



***HERBERT
QUICK***

***ALADDIN
& CO***

Herbert Quick

Aladdin & Co

A Romance of Yankee Magic

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The Persons of the Story.

JAMES ELKINS, the “man who made Lattimore,” known as “Jim.”

ALBERT BARSLOW, who tells the tale; the friend and partner of Jim.

ALICE BARSLOW, his wife; at first, his sweetheart.

WILLIAM TRESKOTT, known as “Bill,” a farmer and capitalist.

JOSEPHINE TRESKOTT, his daughter.

MRS. TRESKOTT, his wife.

MR. HINCKLEY, a banker of Lattimore.

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ANTONIA, their daughter.

ALECK MACDONALD, pioneer and capitalist.

GENERAL LATTIMORE, pioneer, soldier, and godfather of Lattimore.

MISS ADDISON, the general’s niece.

CAPTAIN MARION TOLLIVER, Confederate veteran and Lattimore boomer.

MRS. TOLLIVER, his wife.

WILL LATTIMORE, a lawyer.

MR. BALLARD, a banker.

J. BEDFORD CORNISH, a speculator, who with Elkins, Barslow, and Hinckley make up the great Lattimore “Syndicate.”

CLIFFORD GIDDINGS, editor and proprietor of the Lattimore Herald.

DE FOREST BARR-SMITH, an Englishman “representing capital.”

CECIL BARR-SMITH, his brother.

AVERY PENDLETON, of New York, a railway magnate; head of the “Pendleton System.”

ALLEN G. WADE, of New York; head of the Allen G. Wade Trust Co.

HALLIDAY, a railway magnate; head of the “Halliday System.”

WATSON, a reporter.

SCHWARTZ, a locomotive engineer on the Lattimore & Great Western.

HEGVOLD, a fireman.

CITIZENS OF LATTIMORE, Politicians, Live-stock Merchants, Railway Clerks and Officials, etc.

SCENE: Principally in the Western town of Lattimore, but partly in New York and Chicago.

TIME: Not so very long ago.

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CHAPTER I.

Which is of Introductory Character.

Our National Convention met in Chicago that year, and I was one of the delegates. I had looked forward to it with keen

expectancy. I was now, at five o'clock of the first day, admitting to myself that it was a bore.

The special train, with its crowd of overstimulated enthusiasts, the throngs at the stations, the brass bands, bunting, and buncombe all jarred upon me. After a while my treason was betrayed to the boys by the fact that I was not hoarse. They punished me by making me sing as a solo the air of each stanza of "Marching Through Georgia," "Tenting To-night on the Old Camp-ground," and other patriotic songs, until my voice was assimilated to theirs. But my gorge rose at it all, and now, at five o'clock of the first day, I was seeking a place of retirement where I could be alone and think over the marvelous event which had suddenly raised me from yesterday's parity with the fellows on the train to my present state of exaltation.

I should have preferred a grotto in Vau Vau or some south-looking mountain glen; but in the absence of any such retreat in Chicago, I turned into the old art-gallery in Michigan Avenue. As I went floating in space past its door, my eye caught through the window the gleam of the white limbs of statues, and my being responded to the soul vibrations they sent out. So I paid my fee, entered, and found the tender solitude for which my heart longed. I sat down and luxuriated in thoughts of the so recent marvelous experience. Need I explain that I was young and the experience was one of the heart?

I was so young that my delegateship was regarded as a matter to excite wonder. I saw my picture in the papers next morning as a youth of twenty-three who had become his party's leader in an important agricultural county. Some, in the shameless laudation of a sensational press, compared me to the younger Pitt. As a matter of fact, I had some talent for organization, and in any gathering of men, I somehow never lacked a following. I was young enough to

be an honest partisan, enthusiastic enough to be useful, strong enough to be respected, ignorant enough to believe my party my country's safeguard, and I was prominent in my county before I was old enough to vote. At twenty-one I conducted a convention fight which made a member of Congress. It was quite natural, therefore, that I should be delegate to this convention, and that I had looked forward to it with keen expectancy. The remarkable thing was my falling off from its work now by virtue of that recent marvelous experience which as I have admitted was one of the heart. Do not smile. At three-and-twenty even delegates have hearts.

My mental and sentimental state is of importance in this history, I think, or I should not make so much of it. I feel sure that I should not have behaved just as I did had I not been at that moment in the iridescent cloudland of newly-reciprocated love. Alice had accepted me not an hour before my departure for Chicago. Hence my loathing for such things as nominating speeches and the report of the Committee on Credentials, and my yearning for the Vau Vau grotto. She had yielded herself up to me with such manifold sweetnesses, uttered and unutterable (all of which had to be gone over in my mind constantly to make sure of their reality), that the contest in Indiana, and the cause of our own State's Favorite Son, became sickening burdens to me, which rolled away as I gazed upon the canvases in the gallery. I lay back upon a seat, half closed my eyes, and looked at the pictures. When one comes to consider the matter, an art gallery is a wonderfully different thing from a national convention!

As I looked on them, the still paintings became instinct with life. Yonder shepherdess shielding from the thorns the little white lamb was Alice, and back behind the clump of elms was myself, responding to her silvery call. The cottage on the mountain-side was ours. That lady waving her

handkerchief from the promontory was Alice, too; and I was the dim figure on the deck of the passing ship. I was the knight and she the wood-nymph; I the gladiator in the circus, she the Roman lady who agonized for me in the audience; I the troubadour who twanged the guitar, she the princess whose fair shoulder shone through the lace at the balcony window. They lived and moved before my very eyes. I knew the unseen places beyond the painted mountains, and saw the secret things the artists only dreamed of. Doves cooed for me from the clumps of thorn; the clouds sailed in pearly serenity across the skies, their shadows mottling mountain, hill, and plain; and out from behind every bole, and through every leafy screen, glimpsed white dryads and fleeing fays.

Clearly the convention hall was no place for me. "Hang the speech of the temporary chairman, anyhow!" thought I; "and as for the platform, let it point with pride, and view with apprehension, to its heart's content; it is sure to omit all reference to the overshadowing issue of the day—Alice!"

All the world loves a lover, and a true lover loves all the world—especially that portion of it similarly blessed. So, when I heard a girl's voice alternating in intimate converse with that of a man, my sympathies went out to them, and I turned silently to look. They must have come in during my reverie; for I had passed the place where they were sitting and had not seen them. There was a piece of grillwork between my station and theirs, through which I could see them plainly. The gallery had seemed deserted when I went in, and still seemed so, save for the two voices.

Hers was low and calm, but very earnest; and there was in it some inflection or intonation which reminded me of the country girls I had known on the farm and at school. His was of a peculiarly sonorous and vibrant quality, its every tone so clear and distinct that it would have been worth a fortune

to a public speaker. Such a voice and enunciation are never associated with any mind not strong in the qualities of resolution and decision.

On looking at her, I saw nothing countrified corresponding to the voice. She was dressed in something summery and cool, and wore a sort of flowered blouse, the presence of which was explained by the easel before which she sat, and the palette through which her thumb protruded. She had laid down her brush, and the young man was using her mahlstick in a badly-directed effort to smear into a design some splotches of paint on the unused portion of her canvas.

He was by some years her senior, but both were young—she, very young. He was swarthy of complexion, and his smoothly-shaven, square-set jaw and full red lips were bluish with the subcutaneous blackness of his beard. His dress was so distinctly late in style as to seem almost foppish; but there was nothing of the exquisite in his erect and athletic form, or in his piercing eye.

She was ruddily fair, with that luxuriant auburn-brown hair which goes with eyes of amberish-brown and freckles. These latter she had, I observed with a renewal of the thought of the country girls and the old district school. She was slender of waist, full of bust, and, after a lissome, sylph-like fashion, altogether charming in form. With all her roundness, she was slight and a little undersized.

So much of her as there was, the young fellow seemed ready to absorb, regarding her with avid eyes—a gaze which she seldom met. But whenever he gave his attention to the mahlstick, her eyes sought his countenance with a look which was almost scrutiny. It was as if some extrinsic force drew her glance to his face, until the stronger compulsion of her modesty drove it away at the return of his black orbs. My heart recognized with a throb the freemasonry into

which I had lately been initiated, and, all unknown to them, I hailed them as members of the order.

Their conversation came to me in shreds and fragments, which I did not at all care to hear. I recognized in it those inanities with which youth busies the lips, leaving the mind at rest, that the interplay of magnetic discharges from heart to heart may go on uninterruptedly. It is a beautiful provision of nature, but I did not at that time admire it. I pitied them. Alice and I had passed through that stage, and into the phase marked by long and eloquent silences.

"I was brought up to think," I remember to have heard the fair stranger say, following out, apparently, some subject under discussion between them, "that the surest way to make a child steal jam is to spy upon him. I should feel ashamed."

"Quite right," said he, "but in Europe and in the East, and even here in Chicago, in some circles, it is looked upon as indispensable, you know."

"In art, at least," she went on, "there is no sex. Whoever can help me in my work is a companion that I don't need any chaperon to protect me from. If I wasn't perfectly sure of that, I should give up and go back home."

"Now, don't draw the line so as to shut me out," he protested. "How can I help you with your work?"

She looked him steadily in the face now, her intent and questioning regard shading off into a somewhat arch smile.

"I can't think of any way," said she, "unless it would be by posing for me."

"There's another way," he answered, "and the only one I'd care about."

She suddenly became absorbed in the contemplation of the paints on her palette, at which she made little thrusts with a

brush; and at last she queried, doubtfully, "How?"

"I've heard or read," he answered, "that no artist ever rises to the highest, you know, until after experiencing some great love. I—can't you think of any other way besides the posing?"

She brought the brush close to her eyes, minutely inspecting its point for a moment, then seemed to take in his expression with a swift sweeping glance, resumed the examination of the brush, and finally looked him in the face again, a little red spot glowing in her cheek, and a glint of fire in her eye. I was too dense to understand it, but I felt that there was a trace of resentment in her mien.

"Oh, I don't know about that!" she said. "There may be some other way. I haven't met all your friends, and you may be the means of introducing me to the very man."

I did not hear his reply, though I confess I tried to catch it. She resumed her work of copying one of the paintings. This she did in a mechanical sort of way, slowly, and with crabbed touches, but with some success. I thought her lacking in anything like control over the medium in which she worked; but the results promised rather well. He seemed annoyed at her sudden accession of industry, and looked sometimes quizzically at her work, often hungrily at her. Once or twice he touched her hand as she stepped near him; but she neither reproved him nor allowed him to retain it.

I felt that I had taken her measure by this time. She was some Western country girl, well supplied with money, blindly groping toward the career of an artist. Her accent, her dress, and her occupation told of her origin and station in life, and of her ambitions. The blindness I guessed—partly from the manner of her work, partly from the inherent probabilities of the case. If the young man had been

eliminated from this problem with which my love-sick imagination was busying itself, I could have followed her back confidently to some rural neighborhood, and to a year or two of painting portraits from photographs, and landscapes from “studies,” and exhibiting them at the county fair; the teaching of some pupils, in an unnecessary but conscientiously thrifty effort to get back some of the money invested in an “art education” in Chicago; and a final reversion to type after her marriage with the village lawyer, doctor or banker, or the owner of the adjoining farm. I was young; but I had studied people, and had already seen such things happen.

But the young man could not be eliminated. He sat there idly, his every word and look surcharged with passion. As I wondered how long it would be until they were as happy as Alice and I, the thought grew upon me that, however familiar might be the type to which she belonged, he was unclassified. His accent was Eastern—of New York, I judged. He looked like the young men in the magazine illustrations—interesting, but outside my field of observation. And I could not fail to see that girl must find herself similarly at odds with him. “But,” thought I, “love levels all!” And I freshly interrogated the pictures and statues for transportation to my own private Elysium, forgetful of my unconscious neighbors.

My attention was recalled to them, however, by their arrangements for departure, and a concomitant slightly louder tone in their conversation.

“It’s just a spectacular show,” said he; “no plot or anything of that sort, you know, but good music and dancing; and when we get tired of it we can go. We’ll have a little supper at Auriccio’s afterward, if you’ll be so kind. It’s only a step from McVicker’s.”

“Won’t it be pretty late?” she queried.

“Not for Chicago,” said he, “and you’ll find material for a picture at Auriccio’s about midnight. It’s quite like the Latin Quarter, sometimes.”

“I want to see the real Latin Quarter, and no imitation,” she answered. “Oh, I guess I’ll go. It’ll furnish me with material for a letter to mamma, however the picture may turn out.”

“I’ll order supper for the Empress,” said he, “and—”

“And for the illustrious Sir John,” she added. “But you mustn’t call me that any more. I’ve been reading her history, and I don’t like it. I’m glad he died on St. Helena, now: I used to feel sorry for him.”

“Transfer your pity to the downtrodden Sir John,” he replied, “and make a real living man happy.”

They passed out and left me to my dreams. But visions did not return. My idyl was spoiled. Old-fashioned ideas emerged, and took form in the plain light of every-day common-sense. I knew the wonderfully gorgeous spectacle these two young people were going to see at the play that night, with its lights, its music, its splendidly meretricious Orientalism. And I knew Auriccio’s—not a disreputable place at all, perhaps; but free-and-easy, and distinctly Bohemian. I wished that this little girl, so arrogantly and ignorantly disdainful (as Alice would have been under the same circumstances) of such European conventions as the chaperon, so fresh, so young, so full of allurements, so under the influence of this smooth, dark, and passionate wooer with the vibrant voice, could be otherwise accompanied on this night of pleasure than by himself alone.

“It’s none of your business,” said the voice of that cold-hearted and slothful spirit which keeps us in our groove, “and you couldn’t do anything, anyhow. Besides, he’s abjectly in love with her: would there be any danger if it were you and your Alice?”

“I’m not at all sure about him or his abjectness,” replied my uneasy conscience. “He knows better than to do this.”

“What do you know of either of them?” answered this same Spirit of Routine. “What signify a few sentences casually overheard? She may be something quite different; there are strange things in Chicago.”

“I’ll wager anything,” said I hotly, “that she’s a good American girl of the sort I live among and was brought up with! And she may be in danger.”

“If she’s that sort of girl,” said the Voice, “you may rely upon her to take care of herself.”

“That’s pretty nearly true,” I admitted.

“Besides,” said the Voice illogically, “such things happen every night in such a city. It’s a part of the great tragedy. Don’t be Quixotic!”

Here was where the Voice lost its case: for my conscience was stirred afresh; and I went back to the convention-hall carrying on a joint debate with myself. Once in the hall, however, I was conscripted into a war which was raging all through our delegation over the succession in our membership in the National Committee. I thought no more of the idyl of the art-gallery until the adjournment for the night.

CHAPTER II.

Still Introductory.

The great throng from the hall surged along the streets in an Amazonian network of streams, gathering in boiling lakes in the great hotels, dribbling off into the boarding-house districts in the suburbs, seeping down into the slimy fens of vice. Again I found myself out of touch with it all. I gave my companions the slip, and started for my hotel.

All at once it occurred to me that I had not dined, and with the thought came the remembrance of my pair of lovers, and their supper together. With a return of the feeling that these were the only people in Chicago possessing spirits akin to mine, I shaped my course for Auriccio's. My country dazedness led me astray once or twice, but I found the place, retreated into the farthest corner, sat down, and ordered supper.

It was not one of the places where the out-of-town visitors were likely to resort, and it was in fact rather quieter than usual. The few who were at the tables went out before my meal was served, and for a few minutes I was alone. Then the Empress and Sir John entered, followed by half a dozen other playgoers. The two on whom my sentimental interest was fixed came far down toward my position, attracted by the quietude which had lured me, and seated themselves at a table in a sort of alcove, cut off from the main room by columns and palms, secluded enough for privacy, public enough, perhaps, for propriety. So far as I was concerned I could see them quite plainly, looking, as I did, from my gloomy corner toward the light of the restaurant; and I was sufficiently close to be within easy earshot. I began to have the sensation of shadowing them, until I recalled the fact that, so far, it had been a case of their following me.

I thought his manner toward her had changed since the afternoon. There was now an openness of wooing, an abandonment of reserve in glance and attitude, which should have admonished her of an approaching crisis in

their affairs. Yet she seemed cooler and more self-possessed than before. Save for a little flutter in her low laugh, I should have pronounced her entirely at ease. She looked very sweet and girlish in her high-necked dress, which helped make up a costume that she seemed to have selected to subdue and conceal, rather than to display, her charms. If such was her plan, it went pitifully wrong: his advances went on from approach to approach, like the last manœuvres of a successful siege.

“No,” I heard her say, as I became conscious that we three were alone again; “not here! Not at all! Stop!”

When I looked at them they were quietly sitting at the table; but her face was pale, his flushed. Pretty soon the waiter came and served champagne. I felt sure that she had never seen any before.

“How funny it looks,” said she, “with the bubbles coming up in the middle like a little fountain; and how pretty! Why, the stem is hollow, isn’t it?”

He laughed and made some foolish remark about love bubbling up in his heart. When he set his glass down, I could see that his hands were trembling as with palsy—so much so that it was tipped over and broken.

“I’ll fill another,” said he. “Aren’t you sorry you broke it?”

“I?” she queried. “You’re not going to lay that to me, are you?”

“You’re the only one to blame!” he replied. “You must hold it till it’s steady. I’ll hold your glass with the other. Why, you don’t take any at all! Don’t you like it, dear?”

She shrank back, looked toward the door, and then took the hand in both of hers, holding it close to her side, and drank the wine like a child taking medicine. His arm, his hand still holding the glass, slipped about her waist, but she turned

swiftly and silently freed herself and sat down by the chair in which he had meant that both should sit, holding his hands. Then in a moment I saw her sitting on the other side of the table, and he was filling the glasses again. The guests had all departed. The well-disciplined waiters had effaced themselves. Only we three were there. I wondered if I ought to do anything.

They sat and talked in low tones. He was drinking a good deal of the champagne; she, little; and neither seemed to be eating anything. He sat opposite to her, leaning over as if to consume her with his eyes. She returned his gaze often now, and often smiled; but her smile was drawn and tremulous, and, to my mind, pitifully appealing. I no longer wondered if I ought to do anything; for, once, when I partly rose to go and speak to them, the impossibility of the thing overcame my half resolve, and I sat down. The anti-quixotic spirit won, after all.

At last a waiter, returning with the change for the bill with which I had paid my score, was hailed by Sir John, and was paid for their supper. I looked to see them as they started for home. The girl rose and made a movement toward her wrap. He reached it first and placed it about her shoulders. In so doing, he drew her to him, and began speaking softly and passionately to her in words I could not hear. Her face was turned upward and backward toward him, and all her resistance seemed gone. I should have been glad to believe this the safe and triumphant surrender to an honest love; but here, after the dances and Stamboul spectacles, hidden by the palms, beside the table with its empty bottles and its broken glass, how could I believe it such? I turned away, as if to avoid the sight of the crushing of some innocent thing which I was powerless to aid, and strode toward the door.

Then I heard a little cry, and saw her come flying down the great hall, leaving him standing amazedly in the archway of

the palm alcove.

She passed me at the door, her face vividly white, went out into the street, like a dove from the trap at a shooting tournament, and sprang lightly upon a passing street-car. I could act now, and I would see her to a place of safety; so I, too, swung on by the rail of the rear car. She never once turned her face; but I saw Sir John come to the door of the restaurant and look both ways for her, and as he stood perplexed and alarmed, our train turned the curve at the next corner, we were swept off toward the South Side, and the dark young man passed, as I supposed, "into my dreams forever." I made my way forward a few seats and saw her sitting there with her head bowed upon the back of the seat in front of her. I bitterly wished that he, if he had a heart, might see her there, bruised in spirit, her little ignorant white soul, searching itself for smutches of the uncleanness it feared. I wished that Alice might be there to go to her and comfort her without a word. I paid her fare, and the conductor seemed to understand that she was not to be disturbed. A drunken man in rough clothes came into the car, walked forward and looked at her a moment, and as I was about to go to him and make him sit elsewhere, he turned away and came back to the rear, as if he had some sort of maudlin realization that the front of the train was sacred ground.

At last she looked about, signalled for the car to stop, and alighted. I followed, rather suspecting that she did not know her way. She walked steadily on, however, to a big, dark house with a vine-covered porch, close to the sidewalk. A stout man, coatless, and in a white shirt, stood at the gate. He wore a slouch hat, and I knew him, even in that dim light, for a farmer. She stopped for a moment, and without a word, sprang into his arms.

“Wal, little gal, ain’t yeh out purty late?” I heard him say, as I walked past. “Didn’t expect yer dad to see yeh, did yeh? Why, yeh ain’t a-cryin’, be yeh?”

“O pa! O pa!” was all I heard her say; but it was enough. I walked to the corner, and sat down on the curbstone, dead tired, but happy. In a little while I went back toward the street-car line, and as I passed the vine-clad porch, heard the farmer’s bass voice, and stopped to listen, frankly an eavesdropper, and feeling, somehow, that I had earned the right to hear.

“Why, o’ course, I’ll take yeh away, ef yeh don’t like it here, little gal,” he was saying. “Yes, we’ll go right in an’ pack up now, if yeh say so. Only it’s a little suddent, and may hurt the Madame’s feelin’s, y’ know—”

At the hotel I was forced by the crowded state of the city to share the bed of one of my fellow delegates. He was a judge from down the state, and awoke as I lay down.

“That you, Barslow?” said he. “Do you know a fellow by the name of Elkins, of Cleveland?”

“No,” said I, “why?”

“He was here to see you, or rather to inquire if you were Al Barslow who used to live in Pleasant Valley Township,” the Judge went on. “He’s the fellow who organized the Ohio flambeau brigade. Seems smart.”

“Pleasant Valley Township, did he say? Yes, I know him. It’s Jimmie Elkins.”

And I sank to sleep and to dreams, in which Jimmie Elkins, the Empress, Sir John, Alice, and myself acted in a spectacular drama, like that at McVicker’s. And yet there are those who say there is nothing in dreams!

CHAPTER III.

Reminiscentially Autobiographical.

This Jimmie Elkins was several years older than I; but that did not prevent us, as boys, from being fast friends. At seventeen he had a coterie of followers among the smaller fry of ten and twelve, his tastes clinging long to the things of boyhood. He and I played together, after the darkening of his lip suggested the razor, and when the youths of his age were most of them acquiring top buggies, and thinking of the long Sunday-night drives with their girls. Jim preferred the boys, and the trade of the fisher and huntsman.

Why, in spite of parental opposition, I loved Jimmie, is not hard to guess. He had an odd and freakish humor, and talked more of Indian-fighting, filibustering in gold-bearing regions, and of moving accidents by flood and field, than of crops, live-stock, or bowery dances. He liked me just as did the older men who sent me to the National Convention—in spite of my youth. He was a ne'er-do-weel, said my father, but I snared gophers and hunted and fished with him, and we loved each other as brothers seldom do.

At last, I began teaching school, and working my way to a better education than our local standard accepted as either useful or necessary, and Jim and I drifted apart. He had always kept up a voluminous correspondence with that class of advertisers whose black-letter "Agents Wanted" is so attractive to the farmer-boy; and he was usually agent for some of their wares. Finally, I heard of him as a canvasser for a book sold by subscription—a "Veterinarians' Guide," I believe it was—and report said that he was "making money." Again I learned that he had established a

publishing business of some kind; and, later, that reverses had forced him to discontinue it—the old farmer who told me said he had “failed up.” Then I heard no more of him until that night of the convention, when I had the adventure with the Empress and Sir John, all unknown to them; and Jim made the ineffectual attempt to find me. His family had left the old neighborhood, and so had mine; and the chances of our ever meeting seemed very slight. In fact it was some years later and after many of the brave dreams of the youthful publicist had passed away, that I casually stumbled upon him in the smoking-room of a parlor-car, coming out of Chicago.

I did not know him at first. He came forward, and, extending his hand, said, “How are you, Al?” and paused, holding the hand I gave him, evidently expecting to enjoy a period of perplexity on my part. But with one good look in his eyes I knew him. I made him sit down by me, and for half an hour we were too much engrossed in reminiscences to ask after such small matters as business, residence, and general welfare.

“Where all have you been, Jim, and what have you been doing, since you followed off the ‘Veterinarians’ Guide,’ and I lost you?” I inquired at last.

“I’ve been everywhere, and I’ve done everything, almost,” said he. “Put it in the ‘negative case,’ and my history’ll be briefer.”

“I should regard organizing a flambeau brigade,” said I, “as about the last thing you would engage in.”

“Ah!” he replied, “His Whiskers at the hotel told you I called that time, did he? Well, I didn’t think he had the sense. And I doubted the memory on your part, and I wasn’t at all sure you were the real Barslow. But about the flambeaux. The fact is, I had some stock in the flambeau factory, and I was

a rabid partisan of flambeaux. They seemed so patriotic, you know, so sort of ennobling, and so convincing, as to the merits of the tariff controversy!”

It was the same old Jim, I thought.

“We used to have a scheme,” I remarked, “our favorite one, of occupying an island in the Pacific—or was it somewhere in the vicinity of the Spanish Main—”

“If it was the place where we were to make slaves of all the natives, and I was to be king, and you Grand Vizier,” he answered, as if it were a weighty matter, and he on the witness-stand, “it was in the Pacific—the South Pacific, where the whale-oil comes from. A coral atoll, with a crystal lagoon in the middle for our ships, and a fringe of palms along the margin—coco-palms, you remember; and the lagoon was green, sometimes, and sometimes blue; and the sharks never came over the bar, but the porpoises came in and played for us, and made fireworks in the phosphorescent waves....”

His eyes grew almost tender, as he gazed out of the window, and ceased to speak without finishing the sentence—which it took me some minutes to follow out to the end, in my mind. I was delighted and touched to find these foolish things so green in his memory.

“The plan involved,” said I soberly, “capturing a Spanish galleon filled with treasure, finding two lovely ladies in the cabin, and offering them their liberty. And we sailed with them for a port; and, as I remember it, their tears at parting conquered us, and we married them; and lived richer than oil magnates, and grander than Monte Cristos forever after: do you remember?”

“Remember! Well, I should smile!”—he had been laughing like a boy, with his old frank laugh. “Them’s the things we

don't forget.... Did you ever gather any information as to what a galleon really was? I never did."

"I had no more idea than I now have of the Rosicrucian Mysteries; and I must confess," said I, "that I'm a little hazy on the galleon question yet. As to piracy, now, and robbers and robbery, actual life fills out the gaps in the imagination of boyhood, doesn't it, Jim?"

"Apt to," he assented, "but specifically? As to which, you know?"

"Well, I've had my share of experience with them," I answered, "though not so much in the line of rob-or, as we planned, but more as rob-ee."

Jim looked at me quizzically.

"Board of Trade, faro, or... what?" he ventured.

"General business," I responded, "and... politics."

"Local, state, or national?" he went on, craftily ignoring the general business.

"A little national, some state, but the bulk of it local. I've been elected County Treasurer, down where I live, for four successive terms."

"Good for you!" he responded. "But I don't see how that can be made to harmonize with your remark about rob-or and rob-ee. It's been your own fault, if you haven't been on the profitable side of the game, with the dear people on the other. And I judge from your looks that you eat three meals a day, right along, anyhow. Come, now, b'lay this rob-ee business (as Sir Henry Morgan used to say) till you get back to Buncombe County. As a former partner in crime, I won't squeal; and the next election is some ways off, anyhow. No concealment among pals, now, Al, it's no fair, you know, and it destroys confidence and breeds discord. Many a good, honest, piratical enterprise has been busted up by

concealment and lack of confidence. Always trust your fellow pirates—especially in things they know all about by extrinsic evidence—and keep concealment for the great world of the unsophisticated and gullible, and to catch the sucker vote with. But among ourselves, my beloved, fidelity to truth, and openness of heart is the first rule, right out of Hoyle. With dry powder, mutual confidence, and sharp cutlasses, we are invincible; and as the poet saith,

“‘Far as the tum-te-tum the billows foam
Survey our empire and behold our home,’

or words to that effect. And to think of your trying to deceive me, your former chieftain, who doesn’t even vote in your county or state, and moreover always forgets election! Rob-ee indeed! rats! Al, I’m ashamed of you, by George, I am!”

This speech he delivered with a ridiculous imitation of the tricks of the elocutionist. It was worthy of the burlesque stage. The conductor, passing through, was attracted by it, and notified us that the solitude of the smoking-room had been invaded, by a slight burst of applause at Jim’s peroration, followed by the vanishing of the audience.

“No need for any further concealment on my part, so far as elections are concerned,” said I, when we had finished our laugh, “for I go out of office January first, next.”

“Oh, well, that accounts for it, then,” said he. “I notice, say, three kinds of retirement from office: voluntary (very rare), post-convention, and post-election. Which is yours?”

“Post-convention, I’m sorry to say. I wish it had been voluntary.”

“It *is* the cheapest; but you’re in great luck not to get licked at the polls. Altogether, you’re in great luck. You’ve been betting on a game in which the percentage is mighty big in favor of the house, and you’ve won three or four

consecutive turns out of the box. You've got no kick coming: you're in big luck. Don't you know you are?"

I did not feel called upon to commit myself; and we smoked on for some time in silence.

"It strikes me, Jim," said I, at last, "that you've done all the cross-examination, and that it is time to listen to your report. How about you and your conduct?"

"As for my conduct," was the prompt answer, "it's away up in the neighborhood of G. I've managed to hold the confounded world up for a living, ever since I left Pleasant Valley Township. Some of the time the picking has been better than at others; but my periods of starvation have been brief. By practicing on the 'Veterinarians' Guide' and other similar fakes, I learned how to talk to people so as to make them believe what I said about things, with the result, usually, of wooing the shrinking and cloistered dollar from its lair. When a fellow gets this trick down fine, he can always find a market for his services. I handled hotel registers, city directories, and like literature, including county histories—"

"Sh-h-h!" said I, "somebody might hear you."

"—and at last, after a conference with my present employers, the error of my way presented itself to me, and I felt called to a higher and holier profession. I yielded to my good angel, turned my better nature loose, and became a missionary."

"A what!" I exclaimed.

"A missionary," he responded soberly. "That is, you understand, not one of these theological, India's-coral-strand guys; but one who goes about the United States of America in a modest and unassuming way, doing good so far as in him lies."

“I see,” said I, punning horribly, “‘in him lies.’”

“Eh?... Yes. Have another cigar. Well, now, you can’t defend this foreign-mission business to me for a minute. The hills, right in this vicinity, are even now white to the harvest. Folks here want the light just as bad as the foreign heathen; and so I took up my burden, and went out to disseminate truth, as the soliciting agent of the Frugality and Indemnity Life Association, which presented itself to me as the capacity in which I could best combine repentance with its fruits.”

“I perceive,” said I.

“Perfectly plain, isn’t it, to the seeing eye?” he went on. “You see it was like this: Charley Harper and I had been together in the Garden City Land Company, years ago, during the boom—by the way, I didn’t mention that in my report, did I? Well, of course, that company went up just as they all did, and neither Charley nor I got to be receiver, as we’d sort of laid out to do, and we separated. I went back to my literature—hotel registers, with an advertising scheme, with headquarters at Cleveland. That’s how I happened to be an Ohio man at that national convention. Charley always had a leaning toward insurance, and went down into Illinois, and started a mutual-benefit organization, which he kept going a few years down on the farm—Springfield, or Jacksonville, or somewhere down there; and when I ketched up with him again, he was just changing it to the old-line plan, and bringing it to the metropolis. Well, I helped him some to enlist capital, and he offered me the position of Superintendent of Agents. I accepted, and after serving awhile in the ranks to sort of get onto the ropes, here I am, just starting out on a trip which will take me through a number of states.”

“How does it agree with you?” I inquired.

“Not well,” said he, “but the good I accomplish is a great comfort to me. On this trip, now, I expect to do much in the way of stimulating the boys up to their great work of spreading the light of the gospel of true insurance. Sometimes, in these days of apathy and error, I find my burden a heavy one; and notwithstanding the quiet of conscience I gain, if it weren’t for the salary, I’d quit tomorrow, Al, danged if I wouldn’t. It makes me tired to have even you sort of hint that I’m actuated by some selfish motive, when, in truth and in fact, I live but to gather widows and orphans under my wing, so to speak, and give second husbands a good start, by means of policies written on the only true plan, combining participation in profits with pure mutuality, and—”

“Never mind!” said I with a silence-commanding gesture. “I’ve heard all that before. You’re onto the ropes thoroughly; but don’t practice your infernal arts on me! I hope the salary is satisfactory?”

“Fairish; but not high, considering what they get for it.”

“You used to be more modest,” said I. “I remember that you once nearly broke your heart because you couldn’t summon up courage to ask Creeshy Hammond to go to the ‘Fourth’ with you; d’ye remember?”

“Well, I guess, yes!” he replied. “Wasn’t I a miserable wretch for a few days! And I’ve never been able to ask any woman I cared about, the fateful question, yet.”

We went into the parlor-car, and talked over old times and new for an hour. I told him of my marriage and my home, and I studied him. I saw that he still preserved his humorous, mock-serious style of conversation, and that his hand-to-hand battle with the world had made him good-humoredly cynical. He evinced a knowledge of more things than I should have expected; and had somehow acquired an

imposing manner, in spite of his rather slangy, if expressive, vocabulary. He had the power of making statements of mere opinion, which, from some vibration of voice or trick of expression, struck the hearer as solid facts, thrice buttressed by evidence. He bore no marks of dissipation, unless the occasional use of terms traceable to the turf or the gaming-table might be considered such; but these expressions, I considered, are so constantly before every reader of the newspapers that the language of the pulpit, even, is infected by them. Their evidential value being thus destroyed, they ought not to be weighed at all, as against firm, wholesome flesh, a good complexion, and a clear eye, all of which Mr. Elkins possessed.

"It's funny," said I, "how seldom I meet any of the old neighbor-boys. Do you see any of them in your travels?"

"Not often," he answered, "but you remember little Ed Smith, who lived on the Hayes place for a while, and brought the streaked snake into the schoolhouse while Julia Fanning was teaching? Well, he was an architect at Garden City, and lives in Chicago now. We sort of chum together: saw him yesterday. He left Garden City when the land company went up. I tell you, that was a hot town for a while! Railroads, and factories, and irrigation schemes, and prices scooting toward the zenith, till you couldn't rest. If I'd got into that push soon enough, I shouldn't have made a thing but money; as it was, I didn't lose only what I had. A good many of the boys lost a lot more. But I tell you, Al, a boom properly boomed is a sure thing."

"You're a constant source of surprise to me, Jim," said I. "I should have thought them sure to lose."

"They're sure to win," said he earnestly.

I demurred. "I don't see how that can possibly be," said I, "for of all things, booms seem to me the most fickle and