

HYPNOTIZING A DESPERADO.

Millionaire Southmead's Recent Experience.

BY CLARENCE HERBERT NEW.

JOHNSOUTHMEAD is known to be worth ten millions. Beyond that figure his wealth is a matter of conjecture to those who interest themselves in prominent men. Like many other millionaires, his manner is unaffected, and he is not at all difficult to approach. These facts were largely responsible for the dangerous situation in which he recently found himself placed.

He had just returned from lunch at the Lawyer's Club, and was alone in his private office, when a card was handed him by one of the clerks, who said that a gentleman was waiting outside and wished to see him personally. The name, "J. D. Braume," was unfamiliar, but he gave directions to have the stranger shown, in and greeted him pleasantly when he entered:

"Mr. Braume, I believe—?"

"Yes, sir; and this is Mr. Southmead—Mr. John Southmead?"

"That is my name, sir. Won't you take a seat (waving his hand toward a seat by the desk and leaning comfortably back in his own). What can I do for you?"

"Well, I want to talk with you on a little matter of private business, Mr. Southmead. I believe you are the largest stockholder of the K. L. & W. road, and that you also control the Iron Range system—am I correct?"

"Mmmm—in the main—yes sir."

"Would you consider a proposition to—by the way, there is no danger of our being overheard, is there? This is rather an important matter, and I—"

"None whatever, sir. The partition is a solid one, and the door, as you see, closes with a Norton check."

Mr. Braume looked carefully about the room, noted the position of both door and windows, then drawing from his pocket an envelope containing a type-written letter, he handed it to Mr. Southmead, saying as he did so:

"This letter of introduction will explain itself, and give us a basis of understanding to talk upon."

Mr. Southmead took the letter, carefully adjusted his glasses, and began to read it. Had any of his financial opponents been watching him at that moment, they would have understood something of the character which made the man a power in the commercial world. Without the slightest change of feature—not even a twitch of the muscles—he read as follows:

John Southmead, Esq., Room 482, Smith Building:

Dear Sir:—I have in this satchel, which you see in my hand, an explosive bomb of sufficient force to shatter the walls of the building. A drop of one foot, to the floor, or an equally hard blow, will be sufficient to explode it.

You will at once give me \$500,000.00 in such form that I can carry it safely away with me, or I will throw the satchel on the floor at your feet. I am a desperate man, and have no fear of death.—Very truly yours,

J. D. BRAUME.

After reading it over twice the millionaire took off his glasses, wiped them with his handkerchief, and then looked his antagonist over from head to foot. Braume was rather undersized, with delicate features, thin, nervous hands, and eyes that at first appeared to be pale and weak, but which, upon closer inspection, proved as cold and merciless as those of a shark. Mr. Southmead, on the contrary, was a man in every line of whose face was written "strength and power." His eyes were steel blue—but open and frank—the eyes of a man accustomed to command and be obeyed. His hair and mustache were snow white, but one would have taken him to be under sixty as far as appearance of age went.

For two or three seconds they looked each other straight in the face; then Mr. Southmead said quietly:

"You will have to modify your demand somewhat, Mr. Braume, because it is impractical. Although I am worth a considerably larger sum than you mentioned, I haven't over a hundred thousand dollars in any one bank. Your sole chance of successfully escaping with so large amount lies in getting it into your possession before the banks close, at three o'clock, and while you hold me here powerless. I shall have to make out checks on different banks, and send one of my clerks to draw the money—you could do nothing with the checks yourself. Now, if I make a draft upon any one bank for over—say, eighty thousand—it may inconvenience them so seriously

that before cashing it they will send around an inquiry as to whether it is regular, and whether I insist upon withdrawing that amount to-day. All these delays would, of course, lessen your chances of getting safely away with your money. I think (looking over the stubs of several check books in a drawer of the desk) that the best I can do for you will be two hundred thousand at the outside. Will that do?"

"No sir, it will not. Make it three hundred thousand or I drop the bag at once." (This was said as coldly and as calmly as if the matter were an every day transaction—so coldly that the man's deadly earnestness was undeniable.)

"One moment, Mr. Braume. You say you are perfectly indifferent to death. Let us grant that you are; but, even so, you would prefer living to enjoy a large sum of money if you could do so safely. You needn't answer me—I know you would. Now, I am an old man—69 last month—and in the natural course of events, I can't expect to live more than fifteen or twenty years. My affairs are all settled and I'm not afraid to die. Still, I am willing, of course, to purchase my life if I can. Your bomb will scarcely kill my young men in the other office, so I don't bluff worth a cent. I have told you that an attempt to get over two hundred thousand would be practically out of the question. You will take that or nothing. Shall I make out the checks?"

The two men looked each other in the eye for a moment. Then Braume said:

"Perhaps you're right about the impracticability of drawing the larger sum. Make them out for two hundred thousand, but I warn you—at the first suspicion of treachery, there will be an explosion here."

"Oh, I think that we understand each other (carelessly, as he rapidly filled out the checks). You can look these over and assure yourself that they're regular, while I ring for one of the clerks to go and draw them."

"They seem to be all right; but that's your affair; it's your risk if they are not."

At that moment a young man opened the door in answer to Mr. Southmead's bell.

"Mr. Bilder, here are some checks I'd like to have you draw at once and bring the cash to me."

"Yes, sir. How will you have it, Mr. Southmead?"

"Oh, I'm not particular; (carelessly lighting a cigar and offering one to Braume which he declined.) Say a hundred and fifty thousand in bills of five hundred, and the balance in fiftys and twentys; that will do, won't it, Mr. Braume?"

"Well, five hundreds are a little inconvenient—better make them hundreds instead."

"All right. You understand. Bilder—hundreds, fiftys, and twentys. Guess you'll have to go to the cashiers personally—you won't have time to wait in line."

"Yes sir, I understand;" and Bilder vanished, wondering a little at the magnitude of the sum, but never dreaming anything was out of the way. When they were alone again, Mr. Southmead smoked for a moment of two in silence, and then asked, casually:

"How do you find business this year, Mr. Braume? I don't suppose the tariff affects you very much?"

"Only in scarcity of ready money."

"Been in this line long?"

"Well, no. It's a new departure for me. I did very well last year holding up trains in the southwest; but the large force I had to employ knocked all the profits out of the business. A month ago I made a neat thing out of diamonds, in St. Petersburg, but there's always more or less trouble disposing of them."

"I should think the certainty of being captured, sooner or later would affect your nerves. You can't expect to keep this sort of thing up very long."

"Oh, I shall be able to retire pretty soon."

"Where to? I beg your pardon. That's your affair, of course. By the way—excuse my mentioning it, but I noticed that you seem to be possessed of a strong magnetic influence—I felt it when I shook hands with you. You must have a powerful nervous organization. Have you ever studied the subject of mesmerism?"

"Somewhat—yes. (Here Mr. Braume smiled for the first time, and slightly relaxed his vigilant watch of Mr. Southmead's motions. It would have been imperceptible to anyone else, but the wary financier made a mental note of it.)

"How did you come to go into it?"