

The Man Nobody Knew

By HOLWORTHY HALL

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"PERHAPS THEY COPIED THAT PICTURE TOO WELL."

Synopsis.—In a base hospital at Neuilly, France, his face disfigured beyond recognition, an American soldier serving in the French army attracts attention by his deep despondency. Asked by the surgeon for a photograph to guide them in making over his face, he offers in derision a picture of the Savior, bidding them take that as a model. They do so, making a remarkable likeness. Invalided home, on the boat he meets Martin Harmon, New York broker, who is attracted by his remarkable features. The ex-soldier gives his name as "Henry Hilliard," and his home as Syracuse, New York. He left there under a cloud, and is embittered against his former fellow townsmen. Harmon offers him a job.

CHAPTER II.—Continued.

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The younger man glanced at the card. "My name is Hilliard. Well—competition so keen you can afford to pay that high for business, or is the stuff just hard to sell?"

Hilliard, who had begun to nod assent to the first question, looked rather blank at the second, but rallied quickly.

"Competition. But there's money in it, and you'll get your share of it too—believe me! I've got a sneaking suspicion that you and I can do business together. Want to consider it?"

"All this on such short acquaintance? Aren't you taking a fearful chance?"

Hilliard saw that the young man's irises were extremely luminous and clear; he leaned forward seriously. "I'm simply backing my hunch, son. In the long run it pays me—pays me well. I've sort of taken a fancy to you. As far as I know you may be the rottenest salesman in the whole United States; I wouldn't hire your experience without some references, and maybe a surety company back of you; but I'd hire that face of yours, and your manner, and your voice off-hand. I'd hire your front—not your past! And let me tell you right now, son, I never made a trade as fast as this before in my life. But there's something about you that . . . Well?"

The young man was thoughtful and unblinking.

"You're actually making me a proposition are you?"

"Absolutely"—Hilliard's fist on the table provided the exclamation point. "Here—I don't know you, and you don't know me, but if you're hunting for a job you've found it. . . . It's your next move."

The young man's lips parted in grave good humor; Hilliard was spell-bound at the effect.

"I'll try not to keep you waiting. This speed of yours rather entices me. Besides, if my face is my fortune, I'd better find it out as soon as possible. This organization of yours is in New York city, isn't it?"

"My headquarters are, but I'd want you to work outside. I've got one special town in mind—the state. That's where this list is. It's always been one of our hardest markets, and it's got money to burn. Can't swing it, somehow—they don't respond to any ordinary selling talk; they're too hide-bound conservative. You know the kind: Government-bond crowd. And for a year or so they've been making war profits till you can't see 'em for dust. Manufacturing town. And I'd like mighty well to slip you up there for a month or two; give you time enough to get your bearings and turn you loose. You ought to do great work in a place like that. They need a chap like you—confound it!" He halted abruptly and shook his head in great bewilderment. "I can't make it out at all! You've got the appearance of . . . well, a sort of strait-laced youngster, if you know what I mean, and yet the way you say things, I—"

The young man gestured blandly. "And the town you have in mind?" "It's Syracuse, New York."

"Syracuse?" The young man's chin was squared by a ruler, and noticeably thrust forward.

"Yes; know anybody there?"

Hilliard laughed unpleasantly and resumed his former attitude.

"Why, it so happens," he said, biting the words off sharply, "that I was born and brought up in Syracuse, and if there's any one place in the world I care less about than any other place that's the one . . . I'm sorry, but I'm afraid we're at cross purposes from here on."

Hilliard showed his vexation. "What's the matter? Haven't you kept on good terms with your old friends?" "No."

Hilliard frowned.

"Well, is it so bad you couldn't do any business there? How do they remember you?"

The young man regarded him stonily for an instant; then gradually a far-away expression crept into his eyes; he started and caught his breath.

"I'll let you a fat leather wallet, from which he extracted a tiny photograph, torn from an old passport. "What do you think of that?"

Hilliard scanned it superficially.

"Nice-looking boy. Who is he?"

"It was taken two years ago," said Hilliard, resting his elbows on the table. "You wanted to know how they remember me, so I'm showing you. That's a photograph of me, taken two years ago."

"Impossible!" Hilliard snorted. "That doesn't look any more like you

than . . . than I do! Let's omit the comedy; I'm talking business!"

The young man's mouth curled. "Don't be mistaken, Mr. Harmon—there's very little joking in me when I ever mention Syracuse." Hilliard shivered at the tone, but waved the photograph in scoffing accusation. "So! And you used to be fatter in the face, didn't you? How about your general size, and so on?"

"I've taken on twenty-five pounds; my face is a lot thinner, but there's a reason. It hasn't grown on me; it was manufactured. Incidentally, while I think of it my stride's shortened six inches. That's another identification gone. Bullet in my knee. I don't exactly limp, but—"

Hilliard was beaming now, and flushed with excitement.

"I told you I was in hospital for nearly a year, I believe," said Hilliard icily. "It was shrapnel—across the face. As a matter of fact I didn't have much of any face left. But the surgeons—they're pretty clever. Yes—they're clever!" Hilliard's eyes were needle-points. "They make a man over from his own photograph. In my own case I preferred it differently. So when they asked me for something to use as a pattern in remodelling me I gave 'em this!" He tossed out a picture postcard, soiled and frayed. "Well, that's where the trouble began. They cursed me up and down for a . . . still that part of it won't interest you!" His eyes were bright now, and his voice shook with passion. "Naturally I hadn't meant it as d—d literal as all that . . . but they had me under ether before I could help myself . . . and they went through with it . . . and cursed me some more afterward . . . They couldn't copy it exactly, of course, but they did the best they could. . . . Cloated over it! Took infinite pains to make it perfect . . . and sneered at me while they did it! Sneered—and laughed. . . . Well, you've got the results in front of you. That's what I was—and that's what I am! What's your opinion now?" The last sentence came snarling through set teeth.

The broker's pupils had dilated grossly; his eyes wandered vacantly from the photograph to the postcard and back to Hilliard's face. His whole imagination was pinned down and crushed; he swooned softly under his breath and wet his lips.

"It's . . . a miracle!" he stammered.

"The photograph," said Hilliard harshly, "is the way they remember me up in Syracuse. Do you think they'd ever recognize me now?"

"It's a miracle . . . it's paralyzing . . ." Hilliard swallowed hard, and looked down almost fearfully at the time-worn postcard. "There's so much difference . . . nobody'd ever think of it without knowing . . . but when you see the original! . . . It . . . it knocks me all in a heap! It's staggering! And they did that to you! Just to think they could do that to you! . . . I've got to have a drink!"

Hilliard motioned impatiently, but his fit of rage was slowly going down.

"There's no miracle about it at all. It was good plastic surgery. If they'd sent me out looking as I used to you wouldn't call it a miracle, would you? It's only what they did that makes it staggering. But it's clever—oh, yes—clever! And you can see for yourself how few marks of it there are." He drew a long breath and managed to smile again; but the effect was shocking, for while his features were composed and kindly his eyes were venomous. "Well, I certainly never intended to go to Syracuse again for pleasure, but if there's enough compensation to pay for the risk I'm not afraid to try it on . . . business."

His accent sent cold chills coursing down Harmon's spine. "In fact now that I think of it, it ought to be rather amusing!"

The broker was striving to pull himself together.

"But why on earth didn't you have 'em use your own picture for a copy . . . if they're as clever as . . . Oh!" He stopped short and his chin dropped. "Oh! Is that the answer?"

"Yes," said Hilliard, reclaiming the two photographs. "That's the answer. I didn't mind starting over again only—" He sighed and inhaled mightily. "Only take my advice, Mr. Harmon, and don't lose your temper just before an operation."

Hilliard breathed more freely, but he was still in violent intellectual distress. He round face was wavy with awe, and he was tonguing his lips in constant nervousness, for the complete possibility of the situation was creeping over him.

"If that's the case," he ventured, "why . . . they surely needn't recognize your name either, Mr. Hilliard, need they? I mean, if you had any idea of going back to your home town incognito, as it were."

"They wouldn't recognize anything about me," said Hilliard dryly. His teeth, showing at the moment, were white and regular as a young wolf's.

"We won't discuss that side of it just now, though. But if I go back, I'm

incognito—and don't make any mistake about it. Is that quite clear?"

Hilliard swallowed again. "They'd recognize your voice, wouldn't they?"

"I had to get used to this one myself. Something went wrong with my vocal cords, and the antrum on both sides was hurt; it seemed to have an effect like changing a sounding-board."

"So! And you used to be fatter in the face, didn't you? How about your general size, and so on?"

"I've taken on twenty-five pounds; my face is a lot thinner, but there's a reason. It hasn't grown on me; it was manufactured. Incidentally, while I think of it my stride's shortened six inches. That's another identification gone. Bullet in my knee. I don't exactly limp, but—"

Hilliard was beaming now, and flushed with excitement.

"That's great. Oh! that's wonderful! Nobody'll know you from Adam! Thunder and lightning, what a chance—a chance! Hold on—how well do you know the big men in Syracuse? Well enough to speak up. That's my policy. Cash in on this thing the doctors did for you! Let's play it together, son. If it's a sort of whitewashing you want, I'll help you. I don't care a continental what you did to get in wrong in Syracuse—it's success that counts. Nothing else but success. Is it a bargain?"

Hilliard shut his teeth tight; reflected; yielded abruptly.

"It's a bargain!" he said. "I'm with you!"

"Good! Now—"

"One moment! Let's be frank with each other. Don't get any impression that I've done anything that's—"

"Mr. Hilliard, you don't have to talk like that to me! I've had you sized up from the start, haven't I?"

"Yes, but I wanted you to know—"

"But I do know, son! Wild oats, sort of. Am I right, or am I wrong? That's why I'm banking on you. People turned up their noses, maybe. Said things. Gossip. I know that sort of business. And you're sore—naturally. Well, this'll poultice everybody, including yourself. Go on back to your old friends. You're a new man; they won't know you. Make 'em new friends—and there you are. Oh, here's another suggestion. What would you say to no salary at all, twenty per cent commission, and no limit to your expense account? But you pay back half of your expenses out of your earned commissions. On—say, a three months' tryout. How does that strike you?"

"It . . . why, I don't see what you're driving at."

"Because," said Hilliard, "you're worth more than I thought you were. How do I know? I've watched your eyes, son! You're going into Syracuse with the finest plan, the finest front and the finest opportunity I've ever dreamed of in all my life! And besides, that's all of my life! And I've got that spurt that even I couldn't give you. . . . How are you fixed for money?"

"I'm not fixed at all. I'm broke."

Hilliard fished for his bill-book, and folded two notes into a small compact.

"Here! Bind the bargain. Don't worry—it's an advance. I know who I can trust—that's my longest suit, son. Give me a receipt, if you like. Better not speak to me again until we land. Never know who's aboard that might see you later. Come to my office at ten o'clock the morning after we're docked. And—" He laughed in patient relief. "You know, son," he said, "I'm a pretty wise old bird, and there's not much that fools me, but . . . right up to the last second, I wasn't quite sure whether you'd take that job or not. If the surgeon that mended you could only have doctored your eyes, son—if he could only have doctored your eyes! Whew!" He stared again at Hilliard, and nodded soberly.

"Wonderful—perfectly wonderful," he said, fascinated. "When you smile at me like that, I sort of feel as though I ought to get up and take off my hat and apologize to you, and I'm hanged if I know what for."

"Perhaps they overlaid it a trifle . . . copied that picture too well . . . why don't you see if you can't grow a mustache . . .?"

CHAPTER III.

According to the railway schedule, the journey from New York should have taken about six hours; as a matter of fact, it took seven, and yet to Hilliard, who hadn't once left the observation platform, it was accomplished with the speed of a projectile. The dramatic value of his purpose had seized him, and partly on this account, and partly because he was going home, he was temporarily relieved of perceptive judgment, whether of time, space, or attendant circumstances.

"Now, whatever else you do, son," Harmon had adjured him, "stick to the story! First, last, and always—stick to the story! It's your own business, in a way; and in another way, it's my business; but you keep your head clear and don't let anybody shake you on the facts, and we're both all right. Of course, you're starting out by lying—but it's a good lie. You're justified. As far as the rest of the world's concerned, you're a new man. You're just born. Well, you've got a perfect right to be whatever you want to be. Nobody can prove you aren't what you say you are. Just remember these three things: One, capitalize your experience, and fill 'em full of war-talk—they'll love it; two, capitalize your position, and stick to your story—they'll swallow it whole, and never dream of the answer; three, capitalize your face, and smile, man, smile!" Here he had planted his hand between Hilliard's shoulder-blades with a thump which was meant

to be fraternal and heartening. "And we'll both make good until the cows come home—and I think I hear 'em coming. Don't forget—they can't stop you! It's your second shot at life, and you've got the cards stacked the way you want 'em."

"The only thing," Hilliard had said, "is the . . . the story!"

"D—n it, Hilliard, what's the matter with you? Aren't you justified?"

"Y-e-s, but so much of it sounds unnecessary to me—every now and then. I wish we could have thought up something else, that's all."

"Well, did we?"

"No, but—"

"Then don't be a rank quitter! It was your own idea; and I say it's darned clever; stand up to it. You will, won't you?"

"Oh, I'll do that, Mr. Harmon. I've got to."

"Yes, you've got to. And just keep smiling, son; that's all. That's what I hired you for—start off smiling, and the battle's half won already. That's it! Keep your nerve, son!"

"Good-bye!" And here he had staggered Hilliard by another friendly buffet between the shoulder blades, and swung him cordially into the runway, and disappeared.

On the observation platform, Hilliard had ensconced himself behind a newspaper and a cigar, and tried to hold his emotions and his imagination in check. His purpose, now that it was crystallized, brought him no aftermath

SCRAPS OF HUMOR

A SUSPICIOUS NATURE.

"Gopher Jim says he wants us to come around to his house and have a nice little poker party. He's goin' to have sandwiches and everything."

"Who's goin' to furnish the cards?"

"The host, of course."

"Lemme tell you; if Gopher Jim has time to go over them packs of cards before the game starts he kin well afford to make it a banquet."

TOUGH VARIETY.

Butcher—Well, madam, what kind of steak do you want, porterhouse?

Mrs. Hasher—Porterhouse? I should say not. I want boarding house steak.

The Custom.

This fact strikes me funny. I daily discern it! We all want more money. But don't want to earn it.

Editorial Courtesy.

"I desire no remuneration for this poem," remarked the long-haired poet, as he drifted into the editorial sanctum. "I merely submit it as a compliment."

"Then, my dear fellow, permit me to return the compliment," replied the editor, with true journalistic courtesy.

—London Tit-Bits.

Cigarettes Not So Bad.

M—You see that fine house? A man built that with the money he saved on cigarettes.

N—He must have been a terrible smoker before he broke himself of the habit.

M—He didn't stop. He's a cigarette manufacturer.—London Answers.

Already Convinced.

"Do you believe in ghosts?" asked the man who resented all superstition.

"No, sub," answered Mr. Erastus Pinkey. "An' all I's hopin' is dat dem gho'ses will lemme stay dat way 'stid o' comin' aroun' tryin' to convince me."

The Reason.

"You couldn't tell that woman a secret."

"Why not?"

"Because the minute you tell her it ceases to be one."

A Proviso.

"Do you know I am very anxious to be in your good books."

"That's all right as long as one of them is not my pocketbook."

THE BETTER WAY.

"Do you tell bedtime stories at your house?"

"I used to until my wife got