A GENTLEMAN FROM MISSISSIPPI

By THOMAS A. WISE

Novelized From the Play by Frederick R. Toombs

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CHAPTER VI.

SHOWING LANGDON AND AN OLD FRENCH.

Langdon gazed at the two departing senators with varied emotions. He sat down to think over what they had said to him and to consider what manner of man was Peabody, who singled such an honor in Stevens. He realized that he would have considerable intercourse with Peabody in the process of legislation and manly had to admit to himself that he did not like the senator from Pennsylvania. Just what it was Langdon could not at this time make certain, but he was mystified by traces of contradictions in the senator's character, slight traces, true, but traces nevertheless. Peabody's cordiality and sympathy were to Langdon's mind partly genuine and partly false. Just what was the cause of or the necessity for the alloy in the true metal he could not fathom.

His talk with these famous lawmakers was unsatisfactory also in that it had conveyed to Langdon the suggestion that the senate was not primarily a great forum for the general and active consideration of weighty measures and of national policies. It had been his idea that the senate was primarily such a forum, but the attitude of Peabody and Stevens had hinted to him that there were matters of individual interest that outweighed public or national considerations. For instance,

"Come along, colonel! Yo' can't sit heah all day."

they were anxious that Altacoola should have the naval base regardless of the claims or merits of any other section. That was unusual, puzzling to Langdon. Moreover, it was poor business, yet there were able business men in the senate. Not one of them would, for instance, think of buying a site for a factory until he had investigated many possible locations and then selected the most favorable one. Why was it, he pondered, that the business of the great United States of America was not conducted on business lines?

He must study the whole question intelligently; that was imperative. He must have advice, help. To whom was he to go for it? Stevens? Yes, his old friend, who knew all "the ropes." Yet even Stevens seemed different in Washington than Stevens in Mississippi. Here he played "second fiddle." He was even obsequious, Langdon had observed, to Peabody. In Mississippi he was a leader, and a strong one too. But Senator Langdon had not yet learned of the many founts from which political strength and political leadership may be gained.

What he finally decided on was the engaging of a secretary, but he must be one with knowledge of political operations, one who combined wisdom with honesty. Such an aid could prevent Langdon from making the many mistakes that invariably mark the new man in politics, and he could point out the most effective modes of procedure under given circumstances. It might prove difficult to find a man of the necessary qualifications who was not already employed, but in the meantime Langdon would watch the playing of the game himself and make his own deductions as best he could.

The senator started toward the hotel desk to ask regarding the whereabouts of his son Randolph when his attention was caught by the sight of three powerful negro porters endeavoring to thrust outdoors a threadbare old man. The victim's flowing white hair, white mustache and military bearing received short shrift.

"Come along, colonel! Yo' can't sit heah all day. Them chairs is for the guests in the hotel," the head porter was urging as he jerked the old man toward the door.

The Mississippian's fighting blood was instantly aroused at such treatment of a respectable old white man by negroes. His lips tightly compressed as he hurried to the rescue. He cried sharply:

"Take your hands off that gentleman! What do you mean by touching a friend of mine?"

The negroes stepped back amazed.

"Scuse me, senator, is this gent'man a friend of yours," the head porter gasped apologetically.

Langdon looked at him.

"You heard what I said," he drawled in the slow way natural to some men of the south when trouble threatens. "I'd like to have you down in Mississippi for about ten minutes."

The head porter turned quickly on his assistants and drove them away, shouting at the top of his voice:

"Get about yo' work. How dare yo' intelfere wid a friend of de senator's? I'll teach yo' to be putting yoh nose in where it ain't got no business."

The old man, puzzled at the turn of events, came forward hesitatingly to Langdon.

"I'm very much obliged to you, sir," he said. "I'm Colonel Stoneman, an old soldier."

The Mississippian stretched forth his hand.

"My name is Langdon, sir—Senator Langdon of Mississippi. I am an old soldier too."

"Delighted, senator," exclaimed the seedy looking old man, taking the offered hand gratefully.

Langdon's easy method of making friends was well illustrated as he clapped his new companion on the back. Everybody he met was the Mississippian's friend until he had proved himself the contrary. That had been his rule through life.

Each old veteran of tragic days gone by had quite unconsciously awakened a responsive chord in the heart of the other. A senator and a penniless old "down and outer" are very much the same in the human scale that takes note of the inside and not the outside of a man. And they fell into each other's arms then and there, for what strong fighter does not respect another of his kind?

There they stood, arms around each other, clapping each other on the back, actually chortling in the pure ecstasy of comradeship, now serious, again laughing, when on the scene appeared Bud Haines, the correspondent, who had returned to interview the new senator from Mississippi.

"Great heavens!" ejaculated the newspaper man. "A senator, a United States senator, hugging a broken down old 'has been.' What is the world coming to?" Haines suddenly paused. "I wonder if it can be a pose—merely for effect. It's getting harder every day to tell what's genuine and what isn't in this town."

CHAPTER VII.

LANGDON LEARNS OF THINGS UNPLEASANT.

HAINES quickly walked over and touched the southerner on the arm.

"Well, my boy, what can I do for you?" asked the new senator, turning, with a pleasant smile.

"My name is Haines. Senator Stevens was to speak to you about me. I'm the first of the newspaper correspondents come to interview you."

Langdon's familiar smile broadened.

"Well, you don't look as though you'd bite. Reckon I can stand for it. Is it very painful?"

"I hope it won't be, senator," Haines said, feeling instinctively that he was going to like this big, hearty citizen.

"All right, Mr. Haines, just as soon as I've said goodby to my old friend, Colonel Stoneman, I'll be with you."

And to his continued amazement Haines saw the senator walk away with the old Union colonel, slap him on the back, cheer him up and finally bid him goodby after extending a cordial invitation to come around to dinner, meet his daughters and talk over old times.

The antiquated Federal soldier marched away more erect, more brisk, than in years, completely restored to favor in the eyes of the hotel people. Langdon turned to the reporter.

"All right, Mr. Haines; my hands are up. Do your worst. Senator Stevens spoke to me about you; said you were the smartest young newspaper man in Washington. You must come from the south."

Bud shook his head.

"No, just New York," he said.

"Well, that's a promising town," drawled the southerner. "They tell me that's the Vicksburg of the north."

"I suppose you haven't been to New York of late, senator?" suggested the newspaper man.

"Well, I started up there with General Lee once," responded Langdon reminiscently, "but we changed our minds and came back. You may have heard about that trip."

Haines admitted that he had.

"Since that time," went on Langdon, "I've confined my travels to New Orleans and Vicksburg. Ever been in New Orleans about Mardi Gras time, Mr. Haines?"

"Sorry, but I don't believe I have," confessed the reporter reluctantly.

The senator seemed surprised.

"Well, sir, you have something to live for. I'll make it my special business to personally conduct you through one Mardi Gras, with a special understanding, of course, that you don't print anything in the paper. I'm a vestryman in my church, but since misfortune has come upon our state I have to be careful."

Haines searched his brain. He knew of no grave calamity that had happened recently in Mississippi.

"Misfortune?" he questioned.

Senator Langdon nodded.

"Yes, sir, the great old state of Mississippi went prohibition at the last election. I don't know how it happened. We haven't found anybody in the state that says he voted for it, but the fact is a fact. I assure you, Mr. Haines, that prohibition stops at my front door, in Mississippi. So I've been living a quiet life down on my plantation."

"This new life will be a great change for you, then?" suggested the reporter.

"Change! It's revolutionary, sir! When you've expected to spend your old days peacefully in the country, Mr. Haines, suddenly to find that your state has called on you"—

A flavor of sarcasm came into Haines' reply.

"The office seeking the man?" He could not help the slight sneer. Was a man never to admit that he had sought the office? Haines knew only too well of the arduous work necessary to secure nominations for high office in conventions and to win an election to the senate from a state legislature. In almost every case, he knew, the candidate must make a dozen different "deals" to secure votes, might promise the same office to two or three different leaders, force others into line by threats, send a trusted agent to another with a roll of bank bills—the recipient of which would immediately conclude that this candidate was the only man in the state who could save the nation from destruction. Had not Haines seen men who had sold their unsuspecting delegates for cash to the highest bidder rise in the convention hall and in impassioned, dramatic voice exclaim in praise of the buyer, "Gentlemen, it would be a crying shame, a crime against civilization, if the chosen representatives of our grand old state of —— did not go on record in favor of such a man, such a true citizen, such an inspired patriot, as he whose name I am about to mention!" So the reporter may be forgiven for the ironical tinge in his hasty interruption of the new senator's remarks.

Langdon could not suppress a chuckle at the doubting note in Haines' attitude.

"I think the man would be pretty small potatoes who wouldn't seek the office of United States senator, Mr. Haines," he said, "if he could get it. When I was a young man, sir, politics in the south was a career for a gentleman, and I still can't see how he could be better engaged than in the service of his state or his country."

"That's right," agreed the reporter, further impressed by the frank sincerity of the Mississippian.

"The only condition in my mind, Mr. Haines, is that the man should ask himself searchingly whether or not he's competent to give the service. But I seem to be talking a good deal. Suppose we get to the interview. Expect your time is short. We'd better begin."

"I thought we were in the interview?" smiled the correspondent.

"In it!" exclaimed Langdon. "Well, if this is it, it isn't so bad. I see you use a painless method. When I was down in Vicksburg a reporter backed me up in a corner, slipped his hand in his hip pocket and pulled out a list of questions just three feet four inches long.

"He wanted to know what I thought concerning the tariff on aluminium hydrates and how I stood about the opening of the Tento Pu reservation of the Comanche Indians, and what were my ideas about the differential rate of hauls from the Missouri river.

"He was a wonder, that fellow! Kinder out of place on a Mississippi paper. I started to offer him a job, but he was so proud I was afraid he wouldn't accept it. However, it gives you my idea of a reporter."

"If you've been against that, I ought to thank you for talking to me," laughed Haines.

"Then you don't want to know anything about that sort of stuff?" said Langdon, with a hugh sigh of relief.

"No, senator," was the amused reply. "I think generally if I know what sort of a man a man is I can tell a great deal about what he will think on various questions."

Langdon started interestedly.

"You mean, Mr. Haines, if you know whether I'm honest or not you can fit

"My hands are up. Do your worst."

me up with a set of views. Is that the idea? Seems to me you're the sort of man I'm looking for."

The other smilingly shook his head.

"I wouldn't dare fix up a United States senator with a set of views," he said. "I only mean that I think what a man is is important. I've been doing Washington for a number of years. I've had an exceptional opportunity to see how politics work. I don't believe in party politics. I don't believe in parties, but I do believe in men."

Langdon nodded approvingly, then a twinkle shone in his eyes.

"We don't believe in parties in Mississippi," he drawled. "We've only one—the Democratic party—and a few kickers."

Haines grinned broadly at this description of southern politics.

"What was this you were saying about national politics?" continued the Mississippian. "I'm a beginner, you know, and I'm always ready to learn."

"This is a new thing—a reporter teaching a senator politics," laughed Haines.

Senator Langdon joined in the merriment.

"I reckon reporters could teach United States senators lots of things, Mr. Haines, if the senators had sense enough to go to school. Now, I come up here on a platform the chief principle of which is the naval base for the gulf. Now, how are we going to put that through? My state wants it."

"You're probably sure it will be a wonderful thing for the country and the south," suggested Haines.

"Of course."

"But why do you think most of the congressmen and senators will vote for it?"

The southerner took off his hat, leaned back and gazed across the lobby thoughtfully.

"Seems to me the benefit to the south and country would be sufficient reason, Mr. Haines," he finally replied.

The newspaper man's brain worked rapidly. Going over the entire conversation with Langdon and what he had seen of him, he was certain that the Mississippian believed what he said—that, moreover, the belief was deeply rooted. His long newspaper training had educated Haines in the ways of men, their actions and mental processes—what naturally to expect from a given set of circumstances. He felt a growing regard, an affection, for this unassuming old man before him, who did not know and probably would be slow to understand the hypocrisy, the cunning trickery of lawmakers who unmake laws.

"Sufficient reason for you, senator," Haines added. "You have not been in politics very long, have you?" he queried dryly.

A wry smile wrinkled the Mississippian's face.

"Been in long enough to learn some unpleasant things I didn't know before." He remembered Martin Sanders.

"Will you allow me to tell you a few more?" asked Haines.

Langdon inclined his head in acquiescence. "Reckon I'd better know the worst and get through with it."

"Well, then, senator, somebody from Nebraska will vote for what you want in the way of the naval base because he'll think then you'll help him demand money to dredge some muddy creek that he has an interest in.

"Somebody in Pennsylvania will vote for it because he owes a grudge and wants to hurt the Philadelphia ship people.

"You'll get the Democrats because it's for the south, but if your bill was for the west coast they might fight it tooth and nail, even with the Japanese fleet cruising dangerously near.

"And the Republicans may vote for it because they see a chance to claim glory and perhaps break the solid south in the next presidential campaign. You catch the idea?"

"What!" exclaimed the astounded Langdon.

"Well, who in hades will vote for it because it's for the good of the United States?" he gasped.

"I believe you will, senator," replied Haines, with ready confidence.

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If You Don't Know

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW SENATOR LANGDON GETS A SECRETARY.

LANGDON leaned over and seized the arm of his interviewer.

"See here, young man, why aren't you in politics?" he said.

"Too busy, senator," replied Haines. "Besides, I like the newspaper game."

"Game?" queried Langdon.

"Oh, I use the word in a general sense, senator," replied Haines. "Pretty much everything is a 'game'—society, politics, newspaper work, business of every sort. Men and women make 'moves' to meet the moves of other men and women. Why, even in religion, the way some people play a"—

The speaker was interrupted by the appearance of Hope Georgia, who was searching for her father.

"Stay here and listen to what a hard task your old father has got," said the Mississippian to his daughter, whom he presented to Haines with a picturesque flourish reminiscent of the pride and chivalry of the old south. "He has the idea that those New Yorkers who read his paper would actually like to know something about me."

Hope Georgia stole many glances at the reporter as he talked with her father. He made a deep impression on her young mind. She had spent almost all her life on the plantation, her father providing her with a private tutor instead of sending her to boarding school, where her elder sister had been educated. Owing to the death of her mother the planter had desired to keep Hope Georgia at home for companionship. This good looking, clean cut, well built young man who was taking so big and so active a part of the world's work brought to her the atmosphere that her spirit craved. He gave one an impression of ability, of earnestness, of sincerity, and she was glad that her father approved of him.

Hope Georgia, by the same token, did not escape the attention of the interviewer. Her appealing charm of face and figure was accentuated by her daintiness and a fleeting suggestion of naivete in poise and expression when she was amused. His first glance revealed to Haines that her eyes were gray, the gray that people say indicates the possessor to have those priceless qualities—the qualities that make the sweetest women true, that make the maiden's eyes in truth the windows of her soul, the qualities that make women womanly.

She sat close to her father, her hand in his, listening intently to the unfolding of a story of what to her was a mysterious world—the man's world, the strong man's world—which many a woman would give her all to enter and play a part therein.

"What else have you against a political career, Mr. Haines?" went on the senator, taking up their conversation.

"Well, my age for one thing. I haven't any gray hairs."

Langdon waved this objection aside.

"I might arrange to pool ages with you. Sometimes I think we want young men in politics, like you."

The reporter shook his head.

"Old in age and young in politics, like you, Senator Langdon," he replied. "Politics I sometimes think is pure hypocrisy and sometimes something worse. A man gets disgusted with the trickery and dishonesty and corruption."

"Then," drawled Langdon, "the thing to do is to jump in and stop it! I read in the newspapers a great deal about corruption. The gentlemen in national politics whom I have had the honor of knowing—Senator Moseley, an intimate friend of thirty years; my present colleague, Senator Stevens, and others—have been as honest as the day is long."

"But the days do get short in November, when congress meets, don't they?" laughed Haines, rising. "I'm afraid I've taken too much of your time, and I seem to have talked a lot."

Langdon was amused.

"Does look like I'd been interviewing you. I reckon each one of us has got a pretty good notion of what the other man's like. I wanted it that way, and I like you, Mr. Haines. I've got a proposition to make to you. They tell me I'll need a secretary. Now, I think I need just such a young man as you. I don't know just exactly what the work would be or what the financial arrangements should be, but I think you and I would make a pretty good team. I wish you'd come." He turned to his daughter, with a smile. "What do you think of that, Hope Georgia? Isn't your dad right?"

Smiling her approval, the young girl squeezed her father's hand in her enthusiasm.

"I think it's a splendid idea, dad; just great! Won't you come, Mr. Haines? We—eh—I—I know my father would like to have you."

As he stood before his two new found friends—for such Haines now considered the Mississippian and his daughter—he could not suppress feelings of surprise tinged with uncertainty. He had, like other newspaper men, received offers of employment from politicians who desired to increase their influence with the press. Sometimes the salary offered had been large, the work so light that the reporter could "earn" the money and yet retain his newspaper position, a scantily disguised species of bribery, which had wrecked the careers of several promising young reporters well known to Haines, young men who had been thus led into "selling their columns" by unscrupulous machine dictators.

Haines knew that the Mississippian had no ulterior purpose to serve in his offer, yet he must have time to think over the proposal.

"I thank you, senator," he finally said. "I appreciate the opportunity, coming from you, but I've never thought of giving up the newspaper profession. It's a fascinating career, one that I am too fond of to leave."

Langdon started to reply, when a delightfully modulated southern voice interrupted:

"Father, I've been out with Mrs. Spangler to look for some other rooms. I don't like this hotel, and I found some that I do like."

Haines turned to see a handsomely gowned young woman who had the stamp of a patrician's daughter in her bearing and her countenance—a brunette, with delicate features, though determination shone in her eyes and appeared in the self contained poise of her head. She was the imperious type of beauty and suggested to Haines the dry point etchings of Paul Helleu. He instinctively conceived her to be intensely ambitious, and of this Haines was soon to have unexpected evidence. Gazing at her with a sense of a growing admiration, Haines gave an involuntary start as Senator Langdon spoke:

"My daughter, Miss Carolina Langdon, Mr. Haines," said the senator.

Carolina was interested.

"Are you the newspaper man who is interviewing father? I hope you'll do a nice one. We want him to be a successful and popular senator. We'd like to help him if we could."

The correspondent bowed.

"I should say you certainly would help him to be a popular senator," he declared emphatically, failing to notice that Hope Georgia was somewhat annoyed at the enthusiasm displayed over her elder sister. In fact, Hope Georgia was suffering a partial if not total eclipse.

"I'm leaving it to Mr. Haines to put down the things I ought to say," broke in the senator. "He knows."

"Yes, he knows everything about Washington, Carolina," exclaimed Hope Georgia spiritedly.

The older girl spoke eagerly.

"I wish you'd interview me, Mr. Haines. Ask me how I like Washington. I feel as though I must tell some one just how much I do like it! It is too wonderful!"

"I'd like mighty well to interview you, Miss Langdon," enthusiastically exclaimed Haines.

"I hope you will some time, Mr. Haines," remarked Carolina as she said goodby.

Watching her as she turned away, Haines saw her extend a warm greet-

"I hope you'll do a nice one."

ing to Congressman Charles Norton, who had advanced toward the group.

"Strange how the Langdons treat him as a friend—intimate one, too," he thought. "What if they should learn of Norton's questionable operations at the capitol; of his connection with two unsavory 'deals,' one of which resulted in an amendment of the pure food law so that manufacturers of a valueless 'consumption cure' could continue to mislead the victims of the 'white plague;' Norton, who had uttered an epigram now celebrated in the taprooms of Washington, 'The paths of glory lead but to the graft.'"

"Miss Langdon is very beautiful and attractive, sir," said Haines, resuming with the senator.

"Yes," drawled the Mississippian. "Girls in the south generally are."

"Well, I must be going. I'll think about your secretaryship, Senator Langdon. Perhaps I can find some one."

"Wish you'd think about it for yourself," observed the senator, while Hope Georgia again nodded approval. "It would be a hard job. There are so many matters of political detail about which I am sadly inexperienced that really most of the work would fall on the secretary."

Bud Haines paused. Again he thought over Langdon's offer. Its genuineness appealed to him. Suddenly there dawned on him an idea of just what it might mean to be associated with this honest old citizen who had asked for his help—who needed it, as Haines knew only too well. He would be the senator's guide and confidant—his adviser in big matters. Why, he would practically be United States senator himself. He knew the "inside" as few others in Washington. Here was a chance to match his wit against that of Peabody, the boss of the senate; a chance to spoil some of the dishonest schemes of those who were adroitly "playing the game." He could bother, too, the machine members of the "third house," as the lobbyists are called. He could direct a lightning bolt into the camp of Andy Corrigan, who claimed the honor of being "speaker of the third house." These thoughts crowded into his mind. Then, too, he would become practically a member of the Langdon family and have association with the two charming daughters—with Carolina Langdon.

"It would be a great chance," he murmured half aloud; "next thing to being a senator."

The old Mississippian heard the young man's words.

"I reckon it would," he drawled in agreement.

"You feel sure you want me?" urged the other.

Langdon chuckled.

"I asked you," he said.

Haines came abruptly to decision.

"I've thought it over, senator, and it seems to me it will be a great chance in every way. I'll accept. We'll fix it up tomorrow, and I'll try to make you a good secretary."

Langdon held forth his hand.

"And I'll try to make you a good senator, my boy. Fix up nothing tomorrow. Your duties begin tonight. You are to come to dinner with me and my daughters."

[To be Continued.]

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