THE STOLEN TREATY.

By RICHARD MARSH.

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I.

THE position of confidential agent, which the Hon Augustus Champnell came to occupy in high political circles, was owing, in the first place, in no slight degree to his handling of the case of the Stolen Treaty.

When he reached the British foreign office—within five minutes of his receiving the note requesting his attendance—he was at once ushered into the presence of the then foreign secretary, Viscount Horsham. The viscount thanked the Hon. Augustus for his prompt attendance, reminded him that his father, the Earl of Glenkan, was an old schoolfollow of his own, then, at once, proceeded to the business in hand.

"The fact is, Mr. Champnell, the copy of a treaty—indeed, the treaty itself—which, for the present at least, is of a confidential character, and which we have negotiated with the government of Mexico, has been stolen from this office, from underneath my very nose."

Mr. Champnell looked what, possibly, he might not have felt—surprised.

"Have you no suspicion, my lord, of who the thief is?"

"That, Mr. Champnell, is the delicate part of the position. We have not only a suspicion, we have something which approaches a certainty."

The Hon. Augustus bowed. As yet he did not clearly understand.

Leaning toward Mr. Champnell across the table, the viscount lowered his voice.

"We have only too much reason to believe that the thief is the plenipotentiary from Panama."

The Hon. Augustus began to see the viscount's drift.

"In that case, I presume, you desire not so much the detection of the thief as the recovery of the treaty?"

"Exactly—you have hit it on the head. As you are, of course, aware, we could not arrest the man even if we wished; he is protected by his office. But, apart from our disability, we desire to avoid a scandal. He is accredited to us as Don Joaquim de Coronads—which, by the way, we have again reason to believe has not always been his name."

Pausing, the viscount exchanged with Mr. Champnell a glance which was full of meaning.

"We have cause to suspect that he has not stolen the treaty for his own use, but with a view of selling or otherwise disposing of it to the plenipotentiary from Caracas. You have no notion, Mr. Champnell, what curious representatives are sometimes sent to us by South American states."

"So I should imagine."

The viscount raised his hands.

"Indeed! The name of the plenipotentiary from Caracas is Don Martinez Sutierrez. I will merely observe that while he speaks Spanish, and indeed, for the matter of that, English also, with a marked German-American accent, his colleague, de Coronads, speaks, practically, no language but English—and that with a strong Irish-American accent. The stolen treaty contains a clause having a particular personal reference to Sutierrez, and to affairs in which he is personally interested. He, no doubt, suspecting the existence of this clause, and being conscious of the vital necessity of his obtaining early and exact knowledge of its purport, has instigated de Coronads, who is a personal friend of his own, to get it into his possession."

The viscount stopped. The Hon. Augustus considered.

"I suppose there is no doubt that de Coronads did steal the treaty?"

"Unfortunately, none whatever. The impudence of the act was not the least amazing part of it. I assure you, between ourselves, Mr. Champnell, that neither gentleman is an individual who is at all likely to stick at trifles. The treaty had been returned by the Queen. The Panama and Caracas plenipotentiaries, suddenly arriving together, requested, in a somewhat blustering fashion, an immediate interview. They were shown in to me. The interview was of a not altogether pleasant kind. Toward the close of it Sutierrez drew me aside into the bow-window there, under the pretext of saying something to me in confidence. While I was standing with him, I actually saw de Coronads fingering the papers on my table. But it was not till after he had gone that I discovered that it was the treaty with Mexico that the scoundrel had stolen. It was as impudent and as barefaced a robbery as I ever heard of."

"When did this take place?"

"Not an hour ago."

"So recently. Then, in that case, there is a possibility of the contents of the treaty not having yet been communicated to Sutierrez."

"There is, as you say, a possibility, but it is a slight one. He is only too well aware of the necessity of receiving early information."

"What sort of a man is de Coronads personally?"

"A man of about forty-five, with black hair and whiskers—an impudent-looking fellow. Very big and very broad; possessed, I should think, of the strength of a Hercules. As Irish-looking a Spaniard as I ever saw—or heard."

"And Sutierrez?"

"He is about the same age, tall and thin, with fair hair and mustache, a shifty, disagreeable manner, and a dry, sarcastic fashion of speech; as German a Spaniard as his friend is Irish. To be frank with you, Mr. Champnell, I take it that both men are natives of Europe who have resided for many years in the United States, who have obtained the positions which they now hold during the recent political convulsions in Panama and Caracas, and who, for men in such positions, have about as bad a record as men very well could have."

"Where does de Coronads live?"

"In very modest fashion in Chepstow Villas, Notting Hill. Sutierrez lives in better style in Westbourne Terrace. I take it that neither man is well-to-do. They are adventurers, who have come to England in the hope of being able to recruit their own finances at the expense of the finances of their adopted countries. A good many diplomatists come from South America on precisely the same errand. Fortunately, not all of them adopt the same means to attain their ends which de Coronads has done. If the government of Mexico learns that Sutierrez has gained access to the contents of the treaty, we may have serious trouble."

The Hon. Augustus rose, as if to go.

"Well, Mr. Champnell, what do you propose to do?"

"To recover for you the stolen treaty."

"You understand, that, to be of any service, it must be recovered at once. I may mention that the treaty is drawn up in Spanish, and that, as de Coronads' knowledge of that language, like Sam Weller's knowledge of London, is peculiar, we, for our part, shall be content if it is returned to us before it reaches Sutierrez."

"I understand." The Hon. Augustus went to the door. He stood for a moment toying inside the crown of his hat. "May I take it, my lord, that, in the judgment of the foreign office, there are occasions on which the ends justifies the means?"

Viscount Horsham looked sharply up; then down again.

"That is a point on which I, personally, am unable to express an opinion. Don Joaquim de Coronads seems to think so." He began to play with a paper-knife. "You understand that we must decline to accept any responsibility in matters which I would call extraneous."

"Precisely. I quite understand."

The Hon. Augustus left the room. When he was gone the viscount murmured to himself and smiled.

"I should not be surprised if Mr. Champnell meditates a piece of daring chivalry to match de Coronads' own."

The foreign secretary was right—the Hon. Augustus did.

II.

As Viscount Horsham had said, the plenipotentiary from Panama lived, in modest fashion, at Notting Hill—for a plenipotentiary in very modest fashion indeed. To be plain, the Panama Embassy took the shape of lodgings; a sitting and dining-room on the ground floor, and a bedroom overhead; and the rent of the Panama Embassy was a little in arrears.

Don Joaquim de Coronads had just finished dinner—and not a very sumptuous dinner either. Nothing could have been simpler than the usual conduct of the establishment of the Panama Embassy, except the manners of the plenipotentiary. Panama was the very newest thing in South American republics, and it seemed doubtful if it would survive its novelty. The plenipotentiary himself was beginning to incline to the opinion that it would not. As he put his feet on the table, and lit his cigar, and examined the whisky which was left in the bottle, his mood was gloomy.

"If some dollars don't come along pretty soon, I'll have to skip. This embassy business is a failure—it is that! Here's my salary four months overdue; and it's no use me telegraphing, because I don't get no answer. I'd have done better to have run for President, though they wouldn't have had me if I had."

Don Joaquim de Coronads poured some whisky into a glass.

"I ought to have done what Gustav's done—taken a block in Westbourne Terrace, and made things hum. I wouldn't have had so much difficulty in getting into debt. No one's going to trust an embassy what's located in these rooms. Gustav owes thousands. Fifty would see me through, and it's likely to. A sorrowful man I am to have to say it."

Don Joaquim de Coronads thrust his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat. He puffed at his cigar as he pondered.

"It's a comfort I laid my hand on that there darned treaty. It was a bold stroke, so it was! Gustav'll sit up when he knows, though he suspicioned me directly we got outside the room. He'll have to pay before he has a peep at it, the mean-sowled German thief. I thought I'd have a peep at it, first of all, myself; I did. But the blamed thing's writ in Spanish; and it's tarnation little I know of my natural tongue. That's the worst of not being a native of your own country. I'll have another try at it now, I will. I may find out a trifle of what it means by guessing."

Don Joaquim de Coronads removed his thumbs from his waistcoat armholes, his feet from the table, and was about to rise, leisurely, to a perpendicular position, when a cord was thrown over him from behind, twisted, with very considerable dexterity and rapidity, two or three times round him, and, before he had woke to a reality of the situation, he found himself tied to his chair. In front of him stood a tall man, who was attired in a long dark ulster—which he kept well turned up about his ears—and a long soft felt hat. This gentleman was pointing the barrel of a revolver directly at Don Joaquim's face.

When he had recovered from his not unnatural astonishment, Don Joaquim addressed the new-comer as if he knew him.

"This is friendly, Gustav, to drop in on me, through the window, in this unexpected kind of way—upon my conscience, so it is."

The new-comer replied with that curious twang in his speech which is characteristic of a certain type of German-American.

"You think so, Mr. Timothy O'Rourke, eh?"

Don Joaquim looked about him, with a startled air.

"Ssh! You've left the window open. Maybe some one will be hearing. Haven't I asked you to forget to remember the O'Rourke?"

"And have I not asked you to remember that I am Martinez Sutierrez, Mr. Timothy O'Rourke?—Blathering Tim, Soapy-mouthed Pat, or whatever you call yourself, you dirty Irishman—eh?"

Don Joaquim regarded his visitor with what seemed to be increasing astonishment.

"You've a friendly way of speaking, Gustav, so you have. And might I trouble you to tell me what's the meaning of your coming through the window? Wasn't there a door? And have you taken off your feet, that I never heard you tread on them? Is it a trifle of a game you're having with the best friend you ever had—to tie him to his chair?"

"You behaved to me like a true friend this afternoon—eh?"

"Is it about the treaty you're meaning?"

"What about the treaty—eh?"

"I'll be honest with you, Gustav, as I always am. I lied to you this afternoon when I said I hadn't taken it, so I did. I slipped it into a pocket in my coat which has come in handy more than once or twice before. I don't know how I came to lie to you; I done it before I thought; but I meant to let you have it in the morning, and that's the truth!"

"Then you won't mind my having it now, eh?"

"Not the least bit in the world. Why should I? It was for you I stole it. You're welcome."

Don Joaquim stopped. He looked at the other as if he expected—and hoped—that he would give him some kind of a cue. But his visitor was silent. Don Joaquim's tone became unctuously wheedling.

"It's you who won't forget to give his friend a trifle to recompense him for the trouble which he took."

"Is there—is there any reference to that—affair of mine?"

"You mean in the treaty? And that's what I myself would like to know. I'll be frank with you. I've been spelling of it through; but it's a tricky lingo is the one which I'm supposed to be speaking, and they've hashed it up in a fashion which makes it worse than ever, so that devil a word can I understand at all, at all."

"Where is it?"

"Now, Gustav, there's a word of business I'd like to have with you before we reach the pleasure."

"Where is it?"

"You're handy with the barker, Gustav, and there's a friendly something in your tone which is new, but what I'm after knowing is what you're going to give me."

"If you don't tell me where that treaty is inside of sixty seconds I'll give you the contents of six barrels."

"Oh, no, you won't. I'm not afraid. This isn't a country in which shooting's free, and you know it. This isn't Caracas or one of them happy hunting grounds, but a mean-spirited, low-down place where you have to pay for every drop of whisky you put your lips to. Steady, Gustav! Keep yourself to yourself. Don't you start to overhaul the Panama secret archives—and keep your hands off my tobacco box. That desk's where I keep my cigars. If you're smoking, blaze away at weeds of your own. Steady, I say! Don't you think that because you've tied your friend to his chair that you're going to rob him to suit yourself. If you lay a finger on what isn't yours—and there's nothing here that is—I'll holler. And if I holler I'll raise glory, and there'll be trouble for the plenipotentiary from Caracas. D'ye hear me? Hi—hi!"

Regardless of Don Joaquim's remonstrances the other was proceeding to treat the contents of the room as if they were his own, when the Plenipotentiary opened his mouth with intent to carry out his threat of "hollering." On which the stranger behaved in a really surprising manner. Taking the helpless de Coronads by the throat with one hand, with the other he slipped something over his nose and mouth, which he held there in spite of his victim's struggles. Don Joaquim writhed and twisted. His body stiffened on his chair as if seized with a sudden convulsion, then went limp, and then was still. If it had not been for the cords which held him in place, he would have fallen to the floor. His arms dangled loosely at his sides, his head hung forward on his chest, his breath came in stertorous, unnatural gasps, then seemed to cease. For the representative of a great nation the Plenipotentiary from Panama presented as undignified a spectacle as could be very well conceived. He had been chloroformed.

III.

It was a little later in the evening. The Plenipotentiary from Caracas called to see his colleague from Panama. He showed himself upstairs in the informal fashion which obtained in the diplomatic circles in which he had been wont to move. He even turned the handle of his colleague's door without troubling to announce his arrival.

"Dim, are you busy—eh?" He paused for an appreciable instant to remove the cigar from between his lips. There was no answer. "No? Right! I gome in."

He went in—to stare in amazement at what he saw.

"What—what in dunder! Drunk? Already? What a man!"

A further examination caused doubts to cross his mind.

"He does not look as if he was drunk. I did not dink dere was enough drink in de world to make Dim O'Rourke so drunk as dis; dere is not enough money in Banama to bay for it. Died? Died to his chair? What in dunder? Dere is—dere is a little game here. Ah! He wakes! Dat is better."

A slight convulsive movement passed over Don Joaquim's body. His limbs twitched. There seemed to be a slight attempt at respiration. His colleague observed these signs with interest; he treated him to a gentle shaking.

"Dim, you are awake? No? All right; you will be soon. Berhaps if I were to dake away dis cord it would be as well. Dere is someding here a liddle funny. We shall see. My dear life, it is so dight dis cord, it is a wonder it has not cut him half in two. Do cut it is de best."

The Plenipotentiary from Caracas took a penknife from his pocket—a really serviceable article, with a blade some seven or eight inches long. He cut the cord at Don Joaquim's back with but a touch from its razor-like edge. So sudden, indeed, was the parting of the strands, and the captive's consequent release, that before Don Martinez was prepared for such an eventuality, the Plenipotentiary from Panama tumbled face forward on to the floor. The tall, collected-looking gentleman, with the cigar between his teeth and the gleaming steel in his hand, showed no sign of being distressed by this untoward little incident.

"Dat do him good; shake him up; rouse his sluggish liver."

Something seemed to have done him good. Either the release from galling bondage or the shock of the tumble. Or, perhaps, the effects of the drug were wearing off. At any rate, so soon as he reached the floor he began to show signs of objecting to the position in which he lay. Presently he rolled over on to his back, and finally raised himself to a sitting posture. Looking about him with not unnatural bewilderment, he pressed both palms to his throbbing temples.

"The holy saints! And if there's another head like mine I'd like to see the man as carries it upon his shoulders."

"A liddle ill—eh, Dim?"

Don Joaquim twisted round his head with a degree of celerity which suggested that he had already proceeded some distance on the road to recovery.

"You're still there? You're still there?"

"To be sure. Where would I be if not near my friend when he's in a liddle trouble—eh?"

"By the—by the living jingo, you're a—you're a curiosity. Standing there as cool and calm as if it wasn't straight from hell you've come."

"Dat so? Still feeling a liddle so-so—eh, Dim?"

"I'm feeling a good deal more than a little so-so, and I'm likely to keep on feeling till I've had a few words with you. It's about my turn to talk. Blessed St. Patrick, the head I've on me!"

The Plenipotentiary from Panama scrambled to his feet. It was a process not altogether unattended with difficulty. When he attained to a perpendicular position he swayed to and fro in a manner which suggested a fresh descent. Don Martinez advanced with the apparent intention of helping him to stand. But the other would have none of him. His friendly design had a restorative effect which was possibly unintended. Don Joaquim swung round on his heels with unexpected agility. With fists clenched he stood and glared at him.

"Keep off! Keep away with you! If you so much as touch me with one of your dirty fingers I'll prove to you that I am still a man."

"You're more than a man, my Dim."

"Snigger! Let the sneers slip off the tongue of you! I'm laughing! Maybe you'll be before this meeting rises. Stand where you are."

"I'm standing."

"Then keep standing."

The Plenipotentiary from Panama, with a step which was still a little uncertain, moved toward the door. He turned the key; took it from the lock; placed it in his pocket. His colleague observed him with cigar held between his fingers.

"For what do you lock the door, Dim?"

"To keep you from going through it. Maybe, this time, it was through the door you came, for a change."

"It is generally through the door that I do gome."

"Except when you come through the window."

"Just so. Except. But that is not often. It is some time since I game through a window."

"About an hour ago—or it may be two. You sausage-faced Dutchman, why, it's still gaping!"

One of the windows was wide open. He closed it with an amount of bang and clatter which was, perhaps, a little more than was needed.

"It is a liddle joking you are—eh, Dim? A kind of game you have wid me?"

"You've your own notions of a game; by the saints in Paradise, you have!" He clapped both hands to his head. "It may turn out, before we're through, that I have mine. Now, you long-legged blackguard, I'll give you one fair chance. Have you took it?"

"Dook what? De whisky?"

"The whisky to blazes! You know very well what I'm after. None of your fooling."

"It's you who have done all de fooling up do now."

"I'm coming to business soon. Answer me. Have you took the treaty?"

At the mention of the word treaty a slight alteration took place in the other's demeanor. He became more alert; a little eager—a change which was not concealed by the ostentatious air of indifference with which he replaced the cigar between his lips.

"It is you who dook the dready. Yet you dold you did not. I know, positively, dat is a lie."

"Quit it! You've been through that already!"

"Already? When already? It is about dat I have come now."

"And a pretty way you have of coming, by the life of me. I knew you wern't white, but it's learning I am how black you are. You've had your chance. But, since a straight answer's not to be got from a crooked mouth, it's seeing for myself I'll be."

He went to an old-fashioned bureau which stood in a corner of the room. Throwing open the two doors, he began to throw out on to the floor the very miscellaneous contents of one of the shelves. Having reached the end, without lighting on that which he was looking for, he again turned toward his colleague.

"As I'm a live man, you have took it. So it's a thief you are." He continued his researches on another shelf. When he once more faced the other, he had a revolver in his hand. "Now it's me that's got the drop on you. Is it a little target practice I'm to have, or will you be returning of the treaty?"

"You're very drunk—eh, Dim?"

"I'm sober enough to send a splinter of lead through the wooden head of you."

"Dim!"

"Don Martinez made a movement toward the table. The other stopped him.

"Keep where you are. I wouldn't trust you to move half the breadth of one of the hairs off your own head, unless I'd been shooting of you first. I know you for the blackguard that your mother sorrowed for."

"It seems do me dat we're a liddle off de level, you and I. I said, 'Dere is a dready I would like to see.' You replied, 'Very good; I will come wid you. I will dalk to Milord Horsham; you will your dready sdeal.' It durn out de oder way round. I dalk to Milord Horsham, you sdeal de dready—my dready."

"You've stole it from me since. It's you that's the thief; it's no gentleman you are."

"Dim, what are you blaying?"

"I'm playing on the square; it's you that's crooked. You come through that window——"

"I gome drough dat window?"

"You tie me with your dirty cords——"

"I die you? We march."

"Is it denying it you are?"

"I deny noding—noding ad all. Only I beg you do understand dat I see your liddle game. You wish me to suppose de dready is lost; dat you may ask for its broduction a larger brice; not so? Very well, den, what is de figure?"

"You talk to me like that, when it's in your pocket all the time?"

"In my pocket? So! Now, do get it in my pocket; how much?"

"Listen to me, my bonny boy. You came through the window; you tied me to my chair; you monkeyed with your popgun; you took away my senses with the filth you had. Of all these things I'm not now talking; we'll reach them later. But before we come to them you'll hand me back that treaty. Business first, and after that we'll enjoy ourselves as, under the circumstances, two gentlemen should. I'm always ready for a bit of fun."

"You don't sound as if you were drunk, and, somehow, you don't look as if you were drunk. But, if you're sober, den you're a way beyond me. Again I ask you, Dim, what is it you are blaying?"

"I'll talk no more to you! You're in the right line from Judas. Hand me back that treaty before I put a bullet in you."

"You can but a bullet in me if you like, but if you do you will be a fool for your pains. Let me explain. If, as you seem to infer, someone did come drough de window——"

"If! By St. Peter and the Holy Keys, he stands there just saying 'if!'"

"What extraordinary accident can cause you do subbose it was I——"

"Extraordinary accident is what he calls it! I'll tell you what it was; it was my own two eyes. It was them was the extraordinary accident."

"If you'll let me know at what dime you say de oggurrence dook blace——"

"As if he didn't know! The innocence of him! The amazing face."

"I do not know. What it is you're blaying at I don't understand; but I will give you broof, more dan enough, dat I was not out of my house do-night dill I game in here just now."

"I've all the proof I want—my own eyesight. Do you call my two eyes liars? Don't I say I saw you?"

"Drough a glass of whisky—eh, Dim?"

"Hark to me, Mr. Gustav Schneider, or whatever it is you've not pluck enough to call your dirty old Dutch name. I'm not drunk, I'm sober; worse luck for you! I not only saw you, I heard you; I felt you; I smelt you. And that you should stand there, pretending that it wasn't you mishandled me, it's beyond believing, so it is, entirely.

"But that wasn't the worst. I might have forgiven you if you hadn't rammed your filthy muck into my mouth to draw my senses out! Bah! I taste it now; and the stink of it! And then, when I was like a babe unborn for ignorance, to steal from me that which—at the peril of my good name, which is, as you know very well, to me a jewel, and of my liberty, for which in the cause of a friend I care not that—I stole first of all for you, it bangs Banagher—so it does. It's beyond black ingratitude by all the way from here to nowhere—it is that!

"But I've done with you! I've finished! Hand me back that treaty before I fill you up with lead, and I'll return it to the Saxon hound I had it from—the curse of Cromwell on him! Do you hear me? Hand it back, or, when I've counted three I'll fire, and away'll fly the sowl of you. One! I'm pointing at the very middle of your heart. Two! The bullet's marking of the road it's going to cut right through you!"

The plenipotentiary from Panama would doubtless have said "three"—apparently the word was trembling on his lips—only, in the exuberance of his own verbosity he had not allowed for the alertness of his friend. Before the syllable was actually uttered, the plenipotentiary from Caracas, ducking, dashed across the room with the swiftness of some wild creature. Gripping his colleague by the wrist, and jerking up his arm before he had a chance to fire, he repeated his former inquiry:

"What is it you're playing at?"

"Playing, am I? Then, if you will have a game, and it's for diversion you are, it's that I'm playing at."

With his disengaged hand he struck at his friend, who did his best to counter, but without meeting with complete success. Don Martinez received the finish of the blow upon his ear. It did not seem to improve his temper.

"You Irish pig! I'll have your life for dat!"

"Pig is it? Pig, am I? I'll show you the kind of pig I am! You German swine, I'll tear the heart right out of you!"

The plenipotentiary from Panama took his colleague by the throat, and his colleague gripped him round the waist for all he was worth, each putting forth an amount of energy which was hardly suggestive of that perfect amity between the representatives of two great nations which might have been desired by the lovers of international concord.

IV.

Viscount Horsham turned the card over in his hand, as if wondering if there could be anything on the back which might throw light upon the situation.

"Who is it you say wishes to see me?"

"The plenipotentiary from Caracas."

The viscount was silent for an instant.

"I hope I may be excused for remarking that, things being as they are, his visit's rather—surprising. However, I don't know what harm will be done by seeing him. He can hardly propose, already, to display an interest in other of our papers. Tell them to show him in. And, Mr. Daintrey, seat yourself at your own table. This time I'll have a witness, who'll keep an eye upon the plenipotentiary's proceedings."

Presently there entered a tall, thin individual, who spoke with a very curious accent.

"You see, I gome again already. It is about a madder which is a liddle odd. It is about a dready."

The viscount pricked up his ears.

"Indeed."

"Yes, indeed. About de dready with Mexico." His lordship pricked up his ears still more; his visitor spoke with such a very matter-of-fact kind of air. "by a gurious goincidence, yesterday afdernoon, when I go away from here, I find it in my pocket."

"That is singular."

"Dat is right; it was singular. So I gome to redurn it do you now."

He handed the foreign secretary a document which he took from an inner pocket of his coat. His lordship regarded it askance, as if somewhat taken aback by his visitor's truly remarkable presence of mind.

"Do I understand you to say that you discovered its presence in your pocket, directly you went away from here?"

"Dat is so."

"And that you have retained it in your possession ever since?"

"Only since last night, my lord."

The change in the speaker's tone and manner was as sudden as it was striking. The viscount looked up with a start. His visitor had removed something from his head and face. The Minister stared.

"Mr. Champnell!"

"At your lordship's service."

"What on earth is the meaning of this?"

"It means that I have returned the treaty as your lordship desired. I can give you my personal assurance that it has been seen by no one who can comprehend a word of it."

"But—how did it come into your possession?"

"That is one of the matters on which, as your lordship gave me to understand, your office accepts no responsibility."

"I see." The minister looked down. "I hear there has been friction between the plenipotentiaries from Panama and Caracas."

"So I am told."

"Actual violence."

"Very considerable violence."

"Nearly killed each other."

"I believe they would have quite, if the police had not appeared upon the scene in the nick of time."

"That's—odd."

"Very odd."

"I wonder what was the cause of the trouble?"

The minister looked up.

"I associate myself with your lordship's wonder."

The two men exchanged glances. A smile gleamed in the viscount's eyes, and wrinkled the corners of his lips. Mr. Champnell never moved a muscle.

When the visitor had gone the viscount observed to his private secretary: "Daintrey, that's rather a remarkable young man."

"Rather," agreed Mr. Daintrey.

The minister smiled.

Perhaps he was thinking of the "friction" between the plenipotentiaries from Panama and Caracas.

DUTY OF UNCLE GREENMOSS.

Drawing rein at the top of the hill, I sat in the saddle, moodily viewing the prospect; and with a cynicism born of the day's disappointments, recalled the lines:

Tho' ev'ry prospect pleases,
And only man is vile.

For the past week I had been canvassing F—— county in the interest of my friend, Judge L——, a candidate for political honors. Inexperienced in practical politics, I was shocked at finding the ballot regarded as an article of merchandise by the people generally, and as sucn to be disposed of in the most profitable market. Doubtless my cynicism had its origin partly in wounded vanity, for whatever logic, diplomacy and eloquence I was capable of not only failed to abate the mercenary spirit, but was often ludicrously perverted by it. This condition, though at times appealing to one's sense of humor, was particularly irritating among citizens of African descent, and my mission was to them chiefly.

An experienced politician had advised: "Be positive of success; it is the most effective argument you can use with these people." On my way up the hill, having observed a fellow-citizen leaning on his hoe, in a field by the roadside, I expended a half hour in demonstrating to him why the judge was sure of election. My logic savored of prophetic vision, and was so convincing that the listener drawled:

"I'll g'long wid you, kun'l, dough I's heerd dat de oder canderdate's gwine ter spend a pile er money; but you seems so dead sho, I specks yo' man entends ter spend a lot mor'."

To sound the depths of the man's unconscious iniquity, I asked if he had ever heard of reform in politics.

"Suttinly, sah," he replied; "a refo'm canderdates a man dat wants yo' vote fer nuthin'."

Further on I dismounted at a little dwelling whose quaintly pastoral surroundings promised the abode of honest simplicity. I patiently discussed topics of interest to the old black farmer, and in extolling his crops and live stock, improved upon the truth, meanwhile distributing the customary change among his redundant progeny. Mingling this harmless diplomacy with praises of the candidate, I endeavored to produce a state of mind favorable to my purpose.

"A gen'leman dat knows ez much 'bout hawgs ez you does mus' sholy be able ter size up a man," said the old philosopher. "So I's willin' ter take yo' word fer it and wote fer de judge. I knows you entends ter give dat team er mules you made such 'miration 'bout a chance ter 'arn some money hauling woters on 'lection day; an' I's sho' dat a man ez sma't ez you 'scribes de jedge ter be kin get de ole woman's brudder, wid de rheumatiz, dat jan'ter's place at de cou't house."

Thus, irritated by constantly stumbling over the outcroppings of this mercenary vein, I reached the hilltop overlooking the scene of my futile labors—futile because Judge L—— was running on the reform ticket, and it would appear inconsistent for him to openly bribe voters; besides, what is more to the point, he was not a wealthy man. The sight of a little cabin on the ridge opposite me, the home of honest old Uncle Greenmoss, suggested a means of relief. I knew he possessed considerable influence among his people in the neighborhood, and for the sake of old times would take an interest in my difficulties. His denunciatory style of eloquence would probably be far more effective than any effort of mine, and his belief in the degeneracy of all things modern had always inclined him to attack existing conditions. That the old man was unchanged in this latter respect, I soon had proof.

Uncle Greenmoss sat in the open door of his cabin, out of which came the crackling sounds and savory fumes of frying bacon. He was thoughtfully rubbing the back of a self-satisfied looking shoat.

"My! dem cracklin's from de ribs er yo' mammy do smell good!" I heard him say as I drew near. "But you looks so runty I's feared you's gwine ter be like everything else dese yere days; you won't be half de hawg yo' mammy was."

The old man heard of my difficulties with many a sympathetic groan. "Dey is sholy de wote sellinest lot er niggers dat cumber de varth. But what mo' kin you 'spect dese days?" was his comment.

"And now, uncle," I said, "it is the duty of every honest man to fight this degrading condition. I want you to go to the meeting with me to-night and preach some sense of the responsibilities of citizenship into these people."

He eyed me dubiously before answering: "Sholy, you knows I'd do ennything on yarth to 'commodate you, Mr. Charles, but, yo' see, I's a po' man, an' can't erford ter give my time fer nuthin'."

"You conscienceless old rascal," I broke forth, "what pecuniary loss will you suffer by giving the cause of reform a little of your time to-night, instead of loafing at the cross-roads store? Or, perhaps," I added sarcastically, "you have a previous appointment to visit some hen roost?"

"'Tain't ezactly dat," he said with a gleam of cunning amusement in his eyes, "but dere is mos' in gen'ally considable money spent in dis yer politics business, an' ole Uncle Greenmoss might jes ez well git some er it ez de nex' one. De good book itse'f say 'De labrer am wordy er his hire.'"

"Uncle," I said, yielding without further argument, and placing two silver dollars in his hand, "here is the price of four fine pullets, to make good any loss you may sustain by reason of your failure to keep the previous appointment. If these people who cannot do their duty without being paid for it have one spark of conscience among them, blow it into a flame."

"I'll blow dat spark till dis stiff-necked gen'ration er wushippers er mammon smells brimstone," was the assurance I received.

That night when he arose to address the meeting in the dimly lighted little schoolhouse, Uncle Greenmoss was an impressive figure, with his grizzled hair standing high above his crumpled forehead and his eyes flashing from beneath their bushy brows with the menacing gleam of an accusing prophet.

"Fello citizins an' breddern!" he began pathetically. "Dere air jes' one thing on dis yarth could er enduced me ter drag dese old bones ter dis yer meetin'—and dat air—de call er duty! It done give me mo' pain dan my rheumatiz ter notice dat de people, dese days, is growed so fond of de bird er freedom dat dey'll sell dar souls fer his imige on de back er a piece er silver! Ter notice dat dey enterpits de word freedom ter mean de right ter sell darselves on 'lection days, an' dat you is all became nuthin' mo' ner less dan nigger traders! But I says," he thundered forth, "shame on de man dat kin hear de chink er silver better dan de call er duty! Shame on de man dat'll sell his wote! He air sellin' de freedom er his chillun, an' his chillun's chillun, an' de man dat'll sell de future gen'ration am wordy er de to'ment! Wordy er de everlastin' to'ment, I sez! An' when you is frying down below in yo' brimstone sass, den will you grit yo' teef, an' cry wid a loud woice: 'I did it all fer a dollar an' a little po' whisky!'"

Continuing in this strain, with the numerous repetitions which seem to give force to the oratory of his race, the old man was successful beyond my expectations. He was applauded vociferously. The speeches following his were all in approval. Disinterested patriotism seemed to fill the breast of every man in the audience, and when the meeting broke up I was assured on all sides that any attempt to use money in that election would be met with the abhorrence it merited.

The dawn of election day found me in the saddle on my way to the poll. The morning was auspiciously clear and my spirits were buoyant. As I again crossed the hilltop, where I had determined to invoke the eloquence of Uncle Greenmoss, I mentally patted myself on the back and said: "My boy, you have shown that you possess at least one quality necessary to success—that of being able to choose the proper tool for the purpose. That speech cost only $2, but it gained us enough votes to carry the district." Near the poll, lined up on the roadside, I found a numerous body of colored voters, with Uncle Greenmoss as spokesman.

"Mr. Charles," he said, "dese people all been 'vinced by what you said dat de jedge air de right man ter wote fer, an' dar ain't gwine ter be enny mo' er dis yer sellin' wotes—er cose, dey ezpects ter be paid fer de day's wuck, an' ter git er little sumpen fer refreshmen's, an' ter take a little treat home ter de ole woman and chillun; and dey hopes de jedge'll look out fer em when he gits ter Washin'ton. De oder side done offer 'em dat much, an' er cose dey ezpects dar friends ter be as good to 'em ez de inimy. Fur ez I air consarned, I ain't gwine ter ask nuthin' fer duty—you kin jes give me what you think it's wuth."

CHARLES A. KOLB.

WHY MONOGAMY PREVAILS.

Chinese Woman Solves a Caucasian Problem by Oriental Methods of Deductions.

From the New York Telegraph.

Margherita Arlina Hamm, the well-known traveler and author, called when in China upon the wife, rather the wives, of a great mandarin. Her visit partook of the nature of a festival, so novel was the experience of the Chinese women, whose lives are passed almost entirely within the walls of the yamen. They examined her clothing, and were partly pleased and partly astonished at it. They were shocked by her shoes, and especially by the fact that her feet were not confined by bindings.

Finally one of them said, through the interpreter, "You can walk and run just as well as a man?"

"Why, certainly."

"Can you ride a pony as well as a man?"

"Of course."

"Then you must be as strong as most men?"

"Yes, I think I am."

"You wouldn't let a man beat you, not even your husband, would you?"

"Not at all."

The Chinese women paused, laughed, and then said:

"Now I understand why foreigners never take more than one wife. They are afraid to."

Novel Neckties.

From the Philadelphia Inquirer.

The neckties have not abated a whit of their size or splendor, and with greatest complacency the smartly-costumed woman, who reflects every hourly change of the mode, ties under her chin a broad white moired ribbon, fringed along the edges and painted with bouquets of violets on either extensive tabbed end. This, of course, is a trifle excessive, but no less frequently long scarfs of cornflower blue Liberty silk are remarked, worn in two circles about the neck and knotted on the bust rather low down, while long ends of cream lace float below the waist line. Every mother's daughter has also taken, in keen delight, to the collar protectors sold for wear with high necked, dark fur wraps. There is a theory that Persian lamb, broadtail, &c., when their big ear nippers are turned up, will rub off a shade of their dusky dye on any delicate neck decoration so that a soft, full ruche of chiffon ruffles, in white or a becoming color, is supplied by the thoughtful furrier to slip round the neck before the fur wrap is assumed. This has long streamers to knot under the chin and is useful as well as distinctly becoming to the average of feminine kind.

Again is the turquoise in at the goal of the mode ahead of all other gems, and a series of turquoise-set slides, run on a whiff of white chiffon, is the most modish dog collar for use with an evening dress. Very deep blue turquoise, flecked with the pale brown of the matrix stone, is what a carefully-dressed individual adopts and it is set in Keltic gold. A very little gold and a great deal of silver are used in the making of these settings, so that the effect is rather that of silver, with yellow spots in it than of gold, and all over the plain, round band settings tiny Runic rhymes are engraved, or they are cleverly simulated by the graver's tool.

History of China.

From Forum.

Authentic history and biography in China embraces a period from the year 122 of our era back to the remote period of 2,697 years before Christ. The historians of China embrace a succession or uninterrupted series of more than 2,400 years. The full and continuous history of the empire was compiled in the second century of our era.

The great libraries of Peking contain volumes of books numbered by the hundreds of thousands. In the archives of the government are still to be found the ancient predictions of eclipses made with great accuracy, together with works on astronomy which show a fair knowledge of that interesting science. Biographies, very succinctly written, of the emperors of the most ancient dynasties, still exist.

Flies.

From Meehan's Monthly.

The head-lines of the great daily newspapers are marvels in their way. One from Chicago in magnificent type tells us "Electricity may banish flies. Automobiles may give relief." It goes on to say that when the automobiles—"Tommies" the street Arabs of Philadelphia call them—have banished all the horses, there will be no horse manure in which they can lay their eggs—and when the house-fly lays no more eggs the race will die out.

Surprised Their Friends.

Special to The Post.

Culpeper, Va., Oct. 10.—Miss Daisy S. Groves, of this city, was quietly married in Washington yesterday to Mr. James Swan, of Brandy station, this county. The marriage was quite a surprise to the friends of the young couple.

Northern New York Philosophy.

Some folks follers all the fashions,
Hats an' pants an' coats an' cloaks,
Run in debt an' spend their dollars
Jest tew be like other folks.
List'nin' for the speech of people
On our style an' clothes an' walk.
Say, you jest keep pickin' berries.
Let the other feller talk.
Sez he, jess so,
"Let the other feller talk."

Seems if Providence intended
We should be tew some things blind,
Else he'd placed between our shoulders
A big searchlight eye behind.
Ef we 'tend tew what's before us,
That's about our proper notch,
We'll keep tallyin' the bunkets,
While the other fellers watch.
Sez he, jest so,
"While the other fellers watch."

Onset a feller, almost crazy,
Had a note tew meet next day.
Groaned an' talked an' walked his chamber,
All broke up, he couldn't pay.
Till a feller down below hip
Yelle, "stop all that noise an' talk
Ef you're broke, then take it easy,
Let the other feller walk."
Sez he, jess so,
"Let the other feller walk."

We hain't telephones for people,
Tew about through us funny things,
Nor yet phonographs tew echo
Other people's drivellings.
"Folks will think," 'bgosh then let 'em,
Thought kin neither float nor sink,
You keep tearin' off your coupons,
Let the other feller think.
Sez he, jess so,
"Let the other feller think."

An' perhaps when all's considered,
Folks ain't half so apt tew roam
As we think, for all our neighbors
They gat eate tew skin at home.
They ain't walkin', talkin', thinkin',
Half what fellers think they dew.
While our dolls is leakin' sawdust,
'Tother feller's busy, tew.
Sez he, jess so,
"'Tother feller's busy, tew."

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