

MR. FLEIGHT

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Mr. Fleight by Ford Madox Hueffer

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FORD MADOX HUEFFER

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BY

FORD MADOX HUEFFER

"In no faltering tones the candidate proclaimed the virtues of the constitution of our country, the twin pillars of its shining façade being the unspotted purity of the British Parliamentary machine, and the inviolability of the British hearth."

Hertsfordshire Weekly Chronicle.

"Stat insignisimum templam accedente consensu cleri et populi tanquam eis fuisset a Domino inspiratum."

Chronicle of Amiens.

LONDON: HOWARD LATIMER, LTD.
GREAT QUEEN STREET, KINGSWAY
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TO THAT UNSURPASSED WRITER OF ENGLISH,
UNVEILER OF MOGREB EL ACKSA
AND
CHRONICLER OF THE CONQUISTADORES
R. B. CUNNINGHAME GRAHAM
OF RIGHT KING OF SCOTLAND,
KNOWN TO THIS DULLY REVOLVING WORLD AS A
REVOLUTIONIST
AND IN ALL REALMS OF ADVENTURE
MOST CHIVALROUS

PART I

MR. FLEIGHT

I

A LITTLE, dark man approached Mr. Blood, who sat in a deep armchair of the What Not Club. Mr. Blood, a heavy, grey man of ferocious aspect, was surveying the Thames, the Club occupying ground floor rooms of the great pile of buildings called Whitehall Court.

It was not a good club ; its membership conveyed no social prestige. Mr. Blood took no active part in the affairs of the world. That he was a nonsensical Radical amused his friends, since he was a large landowner ; that he had a violent character gave him a certain distinctness. He was said to have strangled a groom at Newport, Rhode Island, where, presumably, grooms are cheap.

The little dark man was known to the waiters as Mr. Fleight, but none of the members knew him. He had sat for half an hour gazing at Mr. Blood ; Mr. Blood had gazed at the Embankment. There had been no other soul in the room, for it was Derby Day. And then Mr. Fleight, as the clock finished striking four, jumped up and went with a hurried determination towards Mr. Blood.

"My name"—he really shivered the words out—"is Fleight—Aaron Rothwell Fleight—and I want to do something."

Mr. Blood exclaimed:

"Good God!" in tones of such disgust that he appeared on the point of being sick.

"I've known you—I've known of you—for years," Mr. Fleight stammered; "ever since I was at Oxford. My tutor was old Plodge. He had been yours, too. He always spoke of you as the strongest irregular intellect of his day. I've followed your—your career. No, it's not a career. But if you'll let me . . . Half an hour."

Mr. Blood kept his gaze fixed on the Embankment and exclaimed further, but with abstraction:

"Ninety-six: three hundred and eight."

"It doesn't prove anything," Mr. Fleight said desperately.

"Who the devil said it did?" Mr. Blood ejaculated. "What's it got to do with you? What are you talking about?"

"You've been counting the motors against the horse traffic," Mr. Fleight said. "In the last half hour you have counted those numbers. But it does not prove anything because this is Derby Day, and the traffic is out of the normal."

"Aaron Rothwell Fleight!" Mr. Blood speculated as disagreeably as he could. "What sort of a name is that for a human being? Half Scotch, half Hebrew! That's what it is."

"I'm not saying that it's anything else," Mr. Fleight conceded humbly.

"And with that record you come to me?" Mr. Blood cried out. "To me!"

" I don't see why I shouldn't." Mr. Fleight advanced more boldly.

" You don't ! " Mr. Blood whispered in a tone almost of awe. " Have you any idea why I come to this unspeakable club and risk getting spoken to by its unspeakable members ? "

" To count the traffic on Derby Day," Mr. Fleight said. " I don't know any other reason. You have been here on Derby Day for the last three years. I suppose it's a hobby, and you come on Derby Day because racing rather bores you, but the Club is empty. I don't suppose there is any other reason."

Mr. Blood looked round on Mr. Fleight with the air of, for the first time, almost acknowledging that he existed.

" You're not such an abject ass," he conceded unwillingly.

" I never said I was," Mr. Fleight said. " I only want to complain that I am nobody. Nobody ! The unknown member of a rotten club, although I've got pots of money. Enormous pots of money. All the money of Aaron Rothweil, the soap man. And Palatial Hall, at Hampstead. And all his factories and works. Everything. So it does not seem *right* that I should be nobody. Society being what it is, I feel that I ought to be Prime Minister, or a Privy Councillor at least."

Mr. Blood exclaimed :

" By Jove, you are right ! " He looked at Mr. Fleight appraisingly. " You want me to help you. Why ? "

" You see," Mr. Fleight opened his story, and he ventured to sit down, not in the chair opposite Mr. Blood, but on its arm, " I was going mad. No, not mad—on the point of screaming hysteria."