

A Cat's Paw

Or, The Maid of the Mill

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Though as yet but a few weeks old at the trade, Gerard Ainslie, I fear, had already contracted a vice which appears more or less the result of all continuous literary labor—namely, an ignoble tendency to become chary of material, to use many words for the expression of few ideas, and to beat out the gilding from every thin, so as to cover the greatest possible amount of surface. Tale-writing, even for such a paper as the Holborn Gazette, was a pursuit less likely to encourage than exhaust fertility of invention, and our new-dead author sat down to his led writing-table with an overwhelming sense of the difficulties he had before him. Gerard was far too wise, however, to think of abandoning his late career in favor of the new opening offered by Mr. Barrington-Belgrave. Under any circumstances, he would stick to the Holborn Gazette so long as it produced a regular salary. Bread and cheese were hard enough to get. He resolved not to leave go of the one which he made a grasp at the other; so he began to ponder how that same beating-out process, so essential to the making up of his weekly task, might be brought to bear on the construction of a melodrama—gorgeous, of course, in decoration, characteristic, if possible, in dialogue and costume; but above all, as he remembered with a sigh, startling in its situation—

He recalled the expression of Mr. Barrington-Belgrave's large, close-shaven, beetle-browed face, while insisting on this particular essential. He remembered the solemnity, not entirely owing to brandy-and-water, of this enthusiast while he warned his pupil that extravagance, however glaring, was preferable to commonplace; he recollected the examples adduced as stimulants to the attention of a British audience, and his heart sank within him while he pondered. But, as I said before, he had always learned some of the tricks of the trade; and it occurred to him, after brief consideration, that he might make a tale of mystery and horror, on which he was then engaged for the Holborn Gazette, answer the double purpose of a thrilling romance and a new drama.

One fellow's hero, as Lord Dunsany would say, is very like another fellow's hero; and after all, the changes on them how you will, there is but little variety in dress, amongst the puppets that make up the interest of imaginative literature, whether for the library or the stage. You will find in "Ivanhoe" for instance—and I name that romance because everybody has read it, and with equal interest—you will find, I say, in "Ivanhoe" the regular stock characters necessary for the construction of every narrative, and every plot. If you look for anything beyond these, you will have considerable difficulty in hitting on it.

First, there is Wilfred himself, the hero, pure and simple, type of strength, courage, address, rectitude, modesty, and good looks. Would he not have been Sir Gawain at the round table? Sir Charles Grandison in the last century, and more fire-eating dandy that I can name in all the novels of the present? Dickens has got him a situation as an usher at a Yorkshire school; Thackeray taught him to paint, sent him to Charter-House, and married him to Rowena instead of Rebecca, though he took him out of that scrape too before the end of the third volume, while Lever remembering certain proclivities for spur and spear, purchased his commission, and shipped him off to serve under the Great Duke in the uniform of an Irish dragoon. We might pursue the parallel through every one of the characters who attended the tournament at Ashby-de-la-Zouch. There is the Black Knight, strong, good-tempered, and not burdened with wisdom; Front-de-Bœuf, strong, hard-tempered, and totally devoid of scruple. Have we not seen the one with bare neck and glazed hat, the other in high boots and broad black belt, whenever the nautical drama sets Jack Hearty the blue-jacket, in opposition to Paul Ferris, the pirate? Ben's Gulliver, for as far as Tenipar's title remains, is, ally appropriate—has of late become a lawyer, but the sort of lawyer who keeps prussic acid in his inkstand, and a "six-shooter" in his blue bag. Is not Bracy the Lovelace of "Clarissa Harlowe," and the Sir Charles Coldstream of "Lady Chatterback" Parson Adams was no heavier a bruiser, and scarcely more respectable a priest, than the Clerk of Topnamhurst. Gurth and Wamba have worn the powder and plush of every lively in vogue since the first French revolution. Cedric of Rotherwood has come down to farm his own estate of less than a hundred acres; and Athelstane the Unready has been so often before the footlights at the shortest notice, and in such various guises, that he deserves rather to be called Vertumnus the Versatile.

With regard to the ladies, for many centuries we have been limited to two classes of heroines—the dark-eyed and affectionate, the blue-eyed and coy. Rowena and Rebecca must be quite tired of dressing over and over again for their parts; and if nothing else, we owe Miss Bradshaw a name of gratitude that she has introduced us at last to a more original style—to a young person with a good deal of red in her hair, and a refreshing contempt for many of our long-cherished superstitions, including those indicated by the Church Cate-

devil did you bring him to me for? However, 'the Boss' will be here at the half-hour. I'll lay the blame on him. See him? Well, I don't mind. Devilish gentlemanlike fellow, of course. These poor, broken-down chaps always are. Ask him to step in."

So Gerard stepped in, and found himself face to face with a thin, quiet, well-bred man, who expressed in a tone as different as possible from that which he had heard through the folding-doors, first regret, at having kept him waiting, next pleasure in making his acquaintance, and lastly, grave doubts whether the play under discussion, though denoting genius, would be adapted, without considerable alteration, to the company and resources of the Accordion.

Mr. Barrington-Belgrave's face brightened. He knew the manager, and this sounded a little more hopeful. Not only did he take an interest in the production of Pope Clement on Gerard's account, but he was also persuaded that the character of the brigand was specially adapted to his own talents; and he had, indeed, offered several suggestions during the composition of the piece, with a view of electrifying a London audience by his rendering of that part. Gerard, watching his friend's countenance, and feeling humbled in any way that might be pointed out to him.

"You must give us two more women's parts," suggested Mr. Bowles; "or, let me see—pages. Yes, pages will do better. Can you put in a couple of pages, with something to say? You know," he added, looking at the actor for corroboration, "I can't keep Lydia Goddard and little Jessie White idle; and they draw well, in boys' dresses, both of them."

"Nothing easier!" answered Gerard, wondering in his heart how he should get them in.

"Then there's Violante. Aint' that her name? Yes, Violante. You'll have to kill her. She's no use if you don't kill her. Miss Carmine is the only one I don't think I could persuade Miss Carmine to take a part without a die in it. Then about Mrs. Golightly. There is nothing for Mrs. Golightly. No! She would never condescend to play the Pope. I fear it's impossible. I'm really afraid we must give it up, or at any rate put it off to another season. Excuse me, then, the door-bell."

Mr. Barrington-Belgrave, watching Gerard's face, which had grown of late sadly worn and pale, was surprised to see it flush at the sound of a voice in the passage.

Next moment the door opened, and "the Boss," as Mr. Bowles called him, entered the room. That gentleman saluted Mr. Belgrave with his usual courtesy; then stood transfixed, and gaping, in speechless surprise.

His dramatic author broke the silence first. "Why, Dolly!" said he, "I had no idea that I should ever see you again."

There can be little doubt that the period of suspense over the Far East is almost at an end, and that the next few days will bring news of important war operations, says a London correspondent. It is significant that the aggressive talk from Russian sources in the past few weeks has been followed by pessimistic forebodings in military circles in St. Petersburg. The writer learns that grave fears are entertained at Russian headquarters that the fall of Port Arthur is imminent.

The generally anticipated attack did not occur on Saturday night, although a telegram received from Grand Duke Cyril reports that the enemy's ships were sighted on the horizon. It is presumed that the Japanese were warned of the extra precautions which had been taken to guard against a surprise. Vice-Admiral Makarov's torpedo flotilla patrolled the open sea, while the warships, with full steam up, remained outside of Port Arthur.

It is admitted in St. Petersburg naval circles that the situation is so bad that Admiral Togo's next and supreme attempt to block the harbor may be successful. The Russian dilemma in that event would be the gravest, and the practical value of the position both in a naval and military sense would be reduced almost to nil.

The only chance of saving the Russian fleet, if the possibility of sealing Port Arthur be admitted, is to send it to Vladivostok while Admiral Togo is busy conveying transports to the Yalu. It is known that the vicinity of Port Arthur was free of Japanese ships for the past week, and opportunity for this move by the Russian admiral has not been lacking.

It is suspected, however, that if it had been acted upon it would have required extraordinary good luck to enable the Russian fleet to get far on its way without discovery. But if it reached the vicinity of Vladivostok the Russian squadron there, expecting the arrival, would, in conjunction with Admiral Makarov's ships, be much superior in strength to the Japanese fleet in those waters.

The best informed military circles at St. Petersburg no longer anticipate a Japanese landing at the head of the Liao-Tung Gulf. They believe the Japanese have missed their opportunity, the Russians being now too strong.

The opinion now is that the Japanese will try flanking movements from Takushan, west of Antung, at the head of the Gulf of Corea, in connection with their advance on the Yalu River, but the authorities at St. Petersburg make no display of nervousness, manifesting the utmost confidence in the plan of campaign marked out by Gen. Kouropatkin.

A correspondent with the Russian outposts, writing from Antung, on the Yalu River, under date of March 19, describes the fearful state of the roads and the journey from Feng-Huan-Cheng to Antung, which, he says, is impossible for vehicles.

The correspondent depicts Antung as a miserable collection of hovels, the inhabitants of which on account of the scarcity, cannot afford timber for fire and use straw instead. The country between Feng-Huan-Cheng and Antung is sparsely settled. The Chinese avoided the high roads, preferring the mountain fastnesses. Milk, butter, and eggs are almost unknown.

JAPANESE WERE FOILED

Appeared Within Range of Search-Lights at Port Arthur.

A despatch received at London from Chefoo says that 17 battleships and cruisers, 20 steamers and 12 torpedo boat destroyers have passed Chefoo apparently bound for Port Arthur.

A despatch from St. Petersburg says Admiral Makarov telegraphs the attempt to surprise Port Arthur was foiled Saturday night. A number of Japanese vessels suddenly appeared within range of the search-lights, but they withdrew after reconnoitering.

The St. Petersburg correspondent of the Echo de Paris says that the members of the naval general staff believe that Admiral Makarov, perceiving the Japanese squadron, returned to Port Arthur, his idea being to try to induce Admiral Togo to follow him under the guns of the forts.

There can be little doubt that the period of suspense over the Far East is almost at an end, and that the next few days will bring news of important war operations, says a London correspondent. It is significant that the aggressive talk from Russian sources in the past few weeks has been followed by pessimistic forebodings in military circles in St. Petersburg. The writer learns that grave fears are entertained at Russian headquarters that the fall of Port Arthur is imminent.

The generally anticipated attack did not occur on Saturday night, although a telegram received from Grand Duke Cyril reports that the enemy's ships were sighted on the horizon. It is presumed that the Japanese were warned of the extra precautions which had been taken to guard against a surprise. Vice-Admiral Makarov's torpedo flotilla patrolled the open sea, while the warships, with full steam up, remained outside of Port Arthur.

It is admitted in St. Petersburg naval circles that the situation is so bad that Admiral Togo's next and supreme attempt to block the harbor may be successful. The Russian dilemma in that event would be the gravest, and the practical value of the position both in a naval and military sense would be reduced almost to nil.

The only chance of saving the Russian fleet, if the possibility of sealing Port Arthur be admitted, is to send it to Vladivostok while Admiral Togo is busy conveying transports to the Yalu. It is known that the vicinity of Port Arthur was free of Japanese ships for the past week, and opportunity for this move by the Russian admiral has not been lacking.

It is suspected, however, that if it had been acted upon it would have required extraordinary good luck to enable the Russian fleet to get far on its way without discovery. But if it reached the vicinity of Vladivostok the Russian squadron there, expecting the arrival, would, in conjunction with Admiral Makarov's ships, be much superior in strength to the Japanese fleet in those waters.

The best informed military circles at St. Petersburg no longer anticipate a Japanese landing at the head of the Liao-Tung Gulf. They believe the Japanese have missed their opportunity, the Russians being now too strong.

JAPS ADVANCE TO THE YALU.

Information has been received at Tokio that Japanese transports with stores have entered the estuary of the Yalu, and that troops are landing at various points on the Korean shore. Presumably gunboats are covering the movement. If this be true, the Russian forts erected on the other side of the river must be ineffective.

A STRONG POSITION.

While the first line of defence against the Japanese advance from Corea is a strong position, selected by Gen. Kouropatkin near Feng-Huan-Cheng, it is believed the Russians intend to hold out so long as possible at Antung, which commands the Peking road. The place has many natural advantages for defence.

Gen. Kuropatkin's army, according to Russian advisers, is strong out along the road between Anju and Wiju, its advance being severely impeded by bad roads, which made it difficult to push forward the supplies, which are dragged by coolies, requiring eight days' march from Chong-Ju to the Yalu. For seventy miles the river is 500 fathoms wide, and at Yung-ampho it is ice-laden and barred by islands, whence the Russian sharpshooters can harass the Japanese advance.

The Russians have entrenched themselves heavily near Hai-Cheng, to block the progress of the Japanese in case they succeed in landing at the head of the Liao-Tung Gulf.

The Russian naval plan for retrieving the reverses at Port Arthur and Chemulpo has been communicated to one of the Embassies through official channels having access to the highest naval authorities at St. Petersburg. The plan is explained as follows:—Russia recognizes that Japan now has preponderating naval strength in the Far East, and will attempt to reverse it by two distinct moves. First, urgent efforts will be made to have a naval concentration at Port Arthur, the Baltic Red Sea, and Vladivostok, which, it is believed, the Russians will utilize to the best advantage.

According to a Shanghai telegram the Japanese advance guard reports that the Russian defences on the Yalu are very much scattered and are still incomplete, making it difficult for any one body to help another in case of a strong attack. It is stated from a doubtful source that the rapidity of the Japanese advance to Wiju surprised the Russians, who were compelled to abandon 24 guns.

The only news concerning the Japanese fleet is a questionable statement by a Japanese sailor at Seoul, who served with Admiral Togo's fleet in the attacks on Port Arthur. He says in effect that the fleet is divided into seven squadrons. Four of them are watching Port Arthur, the fifth is patrolling the Korean coast, and the sixth and seventh are cruising between Vladivostok and Northern Japan.

The threatened rising of the Tongkang in Northern Corea, has it is stated, induced Mr. Jordan, the British Minister, to ask the Korean Government to send troops to protect the British miners in that part of the country.

It is not believed that the Russian troops between Antung and Chientienchang (about 100 miles north of Antung) could make Russian force, and by the engagement of the Russian troops at Liao-tung, and in that neighborhood be stamped with the Russian mark. The bearers of unmarked arms will be treated as brigands.

JAPANESE NAVAL LOSSES.

Official returns of the Japanese casualties in the various attacks on Port Arthur show the losses were 23 killed and 91 wounded, 40 of whom recovered. It is expected that Vladivostok will be free of ice on the 24th inst.

JAPS ADVANCE TO THE YALU.

Information has been received at Tokio that Japanese transports with stores have entered the estuary of the Yalu, and that troops are landing at various points on the Korean shore. Presumably gunboats are covering the movement. If this be true, the Russian forts erected on the other side of the river must be ineffective.

TO SIEGE THE FISHERIES.

The proprietor of the principal fisheries on Saghalien Island has been informed that the Japanese are preparing to make a descent on the island so soon as the ice shall permit. The inhabitants have petitioned that the Vladivostok squadron come to their defence.

THE MELANCHOLY CZAR.

A despatch to the London Daily Mail from Geneva says that the Czar on Wednesday received two officers who were going to the front to represent Switzerland. His Majesty seemed very nervous and melancholy. He discussed the repulse of the Cossacks at Chong-Ju, and said: "Do not be too severe in your criticisms. Remember everything becomes difficult so far from a base."

JAPS SWIM THE YALU.

Tokio despatches to London newspapers assert that Corea is free of Russian influence. They are said to be bridging the river at Kosan (Chosan). Their retreat amazed the Japanese. Some Japanese accounts, it is stated, swarm the Yalu near Kiu-Lien-Cheng, and then followed the river northward. They found a splendid defensive position, which, it is believed, the Russians will utilize to the best advantage.

According to a Shanghai telegram the Japanese advance guard reports that the Russian defences on the Yalu are very much scattered and are still incomplete, making it difficult for any one body to help another in case of a strong attack. It is stated from a doubtful source that the rapidity of the Japanese advance to Wiju surprised the Russians, who were compelled to abandon 24 guns.

LEADING MARKETS

The Ruling Prices in Live Stock and Breadstuffs.

Table with columns for various commodities like Wheat, Flour, and other goods, listing prices in Toronto and other locations.

COUNTRY PRODUCE.

Table listing prices for various country products such as Butter, Eggs, Potatoes, and other agricultural goods.