

UNDER A CLOUD

THRILLING TALE OF HUMAN LIFE.

CHAPTER X.—CONTINUED.

At that moment the clock on a cabinet rung out the musical chimes of four quarters, and a deeper toned bell sounded the hour.

"Ten," he said, smiling. "Two hours more and then the beginning of a longer day."

He opened a drawer, took out a parchment label, and wrote upon it carefully: To Edward Brettison, when time is no more for his obliged and grateful friend, MALCOLM STRATTON.

Rising from his chair he crossed to the cabinet, tied the label to one of the handles of the clock, then opened the door beneath, and laid bare a shelf of bottles, while a penetrating odor of camphor and other gums floated out into the room—a familiar odor to those who study natural history, and preserve specimens of insect or bird life.

He had to move two or three bottles to get at one with a large neck and stopper, which he shook up and loosened several pieces of dull looking white crystal. One of these pieces he turned out to the table by his letters, hesitated and jerked out another. Then, setting down the bottle, he crossed the room to where a table-filter stood on a bracket, and returned with the large carafé and a tumbler, which he filled nearly full of water. These two he set down on the table, and taking up one of the lumps of crystal he dropped it into the glass, taking care that no water should sprinkle over the side.

He held it up to his lamp to see how quickly it would dissolve, set it down again, and dropped in the second piece before beginning to tap the table with his nails, watching the crystalline pieces of the while.

"Quick and painless, I hope," he said quietly. "Bah! I can bear a little pain." He turned in his chair with a laugh, which froze upon his lips as he saw his shadow on a panel a few yards away, the weird aspect of the moving figure having so terrible an effect upon his shattered nerves that he sprang from his seat and fled to the wall where he stood breathing hard.

"Yes, I know," he cried wildly. "Only my shadow, but it is coming back—I cannot—it is more than man can bear." There was a wild despair in his utterance and he shrank away more and more toward the doorway leading to the further room. Then, as if making a supreme effort, he drew himself up erect, with his lips moving rapidly in a low murmur, stepped firmly toward the table and seized the glass.

CHAPTER XI.

FATE!

Barron was back to dine at the admiral's that night, but the dinner was not a success. Myra was singularly cold and formal in her manner; Edie pleaded a headache; and the admiral was worried by recollections of the morning's blunder, and felt awkward and constrained with his guest.

Strive hard as he would he could not help making comparisons, and a curious feeling of pity came over him as he thought of Stratton's blank face and the look of despair in his eyes, while he half wished that he had not allowed himself to be so easily won over to the engagement.

"For he is, after all, nearly a stranger," he mused as his son-in-law elect tried hard to secure Myra's interest in a society anecdote he was retelling, to which she listened and that was all. "Yes, a stranger," mused Sir Mark. "I know very little about him. Bah! Absurd! What should I know of any man who wanted to marry my girl? I might meet his relatives, and there would be a certain amount of intercourse, but if I knew them for fifty years it would not make the man a good husband to my poor girl. He loves her dearly; he is a fine, clever, manly fellow; there is no doubt about the Barron estate in Trinidad, and he has a handsome balance at his banker's."

The ladies rose soon after, and Barron held the door open, returning slowly to his seat, and shrugging his shoulders slightly. For there had been no tender look as Myra passed out, and Barron's thought was justified.

"Don't seem as if we were engaged. I hope," he said aloud, "Myra's not unwell." "Oh? Oh, no, my dear boy, no. Girls do come over grumpy sometimes. Here, try this claret, and let's have a cozy chat for an hour before we go up."

"An hour?" said Barron, with a raising of the eyebrows.

"Yes; why not? You're not a love-sick boy, and you'll have plenty of your wife by and by."

"Not a boy, certainly, sir. As to the love sickness—well, I don't know. But—yes, that's a good glass of claret. Larose, eh?"

"Yes. Fill your glass again."

"Willingly," said Barron, obeying his host, and pushing back the jug, "for I want to talk to you, sir, very seriously, and one seems to get on over a glass of wine."

"To talk to me?" said Sir Mark sharply, for his nerves were still ajar. "Nothing the matter?"

"Yes—and no."

"No hurry, sir, no hurry," said Sir Mark, frowning. "Well?"

Barron drew a long breath. "Well, what is it, man,—what is wrong?"

"Only the old story. When the cat's away the mice will play."

"What do you mean?"

"I've had bad news from my agent in Trinidad."

"Indeed?"

"He writes to me by this mail that he has done his best, but the estate needs my immediate supervision—that he cannot exert the same influence and authority that I should."

"Losses?"

"Oh, no; gains—that is, a little on the right side. But a little is absurd. Those plantations ought to produce a princely revenue."

The admiral looked at his guest keenly.

"Well," he said at last, "what does this mean?"

"That in spite of everything—my own desires and the love I have for England—I shall have to run across as soon as possible."

"For how long?"

"I cannot say—probably for a year."

"Hah!" ejaculated the admiral with a sigh of relief. "A year before he would be compelled to part with his child."

"And under the circumstances, Sir Mark, I am obliged to throw myself upon your mercy."

"What do you mean?" cried the admiral in alarm.

"Can you ask, sir?" said Barron reproachfully. "I know it is making a great demand upon you and dear Myra; but life is short, and I ask you if my position would not be terrible. It would be like exile to me. I could not bear it. I would say to my agent, 'Let the estate go to—' never mind where; but that would be covering ruin at a time when I am beginning to learn the value of money, as a slave of the lamp, who can, at my lightest order, bring everything I desire to lay at my darling's feet."

"You mean," cried the admiral hotly, "that you want the wedding hurried on?"

"To be plain, Sir Mark, I do. In a month from now. I must go by the next mail boat but one."

"It is impossible, sir!" cried Sir Mark. Barron shook his head and the admiral changed his position in his chair.

"But Myra?" he cried. "Oh, she would never consent to its being so soon."

"I believe our dear Myra would, in the sweetest of her disposition alone, consent, Sir Mark," said Barron gravely; "and as soon as she knows of the vital importance of time to the man who will be her husband, she will endeavor to meet his wishes in every way."

"Yes, yes; she is a dear good girl," said Sir Mark; "but this is terrible; so soon?"

"The time for parting must come, Sir Mark, sooner or later; and think it is for her benefit and happiness. Well, yes, I must confess to my own selfish wishes."

"And then there is her aunt—my sister. She would never consent to— Yes, I know exactly what she would say—such indecent haste."

"Only an elderly lady's objection, Sir Mark," said Barron smiling. "You are certainly bringing forward a new difficulty now, for I fear that I have never found favor in Miss Jerrold's eyes. But surely she has no right to dictate in a case like this. Nay, let us have no opposition. I will appeal to Miss Jerrold myself. She is too high-minded and sweet a lady to stand in the way of her niece's and my happiness. I am satisfied of that. Come, Sir Mark, look at the case plainly. You have been a sailor, sir, and know the meaning of sudden orders to join. Nothing would stop you. Mine are not so sudden, for I have—that is, at all risks, I will have—a month. My fortune is at stake—Myra's fortune, I may say. Help me as you feel the case deserves."

The admiral was silent for a few minutes, during which he filled and emptied his claret glass twice.

"You've floored me, Barron," he said at last. "I can't find an argument against you."

"Then you consent? And you will help me in every way?"

"It is hard work, my boy—a terrible wrench, but I suppose I must. In a month," he muttered; "so soon—and for her to sail right away for a whole year?"

ing quietly that the action of the terrible acid would perhaps be very sudden.

Anything more?

He smiled pleasantly, for a fresh thought flashed across his mind, and taking an envelope he bent down and directed it plainly, and without the slightest trembling of his hand, to Mrs. Brade.

"Poor, gossiping old thing!" he said. "She has been very kind to me. It will be a shock, but she must bear it like the rest."

He took a solitary five-pound note from his pocketbook, thrust it into the envelope, wrote inside the flap, "For your own use," and moistened and secured it before placing it with the other letters.

"About nine to-morrow morning she will find it," he thought, "and then—poor soul! poor soul! The police and—I shall be asleep."

"God—forgive me!" he said slowly as, after a step in front of the easy chair he had placed ready, he once more raised the glass, and closing his eyes:

"To Myra," he said, with a bitter laugh; and it was nearly at his lips when there was a sharp double knock at his outer door.

A fierce look of anger came into his countenance as he stood glaring in the direction of the summons. Then raising the glass again, he was about to drink when there was a louder knocking.

Stratton hesitated, set down the glass, crossed the room, and threw open the doors, first one and then the other, with the impression upon him that by some means his intentions had been divined and that it was the police.

"Having a nap, old fellow?" cried Guest hurriedly, as he stepped in, Stratton involuntarily giving way. "I was crossing the inn and saw your light. Thought I'd drop in for a few moments before going to my perch."

He did not say that he had been pacing the inn and its precincts for hours, longing to hear the result of his friend's visit to Bourne Square, but unable to make up his mind to go up till the last, when, in a fit of desperation, he had mounted the stairs.

"I will not quarrel with him if he is the winner. One was obliged to go down. I can't afford to lose lover and friend in one day, even if it does make one sore."

He had taken that sentence and said it in a hundred different ways that evening, and it was upon his lips as he had at last knocked at Stratton's door.

Upon his first entrance he had not noticed anything particular in his friend, being in a feverish, excited state, full of his own disappointment; but as Stratton remained silent, gazing hard at him, he looked in his face wonderingly; and as, by the half light, he made out his haggard countenance and the wild, staring look in his eyes, a rush of hope sent the blood bubbling, as it were, through his veins. "Has she refused him?" rang in his ears, and, speechless for the moment, with his heart throbbing wildly, and his throat hot and dry, he took a step forward as he saw carafe and water glass before him, caught up the latter, and raised it to his lips.

"But only to start back in wonder and alarm, for, with a hoarse cry, Stratton struck the glass from his hand, scattered its contents over the hearthrug, and the glass itself flew into fragments against the bars of the grate."

"Here, what's the matter with you, old fellow?" cried Guest wonderingly, "Don't act like that."

Stratton babbled a few incoherent words, and sank back in the lounge, covering his face with his hands, and a hoarse hysterical cry escaped from his lips.

Guest looked at him in astonishment, then at the table, where, in the broad circle of light, he saw the letters his friend had written, one being directed to himself.

They explained little, but the next instant he saw the wide-mouthed, stoppered bottle, caught it up, examined the label, and held it at arm's length.

"The cyanide!" he cried excitedly. "Mal! Stratton, old chap! Good God! You surely—no, it is impossible. Speak to me, old man! Tell me, or I shall go mad? Did Edie refuse you?"

Stratton's hands dropped from his face as he rose in his seat, staring wildly at his friend.

"Edie!" he said wonderingly.

"Yes, Edie!" cried Guest excitedly as he bent down toward his friend. "Here, stop a minute; what shall I do with that cursed stuff?"

Striding to the window, he threw it open, leaned out, and dashed the bottle upon the pavement, shivering it and its contents to fragments.

"Now speak," he cried as soon as he had returned. "No fooling, man; speak the truth."

"Edie?" said Stratton as he sat there trembling as if smitten by some dire disease.

"Yes. You told me you were going to tell her of your success—to ask the admiral to give you leave to speak to her."

"No, no," said Stratton slowly.

"Are you mad, or have you been drinking?" cried Guest angrily, and he caught his friend by the shoulders.

"Don't—don't, Percy," said Stratton feebly. "I'm not myself to-night. I—I—Why did you come?" he asked vacantly.

"Because it was life or death to me," cried Guest. "I couldn't say a word to you then, but I've loved little Edie ever since we first met. You were my friend, Mal, and I couldn't say anything when I saw you two so thick together. She seemed to prefer your society to mine, and she had a right to choose. I've been half mad to-day since you told me you cared for her, but I couldn't sleep till I knew all the worst."

She is engaged—to be married—to the admiral's friend."

"Barron?"

"Yes."

I thought as much. Then it was all a mistake about Edie!" cried Guest wildly. "I beg your pardon, Mal. I'm excited, too. I'm awfully sorry, though, old man. But tell me," he cried, changing his manner. "Those letters—that glass? Good Heavens. You were never going to be such a madman, such an idiot, as to—Oh, say it was all a mistake!"

"That I should have been a dead man by this?" said Stratton solemnly. "That was no mistake," he murmured piteously. "What is there to live for now?"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

LITTLE TOM KEEP.

How a Plucky Little Drummer Boy Served His Country in the Crimea.

A little more than a year ago an old soldier, named Thomas Keep, died suddenly in Battersea, England. After the inquest was held, the following story concerning him was told:

He was the son of the bardmaster of a regiment of Grenadier Guards, and enlisted as a drummer at the age of ten. A few months later his regiment was ordered to the Crimea.

Tom was a plucky little fellow, and loved England and hated Russia fiercely, as was natural under the circumstances. Every night when he lay down to sleep, and every morning when he woke, he hoped that the chance would come to him to help his country in some efficient way.

The battle of Balaklava was fought. He was in the midst of it, but was unharmed. There seemed to be nothing for Tom to do. Nobody listened to his drum, and he had neither gun nor sword with which to fight.

On the fifth of November the sleeping English camp was awakened by the fire of ninety parks of artillery placed during the night on heights around them.

All day the terrible battle raged. At evening the dead and wounded lay—fifteen hundred of them—on the plateau, while shot and shell still poured down on them, and the merciless cold of a Russian night silenced the cries of agony on their lips.

Suddenly a stout boy, conspicuous in his red uniform, began to move among them, while shells and bullets whizzed past him unnoticed. He gathered wood and built a huge fire. Then he made a great pot of tea, and in a tin cup carried it to the wounded, freezing men, kneeling by each one, lifting his head gently, and putting the mug to his lips with a cheery, "Try a hot drink."

It was little Tom Keep. Many a wounded soldier owed his life that night to the boy's courage and practical sense. He was dubbed in the regiment, the boy hero of the Grenadiers. But throughout his life Tom angrily refused the title and the credit.

"I wanted to do something for Old England," he would say. "But all I could do was to give a cup of hot tea. What was that?"

Many good men and more good women are in Tom Keep's case. They are ambitious to play a prominently noble part in life, and fate decrees that they shall stand in the background, and only give a little help to the soldiers who do the fighting.

The man who mixes the mortar in the building of a great house may be despised by master masons and decorators, whose work is seen and applauded by the world; but the architect who gave him his work knows that without it the temple would not be reared. His reward will be sure, when the day of payment comes.

China's Finances.

The London News says that the finances of China are in excellent condition. That country "have not contracted the fatal facility of piling up foreign obligations."

About 20 years ago China borrowed about £12,000,000 at 8 per cent., and paid it when due. In 1894 £7,500,000 was borrowed at 7 per cent., and \$12,250,000 at 6 per cent., and this loan has been gradually paid off until only \$3,500,000 is due, and will probably be paid next year. These loans were contracted on a silver basis, and the fall in the value of that metal has practically doubled the rate of interest, but there has been no hint of repudiation nor delay in payments. A portion of the Customs duties are by contract set apart to pay these loans, and none of this portion seems to have been devoted to other purposes. The Chinese revenue is from import and exports duties, tonnage and transit duties, the opium tax, a land tax, and taxes on rice, salt, and other products, besides a system of licenses. Very little is known of the amount of the revenue or expenditures of China. Its credit is so good, thinks the News, that in spite of the war a loan for almost any desired amount could be negotiated in Europe.

A Disciple of Franklin.



Judge (abruptly)—"One dollar." Vagrant (philosophically)—"Yer honor'll never know de real value of a dollar till yer try to get it out uv me."

Every square mile of the sea contains 120,000,000 fish of various kinds.

PUSHING THE QUEER.

HOW COUNTERFEITS CARRY ON THEIR LITTLE GAME.

One Gang Has Been at Work for Years and is so Stick at the Business that the Police Cannot Catch Them.

Ninety-nine people out of one hundred imagine that the distribution of counterfeit money, no matter how nearly perfect the spurious money may be, is the most difficult part of the counterfeit's business.

Those ninety-nine people rest under a misapprehension. The hardest work is to get the perfect moulds for the silver, the plate for the currency and the paper to print the bills on.

Any old-time criminal in this particular line of crooked business will tell you that his first genuine sigh of relief is given when he sees the coins out of the moulds and in bags, and the paper money packed tightly together in bundles.

While the money is in the process of manufacture; that is, when the engraver is busy over his work and, later on, while the other members of the gang are busy with presses and moulds manufacturing the "queer," the danger of detection and arrest is greatest.

COUNTERFEITERS OF ALL CLASSES,

conditions and kinds are known to the detectives, and just as soon as they or any of their allies or cronies appear in any part of the country the word is flashed in some mysterious way—often by a keen-eyed stool pigeon—and a "shadow" is put on every member of the gang.

For days, weeks and, in many cases months, they are kept under the closest kind of surveillance. A night and day watch is constantly over them. Their habits, general modes of life and the time they go out and return to their houses is accurately noted. If circumstances warrant it a raid follows in due course. These raids are not always successful, but in the majority of cases the counterfeiters are caught "dead to rights," as the police phrase has it, with the tools in their hands and the white metal sizzling in the clean-cut moulds.

WHEN THE COIN COMES OUT.

It is when the staff is ready to be handled that the voice of the counterfeiter is raised in a paean of joy and congratulations.

He knows that all his labor is not in vain, and that unless some untoward event occurs he will reap a harvest of some kind for his pains. It all depends on luck and good management whether it be large or small.

Counterfeiters always work in gangs. As a rule five men are in the partnership. One of them is the plate engraver, another the mould designer, a third the metal pourer, the fourth the distributor of the spurious money after it is turned out and the fifth general overseer, director and handler of the finances. The last named is usually the captain of the crowd. He is either an old hand at the business or a bright hustling young man with a thorough knowledge of the business, some capital at his disposal and an ability to direct, command and hold his crooked companions in check.

It is he who maps out the plan for the distribution of the coin. This plan is laid before the distributor. If the latter has any amendments or suggestions to offer they are, if worthy, freely accepted.

THE "PLUGGER'S" SMALL TASK.

On the gang's special staff in small games are what are known as a number of "pluggers." These are the men to whom lots of the counterfeit money is given to get rid of. They are given a liberal percentage on all they dispose of. They are supposed to work a certain territory and flood it with every bit of money they have. The old methods of making a small purchase and getting big change are still in vogue. Inside of an incredibly short time the country is fairly saturated with the bogus money, the agents are paid their commission and the manager divides up the net profits among the inside members of the gang.

Each one goes his separate way after this division to enjoy his ill-gotten gains and wait until the storm, if any arises, blows over. They are, however, always in communication with the leader of the gang, and whenever he has a new game to spring they are again called together and preparations made for the launching of another

AVALANCHE OF QUEER MONEY.

For years a number of these small operators have defied the law. They have been in the business for years, but so quietly do they work that suspicion never attaches to them.

It is the big men who go in for big coups that take the biggest chances. They never trust the work of distribution to special agents as do the small fry. They never touch anything but bills of big denomination. As soon as the money is "off the plates" each member of the gang takes a bundle—it may be \$500,000 or as high as a million—and branches out for the extended territory that it is understood he is to cover.

They "run out" as much of the green stuff as they can, and then when the first cry of alarm or detection goes up they fly to Europe and hide in some out of the way place for months. Sooner or later the whole gang assembles on the other side and compare notes.

His Boy's Profession.

"I don't believe in opposing the preferences of a son in the matter of choosing a profession," said an indulgent father.

"Nor I," said another father.

"Has your son chosen his profession?"

"Well, in a way."

"What is it?"

"Why, he was stage-struck, and insisted that he was 'born for the boards,' as he expressed it; and so I apprenticed him to a carpenter!"

Taken and Taken.

She—"I hate to have a photograph taken." He—"Well, you don't have to, do you?" She—"How can I help myself? I left it here on the table and now it is gone." He—"Oh, ah,"