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CHAPTER I.

ACCORDING TO "THE CODE."

THE story will be an autobiography. I, Dorr Jewett, am the narrator. I am a native of New Hampshire; but the larger part of my life has been passed in the La Fourche district of Louisiana. This should be said, in order that my personality may be understood at the start.

A worn and time-stained copy of the Vicksburg Daily Citizen of April 6, 1853, lies before me. After the occurrence of certain events with which future chapters will deal, I took the trouble to secure this paper, and have ever since preserved it. In its columns is a brief and rather unsatisfactory reference to an affair which had excited large interest in that part of Mississippi. I was not a witness of it; and the description afterward given to me by one of the actors in it was so much more in detail than the newspaper account that I prefer to adopt the former in setting this landmark at the outset of the story.

If you follow the left bank of the river down to a point where the Vicksburg bluffs sink to the ordinary level of the river banks, you will come out upon a beautiful grassy glade overlooking the water. Some small elms and cottonwoods made a pleasant shade bordering the road; a wide strip of land, possibly thirty rods across, lay between the highway and the river bank.

So early upon the morning of the 3d of that April that the sun had not yet shown his rim above the trees, three horsemen came at a brisk trot down the road, stopped at this grove, dismounted, and tied their horses.

"The other people are not here yet," one of the men observed. "There's time enough. Ah! there they are."

Three more horsemen approached from the opposite direction. They also halted here, and fastened their horses.

All of the six were dressed in white duck suits, for the weather of that spring had come on hot. Two of them carried each one a case of mahogany wood, and these two, after saluting each other, came together in earnest conversation. Two of the others also approached and shook hands, and the prefix "doctor" was exchanged between them.

"A disagreeable business," one observed.

"Indeed it is. I hope we shall neither of us be needed."

"I hope so—but fear it will be otherwise. They say both are good shots. You brought your instruments?"

"Yes; I carry them in a large pocket in my saddle-flap."

"All right; my darky is on the way with mine. Now what are Dorion and Basnet about?"

These two, each with his mahogany-case under his arm, had drawn off out of hearing. But as my account of the whole affair came from one of them, their conversation may be stated here.

"Has this thing really got to go on?"

"I suppose so—unless your man will withdraw his challenge."

"He can't do that. To do it would be to confess that he never had any grounds for it."

"And, do you know, Mr. Castex says that he never did have any ground for the challenge. But Bostock put the affront on him in such a public manner, and in his own house, too, that he swears he'll fight, unless the challenge is absolutely withdrawn, without explanation."

"Well, it's an absurd thing! Duels I have been concerned in, have fought three or four myself, but never before was I engaged in one where nobody but the principals knew what the provocation was; and one of them insists that there was none. It seems like boy's play."

"Look at your man; he acts as though he were too angry this minute to contain himself."

The principals to this meeting had bowed in the most distant manner upon reaching the ground. Then Mr. Castex sat down, propped his back against a tree, lit a cigar, and smoked it as lazily as though his spirits were perfectly unruffled by the prospect of the coming encounter. Mr. Bostock, on the contrary, walked nervously about, switching at the grass with his cane, and occasionally turning upon his nonchalant antagonist a glance that was decidedly savage.

The seconds resumed their consultation.

"Is it worth while to try to get an explanation?"

"Not in the temper your man is in, I should say; not without a shot. We will stand them up once, and the first exchange may lead to an arrangement."

"If it don't put one or both of them beyond the reach of arrangements," muttered the other. "Well, come on."

Messrs. Basnet and Dorion crossed the road; the others followed them. The first rays of the sun glanced through the trees; the delicious harmony of birds shook the air; the throbbing of the engines and splash of the paddle-wheels of a boat ascending the river were painfully distinct.

Mr. Dorion thrust a small stick into the turf and deliberately measured off ten paces, marking the limit in the same way.

"Will you toss for position, Mr. Basnet?"

The other tossed up a coin. "Heads!" cried Dorion, and both bent over the place.

"You win, Mr. Castex. Please make your choice."

The person addressed walked to one of the sticks; his adversary walked to the other. Contrasting them as they thus stood face to face, Bostock appeared tall, broad shouldered and ruddy; Castex slighter in build, sallow of face and with a decidedly sinister expression on it.

The pistols were taken from their cases; one was delivered to each combatant. The doctors retired to where the horses were tied. The seconds went to the road.

"Please observe the conditions," Mr. Basnet said, in a loud voice. "Each man to hold his weapon perpendicularly up or down—so! The word will be, 'Fire!—One—Two—Three.' There must be no shot before the first word or after the last. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"I do."

"Are you ready?"

"Ready."

"Yes."

"Fire!—One—"

The last words were drowned by the report of the pistols. The straw hat worn by Castex was seen to turn upon his head; he took it off, and exhibited a bullet hole through the crown.

"Are you hurt, Mr. Bostock?" his friend eagerly asked, running forward.

"No. Give us another shot."

"It is time now for me to say a word," said the friend of Mr. Castex, coming up. "He does not instruct me; I interfere because it seems something like murder to allow this difficulty to go any further. Mr. Bostock, my principal has accepted your challenge because he comes of a race of fighting men; his father was killed at Waterloo; he wants no imputation upon his own courage. He has come here and has exchanged shots with you, declaring to me that you have no just cause of offense against him. Whether you have or not, nobody but you two can know. The language which gave you offense was uttered in your own house, at your own table. What it was, no one heard but you. Both of you ought now to be satisfied; both of you have vindicated your honor. Let the affair end here."

Mr. Bostock faced the speaker.

"Does that man," he asked, while his voice trembled with passion, "does that man affirm that he has not given me just cause for offense?"

"That is what I say," called out Mr. Castex from where he stood, with a strong French accent.

"Then you lie, sir!" deliberately retorted Bostock.

"Indeed! That is very good. You will observe now, messieurs, there is reason to fight, if there has not been before."

The seconds silently assented, and recharged the pistols. As they handed them back, they saw something in the faces of the principals that predicted another result this time. The steamer

THE DUEL.

had advanced to a point nearly opposite where they stood, and the slow deep coughing of her pipes seemed to emphasize the scene.

Again the word was given; both pistols spoke together. As the smoke floated off, Bostock was seen standing upright. Castex lay his full length upon the ground.

Both doctors were instantly kneeling by him. He never stirred. A small hole in the forehead showed where the bullet had traversed the brain.

Mr. Bostock looked at the group. "Is he dead?" he asked.

His friend came over to where he stood.

"Yes," he said.

Mr. Bostock's face was getting white, and an expression of pain crossed it. His friend caught him as he was settling down to the ground.

One of the doctors hurried over and laid the sufferer on the grass.

"He hit me the last time," said Bostock, faintly. "Look at the chest."

The doctor tore open vest and shirt and found the bullet hole. He inserted the probe. Then he administered a stimulant.

"How is it, doctor?" the wounded man asked.

"I don't wish to alarm you, sir; but this is serious."

Under the temporary influence of the stimulant Mr. Bostock sat up.

"I beg of you don't try to talk," the doctor said. "Your life may depend upon your keeping quiet."

His remonstrance was not heeded.

"I want you all to know," cried the wounded man, "that I never wanted to kill him. You saw the chance I gave him. I could have put my first ball through his head just as easily as through his hat, if I'd wanted. He had a chance then to take back the damnably insulting words that he whispered to me at my own table. I wanted him just to say: 'Mr. Bostock, I'm sorry that I said it, and it was not true,' and I would have taken his hand. But no, he must die, repeating the insult. The fool would rush on his fate."

"Mr. Bostock," said the friend of the man who lay dead a few yards away, "what were those words that you claim were so insulting?"

"Not another word!" the doctor cried. "Silence and quiet, at the peril of your life!"

"I can't tell you," Bostock faintly replied. "You must not know what he said. Nobody must know. The fool! —what tempted him? Say, Dorian—all of you—remember!—I have made no will—but my child, Coralie, will

"DON'T TRY TO TALK," THE DOCTOR SAID.

have it all—the plantations here and in Louisiana—all—all—"

The blood gushed from his mouth and he fell back in a faint.

CHAPTER II.

AMONG THE GRANITE HILLS.

As has been said, the scenes described in my first chapter were not witnessed by me. But I had seen and known one of the chief actors long before that memorable morning. I had seen and known him under circumstances that make it necessary to a due comprehension of the narrative to state where, when and how.

It was five years before. To be exact, it was the spring of 1848. I was planting corn with my father, on one of the almost sterile hillsides of the New Hampshire farm. The humble roof under which I was born was visible down near the river. The Merrimac wound along two sides of our little homestead, furnishing the only cheerful feature of the scene. Hills—sterile hills—encompassed us. Twenty miles away I could see the granite top of Mount Kearsarge soaring to the clouds.

I was a boy of eleven, rather precocious for my years. I attended the public school four months in the year, and labored with my father the balance of the time among these rocks. I went to "meeting" on Sundays in the old edifice on top of a high hill, on the steeple of which a veering wooden codfish denoted the direction of the wind, and saved the people from the profanation which a cross in that place would have caused. I listened to the choir, elevated to a fearful height in the rear gallery, as they thundered forth resounding anthems and fugues. I heard the doleful-visaged and drawling-voiced minister pray forty minutes at a stretch, and preach ninety, frequently devoting nine-tenths of the whole race to exquisite and eternal torment. I had a thirst for knowledge that the public school could not supply. A stray copy of the Boston Daily Journal, coming like an enchanter from the outside world, sometimes stimulated this thirst. I was generally regarded as "a green boy," "an odd stick," etc.; and I once heard of Deacon Halleck telling my father that a boy with such outlandish notions as Dorr ought to be whipped regularly twice a week. Doubtless I should have been, had the deacon been given the ordering of me earlier than he was; but my father, although reared in all the vigor of Puritanism, was by nature kind and tender-hearted, and religious fanaticism could not change him. To my own puzzled youthful mind, it often seemed as though a grave mistake had been made in my allotment. I seemed to have been set down in the wrong corner of the world, among a people with whom I had no affinity.

I was still a mere boy. I learned as I grew older, and long before I bade farewell to my northern home, to respect the intelligence, the force, the sturdy honesty of this people, whose very "failings leaned to virtue's side." Still, I thought then, as I think now, that I should always have been dwarfed and cramped among them.

Returning to the bleak hill-side where my father and I were striving to plant corn on that afternoon, I record how I suddenly stopped work, leaned on my hoe, and contemplated my father. He was in his shirt-sleeves; his graying hair and refined but wrinkled face were turned to me as he bent over his toil. A sudden inspiration seized me.

"Father! Do you suppose that when I get to be as old as you are, I shall be planting corn in these rocks?"

He stopped and looked up in surprise.

"I hope not, Dorr—I hope you won't! But what put such a question into your head just now?"

"It's in my head all the time. The way things are going on here, there don't seem to be anything coming to me but the same poverty and the same labor that you have always had."

He looked at me—a serious, pitying glance it was—and sat down on a granite bowlder. He leaned his head on his hand and sighed.

"My boy, I've often thought of this. Your poor mother and I have laid awake nights talking about it; but I never thought it had troubled you any. What do you want?"

"To go to the academy—maybe to college—and by and by to get out into the world, try to make a man of myself, like the men I read of, and to see something besides these hills and these people. I'd like to get rich, and come back and build a big house for you and mother over on the lake. Yes, I'd like to do anything rather than live here all my life."

He smiled at my youthful enthusiasm; but his look of painful reflection quickly returned.

"Dorr, I had just such dreams myself, when I was young, and I presume that my father before me had them. I wanted an education, and couldn't have it. Poverty, hard toil and embarrassment seem to be the lot of those who cleave to this soil. God knows, I wish things might be shaped as you wish them; but how to contrive it I do not know."

His hoe dropped from his hand, and his eyes sought the ground. I chanced to look down toward the river road and I saw a man in a buggy stop at our gate. A woman, my mother, of course, as there was none other about the house, came to the door. There was a brief parley; then the man got out, hitched the horse, climbed the fence and strode over the upland toward us.

Perhaps my frame of mind just then inclined me toward a presentiment. Perhaps the reader will say that it is always easy to predict after the fact. No matter; the fact remains the same that a sudden and decided conviction was forced upon me that this stranger was to have a positive influence upon my life, and that his presence here at this time was of itself a promise of great results for me.

He walked rapidly, removing his wide-brimmed palm-leaf hat and wiping his brow with a large red handkerchief as he came. He was tall, powerful of frame and florid of face; and I observed that there was something about this color, hardly a tan, that I at once attributed to the sun of another latitude than this. Every detail of his person and dress I took in at once; my attention was certainly sharpened by the presentiment I have mentioned. I judged him to be at least fifty years old, though his face was plump and unwrinkled. His features were bold and handsome; there was a twinkle to his eye and an ever-recurring smile upon his face that made him seem the most charming of men. Short curls of chestnut hair ran all over his head. His dress was rich in material and fashionable in cut; diamonds were in his shirt-front, and an immense solitaire sparkled on one of his little fingers.

He came up within a few feet of me, and paused. My father had thus far not seen him at all; he was absorbed in his revery. The stranger looked from me to him, and spoke in a round, hearty voice:

"Well, here we are. My lad, what's your name?"

"Dorr Jewett, sir."

"Is that your father?"

"Yes, sir."

He walked over to my abstracted sire and bestowed such a hearty thwack

"WHAT'S YOUR NAME?" "DORR JEWETT, SIR."

upon his shoulders that he jumped to his feet.

"Well, Amos, how are you, anyway?"

My father looked at the laughing face before him, and was disarmed of all anger. But his memory was not reinforced.

"Really, sir," he said, "you have the advantage of me."

"I am Pierce Bostock."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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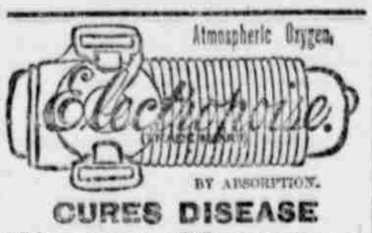

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