

low, and Darrall between them as they slept. A poor precaution. If he had desired his liberty he might easily have secured it; so heavy was their sleep from the fatigue of travel, that they were soon oblivious to all mundane things.

The gravity of the charge against him, was sufficient to keep Wallace wakeful during the early hours, and though the handkerchief, with the infinitesimal drop of blood upon it actually had no bearing whatever upon it, he realized that in the inflamed state of public opinion it might serve as an important circumstance linked with whatever proofs they might succeed in bringing against him—of political antagonism. Since it was the only tangible evidence which could be presented before the jury as a clue to the mystery of Steale's death, connecting him with it, it might serve to hold him for trial and detain him from Marguerite's side.

After thinking the matter over carefully, he decided in his own mind—since it had no real bearing on the case—that for his own preservation there would be nothing wrong in possessing himself of this supposed clue in order to prevent its being brought into court.

It was a hazardous undertaking, yet successful, so deep was the slumber of the officers. Rising cautiously from the bed he quietly secured this bit of evidence and throwing it upon the glowing coals watched it burn to ashes; then returning to his bed, he was himself soon lost in the deep sleep of exhausted nature.

At daylight he was aroused by the deputy and after a substantial breakfast they again took the road, Darrall composed and cheerful; no incident occurring to delay their progress toward the Capital.

Luckily the handkerchief was never missed until nearing their journey's end, the deputy making an inventory of his pockets discovered its loss.

No suspicion arose in his mind as to what had become of it. He took it for granted that it was dropped from his pocket, as such things often are. He regarded it himself as of but little value as evidence, since the origin of the stain had been so readily accounted for by both Darrall and his wife, separately and apart from each other, without the slightest opportunity for collusion.

"You see," extending his hand to the latter. "I am likely to have a need for your services of which neither of us thought when we spoke together.

"Yes. No words I feel are necessary to assure you of my willingness to serve you again."

A serious disturbance, however, arose when the loss was reported, and the officer was compelled to make the journey over the same road the following day in a fruitless search for it.

Upon their arrival in Frankfort, Darrall immediately summoned his friends, Judge Randolph and Sothern.

By this time Judge Randolph had arrived. Greeting his young friend cordially he expressed a deep sympathy with him, in the unfortunate situation which had been developed.

Both Randolph and Sothern seemed greatly impressed with the gravity of the case. Knowing as much as they did of the issue of the challenge upon which Steale's death followed so quickly, they were keenly apprehensive of the danger to Darrall if that circumstance should become known—whether he were innocent or guilty of the charge—particularly just at this time while the excitement was still so intense over party issues.

"His own words replying to your challenge—an acknowledgment of the justice of your cause—taken in connection with what I already knew of the man, gave me some hint of course how the matter stood. I am prepared to serve you, trusting implicitly in the truth of whatever you may confide to me," said Sothern.

"You remember I told you the day of his death, that old story of his youth? When you asked me his object in using a false name, I only hinted to you of the rumors rife at the time because I had too deep a regard for the young girl, whom he was said to have wronged to say anything that would keep alive that old story of the past. Knowing then the character of the man, I thought I could guess the probable cause of your grievance."

"You can testify to this in court, sir, of your own knowledge?" asked the Judge.

"I can, with further details if necessary and believe I can bring others to prove it."

"But my friends," answered Darrall. "The case can never come to court. At the inquest

you will find that they have not a scrap of evidence against me."

"Save the fact that Marguerite is your wife," answered the Judge.

"That fact, until this moment, was known only to you, that man, my wife, and myself. He could never have confided it to another for his own sake."

"The Challenge?" asked the Judge.

"He refused," answered Sothern, "his excuse, as I said before of such a nature that I do not believe he could have confided in another; at least within the few hours intervening between my visit and his death. Besides, he was out of town the next day, I have learned, and the banquet following so close, I hardly think he had mentioned the challenge."

"The blood stained handkerchief?" asked the Judge.

"Has been destroyed; the little stain upon it came from the scratch of a rose thorn upon my finger," showing them the scar. "Believing I was doing no wrong, I secured it and watched it burn to ashes. They think it lost upon the road



"They found him in the shrubbery to one side."

and have sent the deputy to scour the country in search of it," answered Darrall.

"That is well," said the Judge.

"The burden will rest upon them to connect me with his death, without one tangible clue so far as I can learn. They cannot do it; and if by any possible chance—from the causes you have mentioned—they hold me for a trial, it will be from these circumstances alone, out of which they could scarcely make a case."

"And these circumstances," said Judge Randolph—evidently weighing them all carefully in his own mind. "These circumstances if proven, as I believe they can be from what you and Sothern tell me—and there are others no doubt, of which you have not yet informed me—would furnish the most powerful motive for the deed, known to the human heart. A motive my boy, strong enough to prove any man guilty, perhaps, but at the same time so strong as to acquit any man before any jury in this state."

"Well then my friends, if it should come to that, I'd sooner die."

"I do not think it will come to that," quipped Sothern. "Rather than take the chance of opening up this dead man's past show him to the world in his true colors, they find they have nothing substantial which to rest the case, I believe the investigation will be dropped."

"The fact of the arrest being made up, slight a clue as the handkerchief is rather quieting. It looks to me as if someone back all, acquainted with the old story and your marriage, has taken a long chance in having arrested, hoping—if no other clues are forthcoming to urge political grounds for your quarrel they can succeed in picturing Steale a man of his political views, and efforts to bring to the people, ground down to the earth and dened with debt, they will be ready to turn on you. If they charge that, this is but the beginning of an effort of the Anti Relief to rid themselves of the whole administration as they are beginning to assert, I am told—my boy, innocent or guilty it will go hard on you."

"I have thought of it all, and if it comes that issue, I'd sooner die, myself a martyr that cause than any other."

The Judge shook his head. "A noble sentiment, I understand—but for an innocent man die—"

"Oh, my friends believe me, there are things worse than death. Think of a man unable to hold up his head; to walk erect among his fellow men; to look the world square in the face, would be my case if, to save myself—I were to appear as an explanation of this challenge, and so divert attention and sympathy of the public to my wife's screen myself. No! Life at that price would not be worth the living."

"I did challenge this man," said Sothern. "When he refused, I sought to force a challenge from him. I did seek to compass his death because he had wronged me and either he or I must die. But I am no midnight assassin. Whenever it becomes necessary in the management of my case, I will furnish with all the particulars far as I know them. We await the inquest."

CHAPTER XVI.

The inquest held upon the body of Col. Steale, developed the political campaign and its issues as the well known estimate of Darrell and Sothern's former fast friends, sustaining to each other the relation of tutor and pupil was dwelt upon. Several witnesses were brought forward to swear to heated party controversies, between the men in the court room.

It was true, that Steale, having recognized Darrall's wife the Marguerite of his early youth, stung by love and jealous anger, had sometimes transgressed the bounds of courtesy, often between lawyers—in those days as now—leading often to blows after court, and controversies in the streets.

Steale's animus toward him, Darrall had been slow to perceive and, (though he did not understand the true reason) had been quick to resent. Such disagreements alone were of sufficient importance to hold a man, like Darrell, suspected of such a deed.

With the calling of the last witness an element of real danger was brought into the case. In Steale's Secretary then sworn, Sothern recognized Steale's friend; the man who was him that day at the country post-office when he unmasked him. He knew Steale's secret. Would he keep it?

His testimony was long drawn out, covering the friendly relations between Darrall and Steale until within the past year, of the enmity between

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