

The RAGGED EDGE

by
Harold MacGrath

"Let him have it! I can't stand at the elbow of any of the guests and regulate his or her actions. So long as a man behaves himself, I can't refuse him liquor. But I'll call a doctor, since you order it. You'll be wasting his time. It is a plain case of alcoholic stupor. I've seen many cases like it."

He summoned another "boy" and rumbled some Cantonese. Immediately the "boy" went forth with his paper lantern, repeating a cry as he ran—a warning to clear his way.

"Have the aromatic spirits of ammonia sent to Mr. Taber's room at once," Ruth ordered. "I will administer it."

"You, Miss Enschede?"—frankly astonished that one stranger should succour to another.

"There is nobody else. Someone ought to be with him until the doctor arrives. He may die."

The manager made a negative sign. "Your worry is needless."

"It wasn't the fumes of whisky that toppled him out of his chair. It was his heart. I once saw a man die after collapsing that way."

"You once saw a man die that way?" the manager echoed, his recent puzzlement returning full tide. Hartford, Connecticut; she had registered that address; but there was something so mystifyingly Oriental about her that the address only thickened the haze behind which she moved.

"Where?"

"That can wait," she answered. "Please hurry the ammonia," and Ruth turned away abruptly.

Above she found the two Chinaman squatted at the side of the door. They rose as she approached. She hastened past. She immediately took the pillows from under the head of the man who had two names, released the collar and tie, and arranged the arms alongside the body. His heart was beating, but faintly and slowly, with ominous intermissions. All alone, and nobody cared whether he lived or died.

She was now permitted freely to study the face. The comparisons upon which she could draw were few and confusingly new, mixed with reality and the loose artistic conceptions of heroes in fiction. The young man, as she had actually seen him, had been of the sailor type, hard-bitten, primordial, ruthless. For the face under her gaze she could find but one expression—fine. The shape of the head, the height and breadth of the brow, the angle of the nose, the cut of the chin and jaws, all were fine, of a type she had never before looked upon closely.

She saw now that it was not a discolored face; it was as smooth and unlined as polished marble, which at present it resembled. Still, something had marked the face, something had left an indelible touch. Perhaps the sunken cheeks and the protruding cheekbones gave her this impression. What reassured her, however, more than anything else, was the shape of the mouth: it was warmly turned. The confirmed drunkard's mouth at length sets itself peculiarly; it becomes the mark by which thoughtful men know him. It was not in evidence here, not a sign of it.

A drunken idea, Ah Cum had called it. And yet it was basically a fine action. To buy the freedom of a poor little Chinese slave-girl! For what was the slave-girl but a slave, the double slave of custom and of money? Ruth wanted to know keenly what had impelled the idea. Had he been trying to stop the grim descent, and had he dimly perceived that perhaps a fine deed would serve as the initial barrier? A drunken idea—a pearl in the midst of a rubbish heap. That terrible laughter, just before his senses had left him!

Why! Here was a word that volleyed at her from all directions, numbed and bewildered her: the multiple echoes of her own first utterance of the word. Why wasn't the world full of love, when love made happiness!

Why did people hide their natural kindness as if it were something shameful? Why shouldn't people say what they thought and act as they were inclined? Why all this pother about what one's neighbour thought, when this pother was not energized by any good will? Why was truth avoided as the plague? Why did this young man have one name on the hotel register and another on his lips? Why was she bothering about him at all? Why should there be this inexplicable compassion, when the normal sensation should have been repellant? Sidney Carton. Was that it? Had she clothed this unhappy young man with glamour? Or was it because he was so alone? She could not get through the husks to the kernel of what really actuated her.

Somewhere in the world would be his people, perhaps his mother; and it might soften the bitterness, of the return to consciousness if he found a woman at his bedside. More than this, it would serve to mitigate her own abysmal loneliness to pool it temporarily with his.

She drew up a chair and sat down, putting her palm on the damp, cold forehead. A bad sign; it signified that the heart action was in a precarious state. So far he had not stirred; from his bloodless lips had come no sound.

At length the manager arrived; and together he and Ruth succeeded in getting some of the aromatic spirits of ammonia down the patient's throat. But nothing followed to indicate that the liquid had stimulated the heart.

"You see?" Ruth said. The manager conceded that he saw, that his original diagnosis was at fault. Superimposed was the agitating thought of what would follow the death of this unwelcome guest: confusion-poking authorities, British and American red tape. It would send business elsewhere; and the hotel business in Canton was never so prosperous that one could afford to lose a single guest. Clientele was of the most transitory character.

And then, there would be the question of money. Would there be enough in the young man's envelope to pay the doctor and the hotel bill—and in the event of his death, enough to ship the body home? So all things pointed to the happy circumstance of setting this young fool upon his feet again, of seeing him hence upon his journey. Good riddance to bad rubbish.

An hour later the doctor arrived; and after a thorough examination, he looked doubtful.

"He is dying!" whispered Ruth. "Well, without immediate care he would have passed out. He's on the ragged edge. It depends upon what he was before he began this racket. Drink, and no sustaining food. But while there's life there's hope. There isn't a nurse this side of Hong-Kong to be had. I've only a Chinaman who is studying under me; but he's a good sport and will help us out during the crisis. This chap's recovery all depends upon the care he receives."

Out of nowhere Ruth heard her voice saying: "I will see to that."

"Your husband?"

"No. I don't even know his name."

The doctor sent her a sharp, quizzical glance. He could not quite make her out; a new type. "Taber," said the manager; "Taber is the name."

For some reason she did not then understand, Ruth did not offer the information that Taber had another name.

"This is very fine of you, Miss."

"Enschede."

"Ah. Well, come back in half an hour. I'll send or Wu Fang. He speaks English. Not a job he may care about; but he's a good sport. The hard work will be his, until we yank this young fellow back from the brink. Run along now; but return in half an hour."

The doctor was in the middle fifties, gray and careworn, but

with alert blue eyes and a gentle smile. He smiled at Ruth as she turned away from the bed, smiled with both his mouth and eyes; and she knew that here would be a man of heart as well as of science. She went out into the hall, where she met the Jeddons in their kimonos.

"What has happened?" asked Sister Prudence. "We've heard doings and goings."

"Mr. Taber is very ill."

"Oh," Prudence shrugged. "Well, what can you expect, guzzling poison like that? Are you returning with us to Hong-Kong in the morning?"

"No. I am going to help take care of him," said Ruth, quite ordinarily, as though taking care of unknown derelicts was an ordinary event in her life.

"What!—help take care of him? Why, you can't do that, Miss Enschede!" was the protest. "Why can't I?"

"You will be compromised. It isn't as if he were stricken with typhoid or pneumonia or something like that. You will certainly be compromised."

"Compromised," Ruth repeated the word, not in the effect of query, but ruminantly. Mutual concessions," she added, "I don't quite understand the application."

Sister Prudence looked at Sister Angelina, who understood what was expected of her. Sister Angelina shook her head as if to say that such ignorance was beyond her.

"Why, it means that people will think evilly of you."

"For a bit of kindness?" Ruth was plainly bewildered.

"You poor child!" Prudence took Ruth's hands in her own. "I never saw the like of you! One has to guard one's actions constantly in this wicked world, if one is a woman, young and pretty. A woman such as I am might help take care of Mr. Taber and no one comment upon it. But you couldn't. Never in this world! Let the hotel people take care of him; it's their affair. They sold him the whiskey. Come along with us in the morning. Your father."

Prudence felt the hands stiffen oddly; and again the thought came to her that perhaps this poor child's father had once been or perhaps still was, in the same category as this Taber.

"It's a fine idea, my child, but you mustn't do it. Even if he were an old friend, you couldn't afford to do it. But a total stranger, a man you never saw twenty-four hours ago! It can't be thought of. It isn't your duty."

"I feel bewildered," said Ruth. "Is it wrong, then, to surrender to good impulses?"

"In the present instance, yes. Can't I make you understand? Perhaps it sounds cruel to you; but we women often have to be cruel defensively. You don't want people to snub you later. This isn't your island, child; it's the great world."

"So I perceive," said Ruth, withdrawing her hands. "He is all alone. Without care he will die."

"But, goodness me, the hotel will take care of him! Why not? They sold him the poison. Besides, I have my doubts that he is so very sick. Probably he will come around to-morrow and begin all over again. You're alone, too, child. I'm trying to make you see the worldly point of view, which always inclines toward the evil side of things."

"I have promised. After all, why should I care what strangers think?" Ruth asked with sudden heat. "Is there no charity? Isn't it understood?"

"Of course it is! In the present instance I can offer it and you can't or shouldn't. There are unwritten laws governing human conduct. Who invented them? Nobody knows. But woe to those who disregard them! Of course, basically it is all wrong; and sometimes God must laugh at our ideas of rectitude. But to live at peace with your neighbour."

Ruth brushed her eyes with one hand and with the other signed for the spinster to stop. "No more, please! I am bewildered enough. I understand nothing of what you say. I only know that it is right to do what I do."

"Well," said Sister Prudence, "remember, I tried to save you some future headaches. God bless you, anyhow!" she added, with a spontaneity which surprised Sister Angelina into uttering an individual gasp. "Good-bye!"

For a moment Ruth was tempted to fling herself against the

withered bosom; but long since she had learned repression. She remained stonily in the middle of the hallway until the spinster's door shut them from view for ever.

CHAPTER VIII

Slowly Ruth entered her own room. She opened her suitcase—new and smelling strongly of leather—and took out of it a book dog-eared and precariously held together, bound in faded blue cloth and bearing the inscription: The Universal Handbook. Herein was the sum of human knowledge in essence.

In the beginning it was a dictionary. Words were given with their original meaning, without their ramifications. If you were a poet in need of shyness, you had only to turn to a certain page. Or if you were about to embark upon a nautical career, here was all the information required. It also told you how to write on all occasions, how to take out a patent, how to doctor a horse, and who Achaetes was. You could, if you were ambitious to round out your education, memorize certain popular foreign phrases.

But beyond "amicable agreement in which mutual concessions are made," the word "compromise" was as blank as the Canton wall at night. There were words, then, that ran on indefinitely, with reversals? Here they meant one thing; there, the exact opposite. To be sure, Ruth had dimly been aware of this; but now for the first time she was made painfully conscious of it. Mutual concessions!—and then to turn it around so that it suggested that an act of kindness might be interpreted as moral obloquy!

Walls; queer, invisible walls that receded whenever she reached out, but that still remained between her and what she sought. The wall of the sky, the wall of the horizon, the wall behind which each human being hid—the wall behind which she herself was hiding! If only her mother had lived, her darling mother!

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Africa Has River of Ink. William Greenleaf in the Glass Container.

Travelers in Northern Africa have observed a curiosity of nature—a river of ink. The water is black, yet the streams which feed it are perfectly clear. Chemical analysis and examination have revealed the cause. One of the streams is strongly impregnated with iron from the soil through which it flows. Another carries tannin from a peat swamp. It is the chemical combination of the iron, tannin and oxygen of the air that turns the water black. This chemical reaction forms the basis of the most important class of inks known as iron-gall inks.

Iron-gall ink was first made in the twelfth century, but it was not until the fifteenth that it came into common use. The writer has seen a page from a handwritten book on monkish satin, in ink with the date 1445, and the writing is as clear, black and legible as on the day it was written. The ink was iron-gall ink, and it shows the permanency of this type.

The most important factor in the making of this ink is gall nuts, certain species of which are found in China, India Japan and even in some oak and willow trees in America. A peculiar kind of insect, similar to our horsetail, bores into the small twigs of oak trees and lays its eggs. A little later the result. The egg grows with the gall and is soon converted into a larva. Eventually the larva becomes a fly and escapes by eating its way out.

The best nuts for ink-making are those that are picked when fully ripe, but just before the escape of the insect, as these contain the largest amount of tannin.

As the name implies, iron-gall inks are based on a liquid in which an iron salt is combined with tannin extracted from gall nuts. The iron salt is copperas and comes in the form of crystals. These are secured in the United States, while there are other ingredients added, these two are the most important in the make-up of this type of ink.

This liquid is practically colorless until acted upon by the oxygen in the air; that is, a pen dipped into such a fluid would make no visible mark on the paper. Most people, however, like to see what they are writing as they write, and so a blue anilin color is added. After the ink is exposed to the air, the iron-gall compound develops an intensely black and permanent color, entirely superseding the original blue which ultimately fades away. This change in color is what causes it to be referred to commonly as blue-black ink. The black remains clear and legible as long as the paper on which it is written lasts.

Restful, Too. From Wrye's Writings. Plumber A: "Where do you go for your vacation?" Plumber B: "I take my vacation on the job, as usual."

The Last Tryst. The tireless rain with chilling touch The russet hilltop presses; The strident wind so soon forgets Its blossom-time carresses. The swaying trees against the sky Have snuffed the star-shine's glimmer And spilled their sighing shadows till The village lamps grow dimmer. A gray ghost steals across the land With trailing robes a-flutter, And in the Autumn's joyful ways Denuded branches mutter. The shining season parting tryst Has kept in every byway, And none remain of all its host By wood or stream or highway.

—Maude De Verree Newton, in the Kansas City Star.

LAW ENFORCEMENT
Governor Frank J. Hanly
A few months ago I became governor of Indiana. All over the state I found the laws disregarded. I found liquor sold illegally. I found wine rooms open all night, where men, women and headless boys congregated. I found gambling machines, pool-rooms, and betting on hypothetical races everywhere. I did not stop to question whether these things are right or wrong. I found that they are against the law. And to the best I could I sought to enforce the law. No executive officer has any right to do any "thinking" as to the propriety or wisdom of the existing laws. The Legislature of the State has already done that for him. It is enough for him to know what the law is, and that his obligation requires him to enforce it. The people of no city have a right to say that the laws of the state shall be suspended or violated.

THE UNCONSCIOUSNESS OF VIRTUE.

Why callest thou me good?—Mark 10:18.

This word of Jesus by no means indicates his consciousness of sin in himself.

Nowhere do we find any trace of such a consciousness. But it does indicate the unconsciousness simplicity with which he wore his virtue.

His own goodness was never a cloak of smugness about him. Evil shrank naturally from his presence, but the sinner was at home with him.

The only persons who felt restless in his presence were the self-righteous.

To them he was a continual weariness, a tantalizing reminder of their hypocrisy.

If only the "good people" would learn that lesson, what a difference it would make.

I can never forget the cry of a man wrestling with a terrible temptation who said to me:

"In heaven's name, call off Mr. So-and-so; he's killing me with his self-satisfied goodness."

True virtue never parades itself. Self-consciousness is not good for all things. No man wishes to hang out a sign:

"Come and see my wife. She's the humblest woman in the world. I'm proud of her."

Above all, if she herself is a good woman, she would not consent to being made a gazing stock of advertised virtues.

Virtue may be its own reward; but not if you confer the prize on yourself.

Law's Longest Delays.

W. Orton Tewson, in the New York Evening Post.

The law's delays are proverbial, but it would be interesting to know which particular case holds the record in that respect. I saw it stated recently, for instance, that a lawsuit about some land, which had been started in England in 1776, had just been finally settled, and a litigant is even now suing the United States government, according to a contemporary, over property alleged to have been alienated in the Revolutionary war.

The famous case of Eugene Aram, which later formed the subject of the novel by Lytton and the poem by Hood, is a leading one, for the murder was committed in 1745, and Aram was put to death in 1759. In the same century a man named Horne was put to death for the murder of his child thirty-five years earlier, and there is also the case of Governor Wall, who was hanged in 1802 for a murder committed in 1782. A widely known lawyer used to recall a remarkable case of this kind. In 1882 he prosecuted a man who was charged with stealing a leaf from a parish register in 1803.

Health Fads So Numerous They Almost Border on Ridiculous

From the Milwaukee Journal.

If the health faddists don't save us all it will surely not be because of any scarcity in the number of alluring "systems" they have worked out or any lack of suggestions as to what we should eat, how we should take our "daily dozen" and what we should do when ill. Here are a few of the things the faddists offer to make up the "perfect day":

Watch the caged tiger and learn the ways of keeping fit—presumably addressed to the caged office worker.

Cure your cold by standing on your head—your own blood pressure will do the trick.

Want to see one of nature's miracles? Then try the milk diet; or an all-vegetable diet; or a raw food diet, letting the sun do your cooking.

Would you be a great singer? Look at a diagram of Caruso's throat and make your own like it. Simple enough, surely.

More brain power? Well, here is the man who has harnessed the forces of the mind and is ready to deliver. Surely there is no reason why anyone should be a weakening any more.

But suppose a man tried 'em all. Let him start his day with his "daily dozen"; drink a glass of milk and eat two peans for breakfast; walk 20 miles to work, getting there about noon; take his lunch of "sun cooked" apples; lie across the office desk for an hour and a half to teach his nerves composure; spend the rest of the afternoon at strenuous exercise to develop those wonderful swelling muscles that he sees in pictures; take another meal of "sun cooked" food about sundown, and then use the evening to go through his mental hurdles. His problem then would be to do it all and live within 24 hours.

Possibly there are good ideas in some of these suggestions. They may point out things we do which are hurtful. But they are coming so fast that we are fairly swamped. Won't somebody please push out a life raft to save us from the faddist!

What's in a Name.

From Judge.
A Scot whose name was McIntosh and who was proud of the fact that he was directly descended from the chief of the clan, was having a dispute over the fare he owed to a taxi driver. The man with the meter talked loud and harshly, and it angered the Highlander.

"Do you know who I am," he demanded, proudly drawing himself up to his full height. "I'm a McIntosh."

The taxi driver snorted.

"I don't care if you're an umbrella," he said. "I'll have my rights."

The Liberty Bell has been placed on wheels to facilitate its removal from Independence Hall in case of fire.

Sermon on Cider.

That cider is a noble drink nobod, will deny. However weak a substitute for White Seal Extra Dry. And I would sing in cider's praise at early hours and late. If I could find some cider in its pure and native state.

When elder leaves the cider press it's free of mortal sins, But that's the very point at which its fall from grace begins; By fall from grace I do not mean its aptness to ferment; I mean, the tricks that dealers use to turn an honest cent.

They take the finest cider and they make it crystal clear, Till it looks more like hair tonic than a liquid of good cheer. Then they put in a preservative for fear that it won't keep, That makes your tongue and palate taste as though they'd gone to sleep.

As if still more were needed to destroy the elder's charm, They fill it full of water from the old well on the farm. Then its harmlessness and mildness, they would suit the strictest saint. But the flavor of the apple is abominably absent.

I don't require of cider that it be the least bit hard, But I think that these "improvements" leave it rather sadly marred; And if I can only find some that has not been led astray, I will drink it from your jugmout in the good old-fashioned way! —Stoddard King in the Spokane Spokesman Review.

Rent Home During Vacation.

T. B. in World Traveler Magazine. An Englishman's home in an Englishman's castle. That is an ancient saying. Nowadays a great many Englishmen's homes may be anybody's castle—for a price—to judge from the advertisements of furnished houses to let in the London newspapers. The psychology of the well-to-do American and that of an Englishman of the same class is entirely different on this matter of letting homes furnished to utter strangers, provided, of course, that the stranger can pay the rent demanded.

One reads advertisements of splendidly furnished homes for rent for even such a brief period as a month. I assume that these advertisements of furnished homes to be let for various periods are not always and usually from persons who are "a bit hard up" and who need the money to eke out the expenses of their holiday. In many cases the owners of some of "the stately homes of England" are really hard up, thanks to the burdensome and heart and back-breaking taxes, and are not only eager, but compelled to rent their ancient and beautiful homes to strangers, Americans preferred.

Many of the advertisements, however, impart the idea that the owners really aren't compelled to let strangers have their homes, but that they prefer to have the rent money while they are absent and unable to use their homes.

Lovers Must Pay Bribes.

From the Detroit News. Reference has been made frequently to the fact that New York is no great assistance to lovers. There is no privacy. Those whose hearts are full of tenderness are driven to hide even behind posts in the subway. The parks, with their crowds and their petting, offer only comparative sanctuaries. But the parks are becoming worse and worse.

Juvenile industry and rapacity are the cause. Some bright urchin discovered that if he hung around the bench occupied by a couple, he would receive money to remove himself. The news spread and now when a couple, even if middle-aged, sit down, they are surrounded by a wide-eyed mob that only money will move.

Within the last few years children, who ran away from home, substituted for three days on earnings obtained in the manner cited.

College Men to Drive Ice Wagons This Year

Chicago—"Good morning! Is it the madame's desire to replenish the ice chamber this lovely morning?"

If you are thus approached at the back door by a silver-tongued Apollo, deftly poising a hundred pound crystal on his broad shoulder, be not alarmed. He may be a college football captain hardening up for a fall campaign.

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