

The Prodigal Judge

Illustrations by D. Merrill

By Vaughan Kester

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"He can have the whole thing and welcome. I'm playing for a bigger stake." His friend stared at him in astonishment. "I'm kicking a speculation into shape that will cause me to be remembered while there's a white man alive in the Mississippi Valley! Have you heard what the niggers did at Hayti?"

"You let the niggers alone; don't you tamper with them," said Ware. He possessed a profound belief in Murrell's capacity. He knew how the latter had shaped the uneasy population that foregathered on the edge of civilization to his own ends, and that what he had christened the Clan had become an elaborate organization, disciplined and flexible to his ruthless will.

"Look here, what do you think I have been working for—to steal a few niggers? That furnishes us with money, but you can push the trade too hard and too far. The planters are uneasy. The Clan's got to deal a counter blow or go out of business. Between here and the Gulf—"

"I've heard my grandfather tell how he'd heard folks say his father was always hintin' in his licker that he was a heap better than he seemed, and if people only knowed the truth about him they'd respect him mo', and mebbe treat him better. Well, sir, he married and riz a family; there was my grandfather and a passel of girls—and that crop of children was the only decent crop he ever riz."

"Do you want the land and the niggers? I reckon you'll have to take them whether you want them or not, for I'm going to have the girl."

CHAPTER XIII.

Bob Yancy Finds Himself.
Mr. Yancy awoke from a long dreamless sleep; heavy-lidded, his eyes slid open. For a moment he struggled with the odds and ends of memory, then he recalled the fight at the tavern, the sudden murderous attack, the fierce blows Slosson had dealt him, the knife thrust which had ended the struggle. Therefore, the bandages that now swathed his head and shoulders; therefore, the need that he should be up and doing—for where was Hannibal?

Suddenly a shadow fell obliquely across the foot of his narrow bed, and Cavendish, bending his long body somewhat, thrust his head in at the opening. He found himself looking into a pair of eyes that for the first time in many a long day held the light of consciousness.

"How are you, stranger?" he demanded, in a soft drawl.
"Where am I?" The words were a whisper on Yancy's bearded lips.
"Well, sir, you are in the Tennessee river fo' certain. Polly! you jest stop here."

But Polly had heard Cavendish speak, and the murmur of Yancy's voice in reply. Now her head appeared beside her husband's.
"La, you are some better, ain't you, sir?" she cried, smiling down on him. "It's been right smart of a spell, too; yes, sir, you've laid like you was dead, and not fo' a matter of hours either—but days."

"How long?"
"Well, nigh on to three weeks."
They saw Yancy's eyes widen with a look of dumb horror.
"And you don't know nothing about my neevy?—you ain't seen or heard of him, ma'am?" faltered Yancy.

Polly shook her head regretfully.
"Ten or thereabouts, ma'am. He were a heap of comfort to me—" and the whisper on Yancy's lips was wonderfully tender and wistful. He closed his eyes and presently, lulled by the soft ripple that bore them company, fell into a restful sleep.

The raft drifted on into the day's heat; and when at last Yancy awoke, it was to find Henry and Keppel seated beside him, each solacing him with a small moist hand. Mrs. Cavendish appeared, bringing Yancy's breakfast. In her wake came Connie with the baby, and the three little brothers who were to be accorded the cherished privilege of seeing the poor gentleman eat. Cavendish presented himself at the opening of the cabin as

at a door.
"This looks like bein' alive, stranger," he commented genially.
"You-all ain't told me yo' name yet?" said Yancy.
"It's Cavendish. Richard Keppel Cavendish."
"My name's Yancy—Bob Yancy."
Mr. Cavendish exchanged glances with Mrs. Cavendish. By a nod of her dimpled chin the lady seemed to urge some more extended confidence on his part. Chills and Fever seated himself at the foot of Yancy's bed.

"Stranger, what I'm a-goin' to tell you, you'll take as bein' said man to man," he began, with the impressive air of one who had a secret of great moment to impart. "Ever hear tell of lords?"

"No." Yancy was quick to notice the look of disappointment on the faces of his new friends.
"Are you ever heard of royalty?" and Cavendish fixed the invalid's wandering glance.

"You mean 'kings'?"
"I shore do."
Yancy made a mighty mental effort. "There's them Bible kings—" he ventured at length.

Mr. Cavendish shook his head.
"Them's sacred kings. Are you familiar with any of the profane kings, Mr. Yancy?"

"Well, taking them as they come, them Bible kings seemed to average pretty profane." Yancy was disposed to defend this point.

"You must a heard of the kings of England. Sho, wa'n't any of yo' folks in the war agin' 'em?"
"I'd plumb forgot, why my daddy fit all through the war!" exclaimed Yancy. The Cavendishes were immensely relieved.

"Now you-all keep still," said Cavendish. "I want Mr. Yancy should get the straight of this here! The various orders of royalty are kings, dukes, earls and lords. Earls is the third from the top of the heap, but lords ain't no slouch."
"Dick had ought to know, fo' he's an earl himself," cried Polly exultantly.

"Sho, Richard Keppel Cavendish, Earl of Lambeth! Sho, that was what he was! Sho!" and some transient feeling of awe stamped itself upon their small faces as they viewed the long and limber figure of their parent.

"These here titles go to the eldest son. He begins by bein' a viscount," continued Chills and Fever. "It was my great grandfather come over here from England. His name was Richard Keppel Cavendish, same as mine is. He lived back yonder on the Carolina coast and went to raisin' tobacco. I've heard my grandfather tell how he'd heard folks say his father was always hintin' in his licker that he was a heap better than he seemed, and if people only knowed the truth about him they'd respect him mo', and mebbe treat him better. Well, sir, he married and riz a family; there was my grandfather and a passel of girls—and that crop of children was the only decent crop he ever riz."

"My grandfather said he never knowed a man with the same aversion agin labor as his father had. Folks put it down to laziness, but they misjudged him, as come out later, yet he never let on."
"Then one day he got his hands on a paper that had come across in a ship from England. All at once, he lit on something in the paper, and he started up and let out a yell like he'd been shot. 'By gum, I'm the Earl of Lambeth!' he says, and took out to the nearest tavern and got 'b'lin' full. Afterward he showed 'em the paper and they seen with their own eyes where Richard Keppel Cavendish, Earl of Lambeth, had died in London. My great grandfather told 'em that was his uncle; that when he left home there was several cousins—but they'd up and died, so the title come to him. He never done a lick of work after that."

"I'm an orphan man of title now and it's been my dream to take Polly and the children and go back to England and see the king about my title. Don't you reckon he's got the notion the Cavendishes has petered out?"

Mr. Yancy considered this likely.
The furious shrieking of a steam-packet's whistle broke in upon them.
"It's another of them haws, want-in' all the river!" said Mr. Cavendish, and fled to the steering oar.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Judge Sees a Ghost.
Charley Norton's good offices did not end when he had furnished Judge Price with a house, for Betty required of him that he should supply that gentleman with legal business as well.

Thus it happened that Judge Price, before he had been three days in Raleigh, received a civil note from Mr. Norton asking him to search the title to a certain timber tract held by one Joseph Quaid. The judge, powerfully excited, told Mahaffy he was being understood and appreciated.

The immediate result of Norton's communication had been to send the judge up the street to the court house. He would show his client that he could be punctual and painstaking.

Entering the court house, he found himself in a narrow hall. He entered the county clerk's office. He was already known to this official, whose name was Saul, and he now greeted him.

"A little matter of business brings me here, sir," began the judge, with a swelling chest and mellow accents. "I am in some haste to look up a title for my client, Mr. Norton."
Mr. Saul scrambled up out of the depths of his chair and exerted himself in the judge's behalf.
"This is what you want, sir. Better

take the ledger to the window, the light in here ain't much." He drew



His Face Went White and the Book Slipped From His Fingers.

forward a chair as he spoke, and the judge, seating himself, began to polish his spectacles with great deliberation.

"You've set on the bench, sir?" suggested Mr. Saul.

"In one of the eastern counties, but my inclination has never been toward the judiciary." He was turning the leaves of the ledger as he spoke. Suddenly the movement of his hand was arrested.

"Found it?" asked Mr. Saul. But the judge gave him no answer; he was staring down at the open pages of the book. "Found the entry?" repeated Mr. Saul.

"Eh—what's that? No—" he appeared to hesitate. "Who is this man Quintard?"

"He's the owner of a hundred-thousand-acre tract in this and abutting counties," said Mr. Saul.
"Who has charge of the land?"
"Colonel Pentress; he was old General Ware's law partner. I've heard it was the general who got this man Quintard to make the investment, but that was before my time."

The judge lapsed into silence. A step sounded in the narrow hall. An instant later the door was pushed open, and grateful for any interruption that would serve to take Mr. Saul's attention from himself, the judge abruptly turned his back on the clerk and began to examine the record before him. Insensibly, however, the cold, level tones of the voice that was addressing itself to Mr. Saul quickened the beat of his pulse, the throb of his heart, and struck back through the years to a day from which he reckoned time. He turned slowly, as if in dread.

What he saw was a man verging on sixty, lean and dark, with thin, shaven cheeks of a bluish cast above the jaw, and a strongly aquiline profile. Long, black locks swept the collar of his coat, while his tall, spare figure was habited in sleek broadcloth and spotless linen. For a moment the judge seemed to struggle with doubt, then his face went white and the book slipped from his fingers to the window ledge.

The stranger, his business concluded, swung about on his heel and quitted the office. Mr. Saul, bending above his desk, was making an entry in one of his ledgers. The judge shuffled to his side.

"Who was that man?" he asked thickly, resting a shaking hand on the clerk's arm.

"That?—Oh, that was Colonel Pentress I was just telling you about."

"Has he always lived here?"
"No; he came into the county about ten years ago, and bought a place called The Oaks."

"Has he a family?" The judge appeared to be having difficulty with his speech.

"Not that anybody knows of. Some say he's a widower, others again say he's an old bachelor; but he don't say nothing. The colonel's got his friends, to be sure, but he don't mix much with the real quality. One of his particular intimates is a gentleman by the name of Murrell."

The judge nodded.
"I've met him," he said briefly.

Acting on a sudden impulse, the judge muttered something about returning later, and hastily quitted the office.

In the hall the judge's steps dragged and his head was bowed. He was busy with his memories. Then passion shook him.

"Damn him—may God—for ever damn him!" he cried under his breath, in a fierce whisper.

They finished supper, the dishes were cleared away and the candles lighted, when the judge produced a mysterious leather-covered case. This he opened, and Mahaffy and Hannibal saw that it held a handsome pair of dueling pistols.

"Where did you get 'em, judge?—Oh, ain't they beautiful!" cried Hannibal, circling about the table in his excitement.

"My dear lad, they were purchased only a few hours ago," said the judge quietly, as he began to load them.

Norton had ridden down to Belle Plain ostensibly to view certain of those improvements that went so far toward ambittering Tom Ware's existence.

"Do you think Belle Plain is ever going to look as it did, Charley?" as we remember it when we were children?" asked Betty.

"Why of course, it is, dear, you are doing wonders!"

Ware stalked toward them. Having dined with Betty as recently as the day before, he contented himself with a nod in her direction. His greeting to Norton was a more ambitious undertaking.

"I understand you've a new overseer?"

"Then you understand wrong—Carrington's my guest," said Norton. "He's talking of putting in a crop for himself next season, so he's willing to help me make mine."

"Going to turn farmer, is he?" asked Ware.

"So he says." Norton was extremely disappointed when the planter manifested a disposition to play the host and returned to the house with them, where his presence was such a hardship that Norton shortly took his leave.

Issuing from the lane he turned his face in the direction of home. He was within two miles of Thicket Point when, passing a turn in the road, he found himself confronted by three men. One of them seized his horse by the bit. Norton had not even a riding-whip.

"Now, what do you wish to say to me?" he asked.

"We want your word that you'll keep away from Belle Plain."

"Well, you won't get it!" responded Norton.

In the same instant one of the men raised his fist and struck the young planter in the back of the neck.

"You cur!" cried Norton, as he wheeled on him.

"Damn him—let him have it!"

It was mid-afternoon of the day following before Betty heard of the attack on Norton. She ordered her horse saddled and was soon out on the river road with a groom in her wake. Betty never drew rein until she reached Thicket Point. As she galloped into the yard Bruce Carrington came from the house.

"How is Mr. Norton?" she asked, extending her hand.

"The doctor says he'll be up and about inside of a week. If you'll wait I'll tell him you are here."

Carrington passed on into the house. He entered the room where Norton lay.

"Miss Malroy is here," he said.
"Betty?—bless her dear heart!" cried Charley weakly. "Just toss my clothes into the closet and draw up a chair. . . . There—thank you, Bruce—let her come along in now."

And as Carrington quitted the room, Norton drew himself up on the pillows and faced the door. "This is worth several beatings, Betty!" he exclaimed as she appeared.

He bent to kiss the hand she gave him, but groaned with the exertion. Then he looked up into her face and saw her eyes swimming with tears.

"What—tears?" and he was much moved.

"It's a perfect outrage!" Betty paused irresolutely. "Charley—"

"Yes, dear?"
"Can't you be happy without me?"

"No."
"But you don't try to be!"
"No use in my making any such foolish effort, I'd be doomed to failure."

"Good-by, Charley—I really must go—"

(To be Continued.)

ST. PAUL AND MINNEAPOLIS.
Leave for—6:55 a. m.; 9:30 a. m.; 3:10 p. m.
Arrive from—12:01 p. m.; 7:00 p. m.; 10:20 p. m.

LACROSSE.
Leave for—11:38 a. m.; 6:55 p. m.
Arrive from—12:20 a. m.; 3:55 p. m.

CALMAR.
Leave for—12:20 p. m.; 7:20 p. m.
Arrive from—6:30 a. m.; 2:55 p. m.

MASON CITY.
Leave for—12:25 p. m.; 7:25 p. m.
Arrive from—6:40 a. m.; 3:00 p. m.

JACKSON.
Leave for—6:50 a. m.; 3:40 p. m.
Arrive from—11:02 a. m.; 6:25 p. m.

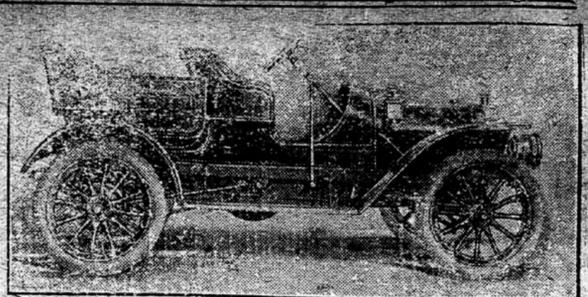
Chicago, Great Western.
Arrive from Fort Dodge, Mason City, and Omaha—5:28 p. m.; 4:24 a. m.
Arrive from St. Paul, Minneapolis, Chicago, Kansas City—12:25 p. m. noon 11:18 p. m.

Leave for St. Paul, Minneapolis, Chicago, Kansas City—5:28 p. m.; 4:24 a. m.

Leave for Omaha, Mason City, Fort Dodge—12:25 p. m. noon 11:48 p. m.

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