

SUNDAY CALL

MAGAZINE SECTION

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FROM SOCIETY SWELL TO PAUPER



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WHO would believe that in such a place as the Alameda County Infirmary—I give it its dignified name for the sake of the man whose story I am going to tell—there are lives that read like a novel, romances that put modern fiction writers to shame.

Here in this most pathetic and sordid of places, is a man who, though living among the fetid and jettison of humanity, is yet apart from them as much as a lone pine is above the brush and chaparral at its base.

A gentleman by birth, education and environment, he has known and had the very best life has to offer. He has not merely tasted, but drained life's most royal pleasures; now he drains the dregs. The hero and applauded favorite of the hour, the curtain now rises down on this sad scene, this pathetic ending of his life's drama.

It is almost incredible; more like a tale out of the "Arabian Nights" than anything else, but it is as true as truth itself, for there are letters and positive vouchers for his history.

I must confess that "pitiful but uninteresting" was my verdict on first looking around the institution. Like the generality of us, I saw things as they seemed, not as they were, until I followed the advice of the chief in charge to chat with So-and-so, or get old Somebody else's experiences if I wanted an interesting hour or so.

I had only to see and speak with this man a very few moments to believe his story. You can always tell "de quality," as the old Southern negroes call it, wherever you see it—even in a county infirmary.

Many a San Francisco society man who considers himself par excellence could take a lesson from this gentleman's perfect courtesy and charm of manner.



"COME, WE WILL BE INTRODUCED TO MON PRINCE."

This man's eventful life. I could see behind the mask and read the turmoil of his soul.

"Bohemians? Ah, yes! Bohemians, truly," the smile that accompanied the pause did not make it appear that being a Bohemian had caused him any anguish.

Two of his companions in Bohemia were none other than the Jim Fisk and Ned Stokes whose little affair was the sensation of the hour and which is plainly remembered to-day. The "Prince of Wales" knowing them personally and intimately, gave me all the little details of the affair.

"Jim Fisk had done a great deal for Stokes both in a commercial and social way. They were very good friends, but he made his fatal mistake when he presented Stokes to his 'chere amie'—you understand—to Josephine Mansfield.

"What a beautiful woman she was, probably the most beautiful woman of her day. Seeing her picture in the paper the other day recalled it all so vividly.

"Well, Fisk became jealous—very much so—and he had no cause to grow less so as time passed. Finally he had his opportunity for revenge. He had Stokes arrested suddenly one morning when he could get no bail for some supposedly dishonest commercial transaction. Three of us, I do not give the names, but they are leading lights in commercial and social New York to-day, were going into Delmonico's that morning, when we were accosted with 'Have you heard the news?' The nephew of the great restaurateur, by the way was the one to ask us. 'No,' we said, 'what is it?' 'Stokes is in jail!' 'Some of Fisk's doings then,' we replied.

"Well, that morning we all went down to commiserate with poor Stokes and when we reached there found Josephine Mansfield already there. She was, 'he paused and smiled, 'Ah, well, I will not say it—yes! Well, pardon me, sitting on his lap.

"Stokes made the remark then that he would get even with Fisk, and as

he said it pulled a tin box that was on the table toward him and drew out two derringers, Miss Mansfield making a remark to the effect that she would help him.

"He watched his opportunity and it came as all opportunities will.

"Stokes preceded Fisk to the hotel and met him at the head of the stairs as Fisk was coming up. Fisk saw him and knew. 'Don't shoot,' he called. Stokes did not act on his advice but shot with fatal accuracy. Josephine, though, was a very pronounced woman—very.

"Fisk had a magnificent establishment, beautiful. I had the—well, privilege of saving the life of one of his ladies at Long Branch. She went beyond her depth and was not a sufficiently expert swimmer to battle with the waves. Being near at the time and something of a swimmer myself, I was able to give her assistance. Fisk was very grateful and said—but we will let that pass.

"It is simply impossible to give an idea of this man's charming manner in conversation. The refined language, the perfectly turned French phrases and expressions, and his gracious and deferential air of courtesy showing the polished gentleman in every word and gesture.

And such he was and is. The son of one of the first families of England he was educated at Westley, in Sheffield, Yorkshire, and is a fellow of that college.

It was about this time that his father, an extensive steel manufacturer, conferred with Bessemer for the purpose of giving theories for a new and perfected method of manufacturing steel. It is an absolute but hitherto unknown fact that the process which made Bessemer famous was not his own idea, but bought from another and this other the father of the man now among the poor dependents of a charity hospital.

"Bessemer, my father and several noted men were dining together," he told it as the "Prince" gave it. "My father turned to Bessemer with the remark that he (Bessemer) must be watched, that another would some day

add something to the perfection of the process. Bessemer paid men in general and inventors in particular the flattering compliment of saying that no one could surpass his knowledge of this subject. To which my father replied that he would like to continue the subject with him later in the evening.

"After dinner Bessemer and he had a quiet conference, when my father told Bessemer there was one great feature which he (Bessemer) had overlooked and which would be the perfecting point of the process, namely: an increase of temperature by the means which he (my father) only knew.

"And that?" said Bessemer.

"That requires a quid pro quo," replied my father.

"And what might that quid pro quo be?" asked Bessemer.

"That I shall be sole representative of the interest in the States."

"To this Bessemer agreed as a foregone conclusion—and it was then my father revealed the process, which has made steel what it has been and is to-day."

The first steel rails for the New York Central to the amount of a million and more dollars were sold to the Vanderbilts by this man's father, and such men as the Rothschilds and the first men of England were his associates and friends.

With more money than probably was best for him the "Prince" finished his college career and began to "see life" in London.

It is here the tragedy begins—the cen-

ter of the plot around which the story of his life is woven. It was the usual "woman in the case"—a woman of highest social standing and wealth, young, beautiful but—the wife of another—a man of title and limitless wealth, but tottering with age.

"Time might have righted all things for this woman and her lover and the latter's story had been totally different from what it is, had the "Prince" not had a brother jealous of the father's love for this younger son of the house.

An undercurrent of scandal doubtless stirred London society while it held its breath and awaited developments—but it was the brother who made it apparent to the father that his son had disgraced the family, that it was due their sacred honor to turn him from house and home.

Four hours were given him to leave—three of the four were spent with his "chere amie" and plans successfully made for a meeting in the States—but not successfully carried out. The usual discovery scene and seven days' excitement—then it all died out and the hero of the tale—well, life has a varied assortment of sides and some must see them all.

With a generous income from the home estate, his reward of merit for keeping away, and an easy as well as highly remunerative position with one of the largest houses in the city, he began to taste New York life.

Handsome, fascinating, polished, of blue blood and large income and a little spice of history to make the whole in-

teresting, he hadn't the slightest trouble in stepping into the innermost seclusion of New York's extra-extra-Bohemian, society leader, good fellow, there was nothing New York had to offer that he did not enjoy.

It was he who, when the real Prince of Wales visited this country, introduced the New York society belles to him at the great ball given in his honor at the Academy of Music. Or to give it as Mr. Congreve told it in his gracefully reminiscent way—and Mr. Congreve lingers over his reminiscences with an air of gentle tenderness and interested absorption that is very pleasant to watch.

"It was at this magnificent reception and ball—for it was truly magnificent, the greatest beauty and wealth of New York were there—I chanced to be surrounded by a gay company of debutantes and fair ones—you will pardon the seeming egotism—I said to them, 'Come, we will be introduced to mon Prince.' So together we made our way to where the Prince was standing. Presenting myself first to the Duke of Newcastle, whom I knew and who was traveling with the Prince, really his chaperon, the Prince being very young at the time—I said to him by way of compliment, I wish to present to you some of 'the fair buds that grow on American soil.'

"Ah," the Duke said, including them all in his admiring glance and bow, 'Such honor is not for me; a greater is due such beauty and loveliness—we will present them to the Prince.'

"And turning to the Prince he said, 'Mr. Congreve would prove to you what just—since America has to be the most envied of nations.'

"Ah, but they were as beautiful women as one could find the world over. No wonder the Prince said to me months later in the evening that he had never seen such charm and loveliness—and I doubt if he has seen greater since, with all his breadth of travel," said Mr. Congreve's face.

"Mack Emmett, son of Judge Emmett—you have heard of him?—and I led a german of a hurried couple at the Ocean House, Newport, when german first came in vogue.

"Many a german I led for Mrs. Vanderbilt—but she was a good friend—she always called me by my Christian name, Walter, and I came and went freely at her home.

"It was at Mrs. Vanderbilt's I first met and admired Elizabeth Clark, Libbie Clark as she was more familiarly known. She was beautiful, beautiful. Many and many a time Miss Clark and I had together—germans, balls, dinners. I became an intimate at her home and we—sweethearts. But her mother grew ill and finally died. Afterward I noticed her sadness, that seemed something more than her mother's death. Finally I questioned her and asked that I might end her troubles by sharing them—that we should marry.

"She threw herself into my arms sobbing—how well I remember that day—every detail, the room, she so beautiful and lovable—'Walter,' she said, 'I promised mother on her deathbed to marry Mr. Bradford and I cannot break my promise—and she did not!'

The pause that followed was unbroken—it was like standing by a grave where words are useless, uncalled for, for whatever Mr. Congreve's life may have had of wrong, there at least he worshipped as at a shrine.

"Mr. Bradford? he was also a great friend of the family—old enough to be her father. She was unhappy, poor girl. Either Mr. Bradford knew of her promise to her mother and realized the real cause of her unhappiness, or he comprehended nothing, for many times after their marriage I was Libbie's escort to balls until once he himself asked me to escort his wife to a german.

"Bradford? I said, 'I will lead the german with your wife, will dance with her, but don't you think you had better take her yourself now?'

"He took the hint, I cared enough to—but that is en passant.

"Long Branch was gay, Newport delightful, but it was at Staten Island that perhaps we had the most truly pleasant time. You have heard of Mrs. Bonnat, the famous singer—the Countess di Rossi? She was a charming friend. And sing ah, but she could sing! She had a cottage at Staten Island. It was a colony of talent—Mrs. Bonnat, the leader of grand opera, and others had cottages there only a short distance from Commodore Vanderbilt's place."

The father and son often met and were reconciled and the father's love and advice kept him from folly, but he himself worded it: "I needed a mother's love—a mother's gentle influence—if I had had that I might not have been the Bohemian and wanderer I have been."

But the end of gay New York came at last.

"I was in the cricket field one day, together with Lester Wallack, the actor—you know the name—Lord P—and others, when a message came to me to come at once to England, my father was dying. I boarded the first steamer and reached home just in time. My father was paralyzed, unable to speak, but he seemed struggling to say something to me—but he never did."

The father dead, the older son in power, the annuity cut off, California beckoned invitingly as a new and untried field—but little by little commenced the beginning of the end. With loss of hope, loss of ambition and self-respect the curtain will ring down some day and this little play be over.

H. B. PERKINS.