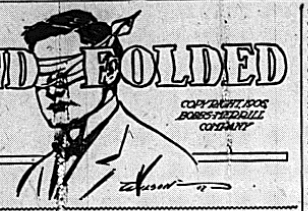
BLIND FOLDED

By EARLE ASHLEY WALCOTT

COPYRIGHT, 1905, BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY



SYNOPSIS.

Giles Dudley arrived in San Francisco to join his friend and distant relative Henry Wilton, whom he was to assist in an important and mysterious task, and who accompanied Dudley on the ferry boat trip into the city. The remarkable resemblance of the two men is noted and commented on by passengers on the ferry. They see a man with snake eyes, which sends a thrill through Dudley. Wilton postpones an explanation of the strange errand Dudley is to perform, but occurrences cause him to know it is one of no ordinary meaning. Wilton leaves Giles in their room, with instruction to await his return and shoot any one who tries to enter. Outside these is heard shouts and curses and the noise of a quarrel. Henry rushes in and at his request the roommates quickly exchange clothes, and he hurries out again. Hardly has he gone than Giles is startled by a cry of "Help," and he runs out to find some one being assaulted by a half dozen men. He summons a policeman but they are unable to find any trace of a crime. Giles returns to his room and hunts for some evidence that might explain his strange mission. He finds a map which he endeavors to decipher. Dudley is summoned to the morgue and there finds the dead body of his friend, Henry Wilton. And thus Wilton dies without ever explaining to Dudley the pressing work he was to perform in San Francisco. In order to discover the secret mission his friend had entrusted to him, Dudley continues his disguise and permits himself to be known as Henry Wilton. Dudley, mistaken for Wilton, is employed by Knapp to assist in a stock brokerage deal.

CHAPTER VI.—Continued.

"We'll have to break down the door, I guess," said Dicky. "Something must have happened." And a resounding kick shook the panel.

"Hold on!" I cried. "What's wanted?"

"Oh," said Dicky sarcastically. "You've come to life again, have you?"

"Well, I'm not dead yet."

"Then strike a light and let us in. And take a look at that reminder you'll find wrapped around the rock I heaved through the transom. I thought it was open." And Dicky went off into another series of chuckles in appreciation of his mistake.

"All right," I said. I was not entirely truthful, and after I had lighted the gas-jet I picked up the stone that lay among the fragments of glass, and unwrapped the paper. The sheet bore only the words:

"At Borton's, at midnight.

Richmond."

This was the name of the agent of the Unknown, who had sent the other note. Dicky and his companion must then be protectors instead of enemies. I hastened to unlock the door, and in walked my two visitors.

The first was a young man, tall, well-made, with a shrewd, good-humored countenance, and a ready, confident air about him. I had no trouble in picking him out as the amused Dicky. The other was a black-bearded giant, who followed stolidly in the wake of the younger man.

"You've led me a pretty chase," said Dicky. "If it hadn't been for Pork Chops here, I shouldn't have found you till the cows come home."

"Well, what's up now?" I asked.

"Why, you ought to know," said Dicky with evident surprise. "But you'd better be hurrying down to Borton's. The gang must be there by now."

I could only wonder who Borton might be, and where his place was, and what connection he might have with the mystery, as Dicky took me by the arm and hurried me out into the darkness. The chill night air served to nerve instead of depress my spirits, as the garrulous Dicky unconsciously guided me to the meeting-place, joyously narrating some amusing adventure of the day, while the heavy retainer stalked in silence behind.

Down near the foot of Jackson street, where the smell of bilge-water and the wash of the sewers grew stronger, and the masts of vessels could just be seen in the darkness outlined against the sky, Dicky suddenly stopped and drew me into a doorway. Our retainer disappeared at the same instant, and the street was apparently deserted. Then out of the night the shape of a man approached with silent steps.

"Five—sixteen," croaked Dicky.

The man gave a visible start.

"Sixteen—five," he croaked in return.

"Any signs?" whispered Dicky.

"Six men went upstairs across the street. Every one of them did the sailor-drunk act."

"Sure they weren't sailors?"

"Well, when six coves goes up the same stairs trying the same dodge, all inside of ten minutes, I has a right to my suspicions. And Darby Meeker ain't been to sea yet that I knows on."

"Darby Meeker!" exclaimed Dicky in a whisper. And he drew a whistle under his breath. "What do you think of that, Wilton? I had no idea he was back from that wild-goose chase you sent him on."

"It looks bad," I admitted cautiously. "I dare say he isn't in good temper."

"You'll have to settle with him for that piece of business," said Dicky with a chuckle.

I failed to see the amusing side of the prospect. I wished I knew what Mr. Meeker looked like.

The guard had melted away into the darkness without another word, and we hurried forward with due caution. Just past the next corner was a lighted room, and the sound of voices broke the quiet.

We pushed open the door and walked in. The room was large and dingy, the ceiling low. Tables were scattered about the sanded floor. A bar took up the side of the room next the entrance and a general air of disreputability filled the place.

About the room, some at the tables, some at the bar, were numbers of stout, rough-looking men, with a few Greek fishermen and two or three sailors.

Behind the bar sat a women whose appearance in this place almost startled me. She might have been nearing seventy, and a hard and evil life had left its marks on her bent frame and her gaunt face. Her leathery cheeks were lined deep, and a hawk-like nose emphasized the unpleasant suggestion conveyed by her face and figure. But the most remarkable feature about her was her eyes. There was no trace of age in them. Bright

and keen as the eyes of a rat, they gave me an unpleasant thrill as I felt her gaze fixed upon me when I entered the door, arm in arm with Dicky. It was as though they had pierced me through, and had laid bare something I would have concealed. It was a relief to pass beyond her into a recessed part of the room where her gaze might waste itself on the back of my head.

"Mother Borton's up late to-night," said Dicky thoughtfully, as he ordered wine.

"You can't blame her for thinking that this crowd needs watching," I suggested with as much of airiness as I could throw into my manner.

Dicky shook his head for a second, and then resumed his light-hearted, bantering way. Yet I could see that he was preplexed and anxious about something that had come to his attention on our arrival.

"You'll not want to attend to business till all the boys are here?" asked Dicky.

"Not unless there's something to be done," I responded dryly.

Dicky gave me a quick glance.

"Of course," he said with a laugh that was not quite easy, "not unless there's something to be done. But I thought there was something."

"You've got a fine mind for thinking, Dicky," I replied. "You'd better cultivate it."

"Well, they say there's nothing like society for that sort of cultivation," said Dicky, with another laugh. "They don't say what kind, but I've got a pretty good stock to choose from." He was at his ease in banter again, but it struck unpleasantly on me that there was something behind.

"Oh, here's a queer friend," he said suddenly, looking at the door. "I'd better speak to him on the matter of countersigns."

"By all means," I said, turning in my chair to survey the new-comer.

I saw the face for an instant. The man wore a sou'wester, and he had drawn his thick, rough coat up as the collar. Cheek and chin I could see were covered by a thick blonde beard. His movements were apparently clumsy, but his figure was lithe and sinuous. And his eyes! Once seen they never could be forgotten. At though he would hide his head under their glance, beard and sou'wester dropped away before my fancy, and I saw in my inner vision the man of the serpent glance who had chilled my spirit when I had first put foot in the city. It flashed on me in an instant that this man was the same man disguised, who has ventured into the midst of his enemies to see what he might learn of their plans.

As I watched Dicky advance and greet the new-comer with apparent inquiry, a low, harsh voice behind gave me a start of surprise.

"This is your wine, I think"—and a lean, wrinkled arm passed over my shoulder, and a wrinkled face came near my own.

I turned quickly. It was Mother Borton, leering at me with no apparent interest but in her errand.

"What are you doing here?" asked the crone in a voice still lower. "You're not the one they take you to be, but you're none the less in danger. What are you doing with his looks, and in this place? Look out for that man you're with, and the other. Yes, sir," her voice rose. "A small bottle of the white; in a minute, sir."

I understood her as Dicky and the new-comer came to the table and took seats opposite. I commanded my face to give no sign of suspicion, but the warning put me on the alert. I had come on the supposition that I was to meet the band to which Henry Wilton belonged. Instead of being among friends, however, it seemed now that I was among enemies.

"It's all right," said Dicky carelessly. "He's been sent."

"That's lucky," said I with equal unconcern. "We may need an extra hand before morning."

The new-comer could not repress a triumphant flash in the serpent eyes.

"I'm the one for your job," he said hoarsely, his face as impassive as a stone wall.

"What do you know about the job?" I asked suspiciously.

"Only what I've been told," he answered.

"And that is——"

"That it's a job for silence, secrecy, and——"

"Spondulicks," said Dicky with a laugh, as the other hesitated for the word.

"Just so," said the man.

"And what else?" I continued, pressing him firmly.

"Well, he admitted hoarsely, "I learned as how there was to be a change of place to-night, and I might be needed."

I looked at him inquiringly. Perhaps I was on the threshold of knowledge of this cursed business from the mouth of the enemy.

"I heard as how the boy was to be put in a safer place," he said, wagging his head with affected gravity.

Some imp put it into my brain to try him with an unexpected bit of news.

"Oh," I said coolly, "that's all attended to. The change was made yesterday."

The effect of this announcement was extraordinary. The man started with an oath.

"The hell you say!" he exclaimed in a low, smooth voice, far different from the harsh tone he had used thus far. Then he leaped to his feet, with uncontrollable rage.

"Tricked—by God!" he shouted impulsively, and smote the table with his fist.

His outburst threw the room into confusion. Men sprang from their chairs. Glasses and bottles fell with clinking crash. Oaths and shouts arose from the crowd.

"Damn you, I'll have it out of you!" said the man with suppressed fury, his voice once again smooth and low. "Where is the boy?"

He smote the table again; and with that stroke the false beard fell from his chin and cheek, and exposed the malignant face, distorted with rage, a feeling of horrible repulsion came over me, and I should have struck at that serpent's head but for a startling occurrence As he spoke, a wild scream rose upon the air, and as it echoed through the room the lights went out.

The scream was repeated, and after an instant's silence there rose a chorus of shouts and oaths, mingled with the crash of tables and the clink of breaking glass and crockery, as the men in the room fought their way to the door.

"Oh, my God, I'm cut!" came in a shriek out of the darkness and clamor; and there followed the flash of a pistol and a report that boomed like a cannon in that confined place.

My eyes had not been idle after the warning of Mother Borton, and in an instant I had decided what to do. I had figured out what I conceived to be the plan of the house, and thought I knew a way of escape. There were two doors at the rear of the room, facing me. One led, as I knew, to the kitchen; the other opened, I reasoned, on a stair to the lodging-room above.

Before the scream that accompanied the extinction of the lights had died away, I had made a dive beneath the table, and, lifting with all my might, had sent it crashing over with my enemy under it. With one leap I cleared the remaining table that lay between me and the door. And with the clamor behind me, I turned the knob and bounded up the stairs, three steps at a time.

CHAPTER VII.
Mother Borton.

The noise of the struggle below continued. Yells and curses rose from the maddened men. Three shots were fired in quick succession, and a cry of "Oh, my God!" penetrated through the closed door with the sound of one sorely hurt.

I lingered for a little, listening to the tumult. I was in a strange and dangerous position. Enemies were behind me. There were friends, too, but I knew no way to tell one from the other, and my ignorance had nearly brought me to my death. I hesitated to move, but I could not remain in the open hall; and as the sounds of disturbance from below subsided. I felt my way along the wall and moved cautiously forward.

I had progressed perhaps twenty steps when a door, against which my hand pressed, yielded at the touch and swung slowly open. I strove to stop it, for the first opening showed a dim light within. But the panel gave no hold for my fingers, and my efforts to close the door only swung it open the faster. I drew back a little into the shadow, for I hesitated to dash past the sight of any who might occupy the room.

"Come in!" called a harsh voice.

I hesitated. Behind, the road led to the eating-room with its known dangers. A dash along the hall for the front door meant the raising of an alarm, and probably a bullet as a discourager of burglary. Should I escape this, I could be certain of a warm reception from the enemies on watch outside. Prudence lay in facing the one rather than risking the many. I accepted the invitation and walked into the room.

"I was expecting you," said the harsh voice composedly. "Good evening."

"Good evening," I returned gravely, swallowing my amazement as best I could.

By the table before me sat Mother Borton, contemplating me as calmly as though this meeting were the most commonplace thing in the world. A candle furnished a dim, flickering light that gave to her hard wicked countenance a diabolic leer that struck a chill to my blood.

"Excuse me," I said, "I have lost my way, I fear."

"Not at all," said Mother Borton. "You are in the right place."

"I was afraid I had intruded," I said apologetically.

"I expected you," she repeated. "Shut the door."

I glanced about the room. There was no sign of another person to be seen, and no other door. I obeyed her.

"You might as well sit down," she said with some petulance. "There's nothing up here to hurt you." There was so much meaning in her tone of the things that would hurt me on the floor below that I hastened to show my confidence in her, and drew up a chair to the table.

"At your service," I said, leaning before her with as much an appearance of jaunty self-possession as I could muster.

"Who are you, and what are you doing here?" she asked grimly.

What should I answer? Could I tell her the truth?

"Who are you?" she repeated impatiently, gazing on me. "You are not Wilton. Tell me. Who are you?"

The face, hard as it was, seamed with the record of a rough and evil life, as it appeared, had yet a kindly look as it was turned on me.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Japanese Railroads.

The rapid growth of Japan's railways during the last few years is seen from the fact that in 1875 the number of passengers carried was 2,754,426, whereas in 1905, it had been augmented to 113,675,403. During the same period the volume of freight traffic has also risen to considerably over 21,000,000 tons, while the total receipts had risen from 644,459 to 69,033,165 yen.

Wholesale Nobility.

The noble families of Prussian Poland have become so numerous as almost to swamp the common people of the province. The priest of the village of Konitz replied to a circular issued by the government that every one of the 40 families in his congregation was of noble birth.

BIG MAIL ROBBERY

REGISTERED POUCH DISAPPEARS IN KANSAS CITY DISTRICT.

CONTENTS ABOUT $100.000

Package of at Least $50,000 Sent East by Los Angeles Banks Part of the Large Haul.

Los Angeles, Cal.—Reluctant admissions made by the post office officials of three cities Wednesday confirm to some extent the belief that the disappearance of a registered mail pouch somewhere within the jurisdiction of the Kansas City (Mo.) post office last Saturday night will prove one of the biggest hauls in the history of the post office department.

From private sources it was learned late Wednesday that a package of at least $50,000 in currency was among the contents of the pouch, which carried, in addition, an unusually large number of letters and packages containing money and other valuables to an amount which can only be conjectured, but which may reach $50,000 more. The pouch was in transit from this city to New York and the postal inspectors who have had the case in charge refuse any explanation of the manner in which it became lost to sight in transfer from one responsible guardian to another as the department regulations providing for the protection of registered matter are of the strictest.

That a pouch of value has disappeared was admitted by the department at Washington, by Postmaster M. H. Flint of Los Angeles, and by inspector W. J. Vickery, attached to the Kansas City post office.

The $50,000 package of currency, which will undoubtedly prove to be the largest individual loss, was a shipment made by Los Angeles banks to their New York correspondent. Postmaster Flint of Los Angeles stated that it would be impossible for any official of the department to even estimate the total contents of the missing pouch until the holders of receipts issued on the day in question had made affidavits as to the matter intrusted to the mails.

AGAINST IMMORAL SALOONS.

United States Brewers' Association Adopts a Platform.

Milwaukee. — The United States Brewers' association at its closing session Wednesday adopted a platform of principles in which it pledges itself to the abolition of the immoral saloon and to the cause of temperance in the use of intoxicants in the broadest sense. At the afternoon session the convention voted to meet next year at Rochester, N. Y., on the first Wednesday in June.

Officers were elected as follows: President, J. Brown, Rochester, N. Y.; vice-president, C. M. Hobbs, Bridgeport, Ind.; secretary, George A. Seager, Rochester, N. Y.; treasurer, C. L. Yates, Rochester, N. Y.

ROBBED OF HIS YOUNG WIFE.

South Carolina Man Relates Strange Experience in Mountains.

Spartanburg, S. C.—W. F. Burns of Jackson county, S. C., while on a bridal trip across Panther mountain, in Greenville county, says he was robbed of his pretty young wife by a gang of six men, after he had been bound, beaten and robbed. He and his wife stopped at a cottage in the mountains and during the night the men entered the room of the couple, attacked Burns and took his wife down the mountain. He says he has not seen her since. The authorities are investigating his story.

JOSEPH LEITER MARRIED.

Young Millionaire Weds Miss Juliette Williams in Washington.

Washington.—A wedding of unusual interest was that which took place at the home of the bride's parents Wednesday of Miss Juliette Williams, daughter of Col. and Mrs. John R. Williams of this city, to Joseph Leiter, son of the late Levi Z. Leiter of Chicago and Washington.

The ceremony, which was performed by Rev. Father Buckey, assistant rector of St. Matthew's Roman Catholic church, was witnessed by about 20 persons.

Owen Wister's Mother Dies.

Philadelphia.—Mrs. Owen Jones Wister, mother of Owen Wister, the novelist, is dead at her home. Mrs. Wister, who was in her seventy-second year, was Miss Sarah Butler, a daughter of Pierce Butler and Fanny Kemble, the famous actress.

New Yorker Dies of Hydrophobia.

New York.—Capt. Edward Rabey, commander of one of the small steamers at the quarantine station, died in a Staten Island sanitarium Wednesday from hydrophobia.

Gen. Evans Made Commander.

Birmingham, Ala.—With the selection of Memphis as the place for the next reunion and the election of Gen. Clement A. Evans of Georgia as commander-in-chief, the United Confederate Veterans adjourned their annual convention late Wednesday afternoon.

Grain Shippers Organize.

Piqua, O.—At a meeting of a committee of Ohio and Indiana grain shippers held here Wednesday, the Ohio and Indiana Grain Shippers' association was formed with 100 members.

QUEEN OF ACTRESSES PRAISES PE-RU-NA.

MISS JULIA MARLOWE.

"I am glad to write my endorsement of the great remedy, Peruna. I do so most heartily."—Julia Marlowe.

Any remedy that benefits digestion strengthens the nerves.

The nerve centers require nutrition. If the digestion is impaired, the nerve centers become anemic, and nervous debility is the result.

Peruna is not a nervine nor a stimulant. It benefits the nerves by benefiting digestion.

Peruna frees the stomach of catarrhal congestions and normal digestion is the result.

In other words, Peruna goes to the bottom of the whole difficulty, when the disagreeable symptoms disappear.

Mrs. J. C. Jamison, Wallace, Cal., writes:

"I was troubled with my stomach for six years. Was treated by three doctors. They said that I had nervous dyspepsia. I was put on a liquid diet for three months.

"I improved under the treatment, but as soon as I stopped taking the medicine, I got bad again.

"I saw a testimonial of a man whose case was similar to mine being cured by Peruna, so I thought I would give it a trial.

"I procured a bottle at once and commenced taking it. I have taken several bottles and am entirely cured."

DAD AND HIS MEMORY.

Old Gentleman Really Had Very Little to Brag About.

It was a severe trial to Mr. Harding that his only son's memory was not all that could be desired. "Where in the world he got such a forgetful streak from is beyond me," said the exasperated father to his wife on one occasion.

"What has he forgotten now?" asked Mrs. Harding, with eyes downcast and a demure expression.

"The figures of the last return from the election on the bulletin-board," and Mr. Harding inserted a finger in his collar as if to loosen it, and shook his head vehemently. "Looked at 'em as he came past not half an hour ago, and now can't tell me.

"As I said to him: 'If you're so stupid you can't keep a few simple figures in your head, why don't you write 'em down on a piece of paper, as I do, and have done all my life, long before I was your age?' "Youth's Companion.

LOOKING FOR COMFORT.

"Hurry up, Shorty, an' git a move on! I wants to make der next town before der jail closes fer de night!"

Useless Society.

Mrs. Jones often declared that she enjoyed a little chat with their fish-dealer because he was a man of such original ideas, but one day, says London Opinion, she returned from market somewhat puzzled by his remarks.

"I said to him, just in the way of conversation," declared Mrs. Jones, "that I had heard that a man becomes like that with which he most associates.

"'That's ridiculous, Mrs. Jones!' he answered. 'I've been a fishmonger all my life and can't swim a yard.'"

BUILT UP

Right Food Gives Strength and Brain Power.

The natural elements of wheat and barley, including the phosphate of potash, are found in Grape-Nuts, and that is why persons who are run down from improper food pick up rapidly on Grape-Nuts.

"My system was run down by excessive night work," writes a N. Y. man, "in spite of a liberal supply of ordinary food.

"After using Grape-Nuts I noticed improvement at once, in strength, and nerve and brain power.

"This food seemed to lift me up and stay with me for better exertion, with less fatigue. My weight increased 20 lbs. with vigor and comfort in proportion.

"When traveling I always carry the food with me to insure having it."

Name given by Postum Co., Battle Creek, Mich. Read "The Road to Wellville," in pkgs.

Ever read the above letter? A new one appears from time to time. They are genuine, true, and full of human interest.