for Mr. Richardson roused himself from seeming torpor at the receipt of it, and began to take a renewed interest in his surroundings.

Close by sat a bronzed, hardy little Britisher, who had perhaps been hunting big game in the Rockies, or exploring Northern Canada; or, maybe, somewhere with the Colours opening up new trade; anyway, travel had worn off the ice-crust of the national reserve, for, after an appreciative glance at the giant's immense shoulders, he seized the occasion of Brand's awakening, and ventured a remark.

"You're right," said Brand absently, "there's plenty more weather where this comes from."

He ripped open the envelope, spreading the contents upon his knee—a large sheet of paper, entirely blank.

The Britisher was speaking.

"When we travellers first arrive here from Liverpool"—he pointed with his pipe toward the receding city—"your interviewers want to know before we land what we think of America. I'm inclined to retaliate for once upon a helpless Yankee"—the Britisher laughed.

Brand knew well what blank paper meant in the usage of intrigue, for nitrate of silver is a colourless fluid which becomes like ink when exposed to the light. He must wait; meanwhile, he might as well be civil, so he looked up under his heavy eyebrows at the Britisher.

"Retaliate, sir, all you've a mind to—I won't bite."

"Well, Mr. Uncle Sam, you're under the flag now; this ship is British territory. What do you think of England?"

"The tender-foot Britisher," was the retort, "generally

comes across with a mission to explain to us how our business ought to be run—to teach us how'to llve. I guess I've a right, then, to advise you Britishers how to make a mess of things—how to die."

"What's the prescription?"

"Misgovern the Irish."

Brand was looking at the paper on his lap, no longer blank, for there was a gradual appearance on it of vague lines and dots, faint marks of writing.

"A fair retort," said the Britisher, "serves me jolly well right. Why, this very *Goliath* may be going the way of the *Tsar*, the *Caliph*, and the *Maharajah*. For all we know there may be Irish dynamite in the hold. Yes, Uncle Sam, our Government, especially of Ireland, is still in the rough—we're a new country."

"A new country?" Brand had been absorbed in the faint manuscript, which seemed, indeed, to refer to matters connected very closely with the misgovernment of Ireland.

"A new country?" He looked up to stare at the Britisher. "What on earth do you mean?"

The traveller crossed his legs.

"Well, you know, our Empire, as a political fact, is hardly so old as your Republic. What had we a hundred years ago? In Canada a few settlements, small, scattered, and mostly French. In India a company of merchants; in the West Indies a cluster of Crown colonies; elsewhere some isolated posts. To-day the Canadian and Australasian dominions are each about as big as our first colony, now the United States; the African sphere of influence rather larger; the East Indian Empire could swallow your eighty millions without feeling the difference, while our outposts give us coaling stations for the safe command of the sea. So you'll understand how an occasional scrap like Ireland

gets overlooked ; but in time we shall have leisure to straighten things out—in time. You must make allowances for our youth."

"Yes," Brand glanced at the writing before him, "things get overlooked—Justice, for instance, when you make the Irish pay double their fair share of the taxes, and allow all the land rent to be spent by absentees who take everything and return to the country nothing. I don't know much about it, Mr. Britisher, I'm a scrub lot, but I'm learning. I thought, for instance, that the Americans knew how to bluff, but you take the cake with your *new country*." Upon that the Britisher went away chuckling in search of a whisky and soda.

The blank sheet had become a legible manuscript now, both above and beneath a careful diagram, the transverse sectional elevation of a steamer.

"MEMORANDUM.

"*New York, Nov. 24, 190—.*

"The diagram and explanation hereunder will guide Captain Barrington, Lieut. R.N.R., of the *Goliath*, in the discovery and removal of an infernal machine, designed by the Liberators, for the destruction of his ship in mid-ocean. He is to be particularly requested, on behalf of the Home Office, to regard this communication as confidential, to use extreme caution in the handling and unloading of the weapon—for which operation safe directions are hereunder given ; to keep the case, together with a sample of the explosive, for transmission to"—here followed the name and address of a Government official—"enclosing therewith this document under seal. Since any violation of the secrecy demanded of Captain Barrington by the Government would have most disastrous consequences, it would be as well if he could be persuaded to remove the explosives without

alarming his crew and passengers, and to enclose a copy of this warning sealed to the owners.

"It is essential that the gentleman who bears this message should not be carried beyond American territorial waters, his presence being eminently necessary on His Majesty's Service in New York. A motor launch will therefore be in waiting at a point on the *Goliath's* course, ten miles beyond Sandy Hook, and she will hoist as a signal the red ensign at her fore truck. In consideration of the fact that the bearer is saving his command from probable destruction, Captain Barrington will, doubtless, see his way to obliging H.M. Government in this matter. No signature is hereto attached, it being only necessary that the handwriting should be recognized at Whitehall. The bearer will find further advices awaiting him with the master of the launch *Zoophyte*."

When Brand went on deck Sandy Hook was already well astern. Captain Barrington seemed about to descend from the bridge to his chart-room—there was indeed no time to spare for ceremony, so it was perhaps excusable for Brand to dispense with an introduction. He ran to the foot of the ladder and waylaid the captain, who asked bluntly what was the matter with him.

"From the British Government," said Brand coolly, thrusting his memorandum into the captain's hands. "Read that!"

The master of the *Goliath*, despite his brass buttons and uniform cap, looked rather an eminent business man than anything nautical. One saw in him more the manager of a floating hotel than the lieutenant in His Majesty's Royal Naval Reserve. Moreover, bronzed, handsome, sturdy, dictatorial in manner, Captain Barrington was the last person living whom it would be safe to slight.

And as he looked down upon Brand from the steps of the ladder he was evidently considering how to deal with a probable lunatic, for surely no sane traveller would appear in such weather so very slightly dressed, no reasonable passenger would take the liberty of so accosting himself.

He returned the paper without glancing at it.

"If," he said, briefly, "you have any business to transact, my purser will see you."

Brand realized his mistake, but to withdraw now would be fatal.

"Do you know," he answered, "what happened to the 'King' Liners? Dynamite is no purser's business, I take it."

"Dynamite!"

Brand laughed. "Captain, if you value the safety of the ship, read this memorandum from your Government."

The Captain took the paper and read, glancing at times towards Brand.

"Who are you?" he said at last.

"I have taken passage, Captain, under the name of John G. Richardson; but I guess my business is what concerns you."

"I'll see to it." Captain Barrington made as though he would pass. "If there's any foundation for this yarn, I'll meet you later, Mr. Richardson."

"Excuse me"—Brand barred the way—"my business is pressing. At the tenth mile from Sandy Hook I must leave this ship."

"You seem to have taken command."

The Captain was nettled.

"Don't be hostile," said Brand, "I don't want to bother you more than I have to. If you'll kindly look ahead, my motor launch must be in sight by this time."

"Come, sir." The Captain led Brand up to the bridge. "Now, where's your launch?"

"There," said Brand, as he caught sight of a small craft running swiftly about three miles ahead.

A black spot glided up her fore signal halliards, breaking at the truck into a fluttering streak of scarlet.

"And that's the flag."

The Captain put his hand on a lever, to which a bell answered in the depths; then the *Goliath* slowed down to half speed.

"Mr. Richardson, it's quite evident, whatever ground you have for thinking my ship in danger, that you've put yourself to a lot of inconvenience to give me this warning. I hope you won't take it amiss that I was doubtful at first. You see"—the Captain smiled—"your actions were, to say the least, unconventional."

"That's all right, Captain; dynamite's unconventional too."

The Captain glanced at the memorandum. "Mr. Wilson"—he called to the officer on duty—"have a rope ready for that launch. She's coming alongside."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Glancing once round the calm sea, rippling before an off-shore wind in the sunlight, Captain Barrington went down the ladder somewhat hurriedly, then from the hurricane deck called back to Brand, "Mr. Richardson, I'll be with you presently."

The *Goliath* slowed down and stopped; the launch came alongside, and, after a few minutes, the Captain re-appeared on the hurricane deck, where Brand joined him.

"Is your luggage ready, Mr. Richardson?"

Brand shook his head. "Haven't got any."

The Captain laughed. "Well, certainly you didn't lack self-confidence. Your memorandum, I find, is

perfectly correct; following its directions, I had no trouble in putting the machine out of mischief; fact is, you've saved the ship, and probably every soul on board—rather a big thing to say 'thank you' for, Mr. Richardson?"

He took two or three paces along the deck, and then came back again.

"Mr. Richardson," his voice faltered a little. "I don't want to pry into your affairs, but—do you mind trusting me with your name and address?"

Brand wrote upon a card, which he handed to Captain Barrington.

"What," said the latter, "the Fighting Editor?"

Brand nodded.

"Another instance, Mr. Haraldson, of distinguished service rendered to Civilization by Gault's *Avenger*."

"Look here, Captain Barrington, I want to ask a favour of you. The Liberators know that I sailed in the *Goliah*, so their agents in Liverpool will be looking out for me, and if they find that I am not on board they will cable the New York gang to warn them. Now, I want you to send to some Liverpool paper a paragraph noting the arrival in England of the distinguished American—what shall I say—engineer, Mr. John G. Richardson. Then, for the return voyage of the first big steamer leaving Liverpool, will you kindly have a passage booked in his name? My life probably depends on this. Here's money for the passage; do you mind?"

Captain Barrington accepted the trust with some amusement.

CHAPTER XXXII

CLEARED FOR ACTION

"NEW YORK, *November 24, 190—.*

"DEAR CHUM,—Trust me a little longer. I'm in a hurry.

"Yours, as usual,

"THE WRITER."

Brand sat in the narrow cabin of the launch, which was now steaming rapidly to the north-east, rocked by a slight sea on her port bow. The *Goliah* was hulled down to the eastward; the land hung dim in the north, heavy with cloud banks, from whence an occasional flurry of snow came reeling down the wind. Brand had been hurried away in the *Goliah*, now he was bound he knew not where. "Trust me a little longer. I'm in a hurry." Surely Straight might have favoured him with a little more explanation than that.

The master of the launch disturbed this reverie. "Say, Mr. Richardson, will you come on deck? I can't make head or tail of this business."

"What's up?" said Brand wearily.

For answer came the dull boom of a gun.

"What does that mean?"

"It means 'Heave to'!"

Brand followed the Captain forward, from whence he saw a steam yacht bearing down upon the launch.

"I guess," he said, "you'd better run away!"

The yacht dipped her colours three times.

"What does that mean?"

"A salute!" cried the skipper.

"I don't understand; but I guess we'll surrender to that."

Then a shout came from over the water.

"There must be some mistake," quoth the skipper.

"Captain"—Brand laughed—"down brakes—off steam—ease her—stop her."

The skipper gave tongue.

"Who are you, anyway, Mr. Richardson?—a royal family in disguise?" Then he grinned at his engineer, pointing over his shoulder towards the yacht. "I'll be everlastingly sunk if he ain't some dook."

Brand perched himself on the little capstan, and mechanically pulled out of his pocket a plug of tobacco, from which he began to whittle a supply for his pipe. What could it mean? Whose yacht was this hoisting long lines of flags, whistling, firing an abortive attempt at a salute, while she bore down rapidly upon the launch?

She grazed alongside, fenders were lowered, lines were thrown and caught, then there came to her rail a tall personage with a large red nose, a frock-coat, a silk hat, and superhuman dignity of bearing. A crowd of men stood behind him at a respectful distance.

"By all the gods!" cried Brand, jumping down off the capstan: "Colonel Giggleswick!"

"The same, sir," answered the personage, "at your service."

Brand would not wait for a gangway, but, the yacht being now within easy reach, he scrambled over her rail, and stood on her clean white deck.

"Mr. Haraldson, sir," the Colonel took off his hat with

a majestic bow, "I have the honour to report to my chief for orders."

"Orders be damned!" Brand grasped his hands. "I'm jolly glad to see you, Colonel. What does it all mean, eh?"

"Parade!" growled Captain Baxendale to a detachment of men drawn up behind the Colonel. "'Tion! Shoulder arms! Present arms! Shoulder, humph! Ground arms!" Twenty carbines rattled their butts on the deck. "Stand at ease."

"Why, Captain Baxendale." Brand had acknowledged the salute. "How are you, old friend? Shake hands!" Then, looking along the line of men, he knew one after another, for his friends of the Reformers' Club, and in defiance of military etiquette shook hands with all of them. "Now, come along, Colonel." He laughed at the old gentleman's disgust at such defiance of the conventions. "Take me away. I'm curious."

The Colonel led him to the main saloon, where luncheon was laid for two, made him sit down, served him with food and wine, then consented to tell the story of his experiences in type-setting.

"I ain't merely curious, I'm downright eccentric," said the Colonel. "A man who runs a besieged garrison on the second-floor of a Broadway business block ought to be qualified for a padded-room and an hallucination that he's an historic personage in disguise. Wall, the sternest reality of war ain't the brass band, the man who blows his own trumpet ain't usually in charge of the brigades, and I don't want to set up as the heavy heroic; no, sir."

"Keep the metaphors for your appendix, Colonel—you're getting mixed."

"To speak plainly, then. I got a pretty good crowd of men, and I didn't spare expense as to the stores."

"The deuce!"

"Oh, that's all right—your department, young man—your department. I doubled all their pay, and offered a bonus of one thousand a head, with double for officers, gave a champagne supper to the boys, and made a speech afterwards—no extra charge for the oratory. I asked them if their hearts bled for the wrongs of suffering Ireland—they didn't to any appreciable extent. Then I said hands up the man who doesn't care a continental damn about Ireland. Up went their hands, and I knew I could trust my garrison; so I went on to say that we intended to smash up the Irish Liberators, and they were pleased all to pieces.

"The cowboys didn't get any wages worth mentioning from their Wild West Show—they had sore hearts, and owed for their washing; so by way of contrast I appointed every day for pay-day, with three men elected by the crowd to hold the cash on their joint behalf. That fixed 'em—they howled with joy. Next, I explained that I wasn't paying for the enjoyment of their personal beauty, or the charm of their manners. I put the crowd under the discipline of a besieged garrison, said that if anything leaked out as to our work there wouldn't be any bonus, that if anybody was caught signalling to people outside, or sending to the saloon for beer, I'd leave his punishment to all hands. 'Finally,' says I, 'if any of you want to talk get through with it right now—because I'm going to "boss" this show without arguing.'

"Everything went like a beautiful greased streak—the cowboys kept the composers and cooks in fear of their lives, and I started in with my 'electric cookery.' By mail I advertized prizes for clam bake, and the best ways of boiling a live lobster; used the answers to kindle the stove, and so got my fuel for nothing. The

cowboys were on guard, the journalists ran the enquiry office, parcels delivered by express were sent back to blow up elsewhere. Gault cut off our water, so we rigged a hose from the Alarm Office; he stopped our gas and electric light, so we got out our candles; he tried the asphyxiation business against closed ventilators. Police raided us for immoral literature, forged bonds, and Anarchist propaganda, and found nothing but editorials on the stewing of eels. I was called to serve on a jury, and proved myself incapable of truth; doctors came to prove me a lunatic, minions of the law to arrest me for debt—but I've been there before my son, I've been there too often before.

"One night I caught the cookee signalling with a stick through the lavatory window—I fixed him. How? Oh, I had him tried by the crowd, sentenced to lose his bonus, locked up for a week on the bread and water of affliction, and soused every evening in the wash-tub. I used him to signal messages every evening, and kept off all further attacks till the very end."

"And what was the end?"

"On the night of the 24th one of my cowboys, the Arizona Snorter, saw a stranger cavorting around in the dark. He's been up to the Alarm Offices, spent fifteen minutes there, and came away all haste, stealth and bad conscience. The Snorter went up with my pass keys and a lantern, found the paint scratched on the door of the Alarm Syndicate Offices, the transom open above. Now a business visitor ain't in the habit of crawling in and out through the transom, so the Snorter investigated. In the manager's room, my old office, he found the very smartest contrivance ever devised, a thing which, patented at Washington, would make a fortune—No Criminal should be without it—Indispensable to Incendiaries—Every man his own Firebug! From the

ceiling hung a pigskin bladder full of petroleum, underneath was a large spirit-lamp to warm the thing up till it burst. It did burst, you bet, wrapped the room in flames in two shakes of a duck's tail. Mr. Snorter cleared out, slammed the door, and put out for solitude. Of course, I was on my hind-legs in a holy second, rang up the fire brigade, crammed a carpet bag with my manuscripts and papier maché casts of the matter we have in type, set half my men to fight the fire, armed the whole crowd with revolvers and a dose of whisky. By that time fire-engines were dashing up in all directions, the hydrants were tapped all along Broadway, and the Brigade took charge; but I suspicioned that Gault had busted up my cookery business. Excited? Sir, I was never so cool in my life except once when I stalked 'bergs and bagged a live glacier for the New York ice market. My men came straggling down by twos and threes, a badly damaged assortment, smelling of fire, clothes charred, hair singed, swearing blue streaks. 'Mr. Snorter,' says I, 'how goes it?'

"'Up to the roof,' says the Snorter.

"'Will this ceiling hold?'

"'It's caving in,' says he, 'at the back.'

"I paraded my garrison, numbered them off, gave orders as to the guarding of the carpet-bag, saw that all hands were properly armed and loaded, and was just ready to march when a big man loomed up through the smoke calling out for me. The roar of flames, the smashing in of ceilings, had got to be all fired horrible, but that's nothing, sir, to men capably commanded. My men took to danger like mother's milk—liked it, in fact, because I knew how to be calm.

"'I'm Captain Baxendale,' says the big man, 'at your service, Colonel.'"

"'Captain Baxendale?'"

"That same chicken. Yes, sir, with a guard of twenty men, organized by that Reverend Gentleman who nursed me in his own bed, and will be given a first-class compartment in a better world. Well, on finding out that even though we must evacuate, Gault hadn't done with us yet, I was disposed to raise three cheers for the Reverend Gentleman when a fireman dashed in from the stairway. 'Come,' he yelled, 'out of this! Out of this!'

"At any other time I should have asked him who the deuce made him commander-in-chief, but the circumstances not being propitious—

"'Steady, boys,' says I. 'Steady! No rushing now—by your left——'

"At that moment a red-hot safe plunged down through the ceiling; vaults, girders, walls were visibly crumbling—and there was no time for military evolutions.

"We cleared out of that building in a wholly unmilitary rush. Yes, sir, we evacuated the position."

"And what next?"

"Oh, well, thanks to that man Straight, to the Reverend Gentleman, and to Captain Baxendale, all was not lost save honour. Foreseeing that things were going to be made warm for me, a guard had been provided by them, which took us in safety through the city, this yacht lay provisioned with a printer's plant and all the ingredients for comfort; steam up, and clearance papers complete. So here we are, wet under foot, but not in any way discouraged. By noon of the 8th we shall have the type set up, the matrices ready for the press."

"Yes," said Brand, "while Gault thinks me on the *Goliath* bound for the bottom of the Atlantic."

"By the way," the Colonel produced a letter, "this is for you."

"DEAR BRAND" (so read Stralght's letter),—

"When I found New York getting too hot to hold us I persuaded Gault to burn out the Colonel, and to have you decoyed away on the *Goliah*. That saved the *Goliah*, put Gault off his guard, and ensured the completion of our type-setting beyond the reach of his detectives, so I hope you won't mind being put to a little inconvenience. Gault has paid me for destroying you, enough to meet all current expenses, so we are fighting him with his own money, and he thinks all the world of me. What do you think of my game?"

"Keep the launch *Zoophyte* for your tender, and get ready to use her for the landing of your matrices by midnight of December the 9th; Captaln Browne, of the yacht, will tell you where to land.

"It may interest you to know that Gault announces the departure of his Fighting Editor on a voyage to Europe, from whence it is hoped that you will return in a month or so completely restored to health.

"Father Jared has told Miss Gault about my arrangements, and she looks forward with renewed hope to the issue. Her wedding-day, December 10th, promises a wonderful surprise for the bridegroom.

"Meanwhile His Holiness, Saint Clewston-Gault, is trying on his halo with a view to an early apotheosis as Reform candidate for the Presidency. The Greatest Philanthropist in the World is playing all his trumps—we keep yours in reserve. So ends my part in this game.

"Yours as usual,

"DICK."

And while these things were being discussed, the yacht, with her type-setting works in full progress, all hands confident, the launch in attendance, the enemy completely outwitted, steamed out on the open sea.

CHAPTER XXXIII

VERSUS THE CIVILIZED WORLD

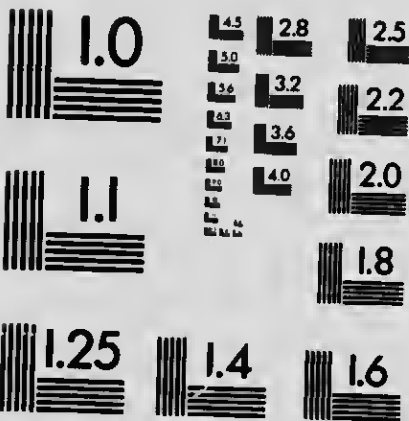
ON the evening of December 8th the type-setting was finished; its gross results, some eighty impressions in papier maché, from which type-metal castings known as stereotypes were yet to be founded in New York. These, mounted on the cylinders of a rotary press, would be ready for instant use. The whole story of Mr. Clewston-Gault was thus prepared for the printers; but yet a day must elapse before Brand's return to New York. The officers knew that on the evening of the ninth the matrices were to be packed in a large portmanteau and landed; moreover, that on the morning of the tenth, Gault was to be overthrown; but how the exposure was to be printed, to be published to the whole world, and to take effect within a space of only twelve brief hours not one of them could conjecture. When afterwards they saw this feat achieved, they were overwhelmed with astonishment at their own stupidity in not foreseeing the event; but, for the present, Brand kept his own counsel, pacing the deck alone. Eight bells sounded on the yacht's bridge, eight bells on the forecastle head; the watch was relieved, and the mid-night silence reigned again unbroken; while the moon poured her light upon the sea, while shadows of masts and shrouds swung tremulous on the white deck, and Brand paced to and fro, to and fro.

They say that the old-time Northmen had their



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sombre moods, that when they had no fighting to do they sulked, and so it was with Brand. His was a joyful disposition so long as there were difficulties to meet, dangers to dare ; the dark hours came only in times of idleness. So the night rested heavy on his shoulders as he paced the deck.

In the past there was the Knight Errantry of children ; in these latter days there is the grave Knight Errantry of men who war against powers invisible, vanquish Fate, ride Nature like a horse, laugh in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and seek their rest only beyond the grave. The heroes of this age are overworked doctors, evangelists of science and revelation, rulers of men—the Gordons and the Lincolns who are too scornful of danger even to carry arms, who are murdered as a sign that the Earth has bred men too great to be wasted on a second-rate planet, men found worthy to fight the enemies of the Almighty on battle-fields that are paved with a dust of stars.

Brand is a twentieth-century hero, type of the chivalry of this age of iron who shed no blood of men, but slay dragons of sin, or carry suns in their hands to light the way for mankind.

But the greater glory casts the deeper shadow ; and this was Brand's hour of darkness.

The moon was setting now ; her retinue of sparkling silver lights trailed off across the waters where she led, and all her white glory blushed into redness as she said farewell.

So the dark hour went by.

The stars blazed down, the very air chilled until it sparkled in faint mimicry of their icy light, while the deck creaked under foot with its rime of frost. Who was that beside the taffrail ? As Brand went aft the man grunted " Good evening."

"Who are you?"

The man struck a match on his breeches, and, holding it before his face, growled, "That's who I am."

Brand recognized the Arizona Snorter, whose eyes glittered like steel, whose hard grim mouth had the lines of an iron will. His was a whimsical Satanic temperament come of the burning deserts on the Mexican border, where the Ishmaelite is independent still, and tells the truth. "You're shivering with cold," said Brand, "why don't you walk and get warm?"

"The boys are trying to sleep down below."

"I was a brute."

"So I've been thinking," growled the frontiersman.

"Have a cigar?"

"Thanks"—he lit his pipe—"this corncob is good enough."

"You cowboys are sick of loafing?" said Brand.

"You've struck it, partner."

"Would you like a game of chance ashore?"

"What are the stakes?"

"You won't find it dull."

"I can make good."

"Thanks. Tell your five cow-punchers to be ready to go on board the launch at a moment's notice. We take the 'paper pulls' to New York."

"And not the herd?"

"They stay with the yacht. I give you gentlemen the post of honour."

Before daylight next morning, that of the ninth of November, Brand was awakened on the arrival of the tender which had crept into a New England port for news. Though Straight had arranged to send letters, and night after night the launch had gone in search of them for more than a week, it had been impossible to obtain any tidings whatever as to what was happening

in New York. So it was with a sickening anxiety that Brand went up to the chart-room, expecting to hear as usual, the same story of failure. But, on this occasion, the master of the *Zoophyte* was better pleased with himself, because he had a prisoner to produce, a stowaway, discovered after he left the coast, only a slip of a lad who could not be made to talk; but still a bird in the hand, which was better than a spy on the wharf. Brand was not surprised, he had expected as much, feared more. The event was significant of a close watch being kept along the coast at a time when any new facts discovered by the enemy might involve the disastrous failure of all his plans; but, on the whole, he was pleased when the prisoner was brought before him—an old and valued acquaintance—Larry Byrne. The sailor boy was, indeed, a fearless little rascal, irresponsible, because he knew no better, loyal to his master with the fidelity of a courageous terrier.

“Well, Larry,” he said, kindly enough, “surprised to see me again?”

“’Taint the worrd, sorr.”

“You’re a nice child, Larry. Your parents must be proud of you.”

“Sure, not more so than I am.” Larry was dignified now, despite the grime of the glory-hole from which he had been unearthed. “It’s the Divil’s own dance we’ve been leading yez—me and Gault.”

“You and Gault, Larry, will be getting into trouble.”

Larry waxed self-righteous. “Sufficient until the day is the avil thereof, and besides——”

“Besides what?”

“Ye don’t know when you’re in luck, or ye’d have stayed on board the *Goliak*.”

“And gone to the bottom with her?”

“Yes—lastewise she’s got to Liverpool all right, for

thim new-fangled machines ain't aqul to the job; but you'd better be at the bottom and shipped in a cool berth with Davy Jones than come back to New York just now." Larry laughed ferociously. "We're sending Mr. Straight where it's warm. You and Dick Straight, says the Boss, shall frizzle, the both av yez on the same grid."

Brand turned to his officers. "Take care of this youngster," he said earnestly; "handcuffs and leg irons for one, but feed him well. Larry, if it's true that you have murdered Mr. Straight, you and Gault shall be his flunkeys down below."

"Flunkeys, indade!" said the prisoner, as he was hustled out of the chart-room. "Flunkeys, be jabers!"

"And now," continued Brand, when Larry's expostulations had died away in the distance, "Captain Browne, I want y to see my six cowboys on board the launch. Has there petrol enough for the run to New York?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

The Captain went out.

"Colonel Giggleswick here?"

"Sir," drawled a quiet voice at Brand's elbow, "Colonel Hiram W. Giggleswick is on hand."

"Take command, Colonel. Run the yacht into Boston by sundown; send these telegrams"—he produced a couple of envelopes—"they're addressed to Mr. Straight, to say that I've arrived in Boston, and am publishing there. These messages are intended to fall into Gault's hands; but do all you can besides to make believe that I am at work against him in Boston. Place Larry Byrne in some quiet hotel, fill him with whiskey, give him a sleeping draught, and mount a trustworthy man on guard over him. After midnight bring all hands by special train to New York; see that every

man is armed and waiting for orders by ten o'clock at the corner by the *Avenger* on Broadway. If I don't turn up by noon report to Father Jared, with this letter, which will ensure that you will get your pay."

Captain Browne returned, reporting all ready on the launch, and the morning clear with occasional flurries of snow.

So Brand, taking up a large portmanteau, went to the gangway with his officers. "Good-bye, Colonel. So long, Captain." He shook hands with the mates and his foreman. "I'm off to New York to smash Mr. Clewston-Gault."

Night was settling down upon New York when, on the evening of the ninth of December, Brand made his way unmolested through the streets of the lower city. The sky was overcast with grey clouds; already the first flakes were falling of a snowstorm destined to be memorable; indeed, the few people hurrying away home had no time to notice the big man who carried a portmanteau, and was attended by half-a-dozen rough-looking followers. Brand and his cowboys went for supper to a lunch-counter not far from City Hall Park. Afterwards, while he smoked his pipe, the journalist must needs glance through the evening paper—a life-time habit, dropped, perforce, during the last few weeks. The sheet was full, as usual, of trivialities. A leader disparaging the Young Turkish Government, prompted, doubtless, by speculators in Ottoman Bonds; scandalous conduct of an English lord—the American Press seldom mentions the good deeds of the peerage; British aggressions—Transatlantic Journalism writes down such in large characters; Indian outrages in the South West: fifty Navajoes shot, and three whites massacred; the President's privacy—three columns descriptive thereof. "Hello!" Brand became suddenly interested. "Marshall

Gault on the Warpath—Tammany Scalps—the Great Philanthropist to take the Chair—Indignation Meeting To-night! Awake Citizens! Down with the Local Misgovernment! The Purity League and the Augean Trust Gault's Battle Cry!"

This evening at eight o'clock a mass meeting at the Metropolitan Opera House was to inaugurate the war of the Purity League against misgovernment in the metropolis; Marshall Gault, who had just accepted the Reform nomination for the Presidency, was to place himself at the head of this great popular movement; and a special edition of the *Avenger* was announced for to-morrow, giving the entire secret history of the criminal gang that so long had dominated local politics. So Gault had been refused his annual subsidy!

Brand's heart beat high at the news—already while he read, the substance of his thoughts banished the shadowy journalese of the printed columns. His plans were formed for the night's work, the paper was thrown aside, the time for action had come. Leaving a few short directions with Bronk, one of the cowboys, to ensure a vigilant guard over his portmanteau, he called the Arizona Snorter to follow him, and went out at once into the streets.

Snow was falling, great white flakes of it, just like souls of little women whirring about, terrified of the foul pavements, seeking refuge on sills and doorsteps, perching on men's shoulders or wayside railings where they could still be clean. But many, alas, were swallowed up, or trampled under foot to be seen no more.

Denser and more dense came the white flakes down into the glare of lighted streets, whirring about the electric lamps like hosts of little spirits dancing; so that now they purified the city which man had fouled, and

the great metropolis was clean; as in this night the hosts of heaven warred against all the powers of darkness, conquering and to conquer.

The people said it was a blizzard; all of them were inconvenienced; some died; indeed, in a population of crowded millions, violent weather is considered a suitable occasion by many to depart this life for one wherein perhaps they will be less uncomfortable.

Brand, fully recovered from his wounds, braced by a few brisk days at sea, rejoicing in the might of his strength, cared nothing for the wind and snow as, buttoning his pilot jacket, obtained on board the yacht, and slouching his felt hat over his eyes, he strode through the empty streets on his way to meet Miss Gault. Of course she would attend Gault's great political meeting, therefore she would pass by the Church of the Redeemer on her way from the tenement; so Brand and the Snorter took refuge in its porch to wait for her. The church was lighted; from within came the murmur of evensong; the clocks struck eight, but Hilda did not come. Of course it was her feminine privilege to be late, yet the half-hour struck before the lady appeared, not along the street from her rooms, but with a slender congregation of women out of the church.

"Hilda," he whispered, gazing the while at her sorrowful, careworn face; and at the sound of his voice all the light of youth and love came back to her eyes, a flush of sudden colour suffused her cheeks, while her lips breathed his name. Yet, thinking, perhaps, that her ears deceived her with some hallucination born of her own thoughts, she would have moved on.

The man's heart sank within him: "She is flushing with anger because I called her name, she won't even stop to speak with me."

"Miss Gault!" he said, respectfully. "Miss Gault!"

Then hearing his voice again, real and distinct, she turned and saw him.

"Hush," he whispered; "if you don't mind, will you come back into the church?"

He led her up the nave, and she heard as in a mist the organ dreaming through some slow voluntary, she saw, as in a haze, the altar lights going out one by one.

"We have only a few minutes," said Brand. "Will you sit with me here in this pew? My man yonder is guarding the door, and I want to report what has been done these last few days."

Her eyes filled with tears, but her face was hidden from him and he did not see.

"I am so glad you came."

"Are you? I have good news. To-morrow you will be free to marry—no, not Gault, but the other, the man you care for."

At that she turned and looked him in the face, wondering. "How stupid of you!" A little smile dimpled her flushed cheeks, while still at least one tear was trickling down that way. "You dear stupid—don't you—don't you see?"

Then the day began to break for Brand. "I see. What a fool I have been! Oh, this is too good to be true! May I?"

"You may."

He did.

"You oughtn't to, you know—at least I oughtn't to because I'm still engaged. They told me you were dead—is it you? Is it the real you? Let me look at your face. There, take both my hands, and prove that you're something better than a dream."

For answer he threw his arms about her and proved himself real with another kiss. "Do you believe me now?"

She nodded with an air of complete conviction. "You mustn't do it again, though, because"—again the old terrible trouble came back into her eyes—"to-morrow."

"And the trousseau is ready?" he asked, brutally, then wished himself dead for his mistake.

Freeing herself with a little hopeless cry, she drew the cloak about her—her nurse's cloak put on for the last time to-night. "Don't torture me," she said, bitterly, "to-morrow I am to be married."

"Yes, darling, married, but not to Gault."

"You said that before—it isn't true. Oh, you are laughing at me, and it's too cruel!"

And Hilda buried her face in her hands, sobbing.

For a moment he sat watching her, very uneasy, inwardly cursing himself. "Stop that," he said, roughly, and she obeyed him. "To-night the yacht puts in at Boston—my people will wire to Dick Straight."

"But he's missing! He's been missing for days and days! A week after you left the city he went out on an errand for Father Jared—and never came back.

"Do you know, dear, when I saw him last his eyes had such a strange look—they made him beautiful. I saw a picture once of a man who was going to his death on the scaffold. He was like that."

"Poor Dick! Poor Dick! He saved us all. Perhaps that was the price he paid for us. There was something queer about his letter—the last line made me uneasy somehow. Look here—'So ends my part in this game.'

"But if he lives, dear, I shall find him yet. It's because I knew he was missing that I have the telegrams sent to him from Boston—because I know that any wire sent to him will be delivered to Gault. The message will be that I have come back, not from

Liverpool, but on board the yacht with Colonel Giggleswick; that I am in Boston to-night printing all sorts of things against him. After he leaves the great meeting at the Metropolitan, Gault will take a special train to Boston. When he is gone I have the night for my work here. In the morning——”

“But I’m to be married at twelve o’clock—don’t you understand?”

“Yes, but before that, when he gets back to New York in the morning, we fight—he and I. Hilda, will the bride be ready for the man who wins?”

“I will be ready, the wedding is fixed for noon.”

“My wedding,” he said, “shall be at eleven o’clock. You will be waiting for me in your rooms?”

“The men fight,” she said, “the women wait.”

He threw his arms about her. “There would be nothing worth fighting for but for women.”

“Brand,” she said, wistfully, “is it always like this—I’m so happy.”

“Because you will belong to me for ever and ever?”

“Yes,” she shivered, “I never belonged to him.”

“You never shall.”

She looked about, feeling that the verger must be waiting. “They want to close the church,” she said.

He stood up. “Yes,” he sighed, “we must go. I’m going out by the vestry door for fear of spies—as you pass, will you tell my man to follow? By the way, is Father Jared at the Opera House?”

“Yes.”

“Good-night, dearest.”

“I dare not keep you longer, Brand. Good-bye.”

“Good-night.”

When Hilda turned into the street the fierce wind caught her cloak, lashing the skirt about her knees so that she could hardly walk; and the snow fell upon her

shoulders, glistened in her hair, was flung in heavy drips about her feet. But it was not the cold that brought the vivid colour to her face, for the years seemed to have rolled away, the lines of care were gone; the light of love triumphant shone in her eyes.

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CHAPTER XXXIV

THE SONG OF THE KNIGHTS

BECAUSE the Reformers' Club was closely watched Brand climbed the stairs of the tenement building at the corner, intending, as he explained to the cowboy, to reach his own headquarters by way of the roofs.

The squalid stairway, dimly lit with gas, gave at every landing upon several doorways, most of them open, disclosing misery within. Hilda's door was closed, and on the step crouched something in rags, human only in that it saluted Brand with a scream of abject fright.

"Who are you, woman?" he asked. "What scared you?"

Then the thing in rags rose up—the sniffing woman, the incendiary. "I thought you was dead," she cried. "She's out, and this door's locked. What shall I do—what shall I do?" She turned fiercely upon him. "Are ye alive, or are ye sent to damn me? Alive! 'Ow could I tell?" she asked. "Shime on ye for frightening honest women. Shime, I say."

Brand nipped the lady's oratory in the bud.

"Well, what are you doing in New York?"

"Are ye stone blind?" she cried, "don't you know? Gawd, man, ye're too laite! Come, if ye want to sive Mr. Straight from bein' burnt to—. Quick, then—follow!"

So, running, she led Brand and his attendant down the stairs, out into the wild night headlong, screaming back to him, "Quick, man! Quicker!" through drift and darkness, in hideous alleys, along the vilest slums, until she drew up at last, breathless, at the end of a narrow lane.

"There, at the fifth backyard on the left--climb the wall, break through a windy, turn off the meter under the back stairs; then search the 'ouse. Mind ye remember the meter!"

Brand hastily scribbled a note on some leaves of his pocket-book, which he gave to the woman. "Take this to Father Jared at the Metropolitan Opera House."

"She ain't acting square," protested the Snorter, as he watched her go; "this is a trap."

"I'll take the risk," said Brand. "See, there's a man running out of that fifth door to raise the alarm. We're seen; go, club him for me."

The cowboy gave chase, as directed by Brand, who, finding the fifth door ajar, went alone into the yard. Bursting through the area window, he found himself in a dark stone-paved basement kitchen, the air smelling strongly of escaped gas. With some difficulty discovering and turning off the meter, he made his way cautiously up the stairs, opening a window on every landing, or he must have been suffocated. Indeed, the upper part of the house reeked with a stench almost impenetrable; but, covering his face with a handkerchief, Brand went on, although his head ached almost to bursting; his brain reeled until he could hardly walk. Still, staggering like a drunken man, he climbed the last stairs; for rest he dared not, seeing a dim light aglow in the back garret which must, within a few seconds, wrap the house in flames.

He never knew how he reached that candle to

extinguish it; only remembered falling headlong afterwards, face downwards, upon the floor. But now he breathed more freely, awakening from a swoon, relieved of the headache, but still only dimly conscious. Then a feeble voice called to him, "Brand!"

"Is that you, Dick?"

"Yes. I'm chained to the floor. Open the window, if you can."

Brand crawled to the window; but since he could not raise the sash, which was fastened with screws, he broke several panes of glass.

Now the cowboy came blundering up the stairs; and, together, he and Brand unscrewed the bolts by which Straight was chained to the floor.

"You saved me, Dick," he grumbled; "you saved the *Goliath*, you saved the Colonel and his people, why not yourself?"

"We all had to take our chances."

"How long have you been here?"

"Ten days," said Straight, refreshed now with a big drink from the cowboy's flask. "They found me out, they tortured me, and I'm hungry."

"A gilt-edged rooster is Mr. Marshall Gault." The Arizona Snorter began to relieve himself. "I'll torture him, the brass-mounted, pigeon-toed, double-barrelled son of a——"

"That's enough," said Brand. "Dick, why didn't the building blow up?"

"The light was flickering a little when you began to open the windows letting in fresh air, then it stopped flickering, and I heard you coming tramp—tramp—tramp up the stairs. Brand, wasn't it clever—that gas business I'm beginning to have a wholesome respect for Gault. Who is this gentleman?" Straight glanced at the cowboy, who was wrenching at the bolts, while Brand brought

all his vast strength to bear on breaking chains.
"Introduce me."

Brand smiled, and, resting a moment, presented the Arizona Snorter.

"I remember—foreman of the cowboys. Can't shake hands, my friend, and thanks isn't good enough. Look here, boys, we must leave this house as you found it—to burn—or we shall have the whole gang at our heels when we reach the street. There, let's see if I've strength to walk. Hark! Do you hear? What's that?"

"Only the back door swinging," said Brand. "Let me help you."

"I can't get up, old chap. Say, are you sure there's no one down yonder?"

Brand turned to the Snorter. "Did you club that man in the alley?"

"No, I didn't. Why? He beat me running."

"Hush!" whispered Straight. "Listen."

Brand was down on one knee with his arms about his friend, the cowboy standing beside them. Through the broken windows came the night wind, howling grey with snow, piling white drifts across the floor, which filled the garret with a ghostly light; and from down below came sounds of creaking boards; and then, between the gusts, a soft footfall on the stairs; then many footsteps, mingled with a breathing and whispering of men. Brand took a sheath knife from his belt, which he gave to Straight; the Snorter was flourishing a long bowie. Straight, staggering to his feet, threw one arm about the cowboy's shoulders, and, reeling to and fro, looked back with a smile towards Brand.

"You're needed to-night down Broadway. See, that ladder leads to the roofs; make haste, while we hold the door."

But Brand laughed. "My dear Straight, you're too weak to climb roofs, and I'm not going to leave you. Run away? I'll see you damned first;" then, with a hoarse laugh, "Come, let's fight them!"

"Is Gault running this attack?"

"I guess not. He's at the Metropolitan Opera House, accepting his nomination. Father Jared's here too. I've sent to him for help."

And the footsteps on the stairs were drawing nearer.

"Brand, this looks like failure."

"You're right, Dick, unless help comes soon."

"If," said Straight, "we get out of this alive, the smashing of Gault will not belong to us!"

"No; that's taken out of our hands now. It belongs to——"

"God."

* * * * *

"Fellow-citizens,"—Mr. Gault's voice rang through the auditorium, and tier above tier white faces bent forward in expectation—"this night you witness a crisis in our national history. The sovereign power was wrenched from the despot by an oligarchy; torn from the oligarchs by an aristocracy; won from the aristocrats by an ever-widening electorate, until, at last, kingship is vested in the popular will. Political freedom was gained for us by our fathers; we fight for social freedom to deliver it as a birthright to our sons; we look forward to a future in which our posterity shall have added industrial freedom also to the rights of the human race. But, in the hard battle for our rights, have we not at times forgotten our duties? The sovereignty of our rights is a dead fact of law, unless it be made alive with that more kingly attribute—responsibility. The sovereign power sits ill upon our shoulders, because in the new

pomp of kingship we forget that the sole purport of the throne is Justice.

"I am no pessimist. I have been entrusted with the leadership of the Reform party, accepting the nomination of that party as their candidate for the Presidency. The planks of my platform are—War against social, judicial, civic, State and Federal corruption, the awakening of our citizens to a sense of their public duties, the enforcement of existing laws, the discouragement of useless legislation. I take no sides in the current war between Capital and Labour. I fight in the battle which ever rages between Right and Wrong.

"To-morrow morning my record as a citizen, as a journalist, and as a man of business, will be set forth in my newspaper, the *Avenger*, together with my political programme which is summed up in the word—Reform. Not until we are cleansed will I talk of money, tariffs, or foreign policy.

"Consider this thing well, weigh my words in the balance of your judgment, pronounce whether Marshall Gault is a fit person to represent the glorious policy of Reform. I do not ask you to give a hasty decision to-night. Judge me to-morrow, when I stand before the great audience of the nation."

Then, with impassioned eloquence, this great man forecasted the future of his people—seeing beyond this age of emancipation, beyond the current doctrines of spoliation and repudiation beyond the awful struggle impending between Labour and Capital, into that glorious future when the United States, trained as all men and nations must ever be trained in the bitter school of suffering, shall seize that heritage of the ages, the mighty sceptre of God-given Power.

* * * * *

"Come on, you devils!" yelled Straight from the head of the stairs. "I'm Richard Straight, at your service, Secretary of the Liberators—agent of the British Home Office—and may God save the King!"

"No shooting, boys," came a sturdy voice out of the darkness below. "We don't want the police in this game—quiet, boys—out with your knives for ould Oireland! Charge, ye blackguards!"

"Yes, charge!" yelled Straight, from above. "Where's Gault? I've a long blade for Gault! Charge, and be damned to you!"

"Steady, Dick," whispered Brand, "stand back a little." With all his strength he wrenched the balustrade from its holding, and flung the splintering woodwork across the stairs. "Now, I want rocks, or——" Running into the garret, Brand seized upon a small cast-iron box-stove, which he sent weltering down upon the charging column. But though two or three men were wounded, a dozen sprang into their places, and in another moment an awful silent fight was being waged at close quarters. Brand, with the butt of a revolver, the other two with their knives, for full five minutes held the stairhead against a score of assailants, but slowly, under the weight of numbers, inch by inch, foot by foot, they were driven back. Straight fought with fiery courage, swift, direct, and deadly; the cowboy with grim fight, Brand slow, deliberate, masterful, laughing at times like a boy as his blows went home. But the Irishmen, who had begun with all their national joy in a promising scrimmage, were roused by the loss of several badly wounded men, to a blind rage against which no mortal defence could make much headway. Once the tide seemed to turn a little, enough to give the defenders time to throw themselves behind the garret door; but

the crazy hinges gave at the first rush, and a dozen men came headlong into the room.

Now for a moment there was breathing time, while Brand and Straight set their backs against the wall for the last stand. The cowboy was badly wounded now, indeed, he would have been cut off from the others but that Brand, running forward, dragged him under cover, just escaping as he did so a slash between the ribs from the Irish leader. Straight was wounded across the face, but that only roused him to white-hot rage as he covered Brand's retreat to the wall.

Then followed a lull in the big fight, for the Irish were arranging their last assault.

"Say," whispered Straight, "we're done for, old chap—booked right through."

"For service beyond the frontier," was Brand's answer.

Straight smiled. "Now I can tell you what I never could before. I have been all along your partner in more than a little—at least we have served her like men."

"What—you!"

"Yes, me; and the tie should bind us—afterwards. I want to make an appointment with you to-morrow—we'll talk these matters over on the other side."

Brand looked back over his shoulder. "I'll go you," he said. "We'll be There presently."

The cowboy lifted himself up with his arms about Brand's legs. "And where do I come in?"

Both men shook hands with him, but they said nothing, having no need of words.

Their assailants were stirring now, dividing into three parties for the attack.

"Come on, you cowards," cried Brand, "are you going to keep us waiting all night?"

Still they hesitated.

"That idiotic song would come in handy," said Straight,

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with his familiar half-sneering chuckle. Then he sang in a low sweet voice, as though stirred by a tender memory of things long passed—

“Wake from your sleep,
Rouse ye and fight,
Clearing the Master's way;
Roll back the night,
Roll back the deep,
Out, swords, and slay!”

As Brand took up the song of the Club, the cowboy lying at his feet said, “Well, I'll be damned!”

“Sunder Death's gates that we may ride
Down through the stars to fight,
Men and the angels, side by side,
Hosts upon hosts of light!

“Sunder Death's gates, and set us free,
Broaden Life's narrow way,
Fighting Thy foes and avenging Thee,
God of the boundless day!

“Sunder life's chains as we 'venge Thy name,
Lend us immortal might,
Arm us with swords of consuming flame
God of the deathless right!

“Take that,” he continued, with a tremendous lunge at the nearest assailant, who was flung headlong; then, keeping a space about him with both fists, he sang once more, his great manly bass ringing along the rafters overhead.

“Surely the love in thine eyes is light.

“Broken your jaw, eh? There!” he wrenched the knife from a big fist within an inch of Straight's ribs.

“Don't mind me,” said Straight.

“Fear of thine eyes is — hell!

"Look out!"

Straight was down now; the cowboy bleeding and senseless between Brand's legs. "You devil!" Brand wrenched a black arm till it snapped; then, in broken gasps between the lunges as that last assault closed down—

"There is no—death! There—is no night!
So that—we—serve Thee—well!"

Then came a rush and roar of many voices—the song of Father Jared's men—as they charged up the stairs to his rescue.

"For the Lord's right!
For the Lord's peace!"

"Hurrah, boys! One more charge! Down with 'em!
Hurrah!"

"Clearing the Master's way!"

"He's alive! He's still fighting! Charge!"

"Till the night cease,
In the Lord's light,
On, swords, and slay!"

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CHAPTER XXXV

THE ARMING OF BRAND HARALDSON

AT midnight Father Jared sat in his bare room, opposite to the black crucifix nailed on the whitewashed wall. In the bed lay Straight, very clean and tidy, his delicate face icily pale, his great dark eyes fastened upon the priest. Brand was filling the old man's pipe from a jar of tobacco on the side table; but he moved stiffly, because of the bandages swathed round his left arm, his right thigh, and his head. "Your pipe, sir"—he turned to the priest, presenting it by the stem, then tried to strike a match on his trousers, but desisted with a little grunt of pain. "Can't do it."

Straight chuckled.

"The one unchallenged prerogative of man, and you can't do it!"

"Try the stove," said the priest; and presently, as he puffed at the newly-lighted tobacco, "Sit down, lad, rest awhile. And now I suppose you want to know how we found you. Well, I was at the Metropolitan, in the grand tier with Miss Hilda, and all over the house were my Reformers by twos and threes, at least a hundred of them.

"Just when young Gault had finished his oration some telegrams were put into his hand, which he glanced at carelessly."

"My wires calling him off to Boston," said Brand; "did he go?"

"Yes, rather in a hurry, and, of course, my trackers shadowed him to the depôt. He left New York, as I learned just now, without any further news reaching him. Then came a message for me, and in the vestibule was our poor firebug woman wild with excitement. I'm sorry to say that Miss Hilda had to go home without escort."

And he fell into a reverie.

"Well, sir?"

"Oh, yes, you want to know the rest? Well, I lost no time, lads. I never thought that at my time of life should see such fighting. I took a detachment with me of likely men. Why, it was like the mutiny days, when we felt like young gods. 'Remember Cawnpore, you —s! Remember Cawnpore!'"

"Oh, Father Jared! This is terrible!" Straight winked a sleepy wink towards Brand. "Think of our morals!"

"Never mind your morals," the priest stood up, waving his pipe in quick gesticulation, "we thought of the little lady at Windsor, we thought about the dead children in the Slaughter House, the women waiting at the Residency—and when the breach was blown in the wall all smoke and brickbats, a raw-legged Highlander shoved me out of the way, but I clutched him by the kilt for my transport. I was the eighth man through the wall and we fought two thousand while the rest poured and yelling for more elbow room." His voice sank, and he went on in a broken whisper, "Two thousand of them lying about in heaps, under the blue night; then came the grey streak in the east, and we heard a bug sounding reveillé from the Residency."

Brand helped him back into his chair, where he lay for a minute with closed eyes, and only a little flutter under the rusty cassock showed that the brave old heart

still lived in him. "Our little scrlmmage," said Brand, "was tame compared with that."

"Not so bad, either." The priest was judicial. "I was first up those stairs! And now, young men, I notice in you 'a bad sign, a very bad sign; indeed, this absurd love of fighting—understand"—the priest was majestic—"I won't have it. This fighting is all wrong—the New Testament teenis with instances to the point; besides," he held up his thin, transparent hands to the stove, "there's this awful butcher's bill to face to-morrow."

Brand smiled to himself.

"Yes, you may well smile," the old man was indignant; "one would think you owed me, at least, some consideration. Can't you deliver a left-hander without breaking men's jaws and giving them concussion of the brain? And there's that wretched cowboy in Dick's room—Mrs. Papps is doubtful if he'll pull through—told me that you—you Brand—monopolized all the fighting, so that he couldn't get a blow in anywhere. Between you you've managed to kill three—and wound seven. For which we shall be answerable when the thing is discovered—probably to-morrow. Really, you must be more careful."

The old man looked severely at each of the culprits, but finding Straight drowsy and the other sufficiently penitent, could not withhold a gay little laugh. "It was a good fight on the whole—a very good fight, but I think I can improve that hymn considerably."

The clock struck one, and there was silence in the house save that in Straight's room the cowboy lay raving in delirium, and Mrs. Papps bustled about him with iced bandages.

"I must be going," said Brand, wearily, "I'm all ready now for the last big fight of all."

"Not yet," said the priest, "not yet."

Until a moment ago Straight had clanked with every movement, by reason of the handcuffs, with loose ends of chain, still on his wrists until a blacksmith should fix them open; but now the morphia had taken effect, and he slept heavily.

"You are going, Brand," the old man spoke quietly almost in whispers, "to fight the last great fight of a with Marshall Gault. Be merciful, my son, remember that all your mighty strength goes for nothing with our Judge unless you are merciful. Remember that you are only attacking a big mirror that reflects the evil of our civilization—for Gault is so far the very embodiment of his Age. Blame not the man, but the Age that produced him; judge not the part, but the whole; and above all things, be merciful.

"He is no mere criminal, because criminals are imperfect men, lacking certain faculties from their birth. Indeed, he is singularly perfect in body and intellect. To-night he spoke to us like one inspired. He is a sublime genius gone astray for lack of a master. Unhappily, unless a man be radiant with the reflection of the Divine, he casts a shadow commensurate with his mental stature; and the shadow of Gault casts twilight upon this nation. So must he perish; and you and Brand, are entrusted with the fearful mission of his undoing, that the light may shine again upon the earth.

"You must not let me preach so much, my son, or I shall bore you, and too much talking is bad. Did I ever here, I have preached asleep. Now that I have got my two sons back from the grave I cannot part with either of you."

"Father, that man's a hero."

"My son," said the old man, not heeding him, "you fight for the welfare of the human race, looking beyo

the present throes of d;ing sln to that age when Christian altrulsm shall have trained man for an age of mightler competltion, more giorlous victories; when earth shall be subdued, the Heavens scaled; when darkness shall be no more ln that city of Promlse whose foundations are of lght, whose streets are of gold like unto clear glass, where the Tree of Life ls for the healing of the nations, and ln the midst of a sea of glory stands the visible throne of the Most High.

"Kneel," said the priest.

Brand bent his knee to the ground.

"As one who had covered himself with steel mail, so put you on righteousness as a breast-plate and the garments of His vengeance for your clothing. Take unto you the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all to stand—your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast-plate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; and, above all, taking the shield of faith.

"And take you the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

"I will put upon you no other burden. Go forth, my son, to war, wrestling not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of the world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

"Go forth, my son, to war, and may the Almighty God have mercy upon you, now and for ever."

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE LAST GREAT BATTLE

A WONDERFUL region was the *Avenger* building, where night after night, a great newspaper was written, composed, and manufactured ready for delivery to the public long before the earliest bird was awake, or the stupidest worm abroad to take the air. Far aloft, in the fifteenth and sixteenth stories, sat the editorial staff, scribbling busily; while the reporters and the special telegraph instruments brought in their news from the world. All manuscript accepted was shot through a pneumatic tube to the upper basement, arriving in the composing-room like a bullet out of a gun. This composing-room was very large, brilliantly lighted, walled, ceiled, and floored with fine white tiles. At one end were the proof readers' cages, reference library, and foreman's office; at the other end a gas-engine, a lavatory, and a refectory. Down the midst of the room stood fifty type-setting machines, at each of which one man could do the work of five old-fashioned compositors; at one side were presses for "proofs"; at the other, type-setters' cases for correction of errors, and a long table where the columns of type were locked into frames of steel. Each of these "formes," representing a page of the newspaper, was thrust complete through a slit in the wall, and the work of the department was ended.

Is this very dull? Dry the details may be to exasperation, and yet one must understand the manufacture

of a daily newspaper in order to comprehend what followed.

The frame of type delivered from the composing-room through a slit in the wall came at once into another jurisdiction, finding itself on the moulders' table. Here this sheet of metal was covered with a slab of damp cardboard, which was beaten with a wooden mallet, called the "flog," until the substance of pulp took an exact impression of all the type. A heavy roller deepened the impress, a hot press dried the cardboard, now known as a matrix. For such a large circulation as that of the *Avenger* eight such matrices were taken of every page.

At two o'clock on the morning of the tenth of December Haraldson sat alone in the little glass-walled office of the foreman of this department; that is to say, of Mr. Pederson, the chief stereotyper; and beside him, on the floor stood a large portmanteau. He was very pale, for the trifling flesh wounds were smarting tremendously; he wore a felt hat to hide the bandage round his head, the heavy pilot coat gashed here and there, and, stained in places with fresh blood, hardly sufficed even in the hot room to keep him from shivering.

"No smoking allowed," he growled, with a glance at the notice on the door. "That's one for Gault. No harm in a dry pipe"—he took an empty briar from his pocket, and, clapping the stem between his strong white teeth—"that's one for me; but now"—he saw the chief stereotyper coming over from the moulders' table—"the fight begins!"

The foreman of the department was, like Brand, a fair Scandinavian; but his face was hard, sour, morose, as though he had blundered all his life through doubt and disappointment. Nevertheless, he spoke with a sort of wintry cordiality.

"Glad to see you back, Mr. Haraldson, though," he stared unpleasantly, "you don't look any better for your trip. Curious, you've been in the wars again!"

"Only a scrapping match," said Brand; "and, as to the trip, it was no holiday. I've been away on special service preparing this."

On catching sight of the portmanteau, which Brand now opened, the foreman bristled, but said nothing until he had inspected its contents—a sheaf of paper moulds—"matrices," such as were being prepared on the moulders' table.

"Indeed, Mr. Haraldson!" All human feeling had vanished from the man, leaving him uncompromising and official as a letter-box.

"Ask no questions, Mr. Pederson," said the other frankly, "and I'll tell no lies. My orders are to deliver these to you; they are to replace eight pages of to-night's issue."

"This is absurd!"

"Here"—Brand presented a written order, in which the numbers of the pages were clearly given—"is this absurd?"

Taking a case from his pocket, Mr. Pederson drew out a pair of spectacles, strong-lensed, and put them on with slow deliberation; then, glaring at the order, his harsh face moved now with extreme excitement. "Signed—Marshall Gault." Then, looking up, "This is a forgery."

"It is—a forgery—to justify you afterwards at my expense."

"I shall not need," said the foreman, freezing, "to be justified. I am an honest man."

"Glad to hear it, Mr. Pederson—wish I were. Now don't be a hypocrite; you know well enough that you're only a slave of the Frailty-Avenger machine, run by Mr. Clewston-Gault."

The foreman laughed.

"Do you remember," said Brand, incisively, "one night you found me out there in the passage, wounded?"

"Eh?"

"I'd just found Gault in the Frailty office, disguised as Clewston. He stabbed me."

"But this is incredible."

"It is, that you, a member of the Reformers' Club, should belong to the Frailty-Avcngcr machine, which is Tammany, which runs the Irish murder gang for the drowning of women and children, which is turning New York into a crime-farm in the name of philanthropy. Remember your oath at the Club. What about your screeching at us over the 'King' steamers, and Gault's speculations in blood?"

"Mr. Haraldson," the man had lost all self-control, but still clung manfully to the one shred left him of certainty; "whatever you say of the man who employs us both, while I am in his service I obey his orders."

"The Devil's orders. I mistook you for a man, for a member of the Reformers' Club, sworn to smash Dr. Clewston—Dr. Clewston-Gault. Come, will you use these moulds, or will you not?"

"But suppose I were to—what would happen?"

"Why this, you ring the bell for your boy, and send word to the moulder's table that certain pages," Brand gave the numbers of them, "are to be brought to you here when they're ready."

The foreman looked doubtfully at Brand, who could be so cool, so competent, so masterful, while he proposed a seemingly enormous crime.

"And then?"

"You examine the moulds for an error, then take each set of them—I'll give you the right ones—and carry them out to the casting boxes."

"And then?"

"The stereotypes will be cast from my moulds—sent to the machine-room, bolted on the cylinders of the rotary presses, and the first copy of the paper—ah!"

"Will land you in penitentiary, Mr. Haraldson."

"Will go up to the night editor. That's all right. I'll fix him."

"And the second copy goes to the foreman of the machine minders."

"To be glanced at as a proof of the press work—that's all right."

"But all the editorial staff get their copies."

"No. That's not allowed now. Didn't you know? Our special news used to leak into country papers. Now the staff go straight home to bed. Where's your boy?"

"Wonderful!" cried the foreman, carried away by the perfection of the plot even in detail, "and yet," his face became clouded again, "my wife—my children—what's to become of them?"

"After to-morrow we will start a new paper that shall tell the truth—will that provide for you?"

"You will provide for—but you——"

"You doubt my word," said Brand. "Can you trust Father Jared?"

"I can't do it! I can't do it! Mr. Haraldson, this treachery—I've always tried to be an honest man."

"Be honest, then," said Brand, impatiently. "You call yourself a Socialist. Who claims your duty first? The capitalist?"

"The people."

"And Clewston-Gault is the enemy of the people."

The man rocked to and fro upon the stool, his face expressionless as a mask, and he repeated the words like a machine: "Is the enemy of the people."

Brand reached forward, his elbows resting on his knees, the empty pipe stiff between his teeth—his eyes staring up into the other's face. "Then," he said, "you take sides with me?"

"I can't! I daren't! I don't understand."

"Mr. Pederson," said Brand, pointing at the forged order, "if this is forgery, it's my forgery; if the business is treacherous, it's my treachery. I don't want you to dare, or to think, or to understand."

Mr. Pederson was silent, but his lips worked, the perspiration stood in great drops upon his face.

"Come," said Brand, roughly, "you're wasting my time. Ring that bell."

The foreman climbed down off the stool, and, trembling violently, pressed both hands upon the electric bell.

Brand leaned back with a little sigh of relief, as the office boy came in.

"Johnny," said the foreman, looking back at the boy over his shoulder, "bring me the next matrix—all the copies. I want them here."

"Yes, sir," said the boy, and ran to the moulder's table.

* * * * *

Brand turned as he left the stereotyper's department, and stood for a moment in the doorway to see how the work was proceeding. Yes, all had gone well without the awakening of any suspicion, the press-men would be too busy save for a casual glance at the quality of the first imprints, the *Avenger* would be sent forth without comment, save that it was a heavy edition, the copies would be

delivered by tens of thousands, New York would awaken in a few short hours, and then——

Sick at the thought of what must follow he went away through the passage between the printing and stereo departments, from whence stairs led up to the street. In a dark alley near by he gave orders that one of the cowboys was to shadow Mr. Pederson home, the remainder staying on guard around the building. On Gault's arrival a message was to be sent by the night porter to Jimmy, the night editor's office.

Half-an-hour later he went round to the front door of the *Avenger* building. The editorial staff and all the reporters had by this time departed to their homes, so that Brand went up to the lift without meeting anybody except the night porter, who congratulated him on his restored health, hoped he had enjoyed the trip to Liverpool, and silently wondered a little why the Fighting Editor, a mere passenger on the *Goliah*, just returned, should find it needful to adopt a sailor's pea-jacket buttoned close up to the throat.

Brand found his friend, the night editor, just entered upon his lonely watch, with a first copy of the *Avenger* spread out before him. He was reading the supplement line after line laboriously, yet, as Brand could see, in utter apathy.

"Jimmy?"

The man looked up, and his eyes were full of tears.

"Go home, Jimmy, I take your duty to-night."

"I was praying for that"—the small man's face became radiant, "I was praying hard—you don't laugh at me! Ah! You've been sent as an answer to my prayer. She's dying, Mr. Haraldson—my little, little sister, and she's only a child—she doesn't understand what it means. And I here—helpless—bound to my chair when I ought to be at her side. How good of

you to come—just like you, Mr. Haraldson. Let me go to her. Oh, you don't know how grateful I am!" When the little man had gone Brand was busy for an hour in the parts of the building adjacent to Gault's locked office. He was busy with tools such as are used by electric-line repairers—but not repairing. Then he was left alone with the special edition of the *Avenger*, which turned him sick when he thought of it. He sat down in Jimmy's den, at Jimmy's desk—poor Jimmy—thrown out of work to-morrow when there's a funeral to pay for; and all the sub-editors, reporters, compositors, press-men, messengers, newsboys, drivers, clerks—thrown out of work by this thing he held in his hands, the final number of the *Avenger*. Then there were the hosts of evil-doers laid naked by this paper—drawn to the life with hideous fidelity—in banks, railway companies, shipping companies, insurance companies, mining companies; commercial transgressors, political transgressors, social transgressors, with all their employees and dependents hurled suddenly to ruin. From the President—whom it is well to say again is not the present or late incumbent of that office—down to the little ragged boys in the streets, the sword of Justice spared neither age nor rank, nor reputation, nor poverty, nor sorrow. And then the commercial panic that must come at the opening of the Stock Exchange, the shattering of public and private credit, the breaking down of that confidence in men which is the foundation of commerce—it was awful!

Brand threw himself over the desk where the paper lay, burying his head in his arms.

Down in the basements the engines rumbled, the great presses revolved ponderous, grinding out the "autobiography" of Mr. Gault, sending forth the news of another public god fallen shattering from the pedestal of Fame.

Hour after hour the *Avenger* special edition was, as Gault had promised, being distributed in tens and hundreds of thousands, so that all the audience of the nation might be able to judge of his fitness to represent them as President.

But Brand was wondering, incoherently, how long there should be shadows on the earth to shelter dragons; how long there should be darkness to breed foul creatures such as Gault, warring against mankind. Shadow is but a circumstance of Time cast by the waves of the sea, by clouds, by night, by wandering bodies in the fields of space, that men may know how beautiful is the light. Likewise, in the glory of the Almighty, men's souls cast a shadow called sin; yet there shall come a time when the shadows will pass away, and Light prevail.

So the dawn broke upon that day of reckoning, the clouds drifted asunder as the red sun rose to light a black Atlantic, a snowy continent, to shine upon the windows of the Metropolis, awakening the people from their sleep.

At their breakfast tables the people read, indifferent first, curious, interested, chuckling over choice bits of scandal—enthralled, amazed, affrighted, panic-stricken as the truth came home to them. Leaders discredited, financial credits impugned—Marshal! Gault none other than Rex Clewston! Everything evil in organized labour, everything foul in organized capital, everything sinister in the commonwealth centred in this master of crime; this great philanthropist, who, as chief of the Reform Party aspired to the Presidency of the Republic.

But the daylight was pouring now into this pit of darkness, the sun was rising unclouded upon the State, and in God's sunshine there is no place for dragons.

Brand looked down from the window and saw a crowd

gathering in front of the building, gazing up in silence at the silent house—a mob which began to trample down the snow in City Hall Park, spreading until all the open space was filled, until all the street approaches were barred.

It was a mob typical of America—of world-devouring Anglo-Saxons for leaders; swart watching Japanese; strong Teutons who must needs think before they can act; Slavs pushing their way in from behind; Latins crowded out, shouldered back to the rear—that gathering seemed an epitome of civilization. And what had civilization to say to Marshall Gault, as his carriage made its slow way to the *Avenger* doors? Civilization saw itself mirrored in that man, and, hating the ruthless truth of the picture, greeted him with a low muttering of rage. Civilization desires to be good—hopes to deal justly—craves earnestly for righteousness; but it is a straight, a narrow way that leadeth unto life. Civilization only learns the right way after every possible wrong way has been tried, but hates the wrong ways nevertheless. And the guide who leads in the wrong way must perish. The police were relieved when Mr. Gault gained the door of the *Avenger* building in safety.

Gault, after his return from Boston, had dressed and taken breakfast at his Club. Now, at nine o'clock, he came to his office, an hour before the usual time, lest his day's work should be slighted on account of the wedding at noon. His personal staff would not be on duty for half-an-hour yet, so he rang for the night editor, and commenced to look over the private correspondence. He could not read his letters. What had offended the mob? His wedding, the sensation of to-day, his speech, the great sensation of last night? When the door opened, doubtless to admit the night editor, he did not look up.

"You can leave the paper," he said. "Stay. What is the crowd in the square?"

Brand could not answer. This easy unconsciousness of his enemy, blindfold still on the instant verge of destruction, made his flesh creep with horror.

Mr. Gault looked up, turned white, and sat still, drumming his heavy fingers on the desk.

"Well," he said at last, "what are you doing here? Who told you to thrust yourself into my privacy?"

"I took over the night editor's work." The evasion seemed cowardly, but Brand could not break his adversary without at least some warning of the coming blow. "Besides, Mr. Gault, look out for trouble!"

Gault laughed a little. "My blackmailing editor is going to strike!"

"Mr. Gault, you know I saved the *Goliath* from your infernal machines; you know I never went to Liverpool; you know that the message which took you to Boston last night was only a ruse to get you out of my way."

"I am much obliged, Mr. Haraldson, but as you see your kind intentions have not postponed my wedding so, doubtless, you have come to confess your failure."

"No, not for that. The great big mob outside, or people who have read the *Avenger* this morning—the edition which I printed after I lured you out of the way——"

From the street below came a roar as of far-away thunder, and Gault stretched out his hand.

"Give me that paper."

Brand gave the paper, and, walking over to the two doors, he locked them, then crossed to the windows where he stood looking out over the snow-clad city. And all the while he thought of the newsboys delivering their tale of damning print—the mob that was getting beyond all control—the end that was coming

Gault turned over the sheets one by one—slowly, patiently—reading here and there, and knew that his power was crumbling away, as a dream melts at sunrise. That dream had been the mastery of the world. It may be that some day this planet will awaken after the great big dream of life, and be once more a lonely mite wandering—a speck in a ray of sunlight icily cold.

There was no sound in the room save the slow turning of pages, one by one. Had there been an explosion of rage to face, Brand would have been glad of that; had there been fighting to do, it would have warmed his blood. But the triumph seemed such a poor thing—the man overthrown so great—the fall so terrible. Gladly would he have gone back to the beginning of the fight; gladly even failed, because the silence of his enemy was not broken.

At last he knew that Gault was reaching across the desk to his speaking-tube. "I have broken that," he said, without looking round. "I have cut all the wires, blocked the ventilator shaft, and locked the doors. You and I are alone."

And then he turned to face his adversary, wondering, because Gault was changed—no longer in the prime of life, but old—so old! Deep lines scarred his face; his coal-black hair was visibly streaked with grey; his eyes were sunken in impenetrable shadow. Then, quietly, almost below his breath, he spoke, while every scornful word struck like the lash of a whip.

"You! You! What have you done? You, one of the puppets I played with, one of the pawns upon my board, fed with my bounty, a starveling from the streets, the Revolversburg fool given bread to eat as a favour to Miss Gault—you, with your lofty airs and your small treachery, what have you done?"

"I had begun a work which was beyond all parallel in the history of the world. I, strangling crime with my strong hands, making all criminals my slaves by turning their misguided powers to great uses. I, sweeping clean the rocks of an old civilization, was laying the foundations, building up the walls of a new order.

"You, seeing things which were beyond your understanding, possessed with an ape-like ease of mischief, a little dangerous knowledge of the use of fire, have set my empire in flames."

Far down below the roar of voices swelled to loud thunder, mingled at times with the clash of broken glass; now could be heard the crash of an improvised battering-ram against the street door; then, while these two men listened, the vestibule was carried with a yell of triumph, and a raging mob began to sack the Enquiry Office.

Brand moved a step nearer to the desk. "Mr. Gault."

"Well?"

"I don't understand, I know very little; but wouldn't it have been better if these walls had not been raised upon a foundation of lies? I did not come to argue, or to triumph. I fought you first for a woman, and to-day I shall marry her, because she loves me; but I don't want to hurt you more than I can help even now. For the rest, can you believe me if I say that I fought not you personally, but what you represent?"

Gault made no answer; and for some minutes Brand stood waiting for him to speak. A peal of musketry rang out across the square, fired by State troops for a warning. The mob broke and ran; the police and the soldiers took possession; but already dense clouds of smoke darkened the windows, because the Frailty Investigation Offices next door had been set on fire,

and a column of flame was rolling up the ventilator shaft between the two buildings.

Gault rose from his chair, trembling a little. It was the first time he had left his seat since Brand's coming. "Marshall Gault cannot be entirely overthrown; while he lives there is no safety for you. Now go."

Brand turned as he went out of the room, saw his great adversary sitting rigid with strong jaws clenched, staring into space.

He left the door wide open.

CHAPTER XXXVII

AN UPPER CHAMBER

THERE were officers in the vestibule, troops drawn up on the further side of the street, firemen by the hundred fighting with their freezing streams from the hydrants, their ladders, towers, and engines, lest the flames should spread from the doomed Clewston offices to Gault's huge marble palace of the *Avenger*. They did not know of the ventilator shaft, now a white-hot furnace opening into the rooms of the Cyclone Explosive Syndicate. Brand answered several officials who questioned him: "Yes, Gault had probably left." He knew of back stairs leading to a subway and thence to certain warehouses across the back lane; but of this he said nothing. No, he was not Gault's secretary, but his late Fighting Editor, at their service. On giving his private address he was allowed pass.

At the Broadway corner the cowboys reported, and shortly afterwards came the Colonel, Captain Baxterdale, Captain Browne, the master of the launch, and all their followers. With the officers he left directions that breakfast should be served to all hands, and appointed a rendezvous for paying off at the Club that day, lest after his arrest for last night's fighting his men should go penniless. The "boys" wanted to make a demonstration, but this he forbade, being unwilling to outrage the feelings of those for whom

the day was one of suffering and loss. Indeed, as he went on his way alone, walking down through the business quarter before going northward, his heart ached for the people. Throngs of anxious creditors were silently besieging the banks; Wall Street was blocked from end to end with a panic-stricken mob; the whole financial quarter was jammed with men; in Broadway, all ordinary business was suspended. Even this was but the beginning, for very few trains had been able to break their way through deep snow from the suburbs, and not half the *Avenger* subscribers had their paper delivered owing to the impassable condition of the streets. Copies were already selling at a dollar each at the curbstone; by noon five dollars would hardly secure one. Scraps of ill news were flying through the crowd—a well-known broker had shot himself, so and so would not take down the shutters this morning; Messrs. Blank had closed their doors, certain stocks in which Gault had been interested could find no buyers. One old French needlewoman Brand saw shouldered out of her place in the queue at a banker's doors, and coming closer, found her wild with fear as to her savings, yet, having forgotten breakfast in her haste, too weak to stand. He got her a cup of coffee, with one for himself to keep her in countenance. Now Madame has betaken her brave, cheery little self to a House of Mercy, where she patters of her husband at rest in a very fashionable cemetery, also of Brand Haraldson, but mainly of Brand, they say, who gave her coffee. This matter of the French woman is only one story among thousands, because most of the people wading in the slush of Broadway came to their ruin that day. It was the same old game of 1837 and 1873 and 1892, a period of buoyant credulity abruptly ended in one

great cataclysm, to be followed by painful years of retrenchment. And Brand had caused this thing—surely the man who does God's surgery must not be squeamish. Prolonged excitement and want of sleep had left him dull, too exhausted to feel more than the heavy aching of his neglected wounds; unable, happily, to think much about anything; but when, arriving at the tenement house, he went up to meet his bride, all that was changed, new life had come to him. Well might his haggard face be flushed, well might he throw back his shoulders in pride, well might his eyes shine, for Hilda was very fair, shrinking back a little in sweet confusion, then throwing her arms about his neck in joy of deliverance and in utter trust. She was arrayed for her marriage, not in the bridal dress prepared for Gaul but just as he had always known and loved her, in the severe uniform of her calling.

"The trousseau, Brand? No, that was for him. Are you sure that I am free—really free?"

"No, Hilda, never free while I live. You are bound more strongly now than ever before."

"But a woman," she whispered, "loves these sweet chains, that nobody else can see, nobody wear."

"Come," said the man, "and let me bind them fast."

On their way down-stairs they stopped to look from a window, down through the winter mist and dense smoke toward the lower parts of the city, where there burned a great fire.

"Poor things," said Brand, "they don't know what good for them. His love gets red-hot at times like the blazing sword that kept the first two sinners out of mischief."

Hilda looked up into his face. "He touches His servants with the sword—the ones that love Him. You

He touched upon the shoulder with the accolade of His Knighthood."

"It's smarting still," grumbled the man, thinking of Gault's knife, and the three new wounds of last night. "Say, Hilda, that fire's getting worse ; I guess it's spread to the *Avenger* block."

"The Dragon's house—did you—is he dead, Brand?"

"Very much alive when I left him, but harmless."

"For the present—until he grows more teeth. I suppose Dragons are but part of the economy of Nature, fulfilling some wise end. He was my foster brother."

An enormous column of flame rose up to heaven, as the *Avenger* building fell, then the rumbling echoes gradually died away.

"I forgot that that might happen," said Brand gravely. "The Liberators kept a stock of explosives there. So that is the end."

"And the beginning?"

"Come, let's go."

* * * * *

In the upper room of the Club were gathered the men who had fought against the Dragon, members of the house, and their guests, Colonel Giggleswick, Captain Baxendale, Captain Browne, and all their following from the yacht, for this was Brand's wedding-day. When he came in with his bride they would have cheered, but, warned by Dr. Schmitt, consented to remain quite quiet ; and Brand, looking about while he shook hands with many tried and valued friends, saw that two—the sorest tried of all—were not present.

"Where is Dick?" he asked.

"Coming in a few minutes."

He turned to Dr. Schmitt to enquire concerning the Arizona cowboy wounded last night in his defence.

"Your friend," said the Doctor reverently, "has been admitted to a better company than this. That's why all the boys are so quiet."

"If we could only see him," answered Brand, "he is here. I want you to have a seat reserved for him at one of the tables, and let us get this matter finished quickly. I may be arrested presently on a charge of murder. I killed three men last night."

The crowd parted on either side of the door, making way as six men came in, carrying Dick Straight upon a bed.

"Lay the bed here," said Brand, "before the curtains."

He took the sick man's hands in both his own. "We had an appointment this morning; we two—we didn't expect to meet here."

"No," said Straight. "If I'd been on the Other Side you wouldn't have kept the appointment, so"—he sighed—"I waited. Have you killed that Dragon? Ah, here is the Princess."

Hilda greeted him very shyly, very much embarrassed; then, to hide her confusion, began, nurse-like, to take charge of the patient while she shook the pillows and made things comfortable.

"Never mind the pillows," said Straight gaily; "you've shamed me, Miss Gault, for I'm to be Haraldson's best man to-day, and the pillows are not intended for the best man. His business"—he took a big bunch of orchids from a boy who had carried them—"is to bring flowers."

There were tears in the woman's eyes as she took the flowers, and one big tear fell upon his face as she bent down and kissed him.

"That tear," said Straight, "belongs to me, Miss Gault."

Straight looked up at them both with a derisive

chuckle. "The days of chivalry have indeed come back."

"Rubbish!" cried Brand. Then, turning to the crowd: "The days of chivalry are only the days of manhood."

Since he had come in he had looked gaunt and haggard again, his cheeks sunken, his hard eyes dark with pain, but now as he spoke the fighting blood surged in him, and he stood before these men, triumphant. "Men! Men! there's lots of work for men! Go out into the world and preach the Gospel to every poor duffer that hasn't got it—the Gospel of the Sword, the Sword of the Spirit. I hate preaching—I don't know how to talk, but do as Straight did—fight as he fought!"

Then Brand took Hilda's hand before that gathering.

The curtains of the days were drawn aside, and the priest was standing before an altar.

"Dearly beloved," he said, "we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony." So Brand Haraldson and Hilda Gault were married, and had the full desire of their hearts.

THE END

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