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# The Fusing Point

Continued from page 6

shoulders as though to shake off all responsibility for the result, "then I must decline to amend my statement."

So quietly that the action did not excite the attention of the card players about them, Colonel Treavor leaned across the table, and said in a voice hardly more than a whisper, "I regret to inform you, sir, that in calling my theory ridiculous you seriously offend me—and that you also lie!"

The words needed no amplification. Periet for a moment looked on in incredulous surprise. Then he smiled and arched his brows with commiseration as he drew his cardcase from his pocket and handed the billet across to the man who was forcing a challenge. Colonel Treavor replied in kind.

"I regret," said the Count slowly, "that a gentleman of your age has found it necessary to insult me. In the premises I cannot act differently—the only reply is a challenge. If you have a friend of fewer years, I shall gladly accept a substitute on the field. I hope that Captain Faurette here will consent to act as my second."

Faurette bowed his willingness. Colonel Treavor rose slowly from the table. "Monsieur le Comte is courteous," he said. "I shall be my own principal. We reach Cherbourg to-morrow. I go direct to Paris. As we are at sea, I am not to-day able to name a friend who will act as my second. My address will be the Hotel Ritz, and there I shall have some one in every way qualified to arrange details with Captain Faurette."

Monsieur le Comte de Periet bowed gravely, also rising. "The plan is perfectly satisfactory," he responded in a low voice. "I am entirely willing that the concluding arrangements be made in Paris." He turned to the others. "I am sure," he suggested, "that we need not request you gentlemen to regard this matter as confidential?"

Both the others bowed, though the boy's face flushed with excitement. He was seeing something in life that had heretofore belonged in his experience exclusively to the pages of books.

ON deck Colonel Treavor walked forward and, finding the Marquise where he had left her, dropped again into the chair at her side. The leaden sky was now piled high with slate-gray clouds; but at the edge of the world they broke into rifts where the sun was sinking close to the water, dyeing the west with broad broken hands of orange and red. Across the swelling, white capped sea came a ladder of reflection with rungs of gold.

Colonel Treavor smiled at the girl. "My child," he said, his eye lighting with reminiscence, "you look very much as your mother did before her marriage. I was your father's best man." He paused and laughed as he bit the end of a fresh cigar. "And it was not my fault," he added, "that at that same wedding he was not my best man."

DUELING is not so open to-day as in times when editorial writers of Paris were wont in advance to commiserate with some unfortunate who seemed to be going to the certainty of death at the point of a celebrated blade. Yet the doings of Comte de Periet were sufficiently well known to excite interest, and in the cafés along the Champs Elysees there were a few intimates of the duelist who spoke together in small knots of the event of the morrow.

It was a somewhat strange arrangement. Major Burton, who acted for Colonel Treavor, had explained to Captain Faurette that the American principal wished terms that were hardly ordinary. As the challenged party, this was his right. He had chosen pistols at short range. The principals were to stand back to back, and on the word "Wheel!" to confront each other as they did in the form of code duello that formerly obtained in the Southern States. But there was to be a difference. Colonel Treavor was not a duelist. He had had of late small practice with firearms and was slow of movement. Therefore, it was stipulated that after the order to wheel each principal might consult his pleasure, firing at once or at leisure. There was no limit of time; but each weapon was to carry only a single load. Of course, if the first exchange failed to satisfy both parties, there might be repetitions.

When this arrangement was related to Comte de Periet in his lodgings he laughed. He could not have planned the affair more satisfactorily himself.

"When I have fired, Faurette," he declared, "this gentleman may have an eternity if he chooses; but it is probable that his eternity will be spent too far away to make him dangerous—unless," facetiously

added the duelist, "his ghost pursues me." And the Frenchman crossed himself with devoutness.

THOSE in charge of the matter had selected a place of sufficient isolation. It was a small opening in the woods, and as the morning dawned gray and chilly the small party gathered there. Colonel Treavor as grave as usual, Monsieur le Comte debonair and smiling. The surgeon laid out his instruments with professional care. Two other men, one of them the American boy of the steamer, stood rigidly upright nearby.

The seconds inspected the weapons in due formality, and as they did so Captain Faurette seemed surprised at some discovery, though after a brief conference with Major Burton he expressed himself as satisfied. Periet stripped to his shirt and stood forward in all the lithe muscularity that years of swordplay had given him. As he was deliberately turning back his sleeves over sinewy fore arms his second asked him some question in a low tone, and despite his previous outward show of courtesy the inherent quality of the bully gained momentary supremacy. The duelist raised his voice loud enough to carry across the narrow intervening space of dewy sod to the ears of his antagonist.

"I feel entirely well, thank you, *mon ami*, and it gives me much contentment that I shall this morning kill another Yankee."

The words went with a sneering laugh, and the man who had been a cadet at Newmarket reddened to his cheekbones; but he gave no indication of having heard. Only when the men walked out to the marked spot did he address the other, and then it was in a voice as self contained as that which had governed his talk in the smokeroom.

"If you please, Monsieur le Comte," he said, "you are in error." His eyes broke into blaze for a moment and the years since Lee's surrender were forgotten. "I am not a Yankee. I am a Scottish Virginian, and whether or not you kill me is to be demonstrated."

The Frenchman made a low bow, and his smile tilted the waxed ends of his mustache more aggressively upward. "I felicitate Monsieur le Colonel upon his optimism."

Across the meadows the morning mist was hanging wet and raw. The line of chestnut trees at Colonel Treavor's front were dripping heavy dew. His hand, hanging at his side, held the weapon loaded with a single charge. Behind him stood his adversary balancing himself on the ball of his right foot, his weapon nicely nestling in his palm, his finger on the trigger, his attitude one of alertness, readiness.

The older man was thinking back. Never had he shed blood unless on the field of battle. Perhaps that was why his thoughts now went back to the wheat fields with fleecy clouds of shells bursting overhead and the drum of rifle fire and booming of artillery to the front. It would seem that his fighting came at the beginning and the end of life.

Then he straightened as he heard the words of the counting.

"One—two—three! Fire!"

AS he came about Treavor heard the sharp bark of Periet's pistol and felt a sting along the ribs at his left side. He knew that the other had fired a fraction too impetuously; that had he waited a moment longer the shot would have been fatal; but that as it was it struck its human billet before it had turned to face him fully and had inflicted nothing more than a glancing wound. On Periet's face sat an expression of surprise. He had been quite sure!

Colonel Treavor did not at once raise his own weapon. There was time enough.

He stood for a moment gazing at his adversary, his own pistol still hanging at his side. Across the Frenchman's face came a sudden look of astonishment. Monsieur le Comte de Periet had fought men on various fields; but he had never before stood facing an executioner who cruelly took his time. Then Colonel Treavor raised his piece slowly, sighted it laboriously, not at the heart but at the head. Monsieur le Comte de Periet waited, forcing a smile; but slowly the blood went out of his face and the smile became that of a plaster cast, stiff and pained.

Monsieur le Comte was awaiting the death bullet. He was thinking, as he suddenly came to know, with an agony of suspense, of many things that do not make death easy. He was realizing that the bullet would strike him full in the face, would mangle his features. He suddenly remembered with nauseating horror a peasant who had committed suicide after bungling fashion by a pistol bullet in the forehead. Why did not this man shoot him in the heart, as a gentleman

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