

OUT OF THE TRENCH. AN ELUSIVE MISSION.

By F. A. MITCHEL.

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A few years after the civil war two men met on Broadway, New York. The one wore the long hair and sombrero that marked him for a southerner; the other was black as the ace of spades.

"Fo' de Lawd, Marse Geo'ge!" exclaimed the negro, with eyes and mouth open wide.

"Ben, yo' black rascal, what are you doing up here in Yankee land?"

"Wha' I doin' up hyar? I would'n be hyar if you war alive!"

"But I am alive."

"Don' know 'bout dat. Spec' yo' may be yo' ghos'. How come yo' be livin' when de fambly all tink yo' was killed at de battle o' Sharpsburg? If yo' be livin', how 'bout dat awful rakedown I got from Missy Alice?"

"What rakedown?"

"Mebbe yo' don' know dat when yo' go off to de war an' I go with you orstentansly to take keer o' yo' boss I war really set up to go by Missy Alice fo' to take keer o' yo'self, specially if yo' got sick or wounded. De night befo' de regiment marched away Missy Alice she come to my cabin an' she say, 'Ben, yo' infernal niggah!'"

"Oh, no, she didn't."

"Well, enny way, she said: 'Ben, I's mighty glad yo' goin' with yo' Marse Geo'ge. If he sick or wounded yo' write me ebry day.' I can't write, Missy Alice, I says. And she says, says she: 'Well, get some-one else to write fo' yo' or send me word if he needs me and I'll come mighty quick to nu'se him. If yo' stick to him an' bring him back safe an' soun' to me I'll see that yo' git yo' freedom.' An' I says: 'Missy Alice, I don't keer 'bout my freedom. I don't want my freedom. I's allus lived in this fambly an' don't want to live anywhere else. But I'll watch Marse Geo'ge fo' yo' an' let yo' know if he needs nussin'.' I don't promise to bring him back safe an' soun' to yo', but if he gets killed or dies o' camp fever or any o' them sojers' diseases I promise yo' on my wo'd o' honah as a Turnoil niggah dat hasn't nevah belonged to no udder fambly dat I'll bring his body back fo' yo' to weep ovah an' be buried in de fambly buryin' ground."

"Den Missy Alice she say: 'Ben, yo's debilish fine niggah!'"

"No, she didn't, but go on."

"She say, says she: 'Ben, I b'lieve you'. If yo' do dat I neber fo'git it. But if yo' don' bring him back either libin' or dead yo'd bettah nevah been bo'n.' How come yo' up hyar in New Yo'k, Marse Geo'ge, when yo' war killed—I mean missin'—in de battle o' Sharpsburg, an' yo' cunnel said yo' body was throwed into de trench?"

"Go on with your story. Never mind my part of it."

"I hunted dat battlefield all ovah, turnin' ebry man layin' on his face, even de Yanks, and I didn' see yo' no-whar, Marse Geo'ge. Den de cunnel be sent an orderly fo' me an' he say: 'Ben, yo' mastah be been killed, an' be body must 'a' been throwed into de trench. Yo' go home an' tell his people 'bout it. Wha' he know 'bout me an' dat I war a Turnoil niggah?"

"I asked him to do all that. Go on. I'm anxious to hear the rest."

"Yo' tell him to do dat? Wha' fo' yo' do dat, Marse Geo'ge?"

"I'll tell you my story when you get through with yours. Go on, I say."

"My story's nuffin mo' 'n de drubblin' I got from Missy Alice. I went home to de plantation one mornin', and Missy Alice she saw me comin' 'way up de road. She fled out of de house an' run to me, out o' bref, an' she cried out: 'Oh, Ben! Is he dead? An' I broke it sofly to her. I says, says I: 'Marse Geo'ge, he wha' he don' suffah no mo', Missy Alice. 'Deed he don't.' 'Wha' is he?' she moaned, stage'n' back. 'In de trench,' I say. 'Dey throwed him in befo' I could zit him?"

"Fo' de Lawd, Marse Geo'ge, though I broke de news as sofly as I knew how, she jis' drop right down wha' she stan' with a shivah. I helped her up an' toted her into de house. Den when she come to herself she said, with a voice dat sounded lak a ha'n't in de tomb: 'Ben, go 'way from me an' don't let me evah see yo' ag'in. Yo's been unfaithful to de trus' I reposed in yo'. Go 'way, you debilish niggah! Yo'!"

"Hold on, there! Don't put words you said to yourself into her pure mouth."

"Yes, Marse Geo'ge, I said 'em, a heap of 'em—wo'se an' wo'se. An' I turned roun', as de men do when de battery's sendin' out shot an' shell an' grape in their faces, an' I lef' de plantation, an' I hain't nebber been back far from dat day to this. An' I suffered all this on yo' account. An' yo' wasn't in de trench atter all. Wha' debilish had luck!"

"Ben," said the other, much affected, "you've hit it exactly. It would have been better if I had been put into the trench. I was stupid enough to become the victim of a diabolical story. There was another girl—well, I was engaged to be married to her long before—who wrote me that a Yankee officer who had come down with the Federal army had taken my place. After Sharpsburg I got my colonel to send you back with the story that I had been killed and thrown into the trench. I wished to be dead to every one I had been brought up with, especially to her."

"It war might' hard on Missy Alice, but I'd rather been Missy Alice than myself. Marse Geo'ge, yo' go right back to de ole plantation an' tell Missy Alice 'twar all yo' fault. Tell her yo' a liar an' I a might' fine niggah."

"I'll do it, Ben, and I'll take you with me."

By WINSLOW HUNT.

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It was I who, after the assassination of the Grand Duke Sergius, was sent to catch Vera Treperhoff, a young girl whom the police knew to have concocted the murder. I will omit how I tracked her to the border and take up the story after she had passed it. She made directly for Austria and thence for Venice. This indicated that she would go to America rather than England and that she would probably sail from one of the two principal Italian ports—Genoa and Naples. Genoa being the shorter distance, I took the train for that city, hoping to head her off before she left the port.

The reason for my being chosen for this work was that I had seen the girl quite often during her trial on a charge of having been implicated in another political crime. Having boarded the train at Venice soon after its departure, thinking there might be one chance in a dozen that Vera Treperhoff would be aboard, I walked through the side aisle, looking into every compartment. In the middle compartment of the third car I noticed a youth with the light hair and eyes of the north, and in a twinkling spotted my quarry. Not wishing to make myself known, I passed on.

I concluded not to make any attempt at arrest till the girl left the train. This would necessitate my watching the departures at every station and the risk that she might elude me. But I knew the stops and kept my eye on her as soon as we slowed up until we were again well on the way. My intention was to have her arrested at Genoa or wherever she alighted, since I could better fulfill the legal conditions at a definite point. Besides, I did not believe she knew her danger.

The last time I saw Vera Treperhoff was in leaving Alessandria. The compartment in which she sat had been emptied except by herself. I kept my eye on her till the train had reached a pace of some forty miles an hour. There would be no further stop till we arrived at Genoa, and I felt confident that I should take the girl back to Moscow and gain the commendation of the government, also a handsome reward.

Just before reaching Genoa I took my hand baggage to the compartment where Vera Treperhoff sat, with the intention of remaining there till the train pulled up at the station. She was not in the compartment. She was not in the car. I went through the train from front to rear, opening every closet, but nothing could I find of the girl I wanted. I scrutinized every passenger, man and woman, boy and girl, but Vera was not among them. Shortly before we slowed up for Genoa I made up my mind that she had, after all, recognized me and preferred death by jumping from the train to the horrors of Siberia.

At Genoa I engaged a special locomotive to go over the route to find the body or any trace of the culprit. I investigated every kilometer of the track between the terminus and Alessandria, but found nothing to give me the slightest clue. I was informed that the rate of travel over the section where I had missed the girl was fifty miles an hour. No one could have jumped from the train and retained sufficient life to crawl away. I offered a reward of 10,000 rubles to any one in the vicinity who would give me any information whatever leading to a clue. The offer brought many reports of a girl limping through the country, but they all proved to have been made up.

Never in all my official experience have I been so utterly incapable of forming a theory as to any escape from my clutches. Familiar with every device that could have been adopted, I went over them carefully and eliminated all of them. That a young girl not over twenty years old could have left a train going at a rate of fifty miles an hour seemed incredible. To assume that she could have passed from it later in disguise would be an insult to my professional skill.

I feared to return to Russia and tell the truth lest I should be accused of conniving at Vera Treperhoff's escape, and if I lied I would be detected. I chose the alternative of going to America to make a new home. I sailed from Genoa, and, going on deck one morning, there in a steamer chair in excellent health was Vera Treperhoff. Approaching her, I informed her that she had nothing to fear from me and asked her how she had left the train.

"This was her reply:

"I recognized you the moment I saw you and knew your errand. Between Alessandria and Genoa is a Y in the railroad connecting it with the road to Piacenza. I knew from my time table that there was no further stop till Genoa and you would arrest me there. While on this Y a train going in the same direction and nearly at the same speed occupied the next track. In a twinkling I was out through the window on the footboard and stepped to the footboard of the other train. Passing over it till I came to a vacant compartment, I climbed in. The train I was on soon stopped. I alighted and took a later one to Genoa."

"This may all seem very strange, but there is one thing stranger still. Vera Treperhoff converted me to the revolutionary cause, and within a few weeks of our landing the girl whom I had so nearly taken to Russia to endure the tortures of Siberia became my wife. I never awake in the morning and look at her and our little ones sleeping peacefully without a groan at what might have been."

A Prayer for the Idle.

The September American Magazine opens with the following prayer by Walter Rauschenbush:

"O God, we remember with pain and pity the thousands of our brothers and sisters who seek honest work and seek in vain. For though the unsatisfied wants of men are many, and though our land is wide and calls for labor, yet these thy sons and daughters have no place to labor, and are turned away in humiliation and despair when they seek it. O righteous God, we acknowledge our common guilt for the disorder of our industry, which thrusts even willing workers into the degradation of idleness and want, and teaches some to love the sloth which once they feared and hated.

"We remember also with sorrow and compassion the idle rich, who have vigor of body and mind and yet produce no useful thing. Forgive them for loading the burden of their support on the bent shoulders of the working world. Forgive them for working in refined excess what would feed the pale children of the poor. Forgive them for setting their splendor before the thirsty hearts of the young, luring them to theft or shame by the lust of eye and flesh. Forgive them for taking pride in their selfish lives and despising those by whose toil they live. Forgive them for appeasing their better self by pretended duties and injurious charities. We beseech you to awaken them by the new voice of thy spirit that they may look up into the stern eyes of Christ and may be smitten with the blessed pangs of repentance. Grant them strength of soul to rise up like men from their shame and give a just return of labor for all they receive and enjoy.

"And to our whole nation do thou grant wisdom to create a world in which none will be forced to idle in want, and none shall be able to idle in luxury, but in which all shall know the health of wholesome work and the sweetness of well-earned rest."

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