

Between Two Fires

By ANTHONY HOPE

"A wise man will make more opportunities than he finds." —Francis Bacon.

CHAPTER VI.—(Continued.)

"Hello, Johnny! Why not at the house?" said I to him. "You'll want every vote to-night. Be off and help the ministry, and take Donna Antonia with you. They're eating up the minister of finance."

"All right! I'm going as soon as I've had another muffin," said Johnny. "But what's the row about?"

"Well, they want their money," I replied, "and Don Antonio won't give it them. Hence bad feeling."

"Tell you what it is," said Johnny; "he hasn't got a—"

Here Donna Antonia struck in, rather suddenly, I thought.

"Do stop the gentlemen talking politics, Madame Devarges. They'll spoil our tea party."

"Your word is law," I said; "but I should like to know what Don Antonio hasn't got."

"Now do be quiet," she rejoined; "isn't it quite enough that he has got—a charming daughter?"

"And a most valuable one," I replied with a bow. For I saw that for some reason or other Donna Antonia did not mean to let me pump Johnny Carr, and I wanted to pump him.

"Don't say another word, Mr. Carr," she said, with a laugh. "You know you don't know anything."

Meanwhile Madame Devarges was giving me a cup of tea. As she handed it to me, she said in a low voice:

"If I were his friend I should take care Johnny didn't know anything, Mr. Martin."

"If I were his friend I should take care he told me what he knew, Madame Devarges," I replied.

"Perhaps that's what the Colonel thinks," she said. "Johnny has just been telling us how very attentive he has become. And the Signorina, too, I hear."

"You don't mean that?" I exclaimed. "But, after all, pure kindness, no doubt?"

"You have received many attentions from those quarters," she said. "No doubt you are a good judge of the motives."

"Don't, now, come to be disagreeable," said I. "I am here for peace."

"Poor young man! Have you lost all your money? Is it possible that you, like Don Antonio, haven't got a—?"

"What is going to happen?" I asked, for Madame Devarges often had information.

"I don't know," she said. "But if I owned national bonds, I should sell."

"Pardon me, madame; you would offer to sell?"

I did not see any need to enlighten her further. So I passed on to Donna Antonia, who had sat somewhat sulkily since her outburst. I sat down by her and said:

"Surely I haven't offended you?"

"You know you wouldn't care if you had," she said, with a reproachful, but not unkind glance. "You will not let your real friends save you, Mr. Martin. You know you want help. Why don't you consider the state of your affairs?"

"In that, at least, my friends in Whittingham are very ready to help me," I answered, with some annoyance.

"If you take it in that way," she replied sadly, "I can do nothing."

I was rather touched. Clearly she wished to be of some use to me, and for a moment I thought I might do better to tear myself free from my chains, and turn to the refuge opened to me. But I could not do this; and, thinking it would be rather mean to take advantage of her interest in me only to use it for my own purposes, I yielded to conscience and said:

"Donna Antonia, I will be straightforward with you. You can only help me if I accept your guidance? I can't do that. I am too deep in."

"Yes, you are deep in, and eager to be deeper," she said. "Well, so be it. If that is so I cannot help you."

"Thank you for your kind attempt," said I. "I shall very likely be sorry some day that I repulse it. I shall always be glad to remember that you made it."

She looked at me a moment, and said: "We have ruined you amongst us."

"Mind, body and estate?"

She made no reply, and I saw my return to flippancy wounded her. So I rose and took my leave. Johnny Carr went with me.

"Things look queer, eh, old man?" said he. "But the President will pull through in spite of the Colonel and his Signorina."

"Johnny," said I, "you hurt my feelings; but still I will give you a piece of advice. Marry Donna Antonia. She's a good girl and a clever girl."

"That's not a bad idea," said he. "Why don't you do it yourself?"

"Because I'm like you, Johnny—an idiot," I replied, and left him wondering why, if he was an idiot, and I was an idiot, one idiot should marry Donna Antonia, and not both or neither.

As I went along I bought the Gazette, the government organ, and read therein: "At a Cabinet council this afternoon, presided over by his excellency, we understand that the arrangements connected with the national debt formed the subject of discussion. The resolutions arrived at are at present strictly confidential, but we have the best authority for stating that the measures to be adopted will have the effect of materially alleviating the present tension, and will afford unqualified satisfaction to the immense majority of the citizens of Auroreland. The President will once again be hailed as the savior of his country."

"I wonder if the immense majority will include me?" said I. "I think I will go and see his excellency."

CHAPTER VII.

The next morning I took my way to the Golden House, where I learned that the President was at the ministry of finance. Arriving there, I sent in my card, writing thereon a humble request for a private interview. I was ushered into Don Antonio's room, where I found the minister himself, the President and Johnny Carr. As I entered and the servant, on a sign from his excellency, placed a chair for me, the latter said rather stiffly:

"As I presume this is a business visit, Mr. Martin, it is more regular that I should receive you in the presence of one of my constitutional advisers. Mr. Carr is acting as my secretary, and you can speak freely before him."

I was annoyed at falling in my attempt to see the President alone, but not wishing to show it, I merely bowed and said:

"I venture to intrude on your excellency, in consequence of a letter from my directors. They inform me that, to use their words, 'disquieting rumors' are afloat on the exchanges in regard to the Auroreland loan, and they direct me to submit to your excellency the expediency of giving some public notification relative to the payment of the interest falling due next month. It appears from their communication that it is apprehended that some difficulty may occur in the matter."

"Would not this application, if necessary at all, have been more properly made to the ministry of finance in the first instance?" said the President. "These details hardly fall within my province."

"I can only follow my instructions, your excellency," I replied.

"Have you any objection, Mr. Martin," said the President, "to allowing myself and my advisers to see this letter?"

"I am empowered to submit it only to your excellency's own eye."

"Oh, only to my eye," said he, with an amused expression. "That was why the interview was to be private?"

"Exactly, sir," I replied. "I intend no disrespect to the ministry of finance or to your secretary, sir, but I am bound by my orders."

"You are an exemplary servant, Mr. Martin. But I don't think I need trouble you about it further. Is it a cable?"

He smiled so wickedly at this question that I saw he had penetrated my little fiction. However, I only said:

"A letter, sir."

"Well, gentlemen," said he to the others. "I think we may reassure Mr. Martin. Tell your directors this, Mr. Martin. The government does not see any need of a public notification, and none will be made. I think we agree, gentlemen, that to acknowledge the necessity of any such action would be highly derogatory. But assure them that the President has stated to you, Mr. Martin, personally, with the concurrence of his advisers, that he anticipates no difficulties in your being in a position to remit the full amount of interest to them on the proper day."

"I may assure them, sir, that the interest will be punctually paid?"

"Surely I expressed myself in a manner you could understand," said he, with the slightest emphasis on the "you." "Auroreland will meet her obligations. You will receive all your due, Mr. Martin. That is so, gentlemen?"

Don Antonio acquiesced at once. Johnny Carr, I noticed, said nothing and fidgeted rather uneasily in his chair. I knew what the President meant. He meant, "If we don't pay, pay it out of your reserve fund." Alas, the reserve fund was considerably diminished; I had enough, and just enough left, to pay the next installment if I paid none of my own debts. I felt very vicious as I saw his excellency taking keen pleasure in the consciousness of my difficulties, but of course I could say nothing. So I rose and bowed myself out, feeling I had gained nothing, except a very clear conviction that I should not see the color of the President's money on the next interest day. True, I could just pay myself. But what would happen next time? And if he wouldn't pay, and I couldn't pay, the game would be up. As to the original loan, it is true I had no responsibility; but then, if no interest were paid, the fact that I had applied a second loan, my loan, in a manner different from that which my instructions authorized and my own reports represented, would be inevitably discovered. And my acceptance of the bonus, my dealings with the reserve fund, all this would, I knew, look rather queer to people who didn't know the circumstances.

When I went back to the bank, revolving these things in my mind, I found Jones employed in arranging the correspondence. It was part of his duty to see to the preservation and filing of all letters arriving from Europe, and, strange to say, he delighted in the task. It was part of my duty to see he did this; so I sat down and began to turn over the pile of letters and messages which he had put on my desk; they dated back two years; this surprised me, and I said:

"Rather behindhand, aren't you, Jones?"

"Yes, sir, rather. Fact is, I've done 'em before, but as you've never initiated 'em, I thought I ought to bring 'em to your notice."

"Quite right—very neglectful of me. I suppose they're all right?"

"Yes, sir, all right."

"Then I won't trouble to go through them."

"They're all there, sir, except, of course, the cable about the second loan, sir."

"Except what?" I said.

"The cable about the second loan," he repeated.

I was glad to be reminded of this, for of course I wished to remove that document before the bundle finally took its place among the archives. Indeed, I thought I had done so. But why had Jones removed it? Surely Jones was not so skeptical as that?

"Ah, and where have you put that?"

"Why, sir, his excellency took that."

"What?" I cried.

"Yes, sir. Didn't I mention it? Why, the day after you and the President were here that night, his excellency came down in the afternoon, when you'd gone out to the Piazza, and said he wanted it. He said, sir, that you'd said it was to go to the ministry of finance. He was very affable, sir, and told me that it was necessary the original should be submitted to the minister for his inspection; and as he was passing by he'd take it up himself. Hasn't he given it back to you, sir? He said he would."

"Slipped his memory, no doubt. All right, Jones."

"May I go now, sir?" said Jones. "Mrs. Jones wanted me to go with her."

I saw all now. That old villain had stolen the cable. And his excellency's words came back to my memory, "I make the most of my opportunities."

CHAPTER VIII.

The next week was a busy one for me. I spent it in scraping together every bit of cash I could lay my hands on. If I could get together enough to pay the interest on the \$300,000 supposed to be invested in approved securities—really disposed of in a manner only known to his excellency—I should have six months to look about me. Now remaining out of my "bonus" was nil, out of my "reserve fund" \$10,000. This was enough. But, alas, how happened it that this sum was in my hands? Because I had borrowed \$5,000 from the bank! If they wouldn't let their own manager overdraw, whom would they? So I overdraw. But if this money wasn't back before the monthly balancing, Jones would know! And I dared not rely on being able to stop his mouth again. When I said Johnny Carr was the only honest man in Auroreland I forgot Jones. Jones also was honest, and Jones would consider it his duty to let the directors know of my overdraw. If once they knew, I was lost, for an overdraw effected privately from the safe by the manager is, I do not deny it, decidedly irregular. Unless I could add \$5,000 to my \$10,000 before the end of the month I should have to default!

This melancholy conclusion was re-enforced and rendered demonstrable by a letter which arrived, to crown my woes, from my respected father, informing me that he had unhappily become indebted to our chairman in the sum of \$10,000, the result of a deal between them, that he had seen the chairman, that the chairman was urgent for payment, that he used most violent language against our family in general, ending by declaring his intention of stopping my salary to pay the parental debt. "If he doesn't like it he may go, and small loss." This was a most unjustifiable proceeding, but I was hardly in a position to take up a high moral attitude toward the chairman, and in the result I saw myself confronted with the certainty of beggary and the probability of jail. But for this untoward reverse of fortune I might have taken courage and made a clean breast of my misdoings, relying on the chairman's obligations to my father to pull me through. But now, where was I? I was, as Donna Antonia put it, very deep in indeed. So overwhelmed was I by my position, and so occupied by my frantic efforts to improve it, that I did not even find time to go and see the Signorina, much as I needed comfort; and, as the days went on, I fell into such despair that I went nowhere, but sat dismally in my own rooms, looking at my portmanteau, and wondering how soon I must pack and fly, if not for life, at least for liberty.

At last, the crash came. I was sitting in my office one morning, engaged in the difficult task of trying to make ten into fifteen, when I heard the clatter of hoofs. A moment later the door was opened, and Jones ushered in Colonel McGregor. I nodded to the Colonel, who came in with his usual leisurely step, sat himself down, and took off his gloves. I roused myself to say:

"What can I do for you, Colonel?"

He waited till the door closed behind Jones, and then said:

"I've got to the bottom of it at last, Martin. That old scamp's villainy," said he, jerking his thumb toward the Piazza and the statue of the Liberator. "He's very cute, but he's made a mistake at last."

"Do come to the point, Colonel. What's it all about?"

"Would you be surprised to hear," said the Colonel, adopting a famous mode of speech, "that the interest on the debt would not be paid on the 31st?"

"No, I shouldn't," said I, resignedly.

"Would you be surprised to hear that no more interest would ever be paid?"

"What do you mean, man?" I cried, leaping up.

"The President," said he, calmly, "will, on the 31st instant, repudiate the national debt."

(To be continued.)

She Knew Her Business.

He had been sweet on her for some time and one evening he dropped in on his way home from the office.

"I hope you will excuse me for calling in my business suit," he said, "but—"

"Oh, that's all right," interrupted the fair maid, "that is, if you mean business."

And the next day a downtown jeweler separated him from a month's salary in exchange for the ring.

Another Version.

Jack was just about to build his famous house.

"Why don't you get some men to help you?" asked a curious friend.

"No, sir," replied Jack, "they would call a strike on me before the house was finished. I'll build it myself."

Thus we know why the house was called "the house that Jack built."

Well, Yes.

Araminta (exhibiting the family cheer)—Is there anything sweeter than a baby?

Young Spoonal—Why, I sometimes think a baby's 18-year-old sister is just a little—er—

Willing Martyr.

MERCHANT—I would be glad to give you the position, young man, but I make it a rule to employ married men only.

Applicant—Beg pardon, sir, but have you an unmarried daughter?

Life.

His Wife—I'm awfully tired. I spent the afternoon at my dressmaker's trying to get a fit.

Her Husband—I'm tired too. I met my tailor on the street and he gave me fits.

Whist.

Eva—Yes it was a long, long quarrel, but they made up when they met at the card table the other night.

Edwin—Ah, they hastened to "bridge" over the difference, eh?



Crested White Ducks.

Bulletin No. 64 of the Department of Agriculture says of the Crested White duck:

The Crested White duck is what may be called an ornamental duck, much like the Polish chickens. They are not bred to any great extent in this country, and they are very seldom seen in the showrooms. They have no especial value to the farmer, as better and more easily bred birds are to be found in the Pekin and Aylesbury.

These ducks have a medium-sized head; medium-sized bill, a large, well-balanced crest upon the crown of the head; a rather long neck; a medium-length back; breast, round and full; body, round, and of medium length;



CRESTED WHITE DUCK.

medium-length wings that smoothly fold; hard, stiff tail feathers, with well-curved feathers in the tail of drake; and short and stout thighs and shanks. Their eyes are large and bright and of a deep leaden blue or gray color. The shanks, toes and webs are of a light orange color.

The standard weight of the adult drake is seven pounds; adult duck, six pounds; young drake, six pounds, and young duck, five pounds.

The Robber Cow.

Two cows cost \$40 each a year for keep. One of them yields 4,000 quarts of milk a year, that bring \$80. The other yields 1,200 quarts, that bring \$24. The latter loses about \$14 and reduces the gain on the former from \$46 to \$32. Why do you keep that 1,200 quart cow? You would be better off with the one that clears \$46, for you would have only half the investment, half the work and half the feeding, and you would gain \$14 each year.

There would be no surplus butter on the market for years to come and prices would rule strong if all the cows were eliminated which are kept at a loss. Dairy farmers have not yet half waked up to an understanding of the great practical importance of weeding out the unprofitable cows from their herds. Many a man would make a fair profit, that now faces constant loss, if he would keep only such cows as pay a profit on their keep.

Water Needed by Corn.

Much interest has lately been manifested in determining the exact amount of water required for the growth of plants. This is just as important in the east as in the irrigated region, for we often have droughts which made necessary the most careful cultivation to prevent plants from suffering. Professor Clothier has found that after corn becomes two feet high each stalk uses up three pounds of water a day until the ears mature. This is equivalent to an inch of rain a week. In regions where the average rainfall is lower, and where a good, milky quality of sweet corn is desired in the garden during August and September, it is obviously necessary to have the soil in the most perfect state of cultivation so as to retain as much moisture as is needed.

Fattening Stock.

Weight is the main object of the farmer in fattening stock for market, and this weight is easiest obtained by feeding corn in order to produce fat. Farmers have long been taught by experience that fat is a desirable quality, and that it adds to the attractiveness of a carcass on the stall. It has been demonstrated at the experiment stations, however, that the weight can be secured at less cost, with a greater proportion of lean interspersed with the fat, by feeding a nitrogenous ration, which means that, in addition to a liberal supply of corn, an animal should receive a variety of food that is not so rich in oil, starch and sugar as is corn. This fact is worthy of consideration.

Heavy Horses.

The weight of a horse is an important item in estimating his value for draft purposes, for the fine-boned horse, with well-developed muscles, may do as much work as the heavy-boned one for a short time, and is even better for road purpose. But in plowing, or other heavy, steady drawing, the light horse is less useful. Then, in price, the weight is an important item. If a good horse weighs over 2,000 pounds he may possibly sell for as much as \$1 per pound, and from 1,800 to 2,000 pounds, for less, the price rapidly declining, 1,200 to 1,500 pound horses selling at from 10 to 30 cents per pound, though it is considerably more than any other grade of stock on the farm will bring if the horses are well bred.

Profits of Middlemen.

Consumers of fruits and vegetables in large cities are charged high prices by the hucksters and grocers. In Chicago peaches are selling retail for thirty-five or forty cents for a small basket containing about twenty to twenty-five peaches; other fruits and vegetables in proportion. It would be interesting to farmers to know just how much of this is booked as profits. Farmers get no such prices; in fact they are lucky if they get one-third of the prices now prevailing in Chicago. Either some class of handlers is making exorbitant profits or there is an unnecessary expense attached to the business of distribution. It costs money to handle produce. It requires storage, horses and men, and none of these things are cheap in the city, but there is no good reason why the consumer should pay three hundred per cent profit on what the farmers sell.—Farm, Field and Fireside.

A Splendid Wheat Crop.

The annual crop and business report of the Commercial National Bank of Chicago, covering the Mississippi Valley, and a few of the more important States of the Pacific coast, says, in part:

"The wheat crop of 1906 will be among the largest and best ever produced. The yield not only will be great, but the weight and quality will be far beyond the ordinary. In these respects it may be considered nearly perfect. The period of uncertainty is closing rapidly and the crop may now be called practically out of danger. The yield of soft winter wheat is large, quality the finest and movement free. Inasmuch as this movement has begun early and all grains are now nearly or quite on an export basis (with the tendency of prices downward), a large export business may be expected."

Cucumbers.

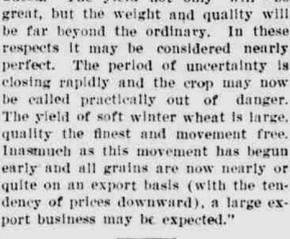
I raise five crops instead of one on the same ground, and on the same vines with hardly any extra work. Plant in the usual way. When a cucumber is taken from the vine let it be cut with a knife, leaving about an eighth of an inch of the cucumber on the stem. Then slit the stem with a knife from its end to the vine twice, leaving a small portion of the cucumber on each division. On each separate slit there will be a cucumber as large as the first. By this method you will only need one-fifth the ground that you would need if growing cucumbers in the old way.—Walter Strossner in Epitomist.

Marketing Farm Produce.

A small farmer who has made a success of marketing his produce gives sound and ingenious advice in a recent magazine. His preliminary work suggests Hannah Glasse's famous preface to her instructions for cooking hare: "First find a lady customer," is his advice. To her sell nothing but the choicest of fruit and produce. It will not be long before she will acquaint her friends, and they in turn will pass along the word to others. It pays to sell nothing but the best; the inferior produce can be fed to stock, and in a short time the farmer will find he has a good market and a good price, with no leakage of profit to the middleman.

Hog-Ringing Trap.

The frame for this hog-ringing trap should be made of 2x4-inch lumber bolted together at corners. The dimensions are 4 feet 2 inches long, 2 feet 4 inches high and 1 foot 6 inches wide. There is a sliding door at the back end. When the hog puts his head through the hole in front, jam the lever against his neck.



SIMPLE HOG-RINGING TRAP.

The Farm Toolhouse.

No building on the farm pays better than a good toolhouse. It should be so convenient of access that there need be no excuse for leaving farm implements exposed to the weather when not in use. Properly cared for, many implements that now last only a few years ought to be serviceable as long as the farmer lives to need them. Besides, a tool that has not been rusted, warped and cracked by exposure will work as well the second and third year of use as the first. On many farms the tools are so much injured by being left out of doors that after the first season they cost more for repairs than they save in labor.

Oiling Harness.

To give harness a good finish saturate the leather with as much oil as it will take, and then sponge the harness with a thick lather made of castile soap. When dry, wipe gently with a solution of gum tragacanth, which is made by boiling half an ounce of the gum in two quarts of water, boiling down to three pints, stirring freely while it is on the fire. When cool apply it lightly on the leather.

How About It?

The coreless apple Has been born, But who would ask For coreless corn? —New York Sun.



"Arabella," called the father from the head of the stairs, "Is that young man gone?" "Yes, father. Completely."

Teacher—Why did the ancients believe the earth to be flat? Bright Boy—Cause they didn't have no school globes to prove it was round.

"I, sir," began Bragg, "am a self-made man." "Yes," replied Wise, "but why apologize now? That won't help matters."—Philadelphia Press.

Mrs. Madison—How do you like your new neighbors? Mrs. Dyer—I don't know. I haven't tried to borrow anything yet.—Town and Country.

Diggs—I understand that Higgins is quite a clever financier. Biggs—Well, he isn't. Why, that man never beat anybody out of a cent in his life.

"Algy, don't you find married life more expensive than bachelorhood?" "Well, it may be more expensive than a rigidly single life, but it's cheaper than courtship."

Senior Partner—There's one thing to be said in favor of classical music. Junior Partner—What is that? Senior Partner—The office boy can't whistle it.—Chicago News.

Mrs. Flip—I have just been talking to a specialist, and he says my brain vitality has all gone to my long hair. Do you believe it? Flip—Well, er—I knew it had gone!—Detroit Free Press.

Medical Student—What did you operate on that man for? Eminent Surgeon—Five hundred dollars. Medical Student—I mean, what did he have? Eminent Surgeon—Five hundred dollars.—Puck.

At the Garage—Boy—Mr. Smith is telephoning for his machine. Can you send it to him to-day? Head Man—Don't see how we can. Why, this machine is the only one around here fit to use!—Life.

"Is there any available substitute for rubber?" asked the instructor of the class. "Yes, sir," answered Miss De Muir, one of the fair coeds. "I think 'stare' or 'gape' is just as good."—Chicago Tribune.

Green—I cannot understand why De Short wants a divorce. His wife had nearly half a million when he married her. Brown—Yes, and she has every dollar of it yet. That's the trouble.—Chicago Daily News.

"Yes, I'm going to spend a few weeks at Kloseman's summer resort. My stomach is all out of order, and I need a rest." "Well, your stomach will get a good rest there, too. I know the place."—Chicago Tribune.

"I suppose that some of your battle scenes are very realistic?" said the sympathizer. "Yes," said the bun actor. "I have impersonated Napoleon at Waterloo several times when real shells were bursting all about me."—Kansas City Times.

"Mamma, what are twins?" asked little Bobby. "Oh, I know," chimed in Dorothy, with all the superiority of an elder sister. "Twins is two babies just the same age; three is triplets, four is quadruplets and five is centipedes."—Harper's Weekly.

"You'll have to fix the poem over before I can buy it," said the editor. "There appears to be something the matter with its feet." "I would have you understand, sir," said the bard, with dignity, "that I am a poet and not a chirographist."—Cleveland Leader.

"Tommy, what ancient king was it who played on the fiddle while Rome was burning?" "Hector, ma'am." "No, no—not Hector." "Then it was Dook." "Duke? What do you mean, Tommy?" "Well, then it must a' been Nero. I knowed it wuz somebody with a dog's name."

A reporter of the Paris Matin tried to purchase a genuine Rockefeller interview with a check for \$1,000. He failed. The proper way to make an American millionaire talk is not to offer him a thousand dollars, but to try to get a thousand dollars away from him.—Puck.

"I would like a pound of your golf sausage," she said to the butcher. "Golf sausage? Sorry, madam, but we don't handle it. We have blood sausage, liverwurst, ham sausage, and other kinds, but no golf sausage."