

The BROKEN COIN

By EMERSON HOUGH

From the Scenario by GRACE CUNARD

COPYRIGHT, 1915, BY WRIGHT A. PATTERSON

Novelized From the Motion Picture Drama of the Same Name. Produced by the Universal Film Manufacturing Company.

SYNOPSIS.

Kitty Gray, newspaper woman, finds in a cargo ship half of a broken coin, the missing inscription on which arouses her curiosity and leads her, at the order of her managing editor, to go to the prince of Gretchhoffen to piece out the story suggested by the inscription. She is followed and on arrival in Gretchhoffen she begins her adventures while chasing the secret of the broken coin.

TWENTY-FIRST INSTALLMENT

CHAPTER LXXIII.

The Encounter at Sea.
Over the sea, up into the stars, sped the distress call of the ship at sea: "S. O. S. Gretchhoffen! S. O. S. Gretchhoffen!"

Broken, incoherent at times, but imperative, the strident wail of the wireless clamored out into the empty air, asking for ears far away to listen to what it said. And ears did hear—the ears of friends.

The prime minister of Gretchhoffen, as has been said, had by this time succeeded in making some sort of a clearance of the unwelcome guests of the Gretchhoffen palace. He had got the king to bed, some of his officers to horse, and a few of his servants to work. As for himself, he felt himself unable to establish the broken machinery of the government on any lasting basis. Frederick—Count Frederick—the man with the strong brain and arm—where was he?

But upon answering for himself this somewhat imperative question, the prime minister made search here and there for some clue to the missing nobleman. His agents ran the trail to the dock whence Count Frederick had sailed so many days ago. He learned that at the time the king's yacht had put out there had been seen the line of smoke of a passing steamer, far below, toward the mouth of the bay. Apparently the king's yacht had set out with the purpose of intercepting this steamer. What then had happened none could tell. Somewhere out on the sea the nobleman of Gretchhoffen had disappeared.

Therefore, said the prime minister to himself, it might well be true that Count Frederick, having been gone a certain period of time, might now be ready to return. These long absences were usual with him, but always he had come back. Hitherto that had meant his return by land. Now it must mean his return by sea. It might be quite as well, reasoned the prime minister, to have one of the earliest interviews with Count Frederick on his return. It was well, surely, to be well established with those who would take control of affairs in the distracted kingdom of Gretchhoffen.

"I shall even take our other yacht, the *Adelina*," said the prime minister to himself, "and put myself in the way of the royal yacht, should it now be returning." And even so he did.

The *Adelina* was a stout little steaming craft, of good lines, and well enough armed.

The prime minister did not hasten in his errand, for indeed he had no definite purpose in view. Only, having put the *Adelina* into commission, he pushed out quite beyond the bay, until he felt the long roll of the Mediterranean under him. Then, as it chanced, at a point not so far from the late shipwreck of the *Prinz Adler*, he slackened speed and kept himself barely under way. Having nothing better to do, he waited.

It was night now, and the stars were shining brightly above. The gentle airs of the South European sea were soft and languorous. But, to the prime minister, as he restlessly paced the deck of the *Adelina*, these things were lost. He was engaged in reflections of none too pleasant a nature. Sighing, he said to himself: "There is no use in this. I might as well put back."

He turned as the boat's wireless operator hastened to him now, a paper in his hand. He had not noticed the crackle of his own wireless masts of late, although from time to time he had sent out signals in the hope of striking somewhere some information regarding the missing craft.

"I beg pardon, sir," said the messenger excitedly, "but we have just got an S. O. S. Someone is calling the *Adelina*."

"Calling us—where is it—who is it?" demanded the prime minister.

"They are calling Gretchhoffen and saying 'Frederick.' It is S. O. S.—they are in trouble somewhere. Who is it, excellency?"

The prime minister started as though struck by an electric shock. "Frederick! Who but the very man I want—Count Frederick—and calling out! Tell me—what is it that he says?"

"Only the same thing, excellency—S. O. S.—Gretchhoffen—*Adelina*—Frederick." And, yes—he says "One hundred and seventy-five miles southwest."

"One hundred and seventy-five miles—that, of course, must mean from the point whence he sailed. We are more

than half of that where we lie now— he cannot be more than forty miles from him this minute."

"Easily within that, excellency. The stuff comes awfully strong—they are close, that is sure."

"Send the captain at once," ordered the official.

The captain came and learned this news also. At once the bow of the yacht was headed toward this call, which came down out of the stars imploringly, urging speed.

That was what the night called out with its mysterious voice. The quick wit of Count Frederick had availed in this emergency in which he found himself. He knew that the *Adelina* would be in commission. He hoped that someone might be found to take command. He knew that any aid which came, must come soon.

The *Adelina* now swung in full speed, her engines purring softly in a continuous roll as she took up her top gear, and held it steadily. Always the call came, "S. O. S.—Gretchhoffen—S. O. S.—Gretchhoffen." For, as a matter of fact, although left long since in his own den on the upper deck, the operator of the Princess had dutifully done what he had been bidden to do.

They plowed on into the starry night for some time. At length an exclamation came from the captain to the official who stood at his side on the bridge.

"I see her!" said he. "Dead ahead, and coming on at a good clip herself. Screaming bloody murder. Well, well, we will see in a couple of jiffies what it is all about. She's not sinking—she's not on fire—what's wrong there?"

Meantime, on board the Princess such confusion reigned that at the time none saw the swift approach of the *Adelina*. The owner of the Princess was busy with his late prisoners. Count Frederick was once more assailed when he attempted to leave the wireless room—where, as has been said, the operator still held to his task, wholly ignorant, naturally, that his call to Gretchhoffen had been answered thus swiftly. Indeed, Frederick and Kitty both found themselves in desperate plight enough, for one of them was outnumbered, and the other overpowered.

But now there came the calling of men on deck, and the rush of feet as they ran here and there. Even Wyndham, engaged in his drunken sport of hectoring the weak girl who cowered helpless and terrified in his own room, at length left her and came on deck.

By this time Frederick had once more broken free of the men who had attacked him, and had himself reached a place on deck whence he could see the outline of the oncoming boat. The searchlight of the *Adelina* swept the decks of the Princess. Back of it could be seen little except the loom of her rigging. But now came the flash of a shot and its plunge into the sea dead ahead of the Princess.

"Good bless us!" exclaimed Wyndham, almost sobered now at this. "They are firing on us—firing on the British flag. It's not done, you know!"

"But it is done, sir," said the executive officer at his elbow, when a second shot carried away a part of the bowsprit of the Princess. "Round to, or she will sink us."

"They are damned pirates!" said Wyndham. "I'll not have it."

"Pirates or not, sir," said the executive officer, "they will sink us if we don't round to."

The next instant he took the matter into his own hands. The engine bells clanged below. The ship slackened speed, stopped, and lay rolling in the sea. By this time the boats of the *Adelina* were putting out, well packed with marines. They swarmed aboard now without invitation, and appeared eminently ready for any business that might be offered.

"Who are you?" demanded Wyndham. "What do you mean by boarding my boat?"

"What do you mean by sending a wireless, sir?" demanded the officer of marines. "You called us, and we are here. What is wrong?"

"I will tell you what is wrong," broke in Count Frederick here, pushing his way forward. "We are two prisoners here—a young lady and myself. We have been mishandled, both of us, by this ruffian here. He ordered me in irons for no reason in the world except to give him better his own way with this young lady. He is neither officer nor gentleman. Having no means of reckoning with him, I, myself, ordered the wireless sent out to Gretchhoffen. I called you on my own responsibility. We needed help, and we thank God you have come."

The master of the Princess now stood crestfallen, much of his bravado gone. "I meant nothing," said he.

"I will forget it all, captain, if you let me go—although we ought to 'blow you out of the water,'" said Frederick, "and all like you. You are not fit to fly any flag, least of all the good one that you disrepute. Clear out with you, and leave these waters. If you show

again we will sink you without an instant's hesitation."

"Who are you?" demanded Wyndham suddenly, impressed by the force of these words.

"I am Count Frederick of Gretchhoffen, of the king's cabinet, and his general in chief as well," said Count Frederick. "This is the government boat for which I called. Aboard it younder is the prime minister of our kingdom. We are a small people, sirrah, but we do not lack spirit. Send for your own saips if you like, and blow down our walls—you are a stronger people than ours. But we will see them fall before we will humble ourselves to such as you. As to what you have done—say one word more, and we will sink you and take our chances with your flag."

Count Frederick, having thus spoken, turned away, and paid no more attention to the master of the Princess.

"Come," said he to Kitty, when at last he had found her.

In a few moments the two were on board the yacht of their own country—or at least that of Count Frederick. With a final shot of defiance to the craft from which they now had escaped, the *Adelina* again got under way and swept a wide curve around, heading back for the port of Gretchhoffen. The Princess, soon hulled-down in the distance, made her way off as best she liked, to be held thereafter only in a contemptuous memory.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

The King of All Countries.

Count Frederick signified to the prime minister that affairs of state were little to his liking at this time, and that he desired to be alone. On the deck of the *Adelina*, therefore, might now be seen but two persons—Count Frederick and Kitty Gray. They



"The Other Half of the Coin," Exclaimed Kitty.

sat near the rail, both silent, the girl looking out over the rippling sea, across which the good boat now was leaping on her homeward way.

"Mademoiselle," said he softly, his hand falling on hers as it lay on the rail, "mademoiselle—"

She stirred—moved—but did not withdraw the hand. Still she looked out across that sea beyond whose waves lay her own country, so very far away.

"Mademoiselle," said he once more, "see, we are going home."

She half turned to him at this—though still her hand lay under his.

"Soon," said she at length, sighing. "I must be going." Her voice had no elation in it after all.

"Going, mademoiselle, where?" rejoined Count Frederick.

"Home, across the sea. It has all been like a dream. I wonder if I am awake, if I am alive."

"I thank heaven that you are both, mademoiselle. As to your return, how can that be?"

"My work is done here. I have no reason for remaining."

"No reason, mademoiselle? Our work is but beginning—I say, our work. Mademoiselle—Katharine—you know, you surely know!"

He could see the color rise in the cheek turned away from him, but she made no answer.

"Oh," he went on rapidly, "I know—do I not know? Some power drove us on—some good purpose was under your coming here—it was some plan of fate which brought you. As you have said, the coin itself spoke with its broken tongue. All the time it has been crying out, endeavoring to speak—to tell what was hid—to tell us, mademoiselle, what was right."

"Yes," said she, slowly. "Liberty—justice—that was the message that it meant, perhaps. Those were the buried treasures which so long have been lost to this people."

"Yes! But we have found them all—we own the key to all of them now—as we like we may use all these for the good of this country. Yonder weak king must go. The people! I

see now that the king is for their use, not they for his! To serve wisely and justly—mademoiselle, it was you who taught me the beauty of that ambition!"

Silence fell again. She did not speak. She dreaded to hear what yet she longed to hear.

"The treasure of the king, buried so long, mademoiselle—yes! But one treasure which also now I have found! Love, mademoiselle—that is what I have found, the greatest treasure of them all. It was buried in my heart, I know not how long. I never knew it. Its secret was hidden. It is but now that I myself have found it. Ah, had I the key to that as well, I should be the happiest man in all the world."

She still gazed out across white-tipped, rippling waves. Her face softened, but what he saw now on her cheek was a tear, stealing down below her lashes! Grieved, he himself could not speak. At last she turned to him.

"I am so sorry!" said she.

"For what, mademoiselle? You know I love you, that I never will love again. Is not that the truth itself? Can you doubt it? Doubt me, fail to believe my every word and I will go. You shall not see me again."

It was like him thus boldly to challenge fate. But she only shook her head.

"I cannot," said she. "I wish I could."

"But you cannot?"

He had her hands in his now. And now she turned her face toward him.

"You shall never deny the truth, my dear," said he. "All my life I shall challenge you to deny me and my love. When you can, when I have been unfaithful to you, life ends for me. But between now and then, long years of happiness lie—long years of love—long, happy, useful years."

"Happy? Useful? Yes, for you,

said she, "you yourself might be." "I might be what, my dear?" "You might be king!" "No," said he. "In the country where we will live love alone will be the king."

CHAPTER LXXV.

The Last Siege.

"Excellency," interrupted the prime minister, at length approaching the deck where Frederick still sat with the young American—"Excellency, I intrude, but perhaps—"

"What is it?" demanded the nobleman calmly. "Are they calling us from our own port?"

"Precisely that, excellency. We have a wireless call. We were summoned out, and now are summoned back again. They demand that we shall come quickly."

"What is wrong?" demanded Count Frederick, springing to his feet.

"Everything, excellency! Word has come that Grahoffen is marching against us once more—even now our city may be besieged."

For a moment Count Frederick stood silent. "I see," said he. "That faithless tyrant Cortislaw has forgot his treaty and is going to war against us when he thinks us unprepared. His traitor and spy, Sachio, has kept him well advised—I warrant that. How are they coming this time?"

"In part by land, but also in a strong fleet by sea."

"So they are attacking on what they think the weaker side of our works. Is there no such thing as faith among kings—is there nowhere honesty in all the world—is there no man of faithfulness and power any more?"

"Sire," said the prime minister, uncovering and bowing to him, "there is one such in our own country."

"Michael, our king—that man?"

"No, sire, not Michael, our king. It is none other than yourself I mean. In you only can our kingdom have any hope—that is plainer now than it has ever been in all our history. Times must change or we are undone. We must dethrone our king; at last. Take the place, I beseech you, excellency, which belongs to you, the place which you only can hold, for, believe me, it is only in you that Gretchhoffen may have any hope."

"I trust that you will remember that it was myself that first made this plain to your excellency," he added, thoughtfully.

"Time for all that later," said Count Frederick hastily. "First we must get back to port and pull together such forces as we can."

"Excellency, I, myself, attempted something of that before we left," said the prime minister. "I attempted to carry out such orders as I fancied you would have given had you been there. Some of the regiments, no doubt, have assembled. The guns may be ready on our sea-front now."

"Very well. Full speed ahead then. We may not be in time."

They were but barely in time. Before the *Adelina* docked in Gretchhoffen port there might have been seen in the bay the smoke of the advancing fleet—the Grahoffen expeditionary force already was crowding in for the landing. At the same time, upon the opposite side of the city, the army of Grahoffen, in full force, was advancing over the route which heretofore had carried the assault. Already this column, composed of cavalry, infantry and the full artillery of Grahoffen, had passed the neutral strip, and was entering the suburbs below the castle walls of the Gretchhoffen citadel.

They came exultantly, confident of their victory, and swept on as though eager to begin the sacking of the city. And the sacking of Gretchhoffen surely had begun but for the arrival of one man.

The prime minister was right. The confidence of the people of Gretchhoffen, as much of it as was left for any one man, now rested solely in the nobleman who held so prominent a part in the country's affairs of late—Count Frederick of Gretchhoffen. Swiftly enough passed from lip to lip the news that Count Frederick had come, that he would lead the army, that he would direct the defense of the city, that his mind was organizing the resistance. And as this word passed, cheers followed it. The men flocked readily to the standards, and once more abided the shock of arms.

In this strained moment Count Sachio of Grahoffen made good his promise to his king—he fought in the front rank of his own troops, and not even the jealous eyes of Cortislaw himself could find fault with his courage or his judgment. He himself led the last assault against the walls, which finally broke through the outer defenses. The forces of Grahoffen advanced so rapidly that it seemed indeed as though Cortislaw would make good his threat to leave standing not one stone upon another in this capital of his enemy.

This was Sachio's opportunity, and he knew it—it was his crucial hour. One thought even more potent than his ambition for military glory still ruled the soul of this warlike nobleman. Sachio fought that he might gain one thing—the treasurers of the kingdom, buried deep somewhere in this citadel. That treasure was the cause of this war. Without its discovery the war itself was worthless.

He stole away from the head of his troops as finally they broke in among the shrubbery of the palace gardens—as yet not having met the encounter of the ambushed troops of Gretchhoffen, again cunningly and effectively disposed for this purpose by the orders of Count Frederick himself.

He made his way up the palace stairs, fought through the guard which defended the entrance, and thus alone

pressed toward the interior of the palace once more. As he had boasted, he knew this place as well as his own bedchamber. He rushed on through the wide hall, down the stairs to the floor below, and back to the point whence led down the galleries of the cavern's floor under the castle itself. He smiled now grimly as he hastened. As yet he was unhurt, and as yet he was unsuspected. Once more his sanguine soul lusted for success and counted on it.

He met no opposition, heard nowhere in these portions of the palace any footfall or any voice. Thus for a moment or two he strode on—and then paused, frozen in his stride by that which confronted him.

Sachio was sure that he had seen the last of the young American. He reasoned that in all likelihood Count Frederick—of whose absence he knew quite well through his own secret agents—had joined her somewhere. He knew of the wreck of the *Prinz Adler*. Sachio was clear in his own mind that these two enemies of his, were gone, never again to confront him.

And yet now, as though spirits summoned by his own thoughts, they stood before him—both of them—the tall nobleman and the slender, shrinking girl leaning on his arm. Yes, it was they! His enemies had arisen from the very grave to confront him. He paused irresolute, unnerved, not believing what he saw, and for the time himself made no speech.

"What do you here, Sachio?" broke in the deep voice of his enemy, once his friend—a friend once too often betrayed.

"I came by virtue of my sword," said Sachio, boldly now, seeing that he might not evade this issue.

"By virtue of your sword only shall you escape from here, Sachio," said Count Frederick, calmly. "Stand back of me, mademoiselle, and give me reach."

In a flash the swords of the two went out and joined in the encounter. Each was an excellent swordsman, and for a moment neither had advantage. The young girl screamed in terror at the sight, for she knew the redoubtable reputation of Sachio as a swordsman, and long ere this she had selected the one whom she desired to see victor in this or any encounter.

But Count Frederick did not glance her way. His eye was still fixed on that of his opponent. Only, softly, gently, he repeated to her, "Stand back, mademoiselle. Give us room."

Sachio was full of tricks. He had no wish to waste time here, and yet knew not how to pass the blade now opposing him. Suddenly he flung up his hand to his chest as though struck, hoping to find his foe off his guard for just an instant. It did not result so. The steady point of Count Frederick lay gleaming before his breast ready to thrust. And for another reason was this subterfuge worse than a useless one for Sachio. As he caught his hand against his bosom there came from its concealment in his pocket something metallic, which fell upon the floor. It rolled but briefly, for it was not round—this piece of metal. It was a half coin.

Upon this Kitty fell with a sudden cry. She knew in a flash what was this bit of metal. She knew how Sachio must have prized it, and now how Sachio, in the luck of the game, had lost, and lost by his own hand.

Agile as a cat, the girl stooped, ran in, and emerged with the bit of metal in her hand. And still the eyes of the two fighting men dared not turn her way. Sachio laughed, and tossed over his shoulder a taunting word.

"It is worthless, mademoiselle," said he—"counterfeit—'tis nothing."

Count Frederick said nothing, but he heard her words coming to him now from behind his shoulder.

"I have got them!" she exclaimed, "both halves of the coin—they are ours—they are ours—I am going now—come quick—as soon as you can."

But the cold eye of Count Frederick never turned from the face of his adversary. He made no answer to these words, although he heard the sound of her footfalls back of him as she fled down the hall toward the interior of the caverns.

"Well, Sachio," said Count Frederick, "your trickery failed. Your attack has failed at every point. Fate fights against you, Sachio. You have lost the toss of the die. You have lost the coin."

The strong wrist of the swarthy nobleman covered his breast with his extended steel. His eyes, bold even in this extremity, met that of his opponent. But Sachio knew the die indeed was cast. He knew now that he had failed.

For one moment he edged on inch by inch, endeavoring to reach a point from which he might spring past Frederick, and so follow the fleeing girl down the passageway. But always the other edged inch by inch in front of him. Always the cold eye looked into his. Always the steady steel menaced him.

"Yes, Sachio," said Frederick, once more, coldly, "I shall kill you. Shall it be now?"

But Sachio himself suddenly closed this present encounter, suddenly deferred what he himself knew in swift consternation must be his end. With a quick sweep of his sword defending the front of his body, he sprang to one side and back. Casting down upon the floor the blade with which he had fought, he fled inconspicuously. Count Frederick did not pursue him. Two things prevented that. One of these was the errand to which Kitty Gray had summoned him. The other reason was Kitty Gray herself.

Turning he hastened after her, fast as he might, down the deep passages through which she but now had fled.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)