

THE LAMP OF DEATH

THE TELLING STORY OF THE SEA

BY PATRICK MORRIS

Author of "No Thumb," &c., &c.

"The Lamp of Death" is the name given by the fisher-folk at Swatley Cove to a mysterious light which pierces the darkness of night far out at sea. The light, in reality, comes from the roof of the "Black Barnacle," a submarine boat, used by Frederick Seale and his gang of under-sea pirates to wreck and despoil ships carrying bullion. In the opening chapter of this thrilling tale it was shown that Captain Edward Lane's plans for a new submarine boat had been stolen from the British Admiralty. Detective Sexton Blake, to whom the Captain's daughter Muriel applied for help, discovered soon afterwards the methods of the "Black Barnacle's" murderous crew. Enlisting the sympathy of the skipper of the English gunboat "Heptic," he started in pursuit of the submarine pest. Muriel Lane, meanwhile, had been lured to the cave of the pirates at Swatley Cove, and afterwards carried unconscious aboard the "Barnacle," there to endure the odious advances of Frederick Seale, a rejected suitor for her hand. The "Heptic," after a stern chase, caught up with the "Barnacle," and with a well-directed torpedo shattered its glass roof. Frederick Seale managed to save the submarine boat by shutting off the inrush of water. The crew landed soon after in Spain, at a wild, almost desolate, spot near Cape Finisterre, and set the vessel to rights. Muriel Lane, kept captive all this time, received one day a note signed "Sexton Blake," giving her minute instructions how to make good her escape. She did as directed, only to find herself in a worse plight than ever. A band of brigands had used the name of Sexton Blake as a bait to ensnare the unsuspecting girl.

Taken before the brigand chief, Muriel was told she must either get a substantial ransom or be tortured. Almost distracted, the girl wrote a hasty note, handed it to the brigands, and then fell upon her knees and sobbed as if her heart would break.

All that night Muriel lay awake, tossing on the wretched sack of straw which did duty for a bed. Her mind was racked with a hundred fears and anxieties.

Had she done right in sending the note? Was her father alive or dead? These two questions echoed and re-echoed through her brain until, as the first streaks of dawn were stealing through the crevices in her miserable abode, sleep came to her weary eyes.

And the note? It was a mere scrap of paper. On it were the words in pencil:

"TO FREDERICK SEALE—
"Now is an opportunity for proving the truth of all your vows of love and constancy. If you wish me to have a chance of entertaining your proposal, you must overlook the past. Come to my rescue, pay £5,000 ransom, and guarantee that on my return I shall be treated as though nothing of this had occurred—as though I had never left."
M. LANE."

Little wonder that Muriel was uneasy. Had she been wise—nay, had she been right—to despatch such a letter? Surely it could not be wrong.

When her life was at stake? How could any girl be expected to look forward calmly to the most cruel tortures and a lingering death? But then, ought she not to brave even death itself rather than consent to marry a depraved a scoundrel? She had not consented to marry him; she had only said that "if he wished her to have a chance of entertaining his proposal—"

"Yes; but if she did not intend to entertain his proposal she was guilty of a base deception; and if she did, she was guilty of something worse. What could she have done?"

So she argued with herself, until sweet sleep lent its gentle aid.

Two days later one of the chiefs of the brigand gang presented himself at her hut.

"We have received a letter," he said, "from your pirate lover, and he is willing to pay your ransom.

Before we can undertake to liberate you we must have an oath from you that you will not reveal anything about us that you now know or may at any future time learn; that you will never give any information about us which is likely in any way to harm us. Will you swear?"

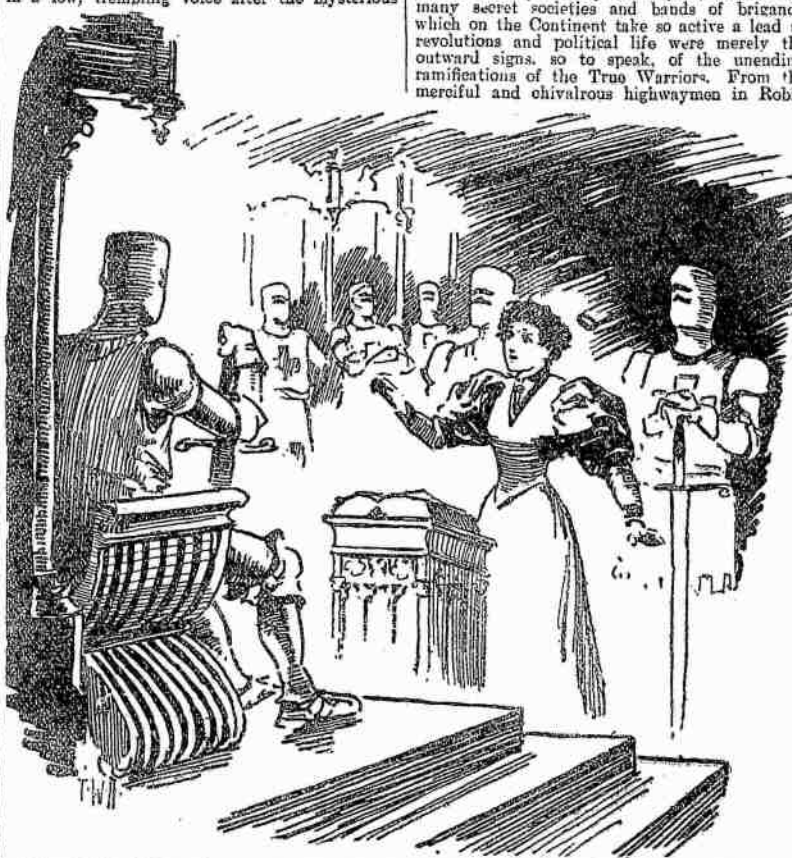
She tremblingly obeyed, and found a footstool, which was obviously placed in front of a large prayer-desk for the purpose.

Some one placed her right hand upon an open volume on the prayer-desk.

"Muriel Lane," said the voice in front of her—no voice that she had ever heard before—speaking in perfect English, "you are here to call Heaven to witness, in the presence of our brethren here assembled, that you swear never to reveal to any living being anything that you now know or may at any future time learn concerning this band or their abode, the subterranean cave, or anything else about them which you have observed or may observe, or about their abode and the way to and from it. Therefore, repeat this oath after me,

your right hand resting upon an open volume of the New Testament."

As Muriel repeated the terribly solemn words in a low, trembling voice after the mysterious



BEFORE HER, SEATED ON A RAISED THRONE, WAS A MAN DRESSED IN THE FULL ARMOUR OF A KNIGHT OF THE CRUSADES; WHILE ALL ABOUT WERE MYSTIC SIGNS AND STRANGE SYMBOLS.

presenter, a thrill of terror ran through her frame. And as the voice died away into silence it seemed to her as though she were standing upon the gallows waiting for the withdrawal of the bolt.

The silence that followed lasted but a second, though in its intensity to her overwrought nerves it seemed an eternity.

"Kiss the Sacred Word," said the voice; and Muriel, inclining her pretty head, touched the pages before her with blanched lips.

As she did so there was a sudden loud thunder of mailed hands being clapped in definite time, a blast of trumpets, and

the bandage fell from her eyes.

Before her, seated on a raised throne, sat a man dressed in the full armour of a knight of the Crusades. All about the large apartment were mystic signs and strange symbols. The air was heavy with incense.

Standing, each in front of a seat fashioned like a cathedral choir-stall, were some hundred men in full armour, with the white tunic and red cross of the ancient Templars.

At first Muriel's head reeled in her strange surroundings, and in the face of the vivid red light with which the room was illumined. She swayed to and fro in giddiness; but one of the two mailed figures which stood statue-like on either side of her, stretched out a kindly hand and assisted her to arise.

As they did so, the man on the throne arose, and, stretching out his hand, clasped hers across the prayer-desk. Sinking on one knee—an action which was imitated by all those present—she

tenderly kissed her hand, saying as he did so:

"Hail, sweet sister! fully tried and newly obligated. The peace of Heaven, the friendship of the Brotherhood, and the kindness of men with you in all countries and at all times!"

An organ pealed forth, and a hundred bass voices thundered forth in unison a stirring chant of martial victory.

To Muriel all was still a mystery. She could not recognise a single face, as all wore their vizors down.

No sooner had the last strains of the warlike chant faded into silence, than the two men beside Muriel led her to a seat on the elevated dais beside him who was evidently the chief of "The Brotherhood."

The latter arose, and was greeted with cries of "Hail, most worthy Pontiff!" by those present. In a fine address he informed Muriel the significance of what had taken place. She was now in the Chief Grand Lodge of a wide-spread secret society, somewhat on the same lines as the Knights Templars and Freemasons. They called themselves "The True Warriors," and

the origin of their society was lost in antiquity, although it was known for a fact that it existed in the earliest period of Egyptian civilisation, about the time of the building of the first pyramid, some thousand years prior to the arrival of Joseph in the land of the Pharaohs. Many of the symbols on the Great Pyramid could only be understood as referring to them.

The Brotherhood, whilst primarily for the object of spreading virtue and purity of life, played an important political part, and all the many secret societies and bands of brigands which on the Continent take so active a lead in revolutions and political life were merely the outward signs, so to speak, of the unending ramifications of the True Warriors. From the merciful and chivalrous highwaymen in Robin

the French revolutions, or the Fenianism in Ireland, or Nihilism in Russia, it has also done harm and brought suffering and misery on thousands of innocents, the fault has been in cynical and mistaken ideas, rather than in bad motives; or in the baseness of their followers, as with the Jesuit movement, rather than in any error in the theory.

It was with feelings partly of awe, partly of joyous thankfulness, that Muriel listened to the long address of the Pontiff, and when he concluded with a few words of personal sympathy and advice, and all present heartily signified their sharing his sentiments, glad tears welled to her eyes.

A long ceremony followed, in which Muriel was initiated into some of the secret rites of the society, and then finally a plan was evolved for the speedy capture of the "Barnacle," and for taking full vengeance on Seale and his associates.

It was with a sense of strange elation that Muriel bade farewell to her new-found friends and set off cheerfully to perform the task allotted to her, which was part of the scheme decided on.

Her task was to return to Seale, to the "Black Barnacle," to the old life, with all its miseries and weariness.

And so, two hours later, she found herself ready to quit the brigands' abode. Now a member of the True Warriors, it was no longer necessary to conceal from her the method of approach to the brigands' hiding-places.

A natural tunnel, like a mining shaft, led sheer down through the ground from the plateau whereon the brigands' home was situated to the valley below. A covering, like that over a well, had been erected over the entrance of this, and a bucket and windlass fitted up to raise or lower those passing between the valley and plateau.

Over the mouth of the cave, into which the lower end of the tunnel opened, a hut had been erected, which was occupied by an old and trusty member of the band, who could thus warn the others of danger, and, in a moment, cut off the means of approach.

Down this Muriel was lowered, and conducted along the road towards the neighbouring town. At a turn of the road she saw Seale, stern and sullen, standing awaiting her alone.

"You have ruined me," was his greeting. "You must, you shall live to rue the day you left us, you shall! Come along!"

* A similar arrangement—the natural tunnel from the top of a precipice opening into a cave at the bottom—is also found in Cornwall, at Pol-Pedn-Padrith, near Land's End.—PATRICK MORRIS.

(To be continued next Thursday.)

["The Lamp of Death" began in No. 225. Any newsagent will supply the back numbers.]

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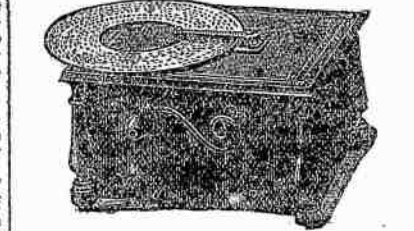
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