

Berkshire Rebel.

By FRANK H. MELOAN.

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IN the year 1900 rumors of an insipient rebellion in the Bay State reached the ears of the ablest agents of the newly installed Wood trust government at Washington, whose rise to a complete assumption of the reins of power men could clearly foresee even in the beginning of the century. The affair threatened to come off on no less a scale than that of the bloodless whisky insurrection, the local outbreak occurring in opposition to the crime law passed by the congress of the United States in March, 1793, and against which President Washington was forced to call out an army of 15,000 militia. Deciding that the arrest of a few of the ostensible ring leaders would put a sudden end to the Massachusetts affair, a secret service man was assigned to duty in each county with instructions to find out the local leader of the impending uprising.

My order was brief and to the point it read:

William Cromwell:

Uprising against food trust threatened in Massachusetts. Proceed to Pittsfield, establish headquarters and report as soon as possible. Berkshire county.

LESLIE KERRY, Chief.

It was in the month of July, therefore, that I was ordered as a special stroke of good fortune, also, had been planning a vacation in the heart of the Berkshire hills. This business, which in truth I regarded as far from serious, I could easily combine with pleasure. This sugar coating my pill of a duty I took some only to get the name of Cromwell. Instead of obeying orders to the letter, I was supposed to use my discretion. Consequently I passed through Pittsfield and the Junction beyond, getting off the train at Coleraine. It was a notion of mine that beneath the roly-poly and satisfaction of the gentle

came and went, glad and unquenching. What I asked myself, could J. S. Rookshaw, a dignified, middle aged and evidently prosperous man, who seemed of sound mind and appetite as he sat at the dining table, eat of fresh caught hawks, bluejays, robins and even ordinary English sparrows? Why, too, after he had got them, did he release them? I was loath to accept, instantly as the notion since I prided myself on having scented a deeper mystery.

In my own mind I had a suspicion that they might be trained as carriers of messages. Yet I could see no reason why such secrecy should be exercised when a private code and the telegraph might be more safely and more conveniently used. Though the whole thing was, in the surface, inexplicable, I was convinced that in some manner J. S. Rookshaw was connected with the premeditated rebellion.

On the 10th day, during the absence of Mr. Rookshaw, the landlord admitted me to the room of his strange boarder. In one corner I found a few feathers; in another were feathers and more conspicuously soiled. The whole fully cleaned, had been used to sweep up the debris. The contents of the well filled wastebasket I immediately seized and carried it triumph to my room, spending hours in sorting what seemed to furnish the only promise of a clue.

All the specimens of handwriting I found were torn into small bits. As, however, no two pieces of paper came from the same source, in the manner as regards it, I managed to so piece them together that I could make out such terms as rising, flight, sea, bold stroke, triumph, difficult, appearance and a few others of no great significance. Such incriminating fragments as these I carefully preserved to send to the chief at Washington with my report. The rest, which were of no value I burned.

On the morning following my securing this evidence J. S. Rookshaw knocked at my door, which I opened, at the same time inviting him to enter. He did so, breathless to deep with relief and wiped the perspiration from his brow with a red handkerchief. After a few preliminary remarks he again tendered his apologies for having disturbed me from time to time, and then, alluding with a shy wink to his "insomnia," he concluded by inviting me to accompany him after breakfast on a drive.

"What?" he exclaimed pompously, yet in a low tone, as if he were fearful of being overheard—"today sees the crowning of my labors with success!" As he finished he stared at me very hard, in spite of myself, I started with surprise. Was the rebellion, I wondered, so soon set up its daring standard? It did not seem probable. Yet I felt certain that I had within my grasp, as it were, the man who controlled whatever segments of the revolutionary circle lay scattered among the Berkshire hills. I determined to surprise my adversary.

"What?" I cried, pointedly. "You expect success?"

He jumped as if given a violent shock, at the same time turning that peculiar hue of red assumed by a lobster squirming in the boiling pot before the cover is put on.

"You have guessed? You know?" he whispered hoarsely.

"Yes," I responded grimly.

"And your advice?" he asked.

"Is for you to die," I had no instructions to arrest the fellow. An ill advised arrest might influence the result of the coming state campaign, for the food trust, powerful though it was, had not then dared to deprive the people of the voting franchise.

"I intend to do so," he admitted frankly in a tone I was at a loss to comprehend.

He ended the conversation by once more inviting me to accompany him on an after breakfast carriage drive, intimating that I should be a witness of his success. Still unable to catch

premeditated precipitating me from the top? I smiled at the idea of my fat and already putting emphasis planning a personal conflict with a young man of my own muscular strength. He carried bundles which indicated that he was on a fishing expedition, but there was no pond, lake or stream near the Devil's leap.

At the verge of the cliff he stopped. Taking no notice of me, he began to undo his bundle, but suddenly paused.

"May I ask you," he said, seemingly aware of my presence for the first time—"may I ask you as a personal favor to go to the foot of this cliff and there await me? I am sorry to have led you up here and must plead pre-occupation of mind. Of course if you do not feel like granting me the favor I cannot prevent your remaining."

For a second only I hesitated; then, convinced that the man was a harm-



"I HAVE SOLVED THE PROBLEM OF AERIAL NAVIGATION!"

less lunatic who could hardly escape me if he tried, I resolved to humor his whim. A walk of a couple of minutes sufficed to bring me to a point below J. S. Rookshaw and his bulk of two hundred and some odd pounds.

There a strange sight met my eyes. The man had arrayed himself in the queerest costume I have ever beheld. The headpiece was kin to the topknot of a bluejay, the tail was like that of a sparrow, and the wings were as those of a hawk, many times enlarged. It is difficult to me that I have solved the problem of personal aerial navigation," he explained shortly, chuckling and flapping his wings two or three times.

The amusement was so indescribably odd and the outcome of my adventure so utterly unexpected that I was overcome by laughter which my chagrin was not sufficiently powerful to check.

"Don't laugh at me!" begged the fat J. S. Rookshaw, looking hurt. I could see that the man was very sensitive, yet I couldn't for the life of me control that laugh, which, like murder, would out.

The eyes of J. S. Rookshaw lit with heroic determination. Again the monstrous wings flapped comically and slowly, the sparrow's tail gave a little twitch, the bluejay's topknot a wobble, and my friend, in all the majesty of his accumulated flesh, "cleave the air!" to my feet!

There was a crackling sound as the woodwork and ceiling of the man's room's tail were crushed beneath him, but the humor of it was half lost on me as I caught the pathos of Rookshaw's half subdued sob of disappointment.

"The tail broke before you fell," I declared, seeking to alleviate his evident mental suffering as soon as I saw that no bones were broken.

"Do you think so?" he asked hopefully.

"I certainly do," I replied firmly.

"Next time, though, I'd advise you to get a younger and a lighter man to make the first experiment. In case something goes wrong the world will then be in no danger of losing one of its greatest inventors."

J. S. Rookshaw took the compliment seriously and looked 50 per cent pleased.

"An eight foot fall," he admitted, rubbing himself rather ruefully, "more than I care to take again."

On the strength of my adventure I reported that the rebellion in Massachusetts was a hoax. In this instance at least the trust was shown to have been without mistrust, for the story of the spring turned out to be the invention of a clever newspaper man who had thus set all official Washington by the ears.

As the result of an invitation to visit Rookshaw at his city home I met his charming daughter Viola. Rookshaw is now my father-in-law, and I have made several descents from the Devil's leap in the interests of science. Rookshaw is still hoping that the best attempt will turn out to be an ascension.



SHOWING THE OMNIPOTENT BADGE OF THE FOOD TRUST.

man who occupied the seat ahead let something of the mystery I had set out to solve. When his attention was called to myself that this and not the ordinary criminal type of man would be the one most liable to concern itself in a rebellion against the laws of the great amalgamated food trust.

He went to Bald Mountain Inn, and I, like Ruth, the Moonlight, in her pursuit of Boaz, followed. At Bald Mountain Inn he occupied the room so did I. Later I consulted the landlord, showing the omnipotent badge of the food trust, before which he bowed servile to the core, while I smiled grimly at the fellow's look of mortal fear. When interrogated, he said that the man, who had registered himself as J. S. Rookshaw, had insisted upon a well curtained room. This confirmed my suspicions of mystery concealed, fully arousing every detective instinct in my body.

During the next three days I worked as hard as newspaper man. J. S. Rookshaw, I learned, kept high society hours, being heard moving about in his room when decent folk were trying to catch the fast express to the land of Nod. By day he slept, only once in these seventy-two hours going out for exercise. At that time his face had an expression betokening both exhaustion and anxiety. He kept an assortment of birds, which he paid the village boys to bring him occasionally, but which he soon released, buying more as opportunity afforded. Occupying the room adjoining his, my only regret was that there was no reason between us. Evidently J. S. Rookshaw was too sharp a bird to be trapped in such fashion.

Each night I was disturbed by a sound reminding me of the sawing of boards. At last I confronted my man in the hallway, asking him bluntly why he made such a noise when other folks were trying to sleep. He turned red in his cheeks, looked very nervous and said he was troubled with insomnia. Although insomnia did not account for the sawing sound, I concluded he would, if questioned, ascribe that to the asthma.

Both the landlord and I were much perplexed by the man's purchase of birds, but the youth of Coleraine



TAKING NO NOTICE OF ME, HE BROKE TO UNDO HIS BUNDS.

the import of his promise, I accepted the invitation me of the sawing of boards, especially on what promised to be so important a day to the plans I had been dispatched to frustrate.

In the neighborhood of Coleraine there is a certain table-knife known as the Devil's leap. Not over eight feet high at the most, it was no terrible leap for a man, to say nothing of the devil, if he believes such as to permit the performance of an effortless athletic feat. To the top of this well spreading rock formation J. S. Rookshaw led me.

Could it be, I asked myself, that he

Willing Hands.

There is a good story going the rounds in Pittsburgh of a young man, formerly a stockbroker, who dropped many thousands in speculation during the early spring.

One night shortly after going to bed the Pittsburgher was awakened by a strange sound. At first motion to jump up by a hoarse voice, "If you sir, you're a dummy!" It said, "I'm looking for money."

"That case," pleasantly answered the erstwhile speculator "please show me to arise and strike a light. I shall deem it a favor to be permitted to assist in the search."—Harper's Weekly.

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