The Honorable Senator Sagebrush

By FRANCIS LYNDE

"I'm not likely to get the chance very soon," he returned. "Just at present I am still a legal resident of the good old commonwealth of Massachusetts and a member of its bar, eligible to office there and nowhere else."

"You'd be a citizen of this state by the time you could get elected to an office in it," suggested the senator.

"I know—the required term of residence here is ridiculously short. But you forget that I am as unknown in the sagebrush hills as you are well known. I couldn't get a nomination for the office of poundkeeper."

David Blount was chuckling softly. "Sounds right funny to hear you talk that way, son," he commented. "Mighty near everybody will tell you that the slate hangs up behind the door at Wartrace, and I don't know but some people would say that old Sagebrush Dave himself does most of the writing on it. Anyhow, there's one place on it that is still needing a name, and I guess yours would fit it as well as anybody's."

The young man, who was so lately out of the well considering east, gasped.

"Heavens!" he ejaculated. "You're not considering me as a possibility on the state ticket before I've been twenty-four hours on the ground, are you?"

"No, not exactly as a possibility, son. We'll call it a sure thing if you want to. It's this way: We're needing a political housecleaning pretty bad this year. We have good enough laws, I guess, but they're winked at any day in the week when somebody comes along with a barrel. The fight is up between the people of this state and the corporations. It was up two years ago, and the people got the laws all right, but forgot to elect men who would carry them out. This time I think the voters have got their knives sharpened. We've been a little slow catching step, but the marching orders have gone out. We're going to clean house this fall."

"Not if the slate hangs behind your door or any man's door, father," was the theorist's grave reminder. "Reform doesn't come in by that road."

"Hold on, son; steady go easy's the word. Reform comes in by any old

"YOU'RE JUST A LITTLE BIT LONG ON THEORY, SON."

trail it can find mostly and thanks its lucky stars if it doesn't run up against any bridges gone or any mudholes too deep to ford. We've got a good man for governor—not any too broad, maybe, but good—church good; he's a minister of the gospel and the president of a church university. No man has ever said he'd take a bribe, but he isn't heavy enough to sit on the lid and hold it down. Alec Gordon, the man who is going to succeed him next fall, is all the things that the present governor isn't, so that is fixed."

"How 'fixed?'" queried the young man, who, though he was not from Missouri, was beginning to fear that he would constantly have to be "shown."

"In the same way that everything has to be fixed, if we're going to get results," was the calm reply. "After the governor the man upon whom the most depends is the attorney general. The present incumbent, Dortscher, is one of the candidates, but we've crossed his name off. The next man we considered was Jim Rankin. In some ways he's fit; he's a hard fighter, and the man doesn't live who can bluff him. But he's poor, and he wants to be rich, and I guess that lets him out."

All this was directly subversive of Evan Blount's ideas of the conduct of affairs political in a free country, but he was willing to hear more. "Well?" he said.

"What we want this time is one of your 'hew to the line' men, son. Reckon you'd like to try it?"

The young man who was less than a week away from the atmosphere of the law school and its theories was fairly aghast. That his father should be coolly proposing him for a high office in the state to which he was as new as the newest emigrant seemed blankly incredible. But when the incredibility began to subside the despotism of a machine which could propose and carry out such unheard of things loomed maleficent.

"I'm afraid we are a good many miles apart, father," he said, unconsciously using one of his father's favorite speech forms, when the proposal had been given time to sink in. "America is supposed to be a free country with a representative government. Do you mean to say that you and a few of your friends can set aside the will of the people so far that you can nominate and elect anybody you please to any office in the state?"

The farseeing eyes were twinkling again. "Oh, I don't know about our being so far apart," was the deprecatory protest. "You're just a little bit long on theory, that's all, son. When it comes down to the real thing somebody has to head the stampede and turn it, and if we don't do it the other bunch will."

"What other bunch?"

"In this case it's the corporations—the timber people, the irrigation companies and, most of all, the railroads."

"Gantry seems to think that the railroads are persecuted, or his railroad at least."

The senator pulled his horse down to a still slower walk. "Where did you see Dick Gantry?" he demanded.

Evan told of the meeting on the veranda of the club, adding the further fact of the college friendship.

"Just happened so, did it," queried the senator, "that getting together last Saturday night?"

"Why, yes; I suppose so. Dick knew I was in Boston, and he said he had meant to look me up."

"I reckon he did," was the quiet comment; "yes, I reckon he did. And he filled you up chock full of Hardwick McVickar's notions, of course. I guess that's about what he was told to do. But we won't fall apart on that, son. Tomorrow we'll go down to the city, and you can look the ground over for yourself. I want you to draw your own conclusions and then come and tell me what you'd like to do. Shall we leave it that way?"

Blount acquiesced, quite without prejudice to a firm conviction that his opinion when formed was going to be based on the merits of the case, upon a fair and judicial summing up of the pros and cons.

He felt that it would be striking at the very root of the tree of good government to allow himself to be the candidate of the machine. But, on the other hand, he saw instantly what a power a fearless public prosecutor could be in a misguided commonwealth where the lack was not of good laws, but of men strong enough and courageous enough to administer them.

He would see. If the good to be accomplished was great enough to overbalance the evil—it was a temptation to compromise, a sharp temptation, and he found himself longing for Patricia, for her clear sighted comment, which, he felt sure, would go straight to the heart of the tangle.

It was that thought of Patricia and his need for her that made him distrait and absentminded at the Wartrace Hall dinner table that evening, and the father, looking on, suspected that Evan's taciturnity was an expression of his prejudice against the woman who had taken his mother's place, and when the son, pleading weariness, retreated early to his room the suspicion was confirmed.

"You'll have to be patient with the boy, little woman," said the master of Wartrace when Evan had disappeared. "I shouldn't wonder if Boston had put some right queer notions into his head."

The little lady looked up from her embroidery frame with a whimsical smile wreathing itself at the corners of the sensitive mouth. "He is a dear boy," she said, "and he is trying awfully hard to hate me. But I shan't let him, David."

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE WING OF OCCASIONS.

FROM the time it was heralded in the mammoth New Year's edition of the Plainsman as "the newest, the finest and the most luxurious hostelry west of the Missouri" the Inter-Mountain hotel in the Sagebrush capital had been the gathering place of the political clans.

After the solid costliness of Wartrace Hall and the thirty mile spin in a high powered roadster, which was only one of the three high priced motor carriages in the Wartrace garage, Evan Blount was not surprised to find his father registered in permanence for one of the private dining room suits at the Inter-Mountain.

It was very evident that the simple life which had been the rule of the Circle Bar ranch household had become a thing of the past, and, though he charged the new and extravagant order of things to the ambition of his father's wife, he could not cavil at it, since he was himself a sharer in its comforts and luxuries.

For the first few days he was left almost wholly to his own devices. Beyond giving him a good many introductions as the opportunities for them came in the semipublic life of the hotel his father made few demands upon him, and they met only at luncheon and dinner, the first of which was usually served in their suit, while for the latter they went to the cafe. But Gantry was back, and he was always available.

Almost before he realized it Blount had been put in touch with the busy, breezy life of the city and was exchanging nods or handshakings with more people than he had ever known in Cambridge or Boston.

"Pretty good little old town, isn't it?" laughed Gantry one day when he had tolled Blount away from the Inter-Mountain luncheon to share a table with him in the Railway club. "Getting so you feel a little more at home with us?"

"If I'm not it isn't your fault, Dick, or the fault of your friends. Naturally I expected some sort of welcome as David Blount's son, but that doesn't seem to cut any figure at all."

Gantry's smile was inscrutable.

"The people with whom it cuts the largest figure will never let you know anything about it. Just the same, it's cutting a good bit of ice. I have met a dozen men, more or less, within the past day or so who have discovered that you are the brainiest thing that ever escaped from the law school."

"Tommyrot!" derided Blount.

"It's a fact. And they are prophesying all sorts of a future for you." And again Gantry's smile was broadly sly.

"Like what?" scoffed the listener.

"Well, for one thing, they are saying that you are pretty sure to run for attorney general this fall. It's all over town. Everybody's talking about it—talking a lot and guessing a good deal more."

Blount was balancing a spoon on the edge of his claret glass and frowning abstractedly. It was the first little discord in the filial harmony—almost a breach of confidence. Without consulting his wishes, without waiting for his decision, his father had committed him—"taken snap judgment upon him," was the way he phrased it.

"Dick, will you believe me if I say that I haven't authorized any such talk as this you've been hearing?" he asked.

This time Gantry's smile was a grin. "The honorable senator took it out of your hands, did he? You'll understand that I don't mean any disrespect when I say it's just like him. If he has slated you, you are booked to run, and if he runs you you'll be elected. Those are two of the things that say themselves in the Sagebrush State."

Blount was indignant—"justly indignant," he called it.

"If that is the case, Dick, it is high time that some one should break the charm. I haven't said that I would accept the nomination, and I am not at all sure that I shall say so. And if I don't say so that settles it."

Gantry was plainly shocked. "You don't mean to say that you've got nerve enough to buck the old m—your father, I mean! Why, great cats, Evan, you don't know what that stands for in the greasewood hills!"

"And I don't care, Dick. Up to this present moment I am a free moral agent. I haven't surrendered any right of decision to any one so far as I am aware."

Gantry's eyes dropped to his plate, and his rejoinder was not altogether free from guile.

"Will you authorize me to contradict the talk as I can?" he asked quickly.

Blount was still warm enough to be peremptory. "Yes; you may contradict it. You may say that it is wholly unauthorized." Then he remembered the claims of friendship. "I'll be frank with you, Gantry. This thing has been mentioned to me once, but nothing was decided, absolutely nothing. I didn't even promise to take it under advisement."

Among those who knew him externally Mr. Richard Gantry had the reputation of owning a loose tongue. But none knew better than the real Richard Gantry when to make the loose tongue wag away from the subject which has reached its nicely adjusted climax.

Almost before he knew it Evan Blount was gossiping with his table companion over a social function two days old. A little later the waiter brought the cigars, and the danger point, if any there were, was safely past.

It was when the two young men were on their way to the club smoking room that some one stopped Gantry to talk business with him.

Blount strolled on by himself and, finding the smoking room, went to lounge in a lazy chair, whose chief attraction was that it stood half hidden in a little alcove lined with bookcases. He craved solitude and a chance to think things over fairly and without heat.

A few minutes later Gantry looked in and, apparently missing the half concealed easy chair and its occupant in the bookcase alcove, went his way.

He was scarcely gone before two men entered, coming down the corridor from the grill room.

Blount saw them, and he made sure that they saw him. But when they had taken chairs on the other side of the room he was suddenly assured that they had not seen him. They were talking quite freely of him and of his father.

"Well, the Honorable Sagebrush has got McVickar dead to rights this time," said the elder of the two, a full faced man, to whom Blount had been introduced on his first day in the capital, but whose name and station he could not recall. "This scheme of putting his son up for attorney general is the foxiest thing the senator has ever put across. You can bet the air was blue in the Transcontinental Chicago offices when the news got there."

"What do you suppose McVickar will do?" asked the other.

"He will do anything the senator wants him to do. Blount is land hungry, and I guess he'll take a few more sections of the railroad mesa land under the Clearwater ditch. That was what he did two years ago, when McVickar wanted the right of way for the branch through Carnadine county."

"Don't you believe he's going to take any little Christmas gift this time," was the rasping reply. "He'll sell the railroad something and take good hard money for it! It's a cinch. The railroad can't afford to have the courts against it, and McVickar will be made to sweat blood. You watch the wheels go round when McVickar comes out here."

Evan Blount found himself turning sick at heart. Could it be his father whom they were thus calmly accusing of graft and trickery and blackmailing methods?

His first impulse was to face the two men, to demand proofs, to do and say what a loyal son should. But the sickening conviction that they were discussing only well assured and well known facts crushed him back into his chair, and after that he was anxious for only one thing—that they might finish their cigars and go away without discovering him.

Fate was kind to him thus far. After a little further talk, in which the accepted point of view of the onlooker was made still more painfully evident, the younger of the two men spoke of an engagement, and they both went out together.

One clear thought, and only one, came to Evan out of the sorrowful confusion. Not for any inducement that could be offered would he now lend himself to the furtherance of his father's plans.

Beyond this he did not go in the miserable hour wrought out in the quiet of the club smoking room.

But when he rose to go another prompting was forcing its way to the front—a prompting to throw himself boldly into the scale against graft and chicanery, to redeem by whatsoever means might offer the good old name that had been so shamefully dragged in the mire.

He did not know just how it was to be done, but he would find a way. That it would be full of thorns he could not doubt, since every step in it would open and widen the breach between him and his father. But, though it should lead him to the bar of justice as that father's accuser, he must walk in it. He said to himself in a fresh access of determination that, though he might have to blush for his father, Patricia should not be made ashamed for her lover.

Upon leaving the club he hesitated long enough on the steps to remember that he was in no fit frame of mind to risk an immediate meeting with his father. To avoid the chance he crossed the street and, passing through the capitol grounds, strolled aimlessly out one of the residence streets until he came to the open country.

It was quite late in the afternoon when he re-entered the city by another street and boarded a trolley car for the downtown center. The long afternoon tramp and the conclusions it had bred made it imperative for him to see Gantry before the traffic manager should have left his office for the day.

His business with the railroad man was purely personal. He meant to ask Gantry a few pointed questions, requiring such answers as friendship may demand. If Gantry's answers were what he feared they would be he would seek his father and come at once to a plain understanding with him.

The trolley car dropped him within a square of the railway station, on the second floor of which Gantry had his office. The shortest way to the Sierra avenue end of the station building was through the great train shed.

Halfway up the block-long platform Blount met the incoming overland steaming in from the east. At the Sierra avenue crossing the yard crew was cutting off a private car. Blount saw the number on the medallion, "008," and noted half absently the rich window hangings and the polished brass platform railings.

A car inspector in greasy overalls and jumper was tapping the wheels with his long handled hammer.

"Whose car is this?" asked Blount.

"'Tis Misther McVickar's, sorr—the vice prisidint av the coompany," said the man.

Blount turned away, saying something which the hammer man mistook for a word of thanks. So the vice president had come, hastening upon the wing of occasions, it seemed, and in the light of the overheard conversation in the club smoking room it was only too easy to guess his errand in the Sagebrush capital. He had come to make such terms as he could with the man who was going to hold him up.

CHAPTER VII.

A BATTLE OF L'OUTRANCE.

BLOUNT had been halting between two opinions. The fighting blood in him prompted him to stay and set up the standard of honesty and fair dealing in the Blount name, to gather a few men of like convictions around him and to enter the political conflict at the head of a movement designed at once and forever to abolish machine dictatorship in his native state.

But, on the other hand, the claims of blood could not be altogether ignored. The campaign for political cleanliness would inevitably involve his father—would, if successful, defeat and disgrace him. Clearly it was the part of filial duty to hesitate before he should set his hand to this particular plow of reform. Would it not be better for him to drop out quietly, leaving the political housecleaning for some one who would not have to pay such a costly price for the leadership?

Thus the two promptings clamored each for its hearing. But, after all, it was chance and the swift current of the occasion that decided for him and swept him along into the vortex of action.

Before he had gone ten steps toward Gantry's office some one in the throng of debarking overland passengers called his name. When he turned he was facing a white haired old gentleman with a scholarly face and an irascible twist to his thin lips, a man and a straight figured maiden with level eyes

"WHY, BLESS MY SOUL, OF ALL THE LUCKY THINGS!"

and a face in which the inherited traits were softened into lines of thoughtful firmness and serenity.

"Why, bless my soul, of all the lucky things!" ejaculated the young man, who but an instant before had been halting between two opinions. "You don't mean to tell me that this is the west to which you said you were coming, Patricia?"

"It is, and you're to blame, young man," snapped the father of the peerless maid. "If you've been telling me fibs about those megalosauridae which you said could be dug out of your sagebrush hills you'll pay our fare back home again—understand? Now show us to the best hotel in this mushroom city of yours, and do it quickly."

Having a definite thing to do, Blount forgot his problem and bestirred himself hospitably.

Though it was only three squares to the Inter-Mountain, he chartered the best looking auto he could find in the hack rank, put his charges into it and went with them to do the honors at the hotel, thereby missing two things which might have had an important bearing on the temporarily forgotten problem.

If he had gone directly to the office of the traffic manager on the second floor of the station building he could hardly have missed meeting a tall, full faced man coming out of Gantry's private room, and he might have overheard the visitor's parting word to Gantry: "Oh, yes; he fell for it all right. If you'd seen his face when Lackner and I came away you'd have said there were battle, murder and sudden death in it for somebody."

"But, see here, Bradbury," Gantry held his visitor to say, "it wasn't in the game that you were to fill him up with a lot of lies. I won't stand for that, you know. He is too good a fellow and too good a friend of mine."

It was at this conjuncture that Blount, if he had been present and invisible, would have seen a sour smile wrinkle upon the full face of the club gossip.

"It wasn't necessary. If he or the senator wanted to sue us for libel we could prove every word that was said. And it got him—got him right in the solar plexus. If you don't see some fireworks within the next few days I miss my guess and lose my ante."

On the other hand, if Evan had lingered a few minutes longer on the station platform he would have marked Vice President McVickar crossing to the carriage stand, followed by the private car porter bearing impedimenta. At the carriage rank the vice president climbed heavily into the senator's roadster, which seemed to have been arranged for in advance, and was whirled stormily up to the Inter-Mountain, where he traced his illegible name in the great guest book two minutes after Blount, still anxious for the comfort of Professor Anners and the serene eyed maid, had gone up in the elevator with them to see that the rooms to which they had been assigned were all that they should be.

Coming down a few minutes later to give the several luggage checks to the hotel porter, Blount missed another incident which might have sent him back suddenly to his problem and its unsettled condition. When Mr. McVickar turned away from the clerk's desk it was to shake hands perfunctorily with the owner of the fast roadster.

"Well, senator," he said, with a certain dogged emphasis, "I'm here. Let's find a place where we can fall it out." And together they entered an elevator, which, as chance would have it, passed, in ascending, the car in which the younger Blount was coming down.

It was to the senator's suit that the two opposing field commanders made their way when their car reached the fourth floor. In the senator's sitting room McVickar dragged a chair over to one of the windows which commanded a view of the Lost River mountains and dropped into it massively.

"I suppose we may cut out the preliminaries and come to the point at once," he began. "Ackerton wired me that you had definitely announced your son as a candidate for the attorney generalship. Have you?"

The senator was opening a box of cigars, and his reply savored of good natured irony.

"The primaries do the nominating in this state, Hardwick. Didn't you know that?" he asked mildly.

"See here, Blount, I've come 3,000 miles to thrash this thing out with you, and I'm not in the humor to spar for an opening. Do you mean to run your son or not? That is a plain question, and I'd like a plain answer."

"I told you two weeks ago what I meant to do, McVickar, but you wouldn't believe me. I'll say it again if you want to hear it."

"And I told you two weeks ago that we couldn't stand for it; that you might name your own price for an alternative."

"Yes, and I told you my price, if you happen to remember."

"I know. You said you wanted us to turn everything over to the reformers and take our chances on a clean administration. Naturally we are not going to do any such utopian thing. What I want to know now is what it is going to cost us to get your consent to do the practical and possible thing."

"Want to buy me outright this time, do you?" said the boss, still smiling gently.

"We"—McVickar was going to say, "we bought you before," but he changed it to a less offensive form—"We have had no difficulty in arriving at some sensible and practical conclusions in the past, Blount, and we shouldn't have now. We can't let you have your son for attorney general. That's out of the question. If you put your son in as public prosecutor you can have but one object in view—you mean to squeeze us till the blood runs. We're willing to discount that object before the fact."

"So you have said before a number of times and in a number of different ways," was the mild counter suggestion.

"I shan't say it many more times, David. You're pushing me too far."

"What will you say then?"

"Just this—if you won't meet me halfway, if you insist upon a fight, I'll fight you with any weapons I can get hold of."

"You've said that in other campaigns, Hardwick, and in the end you've always been like the possum that offered to come down out of the tree if the man wouldn't shoot."

"I'll hand you another proverb to go with that one," snapped the man in the chair by the window. "The pitcher that goes often to the well is sure to be broken at last. You've got a

joint in your armor now, Blount. You've always been able to laugh at publicity before. Can you stand it now?"

"I reckon I'll have to stand it if you buy up a few newspapers, as you usually do," was the half quizzical reply, then for an added flick of the whip, "You and your folks can't paint me much blacker than you have always painted me, Hardwick."

"Maybe not, but this time we're going to give you a chance to start a few libel suits—if you think you can afford to appear in the courts. We've got all the evidence in black and white. We might possibly make your own state too hot to hold you. Have you thought of that?"

"Go ahead and try it," was the laconic response.

"But that isn't all," the man in the window chair went on remorselessly. "Our fellow citizens here know you for exactly what you are, Blount. You rule them with a rod of iron, but that rod can be broken. When it is broken you'll be looked upon as a criminal. In our last talk together you had nothing to say to me about our not keeping up with the change in public sentiment. It has changed—changed so much that it is coming to demand the punishment of the great offenders as well as the jailing of the little ones. We want to push this fight hard enough it is not impossible that you may find yourself a broken man at the end of it, David."

"I'm taking all the chances," was the calm rejoinder.

"But there is one chance I am sure you haven't considered—this son of yours! I know as much about him as you do—more, perhaps, for I have taken more pains to keep tab on him for the past few years than you have. He is clean and straight, Blount—a man for any man to be proud of. If that is the real reason why we are afraid to have him instructing the grand juries of this state it is also our best reason for keeping the past decently under cover. What will you say to him when the newspapers open up on you? And what will he say to you? Had you thought of that?"

For the first time since the beginning of the one sided conference the senator laid his cigar aside and sat thoughtfully tugging at the drooping mustaches.

"You'd set the house afire over my head, would you, Hardwick?" he queried, with the gray eyes lighting threateningly; then: "The last time we talked you posted your defi; now I'll post mine. You go ahead and do your worst. The boy and I will try to see that you don't have all the fun. I won't say that you mightn't turn him if you went at it right. But you won't go at it right, and as matters stand now—well, blood is thicker than water, and if you hit me you hit him. And I reckon between us we'll manage to give you as good as you send. That's all," rising to lean heavily upon the table, "all but one thing. You fight fair, Hardwick. Say anything you like about me, but if that boy has anything in his past that I don't know about, that he wouldn't want to see published, you let it alone and keep your newspaper reporters off it."

"YOU'D SET THE HOUSE AFIRE OVER MY HEAD, WOULD YOU, HARDWICK?"

The vice president laughed. He was of those who regain equanimity in exact proportion as an opponent loses it.

"You needn't let the boy's record trouble you," he averred. "It's as clean as a hound's tooth. That is one of the things I'm banking on, David. I'm going to have that young fellow fighting on our side before we're through."

At this the gray eyes under the penthouse brows flamed fiercely, and the senator took the two strides needful to place him before the man in the chair.

"Don't you do that, McVickar. I give you fair warning!" he said, his deep toned voice rumbling like the bur of grinding wheels. "There's only one way you could do it"—

The vice president stood up and put on his hat. "And you'll take precious good care that I don't get a chance to try that way, you were going to say. All right, David. You tell me to do my worst, and I'll hand that back to you too. You do the same, and we'll see who comes out ahead."

It was some five minutes later when the vice president had made his leisurely way down to the lobby. The electric lights blazed out, and the great gathering place was beginning to take on its evening air of stir and activity. Mr. McVickar pushed his way to the desk, and a row of lately arrived guests waited when he asked his question.

"Where will I be most likely to find Mr. Evan Blount at this time of day?" was the question he wished to have answered, and the obliging clerk made the line wait still longer while he summoned a bellboy and sent him scurrying across to one of the writing tables.

"This is Mr. Evan Blount," he said to the railroad magnate, indicating the young man who came up with the bellboy. "Mr. Blount, this is Mr. Hardwick McVickar, first vice president of the Transcontinental Railway company."

There was no trace of the recent battle in Mr. McVickar's voice or manner when he turned and shook hands cordially with the son of the man who had defied him.

"Your father and I were just holding a little conference over your future prospects, Mr. Blount," he said, going straight to his point. "Suppose you come down to the car with me for a little private talk on the legal situation. I'm not sure but we shall wish to retain you in a cause that is coming up in September. Gantry tells me that you are pretty well up in corporation law. Can you spare me a half hour or so?"

Evan Blount glanced at his watch. Patricia had told him that she and her father would dine in the cafe at 7 and that there would be room at their table for him and for his father, if the ex-senator would so far honor a poor college professor. There was an hour to spare, and if the vice president of the Transcontinental company were not the king he was at least a great man whose invitation was in some sense a command.

It was at the precise moment when the butterfly doors of the lobby entrance were winging to their closing behind Mr. McVickar and his quarry that the house telephone called the registry clerk. A sad faced tourist who was waiting, pen in hand, for his room assignment heard only the answer to the question which came over the wires from one of the upper floors.

"No, senator," the clerk was saying; "he has just this moment gone out—with Mr. McVickar! Could I overtake him? I'll try. But I don't know where they were going. I'll send a boy right away, though."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE QUEEN'S GAMBIT.

WHEN the news went out to the dwellers in the sagebrush hills that Boss David's son had accepted a place on the railroad's legal staff the first wave of astoundment was followed by many guesses as to what young Blount's action portended.

The Plainsman, the principal daily and the leading organ of the reformers, was the first to find an ulterior motive in Evan Blount's appointment and its acceptance. The editor took a half column in which to point out in emphatic and vigorous phrase the danger that threatened the commonwealth in this very evident coalition of the railroad and the machine.

The Lost River Miner, on the other hand, was unwilling to believe that the younger Blount was acting altogether in his father's interest in taking the place provided for him by the railway. Hints there were in this editor's comment of a disagreement between father and son, of differences of opinion which might later on lead to a pitched battle.

The Daily Capital, however—the railroad organ—covertly insinuated that nothing for nothing was the accepted rule in politics; that if the railroad had made a place for the son it was only a justifiable deduction that the father was not as inimical to the railroad interest as the opposition press was willing to have the public believe.

Elsewhere in the state press comment was divided as the molders of public opinion happened to read party loss or gain in the appointment of the new legal department head. But on the whole the senator's son was given the benefit of the doubt and a chance to prove up. Time would tell.

(Continued Next Saturday)