

THE CRANK.

It was an unkempt fellow, with a shock of unburnt hair, who came to beard me as I sat defenseless in my lair; He had a satchel in one hand, plumb full of dynamite, And in his hinder pocket was a box of melinite. His other hand held firmly a right ugly-looking stick. With poisoned prickers on it that would make a cobra sick; And twixt his teeth he held a knife—its edge was very keen. In short, his aspect it was such as turned my visage green.

I asked him what his business was. He modestly replied: He wanted me to let him have my daughter for his bride. And sixty million dollars, and a two-four trotting horse. And did I run? I didn't! I just answered him: "Of course!"

"I'll let you wed my daughter and my cousins and my aunts!"

I had no female relatives and so could take the chance—

"And 'stead of sixty millions, since the sum, my friend, is for you.

Suppose we make it more; let's say an even eighty-two?

"A nickel on account to bind the bargain is the thing,

and you can have the lady when you've bought the wedding ring;

And while we're getting in the gold from brokers and from banks,

I'll draw a draft on Bonner for his trotter Nancy Hanks."

The fellow looked me in the eye, and laid his weapons down;

He bit the nickel viciously, as cockneys bite a crown;

To see if it was genuine and not a counterfeit,

Then passed gayly down the stairs and out into the street.

And I am now possessor of a bag of dynamite, A poisoned club, a bowie and a box of melinite, Which cost a nickel only, so that, far as I can see,

The crank is not so profitless as he is thought to be.

And I would say to millionaires, and others who are scared,

In days like these 'tis well that all for cranks should be prepared.

Lay not up stores of pistols: for the case they rarely serve.

So well as does one nickel and a little bit of nerve.

—John Kendrick Bangs, in Harper's Weekly.

THE OLD MILL MYSTERY

By Arthur W. Marchmont, B. A.

Author of "Misc Headley's Secret," "Madeline Power," "By Whose Hand," "Iza," &c.

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CHAPTER VIII—CONTINUED.

Whoever the men might be, she had no wish to meet them, and she turned back till she could find a spot where she could hide and let them pass. She knew the path well; and remembered that a few yards back there was an old shed, into which she could hide. She ran back therefore, quickly and lightly, and hid herself to let the men go by. She heard them coming on, talking angrily. More than once they seemed to stop in the path and stand together, speaking in lower tones. She could only hear a word now and then, and generally that was an oath. Next she recognized one or two of the voices to be those of some of the more desperate and reckless of the strikers.

When they came to the gap in the hedge by the shed, through which Mary herself had climbed to get out of their way, they stood together in a group; and the girl could just make out the dim outline of the five or six figures standing and gesticulating and talking earnestly together.

Then without giving Mary time to guess what was intended, two of them got through the gap in the hedge and walked up close to the shed. One of them turned to the rest and said, in a voice of irritation:

"Yes, yes, of course it's here that he's coming; where else could he come? Aren't the things all hidden here? Come in and let us wait; we don't want to be seen, do we?"

And the girl had only time to shrink back in a corner of the place before the men entered the shed.

CHAPTER IX.

MARY ASHWORTH'S PERIL.

Mary Ashworth was a girl with plenty of courage, but she was nervous and frightened enough as she shrank back in her corner, whilst the men clustered in the opening of the shed, talking together in low tones.

At first she was too alarmed even to attempt to listen to what was said. She tried to think what would be the best course for her to take—whether to make known her presence at once and trust to the men letting her go without trouble, or simply to rely upon the chance of their not noticing her, and so to wait until they had gone.

It was a difficult position. The chances of their letting her go without trouble, supposing she declared her presence, were very small. On the other hand, the shed was too dark for her to be discovered, and if she kept quiet an opportunity might offer for her to creep out of the place without being seen. Thus the hope of escaping unnoticed, coupled with the fear of consequences should she make herself known, decided her.

She crept into a corner of the shed; close to her was a heap of hay, and she resolved to get behind this, so that if by chance a light was to be brought into the place she would be less likely to be seen.

She waited anxiously, watching keenly every motion of the group of men, and when she found they all joined in talking or laughing, their attention being thus absorbed, she moved an inch or two at a time. Thus the noise they made prevented them hearing her movements. In this way little by little she managed to crawl behind the heap of fodder and crouch down.

After a time the girl began to listen eagerly to what was said.

"What time was Gibeon to be here? It's past it now, ain't it?" asked one of the men.

"Not later than nine o'clock," replied another. "He ought to be here by now."

"He's always late," growled a third. "He and he takes precious good care

to be out of the way when the fun begins, too," said one, whom Mary recognized as Jack Dilworth, the man who had attacked Tom. "He kept out of the way the other night when we tried to square accounts with that young blackleg, Tom Roylance."

"Black-and-blue-leg, you should say, Jack," said another, laughing at the reference to the other's injury.

"Aye, curse the young devil," growled the man, angrily and fiercely, in reply. "I'll make him sorry he ever met me that night. See if I don't."

"Shut up, Jack; what do you want making such a devil of a row for? We've got something more to talk about than a touch of the calf of your leg."

"H—sh!" cried a man, warningly, who was standing outside. "I can hear some one coming. H—sh!"

There was silence among them in an instant; and Mary heard some one go past, whistling as he went. It seemed to her that he was hurrying.

She deliberated a moment whether she should call for help; but consideration showed her that such a course would be foolish.

The next minute she was more than glad she had kept silent.

"Here comes Gibeon," cried the man who was looking out.

"Are you there, lads?" asked the newcomer. "Did you see him?"

"Who?" cried one or two together.

"Why, that knobstick, Tom Roylance. That was him just went by. I've been dogging him."

"Why the devil didn't you knock him in the head?" burst from Jack Dilworth; "or call me to do it if you were afraid."

"Because there's a worse business in store for him than a cracked skull, Jack; as you yourself 'll see, before this job's over," answered Gibeon Prawle, with an oath.

"What's that?" asked the other eagerly.

"What do you say if we put the whole job on to his shoulders?"

"That 'ud be a good'un," cried one or two with a laugh. "But you couldn't do it, could you?"

"Couldn't I? Well, wait a bit and see. But now, what about things? In the first place, I've got news for you, and nice news it is, too."

"What is it?" cried some one when he stopped.

"Why, that a lot of cowards mean going back to work in a day or two, and that they've been to Gorringe and sold us. It's all through those hands who wouldn't come out when they ought to have done, and that Roylance is at the bottom of it all."

"Curse him," said one or two, suiting the action to the word.

"Don't be in a hurry to send him to hell," said Gibeon, with an ugly laugh; "there'll be a little bit of bother worth keeping him on earth for a bit longer yet. I know a thing or two. You leave him, and if he don't get more than paid out in full, my name's not Gibeon."

"Serve the hound right," said the others.

"But now, to business," said Gibeon. "Are we still all of the same mind and determined to deal out justice to the man who has treated us in this way?"

"Yes, of course we are, mate," said one of the men, impatiently. "What else are we here for?"

"Good," said Gibeon. "Have you thought any more about how you mean to do what's wanted to be done, Jos?" he asked, turning to one of the men, whose name was Jos Flamer.

"Aye, lad, that'll be all right. You give me ten minutes, or at the outside fifteen, in the engine room, and I'll bet my last tanner that there won't be no work inside the place for a month—or six months, for that matter. All you've got to do is get me inside, and then leave me to do the rest."

"We'll manage that. Young Ben Drue was to have watched to-night; but he's off; and so old Ben takes his place, and you know what sort he is for his beer. He's been guzzling all the afternoon, with Tom Carter here, and he's tight now, isn't he, Tom?"

"Aye, lad, that he is," said the man addressed, with a laugh at his own cunning. "He's more'n tight—he's downright boozed, and as muddle-headed as a fool."

"You can get Jos inside, can't you, Tom, without his being seen by old Ben?"

"Ben wouldn't see an army to-night," replied the man. "I'll get him in right enough, and go and talk to Ben all the time he's there. Stand him another pint, maybe. Start him on the booze and he's like a train going down grade with the brake busted."

"Then our part will be to keep a sharp look out all round to see that no one comes in the way," said Gibeon. "You've got the key that you want, Tom?"

"What, on me?" answered Tom Carter. "Not me. Tain't very likely as I'm going to walk about with such an ugly bit of evidence as that in my pocket. What do you take me for? But it's all right."

"Where is it, then?"

"Why, here, to be sure; along with Jos' tools. But it isn't good enough to walk about with things like them, is it?"

"All right. I only meant to make sure that everything was in order. It's a bit too early to start yet. You're sure you can do what has to be done in the time you say, Jos?"

"Sure, of course I am. Do you think I'm a fool?"

"What are you going to do?" asked Jack Dilworth, in a surly voice.

"Never you mind. What I'm going to do won't take no lives and won't break no limbs. And if Tom Carter here manages the job properly, so as I can get in and out again without leaving any traces, and if you chaps keep a sharp look out, and save us from any bad little interruptions, we shall be all snug away home and in bed before anything happens. And when it do happens—well," he added, with a snif and a short dry laugh of self-satisfaction, "the whole blooming machinery won't be worth an old mule frame that's all."

He walked to the back of the shed and waited while the men talked to

"Well, you needn't be so blessed secret about it. Only take care your time fuse don't set the place on fire, else you may do the gaffer just as good a turn as you want to do him a bad one—through the insurance money. I don't like your dynamite; it's pesky stuff to handle."

"It won't set it on fire, lad, never fear; and it ain't dynamite that I'm going to use. But it's something that'll do the job all right, don't you fret. I know what I'm after," said the man who had been addressed as Jos.

"Well, I'm hanged if I see what we're wanted for at all," growled Jack Dilworth.

"Don't you? Well, do you think I'm going to work the thing all myself for you to benefit? Not me. We stand in this little matter all together, sink or swim. If you're afraid, you'd better say so, and be quick about it."

"Who said I was afraid?" answered Dilworth, hotly. "If no one was more afraid than me, it would be all right."

"That's all right," said Gibeon Prawle, quickly, interposing to make peace. "There's no need to talk about anyone being afraid, Jos, nor do I care what you think."

"I'd like that for my part of the business," cried Dilworth.

"It'll be done all right, lad, don't you fear," said Gibeon. "There are some of us who don't love him a bit more than you do. We're just going to see that something belonging to him is found by the watchman to-night in a way that shows he must have been hanging round the place."

"It'll take a clever bit of spinning to make much of a yarn out of a bit of short staple stuff like that," said one of the men.

"I did not know you were going to meet. I came here by chance—quite by chance."

"But you were here when we entered. How was that? How came you to be near the shed at all?"

"I tell you it was all by chance. I was walking on the footpath outside, and was going back to the village when I heard your voices. I didn't know who you were, and had no fancy to be met by anyone, so I turned back and came in here to wait while you passed. Then you came in, and I couldn't get out."

"So you stopped and listened to all that passed? Did you hear all that was said?"

"I heard a great deal."

"Ah!" cried several of the men.

"Why didn't you go when you found we were talking about matters that didn't concern you?"

"I had a reason," said the girl.

"Ah! hear that!" cried some of the others again, this time angrily.

"What reason?" asked her questioner.

"I shall not say."

"You'd better. It won't pay to trifles with us."

"I shall not say," repeated Mary, firmly. She was determined not to bring Tom's name in if she could help it.

"Ah, I thought we should come to some secret reason directly. I suppose you were told to say that by those who sent you."

"I was not sent," said Mary. "I have told you the truth."

"Are you going to tell the whole truth?" asked the man.

"Yes, to those questions which I choose to answer."

"Well, then, what did you mean to do if we hadn't caught you before we left the shed?"

"I meant to try and stop you from carrying out your plot to destroy the machinery of the mill," answered Mary, boldly.

"You meant to betray us, did you?" asked the man, and his voice was harsher and his manner harsher than before.

"I meant to save the mill and my means of earning my living."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

NICE DISCRIMINATION.

How George Most Admirably Vindicates the Boarding House.

"George" is a handsome bearded colored man, not black, but of a Spanish complexion, who is managing man, butler and general factotum—for a Boston lady who keeps an expensive boarding house "on the Hill." The manners of George, who was bred in the south, are perfect—at once self-respectful, easy and flattering to each boarder's feeling of personal consequence.

He is one of the rare men who are always deferential and never servile. Though but a head-waiter, he might well be called a gentleman. That he has a very nice discrimination in language this true anecdote will show.

The point on which George is touchy is the reputation of the boarding house, in which he is so trusted, so liked and so much the managing man. He is assiduous in maintaining the table on a liberal scale, and seeing that no boarder lacks anything or waits unduly for any attention by reason of the neglect of the minor servants, who are all women.

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If they are all busy, George "fills the gaps." Thus it chanced one day, not long ago, that he leaned deferentially over the shoulder of a new boarder and said: "Apple-pie and ice-cream, sah."

The new boarder is somewhat deaf, and long accustomed to less liberal boarding houses. Not sure that he had heard George aright, he looked around and said:

"What? Apple-pie or ice-cream?"