

THE NATION'S PAWN

CHAPTER II.
(Continued)

SHE'S coming to meet us," "Billie" and Dick heard some one exclaim, as they wondered why their ship, the Brazil, had stopped. Another voice called back, "Sure! It's a yacht to take our candidate aboard. Can't you see that from her merry little flags?"

The siren turned loose again, drowning everything in its brazen noise. The Brazil was rapidly losing headway. The captain and the girl worked their way ahead until, through an opening, they saw a beautiful white yacht, with flying pennants and gala garb, sweeping in toward them, and on her decks a group of men whose predominant dress appeared to be shining silk hats of ceremony and the frock-coats of dignity. They were cheering now, and the conservative candidate from the end of the bridge, where he had been taken by the skipper of the ship, was repeatedly lifting his hat and bowing.

"Go up with your father. Quick!" the red-faced congressman said, making his way to where the girl and the officer stood. "Hurry up, so you'll be in the photographs. It's necessary! Good campaign stuff!"

He studiously ignored Dick, who tried to ignore the slight, and hustled the young woman away to the bridge gangway, where he fairly shoved her aloft between the shining brass rails. She had neither time for protest nor farewell, and was driven to the fore to take her part in the play of publicity—to become a feature in the advertising end of the show, which would be spread broadcast to indicate in picture form the family qualities of the party leader.

"All a part of the regular bunk! Catches the homelovin'-head-of-the-household-farmer vote!" a sarcastic voice growled in Dick's ear, and he was aware that Judge Reilly was standing near by, with his hat shading his eyes and a long unlighted cigar between his teeth. Somehow or another, the captain had a sharp sense that it was a paltry show, made up of deception and pretense, and staged for fools, and that the gray-haired old cynic at his elbow was merely amused.

"It is a shame, isn't it?" he replied, glad that one who had shown him a kindly attitude was near.

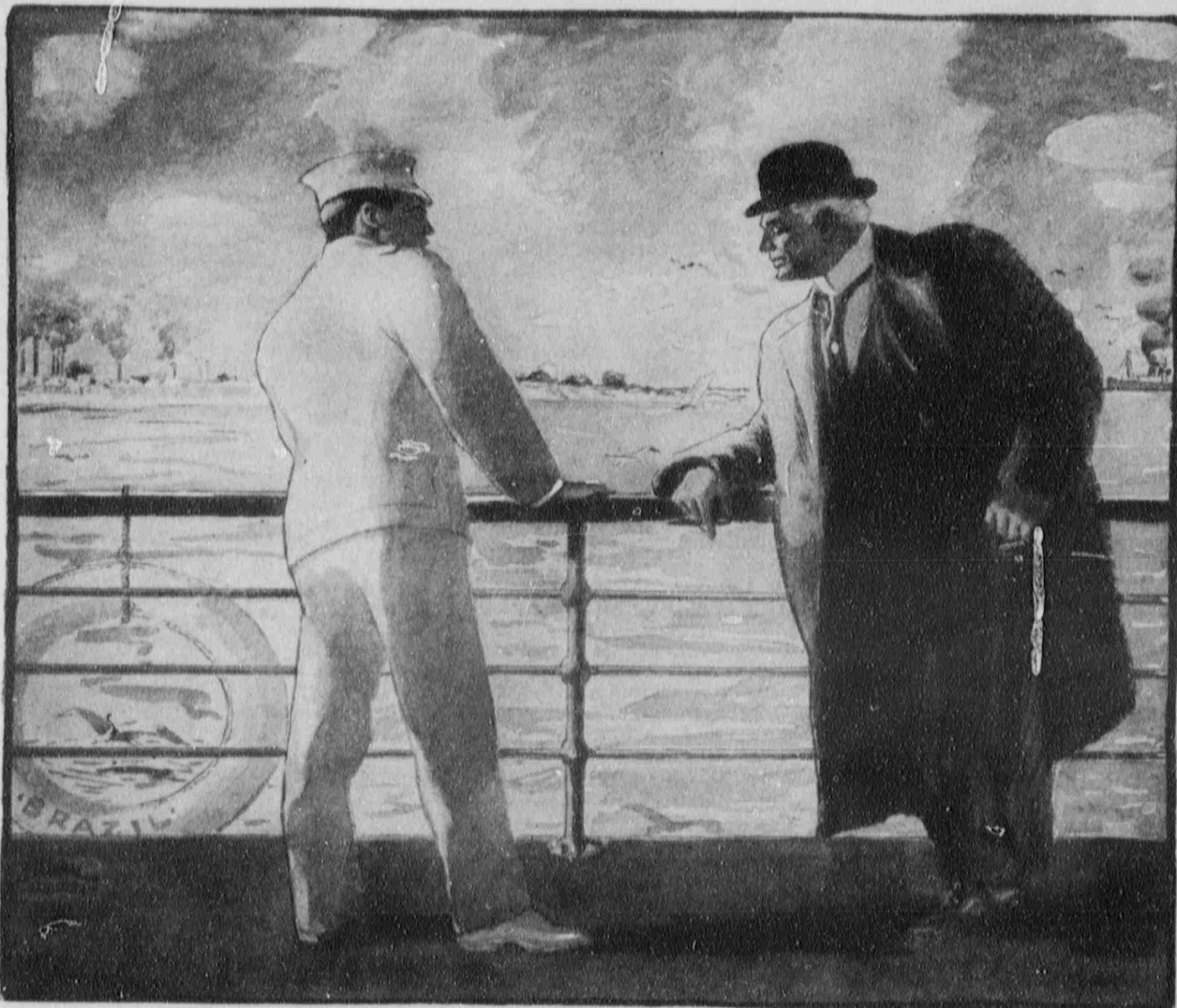
"Sure!" the judge said. "Can't have elections without 'em. Fireworks on a fourth of July don't make people remember it's Independence day, but, if they didn't have 'em, the country'd go to hell."

THE yacht had stopped as close as safety would permit and a band on its forward deck burst out in fortissimo with the hackneyed strains of "See the Conquering Hero Comes," used indiscriminately on public occasions when valiant leaders are returning from war or from ward picnics.

A thin and officious man, who had made himself obnoxious by his ubiquitous sycophantry throughout the southern trip, jostled them out of the way, and was followed by a string of stewards, evidently marshalled for the occasion.

"Goin' to spring on 'em—he is," the judge grunted. "Watch him get where the camera can have him well up in front."

He was right. Before the band had stopped in its first ragged outburst, the officious man was wildly waving his hands and spurring his select choristers on to howl "The Star-Spangled Banner" at the top of their voices, stimulating them by an example which stretched his cavernous mouth to its utmost and threatened to eject his eyes from their sockets. Everything was confusion. Everything was seriously grotesque.



"It ain't changed much," commented Judge Reilly.

BY ROY NORTON
Author of "The Vanishing Fleets"

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

While Secretary of State Lester and his official party were returning on board the steamship Brazil from a remarkable tour of the South American republics, a wireless message brought them the news that the Secretary had been nominated for the presidency by the Conservatives and that the Prohibitionists and Independents had endorsed that nomination. A few days later the wireless again flashed the news that Secretary Lester's one time friend, but now political enemy, Senator Barnes of Ohio, had been nominated by the Liberals and that the Labor and Socialist parties had endorsed him, making certain that the country would be divided into two great political camps for the bitterest campaign of the country's history.

With Secretary Lester on official duty was Captain Dick Barnes, a son of Senator Barnes and the accepted suitor of Secretary Lester's daughter, also on board the Brazil. Before the news of Senator Barnes' nomination had been received, Captain Barnes had been invited to take part in confidential conferences to plan the Lester campaign. Afterward, the young army officer was publicly denounced as a traitor by Secretary Lester's political lieutenants, although Secretary Lester and his daughter refused to believe him other than innocent. However, Captain Barnes felt that fate had dealt harshly with him and he was torn deeply by his emotions as the Brazil neared New York harbor. Miss Lester remained loyal and he found a new friend in "Judge" Reilly, a former Tammany politician who was returning from some years of banishment, but the captain was in an unhappy mood as he stood on deck with his sweetheart viewing the yachts and tugs that were coming out to greet the Brazil and its distinguished passengers.

The port gangway was down, and on to its running grate debouched several of the silk-hatted reception committee, each eager to be the first to greet the man who might be president and—have political favors to bestow. They swarmed forward and clutched the candidate's hand as if they had been hungrier for a touch of his palm, and were the only ones in all the world who loved him. They tried to talk all together, and each appeared to have very confidential news to impart. They hustled him down from the bridge, and gathered close around him, straining their necks to get into close proximity so that their faces might appear close to his in the inevitable photographs. Dick saw that Grace was trying to escape, but that she was powerless. Cameras clicked, the noise broke out again; and the candidate, his daughter and the closest advisers, including the red-faced congressman, were wafted toward the gang-way. Dick had no opportunity to bid her good-bye. He made his way to the rail, and saw that, from the deck of the trim launch far below, she was looking anxiously upward. She sighted him at last, and called something back which was drowned in the babel of noise, waved her handkerchief for him only, and was carried away to the waiting yacht.

Dick felt that he was alone and deserted and that something had at last come between them which would carry her away—out of his life. He was not even aware that both vessels had taken steam again, and were slowly forging onward into the great harbor, where screaming tugs, lolling freighters and sluggish ferries were growing more numerous and occasionally threatened to bar their way.

"It ain't changed much since I left," the judge commented; and Dick for the first time in twenty minutes was aware that Reilly was still leaning over the rail by his side. "The world, the U. S. A., New York and Tammany, just keep joggin' along, no matter who drops out; and sometimes I think the reason is because every feller's tryin' to get his'n, and so they all have to move at once."

Dick made no reply. He was sustaining a feeling of desolation.

"Never mind, boy," the sage counsellor sympathized, discerning his mood. "She ain't dead, nor nothin' like that. You'll meet her again, if I

have to arrange for it myself."

Dick hardly knew whether to be grateful or annoyed; but, before he could define his sentiment, the adventurer had strolled away, elbowing individuals who barred his progress or stepping lithely past groups. After all, Dick was glad that he was not in the limelight. He gave a sigh and went below to look after his luggage, as the Brazil, out-distanced by the reception yacht, slowly nosed her way up through the Narrows, and stopped abreast the quarantine station. When he came on deck again, the white tug with the gilded eagle over the pilothouse was alongside, and uniformed officials were clambering aboard.

"Why, hello! There's Tiger Reilly," he heard one of them exclaim, cautiously. "The grey boss is back again."

"No! you don't mean it!" another answered in an undertone, staring past his fellow-official in surprise. "Guess a few crowned heads are due to lie uneasy."

DESPITE their words, there was something of awe and respect in their attitude that was unmistakable; but the judge, grim and unconcerned, paid no attention to the fact that several passengers were now looking at him with awakened interest.

"Where you going to stop, boy?" he asked, making his way to the officer.

"At the Walland House, till I hear from Washington," Dick answered.

"Good! That's where I'm goin' to stop hereafter—now that I've got no favors to ask, and the wad to pay," the judge drawled.

The captain was not certain that he was glad. Yet, there was something of security and friendliness in the judge's manner that was reassuring.

"Why, I thought you called New York your home?" he said, interrogatively.

"Yes, I do; but it's a home where no one belongs to me, where no one comes to me because they love me, and where they treat me decently only because they're afraid," the returning boss declared. "I'd been hopin' that in five years they'd have forgotten me; but it seems they haven't." His broad mouth relaxed into a half-grin, and for an instant his frown was less pronounced.

"Say," he said abruptly, looking keenly at the officer, "I s'pose you noticed that the gent who led the fat chorus had a considerable amount of guff to hand out to the reporters, didn't you?"

"No," Dick answered, "I didn't."

"Well, you're about the most unsophisticated specimen I ever met outside a 'zoological garden,'"