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THE ADVENTURERS

(Continued from Page 2.)

We moved with the utmost caution, silently making for the distant patch of forest whence the pheasants had started. No word was spoken between us, but we communicated by gestures, which were just visible in the faint starlight. Drawing close in this manner, we halted at length upon the margin of the spot over which our suspicions brooded. Sheppard crawled stealthily forward, and after a time we followed him. He caught my arm and pointed to the ground.

"Some one has passed here," he whispered. "We're on a side track."
 "So much the better," I answered in the same voice. "We shall make less noise in walking."
 With that we resumed our way with the same microscopic caution, and must have covered, as I should guess, about the quarter of a mile, when suddenly Sheppard came to a pause.

"Hear anything?" he murmured in my ear.
 "I shook my head."
 "I believe there's just ahead—several of them," he continued. "Step lightly, for heaven's sake!"
 I needed no reminder, nor did Montgomery. We were like a church service for solemnity, and crept rather than walked as we stalked closer upon our prey. All of a sudden Montgomery, who was walking just before me, dropped on his knee and moved his hand back to me. I followed his example and crawled on all fours toward him.

"What is it?"
 "There's some one behind that tree," he whispered, pointing to a huge oak some ten feet from the path.
 There ensued a deep silence, and then, just as I began to find my position intolerable and was thinking of changing my feet, a twig cracked in the forest, and there came a noise as of feet among the dry leaves.

"What shall we do?" he asked.
 "To say the truth, I had no idea, but it was plain that if we had been seen, concealment was of no further use, and if we had not, that the spy could not now discover us through the undergrowth. So we resumed our path, rather speedily, and caught up with Sheppard. He came to meet us in a state of excitement, laying his arms upon our shoulders and drawing our heads together.

"Hood, as I live!" he cried in a whisper. "Did you see him?" we both spoke at once.
 "Yes, he came from behind me and crossed just in front. I had barely time to fall, and the light just took him in the eyes. We're safe now."
 Our hearts were full of triumph, and we pushed on with no more talk. It was possible that he had not seen us, but I doubted that. If he had, he would have thrown his party forward with greater speed. We were now, however, upon his track, and we were satisfied, and each man, loosed his pistol and girt himself for the eventual encounter. That Hood would show fight I had no doubt, and it was more than probable that he would endeavor to trick us. We must be on the watch for treachery. We wound along the track for the better part of an hour,

now getting news of the enemy and again leaving space for them to get away when our neighborhood seemed in peril of discovery. We had agreed to postpone the attack until the party reached its goal. If Hood had not seen us (and I was now disposed to believe that he had not) that goal would eventually be the hiding place of the treasure. This was how we comforted ourselves, and upon this faith our spirits rose to a high pitch.

By this time we had lost count of our direction in the innumerable windings of the path, but apparently we were now mounting a hill, and I judged that it lay somewhere to the south of the castle and toward the southern threshold of the Gwent. We were proceeding with our customary diligence and precautions when a noise of feet stamping on the earth assailed us, and round a corner came a posse of men and fell upon us. I did not lift my revolver. Already Montgomery's rang out on my right—and then the light of the moon shooting through the trees, which in those parts were sparse, fell upon the face of Jones!

"Jones!" I said, in a voice in which dismay, fury and disappointment blended.
 The man in front of me dropped his hand.
 "You, Mr. Greator?" he asked sharply. "How do you come here?"
 "God knows," I replied angrily. "And what are you doing?" I stopped suddenly, for the next face that came into my line of vision was the black, impassive face of Hood.

"May I ask, sir, what brings you out tonight on this expedition?" asked Jones, pulling out his execrable pocket-book.
 "I was silent, but Sheppard broke in. "We have no objection, Mr. Jones, to give you our confidence, if you will be equally liberal with us. We were hunting for Captain Sercombe."
 "Ah!" says Jones, making a note under the stars. "Then it is lucky I met you, gentlemen, for I am doing the same."

I began to see.
 "Mr. Hood," said Sheppard, with a polite gesture of his hand, "was guiding you?"
 "Mr. Hood had an idea," responded Jones sourly.
 "Ah, Mr. Hood's ideas are very valuable," said Sheppard quickly. "Pray treasure them."
 "I think, Mr. Sergeant," I interrupted, being at length come to myself, "that we have been both badly deceived, and if I were you I should go home."

Jones hesitated. I think he had had enough of it. Wherever Sercombe was, it was certain to me that he was very far from the place into which Hood had decoyed the police.
 "I give you the same advice, sir," replied Jones, "and with your permission I will accompany you."
 "I wish for no better escort than so zealous an officer," I answered, with some bitterness.

Jones spoke a word with Hood, and that done, we retraced our steps through the forest in a mutual and embittered silence.
 I think there was little conversation

between us on our journey. The sergeant used us very curiously, as if he would imply that we were defensible upon our trial. But one thing he said, and that, as Sheppard remarked afterward, without giving us the customary warning.

"I should like to ask you, Mr. Greator," he said, "what you want with upon our trial. But one thing he said, and that, as Sheppard remarked afterward, without giving us the customary warning."

"I want a good deal," I answered bluntly. "I want to warn him that he is wanted on a fatuous charge by a very obstinate and blind-eyed officer."
 "I don't think he needs that warning, sir," said Jones after a pause and somewhat dryly.
 "Besides, you forget, Ned," put in Sheppard, "that he owes me £20."

"All right," he said, "but he is in a tone which implied that he was not to be startled by anything that Sercombe owed."
 "And now," I said, in my turn, "you will perhaps be good enough to tell me how you came to find us?"
 "Mr. Hood heard you," he answered, civilly enough this time.

It was good of Mr. Hood—very sharp Mr. Hood, I returned, "and I take leave to thank Mr. Hood and to wish that he had discovered us a little sooner. Maybe you and I would have been spared a useless tramp."
 If we slept soundly that night it was owing more to the labors of the expedition than to any peace of mind or satisfaction of spirit. We were thoroughly out of tune with ourselves, and for the next two days our tempers came near to snapping. Even Montgomery looked sour and morose, but to give him his due, he was all the more set on pursuing the adventure to an end; and it was in this manner that we spent the last day before the culmination of this strange and tragic history.

The first event in that continuous chain that drew us henceforward forthright to the dreadful close fell that evening and when we were the least expecting so odd a turn to the affair. We had spent the night hunting Sercombe, and so, too, had Jones. We were now to find him. It was some time after 6 o'clock of a very black and ominous day that I spied him from the windows of my library crossing the drawbridge and passing under the archway of the guardroom. At 5 Sheppard pointed out to me the face of a man looking from the bushes, and just upon that comes in Montgomery with the tidings that a police officer was in waiting by the gates.

"What the deuce does he want?" I growled. "I'll let them know better than to trespass on my grounds."
 "I thought I knew the face," said Sheppard. "Let's settle him. It means that we're watched."
 We hurried out, but the picket was gone. Perhaps he had his orders, or it might be that he had already exceeded them.

Six o'clock, as I say, had struck, and it must have been twenty minutes later when Sercombe came up the drive. I ran down the stairway to meet him, he had escaped the police by a few minutes. I wanted to warn him of his danger. I have never to this day believed that Sercombe had any hand in Williams' death nor that he was privy to it. In fact, I am quite certain that neither he nor Hood knew anything about the assassination and that they were equally startled with ourselves and perhaps quite as much put about. The Greeks alone were responsible.

As the man drew near me I saw for the first time the change upon his face. The color, which was always high, had fallen and presented either a ghastly green or pallid white. His great mustache was ragged and blew in wisps about his mouth. His clothes, which he was wont to wear in excellent style and condition, were dusty, torn and soiled. He had, to my astonished eye, the air of a drunken lunatic, and his stuttered oaths and his uncertain gait deepened the impression on me. He came up to the door and put out a hand, as if groping for the bell; but, though I stood by, he did not seem to notice me.

"Sercombe!" called in amazement. He passed his hand across his eyes. "Is that you, Mr. Greator?" he asked, me, sir; I see badly. My eyes—Excuse me, sir, for God's sake!" he concluded, almost in a whine.
 I took his arm and assisted him into the nearest room, when he sank into a chair, breathing his exhaustion.

"I'll tell you what, Mr. Greator," he said presently, staring about him, "you're a good sort—if that's news. But what price would you put upon Hood now?"
 The man was plainly beyond himself with fatigue or pain, or both, and so I produced a glass and some brandy from the cupboard and poured out a dose. I expected to see at a bound the color jump into his distempered face. It swung back into his cheeks, and his bloodshot eyes beamed on me.

"I feel better for that," he said generally, "and I could do with some food too."
 "You shall have some directly," I answered. "It is preparing now. But see here, Captain Sercombe, I must warn you that you are in danger."
 "Danger!" he echoed and appeared to start in his chair. I could see that the man's nerve was altogether broken.

"Yes; the police have a warrant out for you. Something to do with Williams, I believe."
 Sercombe's head dropped on his knee. "I see it now," he muttered. "That was his game." He looked up at me and curried his mustache with his fingers.
 "Well, I fancy, Mr. Greator, that I've come from greater danger than that. I can't quite catch the police. Oh, no!" And he laughed a little.

"They are outside keeping guard upon the castle," I explained, and I moved to the window and looked out. "I cannot think how you escaped them."
 "What! Are you, too, in disgrace?" laughed Sercombe, in his old fashion; then, more quietly, "I tell you, I'm not afraid of the police. What have I done? I defy them to pin a suspicion on me. I know to whom I owe this, and make no bones about it. I don't forget. I might have seen it coming—perhaps I did—but that didn't trouble me."
 "I should be wiser, Captain Sercombe, if I knew where this led," said I.

He pondered, eyeing me. "Sir, I will tell you presently. If I may have that



He sank into a chair, breathing his exhaustion.

food you spoke of I think I shall be in a better way to talk with you."
 At that moment the gong sounded in the hall.
 "You have your answer," I replied. "We are just going to dine, and I hope you will give us the pleasure of your company."

You may easily imagine the amazement with which my two companions received this strange visitant. He was certainly the last person we had expected to be entertaining in an amicable fashion. But neither interfered with any questions, Montgomery out of dogged loyalty to myself and Sheppard out of a reasoning intelligence, Sercombe looked out on life with his own eyes once more, but yet he showed certain signs of discomposure, more particularly in the way in which he hurried through his food.

"I'm mighty empty," he explained. "I've had a longer communication on that subject at the time. Presently, however, he put down his knife and fork and broke out unexpectedly.
 "Mr. Greator, in the Swan some time ago you made me a proposal."

"I did," said I.
 "A little later I approached you with a counter proposal. Can't we make the basis of an agreement still?"
 "I think that is quite practicable," I answered. "We might make a basis, but the question is, Should we keep to it?"

Sercombe studied his glass. "I understand you," he said. "I take you. But I admit to you that things are changed since then—changed, I will impress upon you, with you as well as with me."
 I bowed. The others sat silent, waiting with interest what might be forthcoming.

"Once before we tabbed our cards, Mr. Greator," said Sercombe. "I think it would be wise if we were to do so again."
 "I understand you to hold all the trumps," said I.
 "Ah," said he, "that's the rub. I don't say no. But what I wish to put to you is this: What is it worth to you if I can lay your hands on that treasure?"

"I think this was the problem I was confronted with at the Woodman, Captain Sercombe," I replied.
 "It was," said he. "And then I put a price on myself, which was share and share with your party."
 I considered his statement. Sheppard's eyes telegraphed at me across the table. What in the world had brought us to this pass? It was not Sercombe's tardy repentance, nor was it a heroic act of generosity offered out of friendliness. No; the split had anticipated had come about—the thieves had fallen out. And I now began to put a point on Sercombe's condition and Sercombe's visit. If this were so and the partners had quarreled, I felt that we stood to gain a great deal.

"I remember you asked a high price," I said. "You rated your conversion, let us say, very highly."
 "I did," said he easily, "and I do now. I ask you, is your case any better? Indeed, I think it is a good deal worse, and you know well enough that if you make no terms with me you will not see a gold piece of that hoard this side of judgment day. I am being frank with you."

"I thank you for your frankness," I answered, "and I am equally open with you when I remind you that if you make no terms with me you have a little chance of that same hoard as ourselves."
 "Very well, sir," he said cheerily. "Then isn't it obvious to you that we should find a compromise?"

"I agree," I said, "and upon these terms only—that you stand in to take your part—a quarter and no more."
 He struck out his hand as if he were presenting a pistol.
 "Done!" he said, and there was a
 (Continued on Page 4.)

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ARRIVALS		
60 From Toronto	5.00 a.m.	
19 From Peterboro	8.00 a.m.	
32 From Haliburton	8.55 a.m.	
0 From Port Hope	9.10 a.m.	
0 From Cobocook	10.10 a.m.	
22 From Toronto	10.50 a.m.	
35 From Port Hope	2.05 p.m.	
2 From I. B. & O. Jct.	5.45 p.m.	
23 From Port Hope	6.28 p.m.	
54 From Whitby	7.30 p.m.	
24 From Toronto	8.05 p.m.	
56 From Whitby	8.45 p.m.	
18 From Toronto	9.40 p.m.	
1 From Belleville	9.45 p.m.	
DEPARTURES		
34 For Port Hope	6.00 a.m.	
51 For Toronto	6.30 a.m.	
0 For Belleville	7.20 a.m.	
21 For Toronto	9.15 a.m.	
2 For Port Hope	10.53 a.m.	
3 For I. B. & O. Jct.	11.05 a.m.	
23 For Port Hope	11.05 p.m.	
54 For Whitby	12.05 p.m.	
27 For Toronto	2.40 p.m.	
39 For Toronto	6.25 p.m.	
31 For Cobocook	6.35 p.m.	
19 For Peterboro	9.46 a.m.	
18 For Toronto	8.05 a.m.	

The Congregational Union of Ontario and Quebec will hold its annual meeting at Embro, Ontario, from June 6 to 11. Representatives will be present from all the Congregational churches throughout these two provinces as well as from outside points. The Embro Congregational church is a place of special interest, owing to its pastor, Rev. W. T. Gunn, having been secretary of the Jubilee movement to free the Congregational churches throughout Canada from debt.

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