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Creole and Puritan

A Character Study in Three Parts.

By T. C. DE LEON.

PART II.—IS THE SOUTH.

The proud head drooped in deep and motionless reverie; the little glove still held in the battle-brown but delicate hand.

So deep was the man's thought that he heard nothing of an opening door on the gallery behind him, of a woman's step upon the walk, or the rustling of her train on the fallen orange leaves.

Developed in the fullest splendor of womanhood, she was still little and graceful enough for girlishness, the perfect neck and rounded arms glittering with diamonds, and the whole toilet—Fountain costume—combining coquetry and taste.

"So this is our general's excuse for delay! I must be hours late at the balls, while he plays mountebank among the people. Di done, Monsieur Pierrot!"

"Come, Dale," she said, "give me credit, and I'll offer two pennies for the thoughts—Merciful heaven!"

The rich satin draperies crumpled back against the tree, and the little hands clinched tightly over the heavy bust. For, at the first words he heard, the Creole had stooped forward, thrust the soiled glove into his breast, and then turned full to the speaker.

"So this is Dale's expensive toy?" he muttered. "Truly he pays well for it in silks and diamonds! Confound the jade! I'm sorry she caught me mooning, though. I wonder if she saw."

"That's all right," she answered, "but I don't mind if you see her. She'll be here in half a minute." The woman's voice was lower than before.

"Where you have never been, pretty Creole," he answered, all the lightness in the words, none in the voice. "On the cold banks of a northern river, where one woman's act killed the future of two men and her own honor as well!"

"Oh, God!" he groaned in bitterness of soul, "this cursed war has passed over our country like a blight. It has dried up the springs of honor in men, poisoned the fountains of purity in women!"

broke on the night-scene floating to those two under the orange trees.

For some seconds the woman stared at him in dumb wonderment. Suddenly she recoiled as if he had struck her with his fist; surprise, horror and contempt sweeping over her face. She dropped her eyes, but held out her hands to him, entreating piteously:

"Adrien, you must hear!"—"He broke in almost brutally. "Get up! Get up!" he cried hoarsely, "or you will force me to do what I never feared before—insult a woman!"

"There was no mistaking the tone, even had the mere words been less plain. Instantly her face changed. The hard, proud look rose to it and set there. Without another glance at him, Adrien's old love turned her back upon him and, drawing her rich robes about her, passed under the orange trees out of his sight."

"Adrien, you must hear!"—"He broke in almost brutally. "Get up! Get up!" he cried hoarsely, "or you will force me to do what I never feared before—insult a woman!"

"For a full minute he stood still as though carved in stone. Then he dropped upon the seat, the proud head buried in his hands, with the wry cry: "Fallen! and through him!"

"I just missed her. Arnold says she"—

"At the touch the Creole had sprung to his feet, his face full in the moonlight. Something in that face cut off speech as a thunderclap might. It was marble calm, but the set lips and the ugly gleam in the eyes there was no mistaking. The cold steel ring in the voice nullified the air upon the startled, palpitating face before him."

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PART III.—UNDER SHADOW OF THE SPHINX.

CHAPTER I.

OLD FRIENDS IN NEW PLACES.



Latour started forward and grasped Lord Martindale's hand.

One of those delicious December afternoons, only dreamed of elsewhere, but common under Egyptian skies, was setting down over Cairo.

Warm, soft and hazy as the "Indian summer" of America, the day was dropping half reluctantly in the lap of night. The red globe of the sun hung low over the distant desert across the Nile, its ever shifting and waves motionless now, under the light breeze, and the refreshing moisture of night beginning already to creep into the air.

Far to the southwest showed the dimming line of the Mokattam hills, while away toward sunset rose the tall cones of the pyramids; the Sphinx a grave and silent sentinel thrown forward in advance. Between them and the city the immemorial Nile sent her current racing to the sea, low now and curving like a silver serpent between retreating banks fringed with tall topped palm trees and dotted with splendid balconies.

Within the city sights and sounds began to make themselves known which ever shone the day in this strange land; for day is dull and still in Egypt to all save those unfortunate who need to toil call into activity; and there, by the fiat of climate, only night lives.

Central in El-Kahirah, the victorious city, is the great grove, public park, covering several acres and known as the Ezekiel. Ancient—for what is young in this land which makes Antiquity herself look new—and unique, too, this common breathing place of all the mixed races combines the gaiety of the Bois de Boulogne with the chaffering of the Bovey. About this great open park group the principal hotels and many residences of the better class of European population, occasional palaces rearing their lofty domes among them.

Over one of these, at the gateway of which an armed soldier walked his post, in place of the usual bowser or porrier floated the crescent flag of the Sublime Porte; for the semi-sovereignty of Egypt, under the firm granting its powers, is permitted to separate flag and its spacious court yard and garden was stabling and grooming space for a cavalry detachment, the lower range of rooms being used for offices and barracks.

In the main apartment above, stretched upon a divan and enjoying the long, deep whiffs from his narghileh, reclined an officer of the army of the Khedive Ismail Pasha, for that luxurious grandson of a warrior grandeur—Mehemet Ali, "the Lion of Islam"—now held the reins of a government almost independent of Stamboul. This soldier's little but powerful frame was half hidden in the full folds of pajamas of India silk; but the languid pose and femininity of dress were negated by the clear, strong lines of a face out of which flashed his eyes, restless and defiant even in his reverie. The thick, short black hair, touched with white about the temples, proclaimed him a Christian, spite of the red fez lying near upon the cushion, and the features were those of a Frank, though their warthy olive denied his being English.

Even an old acquaintance might have needed a second glance to recognize in Latour the Creole youth so famed for many a prowess at West Point a decade gone. Yet Time had set no special pressure of his signet on him, spite of the light snow round his brow and the stray white threads marking the drooping, straggling locks which the drop of straw something which indurates characteristics, impressing the inner upon the outer man; that something which whippers, even through casual expression and movement, that the man has lived.

shirt from a brown, sinewy arm, and took his sword from Arnold.

Then, in the calm moonlight sifted through the oranges, the friends of boyhood looked into each other's eyes as men look when they kill. The even skill, that years gone had been the wonder of West Point, was now to leave its deadly test. The sabers crossed, shivered the moonlight into silvery spray, from feint and thrust and parry. And the giddy song of the maskers, nearer and more gay, swelled in the chorus of a wild scream, as Bennie Standish flew from the distant shadows toward the combatants.

At the same instant, Everett's sabre—made by contract for other work than this—sifted at the hilt, flying ten yards away.

Before the fragment touched the ground, the Creole had stepped back one pace and grounded his point, just as the terrified woman fell between them in a dead faint.

For an instant Latour stood like a statue. Then he said to Capt. Arnold: "The general does not demand another sword. His life is his. Please say to your commander, captain, that if he desires to have the rebel arrested he must do so before the dawn. For your service to me, thank!"

Dale answered nothing—seemed to hear nothing. He was bending over the prostrate woman as tenderly as though not deadly combat had ever known him. With a courteous salute to the young captain Adrien Latour put on his hideous mask and passed from the garden into the shadows of the street.

"More of these cursed English!" Latour added to himself in French, as he rose and strode about the room. "More boredom with titled donkeys, all whiskers and eyeglasses, and frowsy old red faced dogwags! Non du diable! why cannot his highness keep them within the light of his own face! It is bad enough to command his black soldiers and train his infidel officers! Not much better than if I had taken the oath and applied for a nigger regiment! But this bear leading for John Bull is worse! I'd rather, ten to one, have the Sheik Abon-All refuse to pay the tribute, and be sent to squeeze it out of his black hide. Ah! Ahmed's escort back? Perhaps I may!"

With a smile at his own warmth over a trifling the Creole changed his mood, walking calmly to the window that overlooked the court below. The clatter of hoofs and challenge of the guard had died away; and he saw a handsome young officer dismount, give an order to his sergeant and, as the troopers of the escort rode off, disappear under the portal. The next instant, preceded by the orderly, he entered the chamber and saluted.

"Well, captain," Latour queried in French, "what did the sheik answer?"—"Literally nothing, colonel," the other answered in the same tongue. "We smoked many pipes and drank much vile coffee, under his tent at Minieh, and we also paid many compliments. Sheik Abon-All spoke most loyally of his highness; but I could only induce him to promise to send a trusted messenger of his own to Cairo with a letter regarding the tribute."

Turk of influential family, young, talented and soldierly. One of the young Egyptians sent to Europe by Said Pasha for education, his tastes were Parisian rather than oriental. He was Latour's adjutant, and more nearly his friend than any native officer.

"But you know these Arabs, colonel," Ahmed added. "From our conference I have no idea that the sheik will pay the tribute."

"Then we will doubtless be sent to bring it," Latour answered. "It will be a pleasant change from garrison routine, captain. But you have a hard ride, and need food and rest."

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