

The Corner

BY ARTHUR TRAIN
ILLUSTRATION BY NORMAN ANTHONY

BECAUSE he was regarded as a "safe" man, Mulvany, the boss, had made Randolph Carter district attorney just when it seemed likely that a safe man would be needed. For the class of busy-bodies known as "reformers" had been making things exceedingly sultry for the big corporation, and the grand jury had started in upon one of those unnecessary and frequently annoying frolics known as "investigations."

Just now they were on the city water-works and the big dam in process of construction by the Tidewater Concrete company. They had found a most appalling amount of sand in the concrete, and a startling discrepancy between the number of cubic yards of masonry certified to the controller and the number actually erected. The press said that the company's officers were all criminals and that the dam was the biggest steal in the history of municipal corruption. But those who were "wise" said that, after all, the whole thing was more or less a matter of opinion, and that figures were apt to lie, anyway—so that, as long as a "safe" man was in office, nobody concerned was inclined to worry.

Accordingly, Randolph now sat behind a polished desk with a row of mother-of-pearl buttons and received deputations of indignant citizens who wanted every abuse put an end to at once and the millennium instant. Thus, gracefully but noncommittally, he had given audience to that "prominent body of distinguished representatives from every walk of life" who had demanded the indictment of the officials of the Tidewater company and the removal of the controller. Having listened patiently to their diatribes and read their carefully engrossed resolutions, he had bowed them out, promising to give the matter his fullest and most immediate consideration.

"Larry," he said, after they had departed, to his special private confidential assistant, Lawrence Endicott, a native of Boston and a son of Harvard. "Just do this out for me, will you, and see if it's a frame-up?"

For thus did it amuse the district attorney to tease his blue-blooded and university-bred disciple by dropping into the vernacular of his office. Randolph was alleged to have "peculiarities"; and this was one of them—that he should have ever about him this youthful Puritan who had wandered into the professional staff quite by chance.

Endicott, nurtured on the scanty soil on the sunny side of Commonwealth avenue, amid a family to whom the annual migration to the North Shore was a chief event of the year, had plunged into the grimy, passionate life of the Criminal Courts building just as his father before him had plunged into the turmoil of Washington before Antietam. It was exhilarating to Randolph to see this "blue stocking" throw off his coat and fight for sweetness and light in an atmosphere that reeked of profanity and tobacco smoke.

LARRY worked like a slave over the Tidewater company papers, and two days later entered Randolph's office with a glitter in his eye. "By George!" he cried. "This thing is rotten! They've simply been flim-flaming the city from beginning to end!"

"What have they done, Larry?" inquired Randolph, pushing back from the desk.

"What haven't they! Just look here!" answered his assistant, excitedly thrusting a paper into his hands. "To begin with, they have simply disregarded the specifications altogether! 'Clean, white river sand properly puddled.' Why, there aren't a thousand cubic yards of real sand in the whole dam. They've used old scrapings right out of the reservoir. And our expert reports that into that embankment, upon which the safety of the thing depends, they've chucked any old thing—rocks, trees, barrels, and in one place left an old trestle! Besides, the dam leaks like a sieve. He figures 10,000,000 gallons of waste a day. Think of that! And the officers certified the accounts over their own signatures. Twice in three times sometimes more they've done it!"

"Bad as that?" exclaimed Randolph wrinkling his forehead.

"Yes, bad as that!" echoed Endicott indignantly. "Oh, it's a regular steal! You can nail 'em all for forgery in the third degree!"

Randolph pulled silently on his cigar. "It's even worse than those 'silk stockings' made out," continued Endicott. "They didn't know half of it. Do you want me to get up the indictment?"

Randolph did not answer.

"Want to go over it yourself?"

"No, I'll take your word for it," replied Randolph.

"How about the indictments?" persisted Endicott.

"Well, you might as well be getting them ready," answered Randolph, thus disposing of the matter in the simplest way.

The press duly reported the reception of the delegation at Randolph's office, and his promise to look into the business; the grand jury "desked" it some times does, and rumors of the impending indictments got abroad; worst of all, an enterprising reporter for a yellow journal stole a copy of the engineer's report, and his paper published it in full with photographs of the embankment composed of "any old thing," including the trestle. Even the regular organization felt that it would be a bad break if, out of deference to public opinion, some action were not taken—not, of course, a formal accusation of crime, but a "presentment" of some sort. Endicott finished his indictments and laid them on Randolph's desk for approval.

Then, coincidentally, Mulvany telephoned that he was coming round for lunch, and he and Randolph had a talk—nothing for publication, you understand—and Mulvany did the conversation.

"Of course, you don't care whether these fellows are indicted or not," said he, "and neither more do I. But Hopper

holds a powerful bit of stock in the company, and there's no use running counter to him, for he's good for fifty thousand at the next election—your election, Ranny, my boy. Now, my own feeling about the matter is that you can't make a crime out of building a rascally. How can it be a crime to use less sand in the concrete than the contract calls for? Sure, that's no crime—it's business! Better go easy, and think it over before you commit yourself to anything serious."

RANDOLPH returned to the office with his warm glow of affection for Mulvany modified by the consciousness that for party reasons the boss had indicated to him a course of action which he knew ran counter to his duty. Still, he had not yet examined the papers himself, and he had a good excuse for going slow. He promised himself that that was all he would do—even for Mulvany; for, although he had been doing favors all his official life, it had never been "put up" to him in quite this way before.

Just at this juncture a state senator called on the district attorney. He was a very urban gentleman, was Senator McCall, and he was close to everybody, including the boss. He and Randolph had held office together and called each other by their first names.

"Tis glad I am seeing you look so well, Ranny, my boy!" said the senator, once they were in the back room—lighting the cigar tendered him by Randolph. "Sure you're the lad to succeed, with everybody sayin' you will be a judge at the next election! I'm right proud of you."

"Thanks," said Randolph.

"It's a great shame all this trouble about the waterworks should be dumped on you and not on the mayor, where it belongs," continued McCall unconsciously. "Why all this everlasting holler about sand and cement and cubic yards of this and that? Why don't they appoint a commission of engineers to look into it and report to the aldermen or the legislature, instead of cloggin' a busy office like this, which has all it can do without invitin' trouble!"

"I wish they would!" said Randolph, honestly.

"Why shouldn't they?" asked the senator.

"Well, they didn't," answered Randolph. "And it's rotten!"

"How do you know?" inquired his visitor.

"You don't know nothin' about waterworks!"

"Well, Endicott, my assistant, has been over it and he says it's rank!" returned Randolph.

"H'm!" grunted McCall. "Endicott! Who's he?"

"No one you know—just a man on my staff. But he knows graft when he sees it," replied Randolph.

The senator got up and took a few steps about the room, finally coming to a pause in front of the window.

"Any notes of yours lyin' around, Ranny?" he asked quietly, without turning.

"Eh!" cried Randolph with a start.

"Notes—any notes, I said," murmured McCall, looking out of the window. "I understand the Tidewater company took an assignment quite a large one that has your signature from a fellow named Boyle, and they think of suing you on it."

Randolph sprang to his feet.

"God!" he cried. "Is that straight?"

"Straight as a die," announced McCall. "Here's a photograph of it." And he handed Randolph a small unmounted print of an oblong piece of paper.

Randolph put his hand to his forehead. McCall looked distressed.

"Come, old man! Don't lose your nerve! This is the only one and the plate's been destroyed. I guess you know you can rely on me, so long as you treat us square. Why, everybody is stuck on you, Ranny! We're all going to vote for you for the asking—campaign contributions and all that. You're on Easy street, if you only knew it. You could borrow all the money you wanted."

Randolph had sunk down in his chair with his shoulders hunched and his head in his hands.

"Funny thing happened once," McCall went on in a musing tone of reminiscence. "I was sittin' right in this room with old Tom Beech, district attorney along in the eighties, and a man came in and had a little chat about a case with him, and when he had gone, lying right on that desk, was a brand new, fresh \$10,000 bill—with not even a pin hole in it!"

Randolph did not seem to hear.

"Well, well! I must be goin'," said McCall, picking up his shining tall hat and cane. "Think over about those indictments, will you? Don't you think the public interest would be just as well served if the grand jury handed in a 'scathing presentment'—a regular old-fashioned scolding?"

Randolph arose bewilderedly to his feet and mechanically took McCall's outstretched hand. His under jaw was set and his face flushed.

"Aw, come!" exclaimed McCall, soothingly. "Don't take what I said too seriously. Don't be in too much of a rush about this thing—that's all. See you again, S'long!" And the senator, putting on his hat with the distinctive manner that is characteristic of state senators, buttoned his frock coat across his Websterian chest and, pausing to sow a few seeds among the newspaper reporters in the hall, majestically departed in a cloud of cigar smoke in the direction of the elevator.

Randolph sat alone in the inner office, his head still on his hands. It had not needed McCall's delicate reference to the judgeship for him to appreciate that the threatened suit upon his note—the note given to Boyle in payment of the losses incurred at the wheel during that unfortunate night of revelry five years before—would mean the end of his political career and the loss of the judicial nomination promised him by the boss. More: it would bring immediate censure and disgrace upon his organization, for Boyle was one of the gamblers that his oath of office required him to prosecute, and as yet he had taken no active steps to do so.

Once let that photograph get into the hands of one of the daily papers and—bing! that would be the end of Randolph Carter.

BUT it was not the mere fact that Mulvany had ordered him to do a dishonorable thing, nor yet that an attempt was being made to blackmail him into silence that had struck his spirit into this crushing, numbing blow, so that he sat dizzily and hopelessly sick at heart. It was the sudden realization that he had sold his birthright and become a man that others would not hesitate to try to bribe and blackmail. He was that kind of a man! He was stupefied at the shock of it—that he, Randolph Carter, in whose veins flowed the blood of generations of gentlemen so sensitive of honor that they had thought nothing of life without it, had fallen so low that he could receive the suggestion of a dishonest course of action without resenting it, and even take the hand of a miserable hound who had tried to bribe him, instead of kicking him out of his office. Instinctively, he rubbed that hand upon his trousers' leg as if to remove the stain left there by its contact with McCall's!

"My God!" he groaned again. "What's the use! I might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb!"

Lying on the right-hand side of the desk was the bundle of indictments which Endicott had so carefully drafted. Randolph glanced quickly toward the door of the office. Then, seeing no one, he picked up the package of papers and thrust it into the remotest part of the bottom drawer.

"I guess they'll stay there for a while!" he muttered. "But, by Heaven, it's the first time! It is the first time!"

THE sound of voices outside the door brought him to himself, as he sat in a sort of unhappy dream.

"Will you see a man, sir?" asked Pat, the doorkeeper, coming in apologetically.

"Send him in," muttered Randolph, for his work had to be done.

"This way!" said Pat to someone behind him, and a man entered, crumpling his cap between his hairy, knotted hands. He was tall and gaunt, and walked with a slight stoop; but what one noticed most was the hollowiness of his cheeks, the lustrelessness of his eyes, and the fact that he was nearly bald, although obviously young.

"Are you the district attorney?" he asked in a husky voice.

"I am the man," said Randolph.

"What do you want?"

"I want to tell you something," said the stranger. "If you can give me the time. It may take five or ten minutes. I want to ask a sort of favor of you."

"Oh, well, go ahead!" said Randolph, glad enough of anything to take his thought off himself. "Sit down. What's the matter?"

The man drew up a chair and seated himself. His hands trembled a little, and every now and then he gave a twitch as if he had St. Vitus' dance.

"Thanks," he said. "I don't want to make no false pretenses. I'm an old-timer—an ex-convict. Name's Titan. I served three and a half for burglary. I say I was 'jopped,' but that has nothing to do with it. I got it in the neck all right."

He gave a jerk with his shoulders. "I'm not goin' to bother you with that. I ain't here about myself. When I got out six months ago I found my wife had been put out of her rooms, with my two kids, and had to walk the streets all night in the rain."

"Well, anyway, she was awfully sick, and so was one of the kids, and there was nothin' doin' in my trade, and no one would have me, anyway! I hampered the sidewalks lookin' for work for weeks. I couldn't find a thing! I was up against it for fair. Then Katie's brother, Tom, who had been 'twinn' with us and helped support her while I was in prison, lost his job because he crushed his hand in a pulley."

"Well, for almost a week," he went on, "I watched my wife begin to starve. Then I made up my mind, as I had got settled for a crime I wasn't guilty of, I might as well commit one to even up. I'd learned a lot up in Sing Sing, and I went to a hang-out and borrowed a jimmy and touched a flat for about \$300 worth of silver. Gee! How easy it was! Now here's the funny part. I'd forgotten to tell 'em I was goin' anywhere, and Tom was out in the street lookin' for me. When I came up he grabbed my bundle with his good hand, not knowin' what was in it, to give me a lift. Just at that minute a cop stepped out of a doorway and nabbed us. Say, that was a good one, now, wasn't it? Wife and kid sick, brother with a busted hand, and me and him collared with the goods. Does crime pay? Does it pay? No, it don't! But suppose you ain't got no choice? I ain't no anarchist, but sometimes—"

"I know," said Randolph, sympathetically. "Have a cigar?"

"Eh?" said the man. "Sure I will." Titan took the weed and lit it tremblingly.

"Go on," said Randolph. "Tell me about Tom and Katie."

"Well, to make a long story short," said Titan, "when Tom found what was in for, he—insisted on takin' the blame and goin' up for it. God! What could I do? I was the only one in the bunch that wasn't sick. I had my hands at any rate. Tom didn't. Katie was pretty near all in. We talked it all over, and I didn't want to at first. You see, I'd done one bit without deservin' it. But Tom said that was one reason why I shouldn't do another. Said we ought to sort of average things up. Then he said I hadn't no right to saddle a man with a bad hand with the care of a woman and two kids. So we framed it up. I knew they'd do me on my record, and the game was to keep me off the stand entirely so they couldn't prove it on me. So Tom he pleaded guilty to burglary in the second, and I pleaded not guilty and went to trial. Then Tom became a witness for me and said how he committed the burglary and I didn't have nothin' to do with it. And the jury acquitted me

without my even goin' on the stand at all."

"By George!" said Randolph. Titan twitched again. His cigar had gone out and his lips were drawn.

"But that was only the beginnin'. Tom got soaked seven years and four months! Think of it! For somethin' he didn't do! That was two months ago. I found work pretty soon after that, and now that the weather has got cool Katie is all right again. She's goin' to get a job in a laundry at twenty a week. We'll be on Easy street before long. The kids are goin' to school. And I've got a man who has promised to take Tom on as a watchman at \$90 a month."

"Tom?" said Randolph.

"Sure," answered Titan eagerly. "No judge is goin' to keep a man in Sing Sing who is innocent. I haven't slept a night since he was sent up! I think of him every minute—goin' through all I suffered for three years. I can't stand it. Maybe they won't settle me for so long when they understand all the facts."

"I don't understand," said Randolph. "Tom is— You're going—"

"—to get 'em to let me plead guilty and get Tom out. I can't stand it. I'm hardened. He ain't. He's only a young feller. I'm tough! And Katie—Katie can wait!"

Randolph stared hard at him. "What do you want me to do?" he asked.

"Look me up," answered Titan simply. "That's all. And tell the judge the facts."

He twitched and set his teeth hard. Randolph held out his hand.

"I'll do what you ask, Mr. Titan," he said. "But I want to shake hands with you first. You're all right!"

Tears clouded Titan's washed-out eyes, while Randolph pressed a bell, and an officer in uniform expectantly entered the room.

"Kelly, I want you to arrest this—this gentleman, and take him—take him down before Judge Murray. He'll do the rest himself."

"Very good, sir," said Kelly. This way, sir."

And Titan passed out.

WHEN the man had gone, Randolph sat for a long time with his eyes fixed on nowhere, while the smoke from his dying cigar trailed toward the ceiling in a thin blue line. Something had gripped him in the throat and he couldn't smoke. This fellow's Katie! He wondered what she was like. He knew the type all right, big-boned, red-handed and freckled, probably. Then he gave a grim laugh and pressed one of the bells.

"Tell Mr. Endicott to come in here," he said to Pat, and his voice had a soft huskiness that made the big-hearted Irishman wonder if the chief was feeling quite up to the mark.

"Let's go over and have some lunch, Larry," he suggested. "I want to talk to you about those indictments."

Over in the back room of Pontin's restaurant he told Endicott of his visit from the man Titan, and the boy's eyes glowed.

"By George!" he cried, "that fellow is all right!"

But Randolph said nothing.

"It must have taken a lot of nerve," continued Endicott, "to do a thing like that! He's the real stuff, if he is an ex-convict. Think of walking right back into jail to get the other fellow out. That's pretty fine!"

"I imagine you would find plenty of people who would say he was a fool," returned Randolph. "What good will it do?"

"What good!" exclaimed the boy. "What good? Why, all the good in the

world—just because it's the right thing! What's the good of anything that's straight and decent, that isn't going to put money in your pocket? What are we here for anyway? I don't believe in this make-believe reform any more than you do. I know that a lot of fellows holler because the other fellows have the jobs. And I don't pretend to be any moral hero myself; but I do admire a chap that will walk the plank and chuck the whole game just because it's the square thing."

"How many big men are on the square in that way?" asked Randolph. "I mean the way you mean."

"I don't know," answered the boy, "and I don't care. If to be big one has to be crooked, I'd rather stay small."

"Lots of times you can't tell what is the square thing," commented Randolph, toying with his coffee cup.

"Can't tell?" retorted his assistant. "Of course you can tell—if you want to! It's only a coward that pretends he can't. Suppose Titan had been a welcher? Couldn't he have reasoned it out any way he wanted to? Sure he could. If he'd wanted to soldier, he'd have let his brother-in-law stay in prison because he was no good to work on account of his hand, and because if he confessed himself they both might go to jail. You can argue a thing so it will come out your way every time. Why, because his brother-in-law perjured himself you could claim he ought to stay in prison. If Titan confessed, there might be no one to support the family. Besides, they had it all figured out once—what was best—and what was the use changing their minds? It's a cinch! But no matter how you argue, you know all the time."

"I guess you can't always tell. I've

(Concluded on Page Three, This Section)



THERE IT LAY, SMOOTH AND CRISP AND FLAT—A YELLOW-BACK FOR—YES—TWENTY THOUSAND DOLLARS

Conspicuous nose pores grow larger if neglected

THE pores of your face are not as fine as those on other parts of your body.

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To reduce enlarged pores, follow every night this simple treatment:

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When the heat has expanded the pores, rub in very gently a fresh lather of Woodbury's.

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