

## The Erne's Mission.

**T**HE beautiful Ocean Drive that borders on the placid Naragansett was now a scene of jocund festival. Merrily the crowds of men and women thronged the joyful scene. The bay glistened under the noonday sun and the collection of pleasure craft outnumbered all past events. With the ascendancy which the larger boats acquire in these waters, the steam yachts lorded proudly over the small surrounding craft.

In this heterogeneous gathering, one, the Erne seemed most admired of all. She carried a clean coat of white paint, with a bright yellow smokestack and was decked from stem to stern with flags and bunting. As she rode serenely on the undulating swell, she appeared like a floating palace to the "landlubbers," who looked with admiration on her graceful lines.

Among the gay throngs who gazed at random across the bay was a neatly-dressed young man, whose height of six feet, and broad shoulders gave him a commanding appearance and whose square firm-set jaw bespoke much energy and determination of character.

He looked upon the Erne with a fixed and steady gaze, apparently unconscious of the activity by which he was surrounded.

As the gay crowds passed by, some noticed his abstraction, and whispered to one another in wonderment. But soon their curiosity subsided as their attention was diverted to one or other of the numerous incidents which were transpiring about them.

Soon a tall gaunt man sauntered along the walk in a zig-zag fashion, dodging in and out among the merry groups. A black slouch hat was pulled well over his eyes and a heavy beard and mustache covered the part of the face which the hat failed to conceal.

Coming close up to the young man who watched the Erne so closely, he looked cautiously about and asked in muffled tones, "Have you sighted anything Jack?"

"No Pete" replied Jack, "Nothing that appears

suspicious. Only a tender pushed off an hour ago bearing Mr. Seymore the owner ashore."

"Well" responded Pete, "Go, get your dinner while I watch."

Until a month before this time Jack Moore was employed as a porter in the hotel where Mr. Seymore, the owner of the Erne, occupied a suite.

One morning as Jack was sweeping in the corridor where Seymore's suite was located he noticed a small stain on the plush carpet, and was endeavoring to scratch it out when Mr. Seymore issued from his room. His flushed face, bloodshot eyes and hair tossed in profusion, showed evidence that he had been drinking heavily. Rushing aimlessly down the hall he did not see Jack, who was struggling vainly with the stain and fell headlong over him. Cursing loudly, he went downstairs and complained to the Manager, demanding that Jack be immediately discharged, or he would transfer his suite to a rival hotel.

As he could not afford to loose his patronage and as there was no alternative, the Manager called Jack to the office, paid him off and told him to go.

Jack refrained from giving vent to the rage that burned within him, but resolving then and there that Seymore should suffer for his ill-treatment left the hotel.

For fully a half a year Chinese smuggling had been carried on in Newport to a great extent, and the U. S. Secret Service were baffled from start to finish. A reward of a thousand dollars was offered by the Government for evidence that would convict the guilty smugglers.

Jack was now covering Seymore's tracks with a scrutinizing eye and wondered at the frequent trips his yacht made to foreign waters.

A month slipped quietly by and nothing arose by which Jack could satisfy his craving passion for revenge. One morning as he was munching his meagre breakfast he scanned the morning paper and his eyes on a large-typed advertisement, saying that a thousand dollars would be given to the person who would give sufficient evidence to convict the smugglers.

"A thousand dollars," thought Jack, "How well I could use that sum." The more he thought the more enthusiastic he became.

His thoughts travelled back to his dreary garret-room, with its scanty furnishings, consisting of a dilapidated bed and a decrepit wash-stand.

Lost in abstraction, Seymore's yacht, dressed in gaudy attire appeared to him floating on a invisible cloud. He stared absently into the depths of his cup ; then rousing from his dreams with a sudden impulse he exclaimed. "This ship is the means by which these Asiatics are brought in. I will watch the Erne."

To help him in carrying out his design Jack procured the assistance of Charles Pete a U. S. Secret Service man and a particular friend of his.

Leaning lazily over the iron railing Pete watched with all the earnestness of his associate. Presently Jack returned, refreshed by a good substantial dinner.

Joining his companion they strolled leisurely along the walk discussing their future plans. "I think your plans are about to fall through," said Pete, "I am of the opinion that your suspicions regarding this man are entirely groundless." "No," reiterated Jack, "It is impossible, I have watched him for more than a month and I am certain that out of his doings emanates the mystery which baffles your great office."

"We will watch the landing to-night," said Pete sullenly, "and if nothing arises there I will drop it."

Jack tried to remonstrate, but his friend walked briskly away. Now a sense of despair swept over him as he thought of his hard labor and diligence about to be swept to the winds. Again despair tainted with desperation seemed to grasp him with a firm grip as he pictured the scenes of only a month ago. His plans and eager hope for reward, which meant so much for his uplift were soon to be frustrated. Now even his friend upon whom he relied so much was going to forsake him. What bid fair to be a profitable undertaking was now like a beautiful flower struck by some inopportune frost and lay limp and wilted forever.

Walking languidly along he half forgot the presence of the Erne, concentrating his thoughts wholly upon



how near he came to that coveted reward and yet how far removed from him it now seemed. Arousing himself from this meditation and spurred on by the last strength of his dying hope he resumed his vigil for the remainder of the afternoon.

The never tiring sun began to sink in the west, dipping her glowing disk slowly in the water as if to cool and refresh herself from her hot and vigorous day ; the yachts were hurrying up the bay under full sail as if the breeze which bore them along was the final breath of day.

Jack looked upon the scene but its grandeur made no appeal to him ; for the thought of his apparent defeat alone occupied his mind. The shades of night began to fall and the Erne to fade slowly from sight.

Jack watched till her graceful lines become like a great mass riding on the waves.

Walking absently along he arrived at the landing place sooner than he expected and came near colliding with Pete, who in the guise of his profession appeared to be waiting for some friends, but who in reality was watching the actions of two men who were talking together near a small tender.

Soon a big limousine lumbered up and stopping at the entrance stood panting and wheezing, impatient to be away again. The chauffeur hastened to open the door of the cab from which Mr. Seymore alighted.

Giving some speedy orders he walked briskly down the landing and without a moment's hesitation stepped into the tender, followed by the boatmen. A turn of the fly-wheel, the motor responded with a crackling roar and the boat with prow pointed in the direction of the yacht disappeared rapidly in the darkness. When the "putt putt" of the motor grew faint in the distance Jack went over to Pete and together they walked up the landing to the street.

Jack walked in moody silence, while his partner seemed light-hearted and cheerful.

Pete at length broke the silence, saying with a sardonic laugh, "As I have said this afternoon, it is practically useless to suspect that man, because smug-

gling is much inferior to his station in life. I am through with it. I bid you good night."

Jack, filled with disappointment, retreated to his lonely garret-room thoroughly disgusted with himself and the world. That pertinacious will which followed him through life, would not allow him a moment's rest but urged him on to see to its end the project on which he had entered. Retiring, he tried to relieve his despondency by sleep, but sleep he could not, and arising he paced restlessly up and down the narrow room.

Suddenly an idea rushed through his pensive mind, "Could I go out to the Erne and search her alone?" After a moment's reflection he considered himself capable of accomplishing this perilous task and resolved to do so.

As he came forth from the house Jack heard the old clock in the square proclaim to the city, in solemn voice, that it was now two o'clock. The early morning rolled on disturbed only by some belated traveller, who homeward plodded his weary way, or the sound of footsteps of the policeman, who trod his lonely beat.

Making his way to the landing Jack found a small rowboat moored to the float. Cautiously he untied her and rowed silently out into the bay. With muffled oars he crept slowly up to the big white sides of the Erne. Here he listened intently but everything was in absolute silence.

Quickly making a noose out of a rope he found in the rowboat, he flung it over the rail, trusting to Providence that it would catch some stable object aboard. Luckily enough it caught a belaying pin on the railing.

Climbing up hand over hand he reached the deck and crawling on his hands and knees, he directed his course towards a small light flickering dimly in one of the state-rooms at the stern.

Peering into the small window from which the feeble rays of light issued he saw Seymore seated in a large Morris Chair. He had in his hand several letters which he would hastily peruse, and then set on the table, displaying the while great agitation of mind. From Seymore Jack turned his attention to the interior



of the room, when suddenly the wash of an incoming steamer gently raised the Erne and set her down with considerable force. The unexpected jar caused Jack to lose his balance, and his head struck the window with force sufficient to arouse the inmate of the room. He jumped from his chair and looked about him. Then opening the door he peered out, through the darkness, but failed to notice Jack, who was behind the door.

The waves rocked the Erne to and fro and every swell found Jack in terrible anguish, for if Seymore should become aware that anyone besides himself and crew were aboard, all his labor would be lost and his life would in all probability be the penalty which he would pay for his daring.

Cursing loudly the Master closed the door, and throwing himself on his bed was soon in the land where care is unknown.

Stealthily Jack entered and making Seymore's room the basis of operation, began his search. Quietly he crept over to the table where the letters lay. These he had put securely in his pocket, when Seymore sat up in his bed and gazed around with a somnolent stare. By a few dexterous movements Jack, still unobserved, crawled under the bed, and Seymore arose. Restlessly he paced up and down the room and then, apparently having settled the question which burdened his mind, again retired and soon was fast asleep. Crawling from his hiding place Jack quietly opened the door and stepped out on the deck. The sun was forcing its bright rays over the horizon as he emerged from the room.

Creeping panther-like he traversed the full length of the deck and opening the diner, passed through the scene of the steward's labors. He then went down the steep companionway and found himself in the sailors' quarters. Here they lay, strewn about, some between blankets; others thrown in clothes and all; the whole number apparently in a drunken sleep.

Tremulous with anxiety, Jack's alert ear caught the patter of footsteps behind him, and dodging into a little room which was used as a storeroom he peered out into the aisle. Here he beheld Seymore, dagger in hand, and with eyes bulging with passionate fury,

creeping stealthily along. As he passed the door Jack's fist shot out and hit him square on the jaw with a sickening thud. He would have fallen like a dead man, but Jack caught him as he was staggering and dragged him into the small room. Once inside he began to recover and still grasping the treacherous knife he blindly thrust it about him. Jack, fearing that he would injure himself and fearing for his own safety, determined to prevent the former and insure the latter, and quickly dealt him a second blow which he was convinced would guarantee insensibility for half an hour at least. Leaving Seymore he discovered a small door leading still forward. On opening this a dead, stagnant air struck him and nearly threw him back.

Stepping over the high threshold his feet struck a heavy chain, which sent a cold chill through his body. The place was pitch dark and every step was accompanied by clanking of chains. He crawled along the rust covered floors over chains and tanks, till he observed a small ray of light piercing the flooring overhead.

Standing on a large water tank he carefully pushed the flooring and found a small trap-door lifting up.

Slowly, cautiously he raised this secret lid and in a small mysterious chamber beheld more than a score of Chinamen, all huddled together and asleep.

Jack's heart for the first time in his life beat unnaturally. His hopes revived and as he gazed on the sleeping Chinamen he saw his way paved more smooth for the coveted reward.

The question which now troubled him most was: Could he make his way out as safely as he entered?

He carefully let the trap door descend, and retreating found every sailor in the exact position as when he first went through. Reaching the deck he found his boat, still riding serenely on the quiet waters. He quickly entered her and as speedily as possible rowed to the landing.

Making a frantic leap to the float he ran hastily through the sleepy Drive and rushed breathlessly to the Chief's office. Here he told his story and immediately the chief and several officers set out in



their launch for the yacht. Jack led them to Seymour's room and found it locked, even the windows being barred.

Using a big fire axe which was fastened to the deck, they quickly chopped away the lower panel of the door and entering found Seymour raving madly within.

His usual ruddy face was now snow white and the glances he shot at the intruders betrayed extreme nervous excitement and fear.

When he beheld Jack crawling through the entrance, behind the officers, his heavy brow knitted into a straight line across his forehead. Soon he was worked up to so high a pitch of excitement that he made a mad leap for Jack; but the officers intervened and held him firmly in their grasp. Staring wildly at Jack he shouted, "You are the man who illicitly came aboard my yacht this night. Officers, in the name of the law arrest that man. He"—The massive hand of an officer prevented further speech, and leaving him in the care of one of their number the others proceeded to deal with the Sailors and Chinese.

One of the Orientals, who could speak English fluently, demanded of the officers that Seymour refund the four hundred dollars that each man had paid him for his safe conveyance into the United States.

The Chinamen are now awaiting transportation to their native land, and Seymour is pulled down from his lofty social throne, whose foundation rested on that dangerous but profitable business—smuggling.

The government is always willing to pay its debts and Jack received his reward with due promptness. He now wears the happiest smile that ever graced a young man's face as he hands you this card

.....  
 : JOHN MOORE, :  
 : Newport, :  
 : U.S.S.S. R. I. :  
 : .....

THOMAS H. ELLIS.