

BY AN UNSEEN HAND

A Story of the Secret Society Known as the "Ragged Thirteen" By Edward Hughes.

CHAPTER I.

The Flight From London.

The first seven years of my life, or at least such of them as I can remember, were spent at an old farmhouse in Oxfordshire, and there I was like to have been utterly spoiled, for the dear old couple with whom I lived would have made an attempt upon the moon had I expressed a wish to have had that luminary for a plaything. Two or three times a year a gentleman came to stay with us, and so exciting an event did his advent become by reason of the many good things he brought me, that I grew to look for him anxiously; and when I was old enough, and it was announced to me solemnly that he was my father, I had no objection whatever to take upon my young shoulders all the responsibilities of sonship seeing that my sire was so pleasant a personage. "Jack"—by the way, I was known as Jack Tremayne—"Jack," said he to me one day as I sat on his knee, "we must begin to learn something."

I stared at him in surprise, for I took his "we" literally.

"We must have a primer, and before the winter comes we ought to be able to read"; and when I asked him with all the solemnity of puzzled childhood why it was that he couldn't read, I was answered with a merry laugh.

"I'm speaking of you," he said; "and a kind gentleman has promised to come over and give you lessons, and I know that for my sake you'll be a good boy and work hard."

I gave this promise readily enough, but the carrying of it out was another matter, as the "kind gentleman" found to his cost; for though he labored with me conscientiously enough for an hour every day, I just as conscientiously thwarted his good endeavours, and tried to learn nothing, and was eminently successful. And he might have been teaching me with the same result through all the days of my childhood had not "my Mary"—for I speedily appropriated her—come upon the scene.

I thought her the sweetest lady in existence, and I would fain have adopted her for my mother had she given me the slightest encouragement to do so, for, in my innocent way, I argued that, since I had so nice a man for a father, and as he had, so to speak, "proceeded" to the relationship, I couldn't see why the sweet lady shouldn't qualify for the honours of maternity. I did not, of course, put it to myself exactly in that way, but no doubt I should have done so had I been able.

"My Mary" was a visitor who had come to spend the summer with us, and she took me in hand, and matters soon went smoothly, so smoothly, indeed, that I had quite mastered the rudiments of reading, when a giant came and took my business away.

It was the leafy month of June, and I had made myself happy and my knickerbockers airy by climbing to a high perch in an old oak tree, and I was contemplating a still loftier flight, with the prospect of a rapid descent, when I heard voices beneath me, and, looking down, I saw Mary and a gentleman with her, and the gentleman's arm was where I considered it ought not to be, for it was around her waist. And he kissed her, not once, nor twice, but many times, and presently, when he had called her names that set my boyish heart beating (for I knew, by the way she allowed it, that he had the right) he drew her away.

"You must come and sing my old favorite for me, Mary," he said, and as soon as they were out of sight, I slipped down and followed, and presently, nestling by the rose bush that grew near the best room window, I heard her playing the old piano softly, and singing a song that she had often sung to me, an Irish melody, set to words that began—

"I'd mourn the hopes that leave me."

Two days afterwards the man with the blue eyes and the big beard came for "my Mary." I clung to her, but at last she put me from her gently, and kissed me and bade me "good-bye," and then she promised to come back in a few days—and she was one who always kept her promise if she could. I never saw her again while I was at the farm house. That was the first blight the Ragged Thirteen put upon my life, though many years passed before I knew who were the authors of my trouble.

The leafy month of June had given way to the much more satisfactory fruity July, when one night, as I was preparing for rest, my father suddenly appeared, and, even to my childish eyes and understanding, it was plain that he was in great trouble. He took the old lady and gentleman into an inner room, and some quarter of an hour afterwards I was dressed for traveling, and when dear old daddy and mammy had wept over me, I drove away with my father to the station.

The next day a steamer carried us to the continent, and for years we wandered through the by-ways of Europe, avoiding the large cities and staying in the neighborhood of none of them for any long time.

My father became my teacher, and a better of more patient master no child ever had, and while he did his best to develop my intellect, he spared no pains in getting me physically fit for my "rough-and-tumble" with the world; and, fine scholar though he was, I believe he was as much pleased when I could stand up to him with the gloves and take my part with credit as he was when I mastered some ab-

lace handkerchief, and I never catch the scent of hellebore now, though many years have gone by since it floated to my nostrils that night, without the scene recurring to my mind most vividly.

It was clear to me that my father was now acting under the influence of some great terror. His face was white and rigid. There were beads of perspiration on his forehead, and ever and anon he glanced at the window as though expecting an attack. He stooped once more and put his fingers beneath the left flap of the man's coat, but scarcely had he touched the clothing than he drew them back quickly, and I saw upon them that which told me how the man had come to his end.

I felt my father's terror communicating itself to me. I looked for him to rush from the place and summon the police; I could scarcely refrain from shouting, or screaming, to break the awful silence, and I had well-nigh come to the end of my self-control when he whispered:

"Get back to the room above. Quick!"

I needed no second bidding, and as I flew up the stairs two at a time I could hear him locking the door of the room whence the man lay.

He followed me closely.

"Dress yourself," said he, sharply, as I stood there shivering with terror and cold. "Dress yourself, and put your old clothes into your portmanteau. I'll collect my papers and things," and in less than a quarter of an hour we stood, baggage in hand, ready to depart from the ill-omened house.

"Are you going to inform the police?" I asked, as he took up the candle.

"He put it and his bag down.

"Listen to me, Jack," he said. "I mayn't have much time to give you advice in the morning; but if you set any value on my life or any store by your own, you'll never tell a soul what you've seen to-night. If we appear in this case, our lives would probably not be worth a day's purchase. I shall contrive to get some way or other to send you home here. We can't do the poor fellow below any good."

"Do you know him?" I asked.

"No; I have seen him before, but I found something beside him that tells me plainly enough who planned the deed."

"Then why not tell?"

"I can't explain to you, Jack; you must trust me, absolutely. I am acting for your interest, so pull yourself together. You've been a plucky boy; don't break down now. We must get away from this, and we mustn't let anyone see us going."

He blew out the light, and we groped our way down stairs and past that door, and I was thankful when we found ourselves in the street and felt the cool night air on our faces. It was nearly 12 o'clock, but, after a long walk, we found shelter in a lodging house near Tottenham Court Road, and I was glad to nestle down in bed, and pulling the sheet over my head, I tried to forget the awful sight I had seen, and at last fell asleep.

When I awoke it was broad daylight and I was alone. I looked about me, and on the table saw a small packet addressed "For My Dear Son." I opened it, and found within a letter written in pencil, and as I read and reread it until I knew every word of it, and as it explains my position exactly, cannot do better than reproduce it here, as nearly as possible.

"My dear son," it began, without mention of day or place, "you will be surprised when you find that I have left you, and you will be still more so when I tell you that it is utterly impossible for me to say when we shall forget again. We have been such close companions for so many years that our parting causes me the greatest pain. You have been a lad of grit—a boy after my own heart. Be brave now, and comfort yourself with the thought that at this crisis of our affairs I am trying to act the part of a loving father as earnestly and faithfully as ever I did when we were together.

"I am leaving England at once, and my flight is connected with the awful event of which you have just been a witness. I thought at first that my enemy had found me out, but, on reflection, I have come to the conclusion that it is only a coincidence that what happened to that poor man should have happened in the house where I chanced to be. Still, it is a warning to me. I would stay and take my chance, but that for your sake life is very precious to me now, and I shall be able, just as well, at a distance, to bring to maturity certain schemes that will enrich you.

"My dear, dear boy, I can understand how puzzled you will be by all these mysterious hints at hidden danger; but if I explained matters fully I should be laying upon your young shoulders a burden that had galled mine for years, and I should be marred the brilliant career which I believe lies before you. Why not seek the protection of the police? Why not ask my dear boy, the police could give me no help years ago, and they can give none now. Rest assured that whenever it is safe for me to do so, I shall rejoin you; but until that happy hour arrives you must be guided by me, and follow out the directions I am about to give you.

"You will find a purse under your pillow, with plenty of money for your present needs. I want you to make your way without any delay to Kendal in Westmorland. You will travel from Euston, and I advise you to go to the station by bus, on change at Oxenholme, and, having arrived at Kendal, go to 95, Strickland Gate, and ask to see Mr. Travers, and you will tell him that John Tremayne, your father, has sent you. Nothing more will be necessary to secure you every home comfort, and you will be prepared for college, and your allowance will be such as, coupled with hard work, will make your career, I trust, a happy and successful one. I leave you to choose a profession, but, before settling down, you might, with advantage, travel for a year or so, and I have arranged that your income shall be one thousand a year. It will be paid through Mr. Travers, who will give you my banker's name and address. I know that this is a large sum, but you will be able to save, and it will be well to have as much money by you as possible.

"And now, let me entreat you to make no efforts to find me, for if you do you may only be finding me for an enemy. We have always been known by the name of Tremayne, but is not your surname. I shall not write that down, but if happier days come—if God grants that I should put my arms about you again—then we shall be known by the name of our forbears. I have watched you from a tiny chink, I have dangled you on my knees, and I have felt all a father's pride as I saw you chews and snaws shaping themselves to a man's estate. You have never told me a falsehood yet. Try and act in the same way to everyone.

"When you have read this, ponder over it for a while, until you thoroughly understand its contents, and then destroy it. You will find everything arranged with the proprietor, and your first act of self-control will be to sit down and eat your breakfast, as though my absence were something you expected. Lose no time in taking train to the north.

"And now, my dear son, good-bye. Pray for me, as I shall ever do for you, and may God grant that when we meet again, be it in this world or the next, we may be able to say, one to the other: 'I have done nothing for which you need feel shame.' You were sleeping so calmly that, when I kissed you, you never moved. Fear God, honor the Queen, do your duty, and remember that I am now, as I ever shall be, Your loving

"Father."

Little need had he to tell me to ponder over his letter. I read it and reread it, and I am not ashamed to say that my tears fell upon it, and at last I rolled it up, and setting fire to it, threw it under the grate, and when it had burned out I broke up the ashes. I found the purse under the pillow, and I had finished my toilet and fastened up my bag, when I saw on the floor, under the head of the bed, a small parcel. It had, apparently, rolled off the table, and it might have been placed there for me; or, again, my father might have intended to take it with him, and, in the tumult of his feelings—and, judged by my own, this must have been great—have forgotten it. It was neatly and securely fastened, but I deemed it best, and perhaps curiosity helped me to the decision, to open it, and when the outer paper had been unrolled, I was sure of a part of the contents, for the scent of hellebore, though very faint, was still perceptible.

When I had opened it completely I found, as I had suspected, the little lace handkerchief that had lain so near the dead man, and, in addition to it, there were five small cards and some newspaper cuttings. Besides the three cards I had seen, and which I have described, I now saw that there were two others—to wit, the six and seven of spades, each of them showing their pips plainly standing out from a red background.

I glanced at the printed matter, and so interested in it did I become that I read it through, and this is the substance of what I read. It appeared that on a certain morning, which was alluded to as that of the day before yesterday, a boy was tending some cattle on the marsh land near the town of Oldburgh on the east coast.

It was about eleven o'clock in the forenoon when he noticed a gentleman riding along the turf on the far side of a dyke that bounded the marsh. He was walking his horse and had come abreast of the boy, and some two or three furlongs from the rushes in which he was lying, when a man, apparently a tramp, rose up from amongst the gorse. As the tramp and the horseman were coming together the former suddenly threw up his arms and fell on his face. The gentleman dismounted and, holding the bridle, bent over the prostrate man. In an instant the fellow sprang to his feet, there was a flash as of steel, the gentleman reeled backward and fell on the turf, and the tramp mounted the horse and rode off at a gallop. The boy was naturally terrified at what had happened.

His master's house was quite half a mile away, and thither he ran at top speed, as it would have been useless for him to attempt to reach the injured man, since the dyke was deep and broad, and the boy could not swim.

Mr. Byrne, the master, was a quick-witted man. He remembered that he had seen the inspector of police going towards Thorne, a fishing village some distance along the coast, so he set the boy on a pony, and bade him ride with all speed to this village—to reach which he must, of necessity, pass the place where the gentleman lay—and bring back the official, while he himself hurried off to Oldburgh in his tax-cart to the doctor.

Byrne was some considerable time in finding the medical man, and when at last he and that gentleman arrived at the spot indicated they saw plainly enough the bloodstains on the grass and the marks where the horse had started off at a gallop, but there was no official, no boy, nor any wounded man to be seen.

In due course the inspector summoned Thorne by another messenger arrived and making a somewhat more extended search than the others had done he found under the first line of furzebrushes three small cards—two aces and the six of spades; and I may say here that the description of these cards tallied exactly with that of three of those I found in the parcel.

But in spite of the help of the telegraph and the efforts of some of the smartest detectives, the whereabouts of the boy, gentleman, and tramp remained a mystery.

On making inquiries it was ascertained that a gentleman had arrived at Oldburgh by the last train on the previous evening, that he had put up at the Brunswick Hotel, and that he had ordered a horse and started for a ride about eleven o'clock, and subsequently when the horse was not in a stable at Saxham, some twenty miles away, it was identified by its owner, the proprietor of the Brunswick.

The description of the gentleman, as furnished to the police, was that he was of medium height, had black hair, and spoke very slowly; but beyond this no one seems to have taken

any particular notice of him, and he retired early.

He had given the name of Smith, and he had very little luggage, though he seemed to have plenty of money and offered to pay for his rooms for a week in advance. When his small portmanteau was examined it was found to contain such articles as a gentleman would naturally require for a week's outing, but not a single article of apparel was marked in any way.

The pony was discovered wandering about the marsh, and when inquiry was made at Saxham, where the horse was found, no explanation was forthcoming as to how the animal got into the stable.

The other paper cutting was evidently of a later date, for it referred to the Oldburgh mystery, as it was called, and, after spinning a long theory, concluded with the intimation that nothing had been discovered whereby the mystery might be solved.

I had finished my reading and made the parcel up again so that it would fit easily into an inner pocket, when there was a tap at the door, and a voice proclaimed that breakfast would be ready in ten minutes, and I was thankful for this interval, as it would enable me to pull myself together and to assume an unconcerned air. When my breakfast had been successfully negotiated—and I found that grief and anxiety had not robbed me of my appetite—I walked out, and presently finding a 'bus going to Euston, I got on it and caught the train that started for the north at 9 o'clock.

My long journey gave me ample leisure to think over my position, and, as the outcome of my musings, I made this resolve: that the end and aim of my life should be to discover my father's dreaded enemy, and at all hazards to clear up the mystery that had obtruded itself upon me in the morning of my life.

I supposed my father thought I was too young yet to be trusted, but I was strong and healthy, I had been trained in athletic exercises until I was more than ordinarily proficient in most of them, and there was every probability that I should grow to man's estate. Then I could devote such energy as God might bestow upon me to my one purpose, and to do this with the best results, I would strengthen my mental faculties and powers of perception in all ways.

(To Be Continued.)

THE SACRED CAVE OF ZEUS.

Discovered in the Cretan Mountains by Hogarth, Director of the British School at Athens.

Deep in the tough heart of the Cretan mountains has Mr. Hogarth, the director of the British school at Athens, been digging for months, the sacred cave of Zeus being the object of his zeal. Recently he returned to London and added to what has already appeared on the subject of his excavations.

The cave is sacred to Zeus because his mother, Rhea, is supposed to have hidden him there to save him from the cannibal propensities of his father. It lies about 2,000 feet above the level of the sea.

For some fifteen years past the natives have been finding ancient objects there. One day a man rested his candle in a niche of the stalactite pillars with which the lower cave is lined. Something glittered behind it, and this proved to be a venerable offering placed there some 2,000 years ago. Other niches in other stalactites yielded the same finds—weapons, or imitation weapons that had been offered to Zeus, and needles and deplorable instruments offered to his mother. To collect these objects, Mr. Hogarth employed women, because their eyes were sharper and their touch lighter than the men's. They fished the treasures out of the niches by means of the tweezers used by the natives in their charcoal fires. He gave them "backsheesh" for everything they found. They enjoyed the work and rejoiced in the pay.

So great was the quantity of antiquities found by these women that Mr. Hogarth believes it will take him seven years to study and classify them.—London Daily Mail.

Woes of a Cow-herd.

The man is unwise for a country office. He is also running a saloon. He was sitting in his place of business one evening last week, when one of his constituents came in.

"Say," said the caller, "I want you to get Bill Vocht out of jail."

"What's Bill been doin'?"

"Nothin' much. Jest hit his brother with an ax. Nothin' but a little family quarrel."

"How bad's the brother hurt?"

"I don't know. They took him to the county hospital, an' I ain't heard how bad he is off. Head cut open some, I guess. But, say, it was Bill's own brother he hit. Jest a family quarrel, that's all."

"I'm afraid I can't do it."

"You ain't goin' to let Bill stay in jail all night, are you? Why, he jes' hit a man with an ax, that's all. All right, if you ain't a-goin' to do anythin', Bill'll know what to do on election day. I an' the rest of the boys'll know, too. Jes' fer hittin' a man with an ax!"—Chicago Tribune.

All Old Chimneys Do.

An Austrian prince once sent his servant to a painter, remarkable for his idleness as well as skill, and gave him a picture to copy. It was the painting of an old farm house. In a few days the servant went to see what progress had been made, and on his return informed the prince that all was done except one chimney. A week passed, and the picture was not returned. The prince then resolved to go himself. He did so, and found the artist still at the unfinished chimney.

"How is this?" said the prince, severely. "all this time employed on one chimney?"

"I have been obliged to do it and undo it several times," said the artist.

"For what reason?" asked the prince.

"Because," said the artist, coolly, "I found that it smoked."—London Tit-Bits.

Mutually Hypnotised.

"So he has at last led her to the altar?"

"I don't know whether he led her or she pushed him."—Indianapolis Press.

THANKSGIVING.

To the popular mind the word "Thanksgiving" stands for a day of festivity. But they who lose its subjective meaning in mere creature enjoyment suffer a misfortune and miss an opportunity.

To our fathers, Thanksgiving was a sacrament. It was one of their acts of religion to get apart for it an annual day. Heaven had blessed their harvests, and they wished to express in a special way appreciation of its favors.

Nothing in their example was more sane and sensible than the creation of this November family custom, now become national. There have been changes of our social life since the old time. These have made it less easy to observe the day so generally with public rites of worship, but the ordinance holds its place with pleasing fitness, and with ample reason.

We have a thousandfold more to be devoutly glad for than our fathers had; and the feeling and the faith they carried with them to the "solemn assembly" we can radiate in brighter homes and wider activities of kindness.

The unfolding Christian age has given us the larger thought of the meaning and mission of freedom and of civilization; the grander type and idea of benevolence; the tenderer beliefs that sweeten life and death with hope. For all these let us thank God.

Gratitude is not only "a natural function of the healthy soul"; it is its wealth. Invest it. Its interest will enrich the character, and uplift the whole life.

THE FIRST THANKSGIVING.



The snow upon the hillside lay,
And thatched the cottage roof.
The web of vines by the Pilgrim's door
Was filled with icy wool.
The boughs were leafless on the trees.
Across the barren plain
Above the little Plymouth town,
The north wind swept despairingly
And moaned like one in pain.

(It whimpered like some hungry child
That clasps its parent's hand
And pleads for bread when there is none
In all the dreary land.)
Above the little Plymouth town,
Circling with empty maw,
Mocking their hunger, flew the crow,
Shrieking his "haw, haw, haw."

Patience, a blue-eyed maiden,
(Her eyes with tears were dim.)
From hunger feeble, trembling kneel
And raised her voice to Him.
"Dear God," she said in pleading tones,
Tender, plaintive and sweet,
"We're almost starved, an' won't 'oo please
Send down some flings to eat."

Then all day long her watchful eyes
(Gazed down the village street,
Not doubting but she soon would see
Some one with "flings to eat.")
And, lo! before the sun had set,
With wild howl laden down
Four hunters from the forest drear
Came marching into town.

And (as in answer to the prayer),
To add to all the cheer,
And banish famine from the place,
(Came Indians with their deer,
The joyous villagers rushed out,
The laden ones to meet,
But Patience knelt and said: "Fanks, Dod,
Fer sendin' flings to eat."

Then all day long her watchful eyes
(Gazed down the village street,
Not doubting but she soon would see
Some one with "flings to eat.")
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The instinct of Liberty.
Nature imprints upon what'er we see,
That has a heart and life in it, "Be free!"
—Cowper.