

Between Two Fires

By ANTHONY HOPE

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

CHAPTER IX.—(Continued.)

I had nothing left to say. I fell back in my chair, and gazed at the Colonel. At the same moment a sound of rapid wheels struck on my ears. Then I heard the sweet, clear voice I knew so well saying:

"I'll just disturb him for a moment, Mr. Jones. I want him to tear himself from work for a day, and come for a ride."

She opened her door, and came swiftly in. On seeing the Colonel she took in the position, and said to that gentleman: "Have you told him?"

"I have just done so, Signorina," he replied.

I had not energy enough to greet her; so she also sat down uninvited, and took off her gloves—not lazily, like the Colonel, but with an air as though she would, if a man, take off her coat, to meet the crisis more energetically.

At last I said, with conviction: "He's a wonderful man! How did you find it out, Colonel?"

"Had Johnny Carr to dine," said that worthy.

"You don't mean he trusted Johnny?"

"Odd, isn't it?" said the Colonel. "With his experience, too. He might have known Johnny was an idiot. I suppose there was no one else."

"He knew," said the Signorina, "anyone else in the place would betray him; he knew Johnny wouldn't if he could help it. He underrated your powers, Colonel."

"Well," said I, "I can't help it, can I? My directors will lose. The bondholders will lose. But how does it hurt me?"

The Colonel and the Signorina both smiled gently.

"You do it very well, Martin," said the former, "but it will save time if I state that both Signorina Nugent and myself are possessed of the details regarding the—"

—(the Colonel paused, and stroked his mustache.)

"The second loan," said the Signorina. I was less surprised at this, recollecting certain conversations.

"Ah, and how did you find that out?" I asked.

"She told me," said the Colonel, indicating his fair neighbor.

"And may I ask how you found it out, Signorina?"

"The President told me," said that lady.

"Well, as you both know all about it, it's no good keeping up pretenses. It's very kind of you to come and warn me."

"You dear good Mr. Martin," said the Signorina, "our motives are not purely those of friendship."

"Why, how does it matter to you?"

"Simply this," said she, "the bank and its excellent manager own most of the debt. The Colonel and I own the rest. If it is repudiated, the bank loses; yes, but the manager and the Colonel and the Signorina Nugent are lost."

"I didn't know this," I said, rather bewildered.

"Yes," said the Colonel, "when the first loan was raised I lent him \$100,000. We were thick then, and I did it in return for my rank and my seat in the Chamber. Since then I've bought up some more shares."

"You got them cheap, I suppose?" said I.

"Yes," he replied, "I averaged them at about 75 cents the five-dollar share."

"And what do you hold now, nominal?"

"Three hundred thousand dollars," said he, shortly.

"I understand your interest in the matter. But you, Signorina?"

The Signorina appeared a little embarrassed. But at last she broke out:

"I don't care if I do tell you. When I decided to stay here I had \$50,000. He persuaded me to put it all into his horrid debt. Oh! wasn't it mean, Mr. Martin?"

The President had certainly combined business and pleasure in this matter.

"Disgraceful!" I remarked.

"And if that goes, I am penniless—penniless. And there's poor aunt. What will she do?"

"Never mind your aunt," said the Colonel, rather rudely. "Well," he went on, "you see we're in the same boat with you, Martin."

"Yes; and we shall soon be in the same deep water," said I.

"Not at all," said the Colonel. "Financial probity is the backbone of a country. Are we to stand by and see Aurestaland enter on the shameful path of repudiation?"

"Never!" cried the Signorina, leaping up with sparkling eyes. "Never!"

She looked enchanting. But business is business; and I said again:

"What are you going to do?"

"We are going, with your help, Martin, to prevent this national disgrace. We are going," he lowered his voice, "useless, for the Signorina struck in, in a high merry tone, waving her gloves over her head, with these remarkable words:

"Hurrah for the Revolution! Hip! hip! hurrah!"

The Signorina looked like a Goddess of Freedom in high spirits and a Paris bonnet. She broke forth into the "Marseillaise."

"For mercy's sake, be quiet!" said McGregor, in a hoarse whisper. "If they hear you! Stop, I tell you, Christina!"

"Kindly unfold your plan, Colonel," I said. "I am aware that out here you think little of revolutions, but to a newcomer they appear to be matters requiring some management. You see we are only three."

"I have the army with me," said he, grandly.

"In the outer office?" asked I, indulging in a sneer at the dimensions of the Aurestaland forces.

If he lets the debt slide, he can pay them."

"Exactly," said he. "Hence we must get at them before that aspect of the case strikes them. They are literally starving, and for ten dollars a man they would make Satan himself President."

Have you got any money, Martin?"

"Yes," said I, "a little."

"How much?"

"Ten thousand," I replied; "I was keeping it for the interest."

"Ah, you won't want it now."

"Indeed I shall—for the second loan, you know."

"Look here, Martin; give me that ten thousand for the troops. Stand in with us, and the day I become President I'll give you back your \$300,000. Just look where you stand now. I don't want to be rich, but isn't it a case of—"

"Some emergency?" said I, thoughtfully. "Yes, it is. But where do you suppose you're going to get \$300,000, to say nothing of your own shares?"

He drew his chair closer to mine, and, leaning forward, said:

"He's never spent the money. He's got it somewhere; much the greater part, at least."

"Did Carr tell you that?"

"He didn't know for certain; but he told me enough to make it almost certain. Besides," he added, "we have other reasons for suspecting it. Give me the ten thousand. You shall have your loan back, and if you like, you shall be minister of finance. We practically know the money's there, don't we, Signorina?"

"Yes," said the Signorina.

"If we fail?" said I.

He drew a neat little revolver from his pocket, placed it for a moment against his ear, and repocketed it.

"Most lucidly explained, Colonel," said I. "Will you give me half an hour to think it over?"

"Yes," he said. "You'll excuse me if I stay in the outer office? Of course I trust you, Martin, but in this sort of thing—"

"All right, I see," said I. "And you, Signorina?"

"I'll wait, too," she said.

They both rose and went out, and I heard them in conversation with Jones. I sat still, thinking hard. But scarcely a moment had passed, when I heard the door behind me open. It was the Signorina. She came in, stood behind my chair, and, leaning over, put her arms round my neck. I looked up, and saw her face full of mischief.

"What about the rose, Jack?" she asked.

Bewildered with delight, and believing I had won her, I said:

"Your soldier till death, Signorina."

"Better death!" said she, saucily. "No body's going to die. We shall win, and then—"

"And then," said I, eagerly, "you'll marry me, sweet?"

She quietly stooped down and kissed my lips. Then, stroking my hair, she said:

"You're a nice boy, Jack."

"Christina, you won't marry him?"

"Him?"

"McGregor," said I.

"Jack," said she, whispering now, "I hate him!"

"So do I," I answered promptly. "And if it's to win you, I'll upset a dozen presidents."

"Then you'll do it for me? I like to think you'll do it for me, and not for the money."

"I don't mind the money coming in," I began.

"Mercenary wretch!" she cried. "I didn't kiss you, did I?"

"No," I replied. "You said you would in a minute, when I consented."

"Very neat, Jack," she said. But she went and opened the door and called to McGregor. "Mr. Martin sees no objection to the arrangement, and he will come to dinner to-night, as you suggest, and talk over the details. We're all going to make our fortunes, Mr. Jones," she went on, without waiting for any acceptance of her implied invitation, "and when we've made ours, we'll think about you and Mrs. Jones."

I heard Jones make some noise incoherently suggestive of gratification, for he was as bad as any of us about the Signorina, and then I was left to my reflections. These were less somber than the reader would, perhaps, anticipate. True, I was putting my head into a noose; and if the President's hands ever found their way to the end of the rope, I fancied he would pull it pretty tight. But, again, I was immensely in love, and equally in debt. To a young man, life without love isn't worth much; to a man of any age, in my opinion, life without money isn't worth much; it becomes worth still less when he is held to account for money he ought to have. So I cheerfully entered upon my biggest gamble, holding the stake of life well risked. My pleasure in the affair was only marred by the enforced partnership of McGregor. There was no help for this, but I knew he wasn't much fonder of me than I of him, and I found myself gently meditating on the friction likely to arise between the new President and his minister of finance, in case our plans succeeded. Still the Signorina hated him, and by all signs she loved me. So I lay back in my chair, and recalled my charmer's presence by whistling the hymn of liberty until it was time to go to lunch.

CHAPTER X.

The morning meeting had been devoted to principles and to the awakening of enthusiasm; in the evening the conspirators descended upon details, and we held a prolonged and anxious conference at the Signorina's. Mrs. Carrington was commanded to have a headache after dinner, and retired with it to bed; and from then till one we sat and conspired. The result of our deliberations was a pretty plan, of which the main outlines were as follows:

This was Tuesday. On Friday night, the Colonel, with twenty determined ruffians (or resolute patriots) previously bound to him, body and soul, by a donation of no less than fifty dollars a man,

was to surprise the Golden House, seize the person of the President and all cash and securities on the premises; no killing if it could be avoided, but on the other hand no shilly-shally. McGregor wanted to put the President out of the way at once, as a precautionary measure, but I strongly opposed this proposal, and, finding the Signorina was absolutely inflexible on the same side, he yielded.

I had a strong desire to be present at this midnight surprise, but another duty called for my presence. There was a gala supper at the barracks that evening, to commemorate some incident or other in the national history, and I was to be present and to reply to the toast of "The Commerce of Aurestaland."

My task was, at all hazards, to keep this party going till the Colonel's job was done, when he would appear at the soldiers' quarters, bribe in hand, and demand their allegiance. Our knowledge of the result as a certainty, if once the President were a prisoner and the dollars before their eyes. The Colonel and the troops were to surround the officers' messroom, and offer them life and money, or death and destruction. Here again we anticipated their choice with composure. The army was then to be paraded in the Piazza, the town overawed or converted, and, behold, the Revolution was accomplished!

The success of this design entirely depended on its existence remaining a dead secret from the one man we feared, and on that one man being found alone and unguarded at 12 o'clock on Friday night.

If he discovered the plot, we were lost. If he took it into his head to attend the supper, our difficulties would be greatly increased. At this point we turned to the Signorina, and I said, briefly:

"This appears to be where you come in, Signorina. Permit me to invite you to dine with his excellency on Friday evening at 8 precisely."

"You mean," she said slowly, "that I am to keep him at home on Friday?"

"Yes," said I. "Is there any difficulty?"

"I do not think there is great difficulty," she said, "but I don't like it; it looks so treacherous."

Of course it did. I didn't like her doing it myself, but how else was the President to be secured?

"Rather late to think of that, isn't it?" asked McGregor, with a sneer. "A revolution won't run on high emotional wheels."

"Think how he's jockeyed you about the money," said I, assuming the part of the tempter.

"By the way," said McGregor, "it's understood the Signorina enters into possession of the President's country villa, isn't it?"

Now my poor Signorina had a longing for that choice little retreat, and between resentment for her lost money and a desire for the pretty house, she was sore beset. Left to herself, I believe she would have yielded to her better feelings and spoiled the plot.

"I'll do it, if you'll swear not to—"

"I've promised already," replied the Colonel, sullenly; "I won't touch him, unless he brings it on himself. If he tries to kill me, I suppose I needn't bare my breast to the blow?"

"No, no," I interposed; "I have a regard for his excellency, but we must not let our feelings betray us into weakness. He must be taken—alive and well, if possible—but in the last resort, dead or alive."

"Come, that's more like sense," said the Colonel, approvingly.

The Signorina sighed, but opposed us no longer.

Returning to ways and means, we arranged for communication in case of need during the next three days without the necessity of meeting. My position as the center of financial business in Whittingham made this easy; the passage of bank money to and fro would excite little remark, and the messages could easily be so expressed as to reveal nothing to an uninitiated eye. It was further agreed that on the smallest hint of danger reaching any one of us, the word should at once be passed to the others, and we should rendezvous at the Colonel's "ranch," which lay some seven miles from the town. Thence, in this lamentable escape, escape would be more possible.

"And now," said the Colonel, "if Martin will hand over the dollars, I think that's about all."

(To be continued.)

His Weak-End.

Mr. Melville Ingalls, the Western railway magnate, was induced by a friend while spending Sunday with him to attend service at a church, the pastor of which is noted for the extreme length of his sermons.

As the friends were leaving at the conclusion of the service, the Bostonian, with a touch of pride, inquired:

"Dr. Blank is a most eloquent minister, is he not?"

"Very eloquent," was the dry response of the railroad man, "but he has poor terminal facilities."—Harper's Weekly.

Not That Anxious.

"I'd give a million dollars if I could keep from getting bald."

"If you will rub a raw onion on your hair every day it will keep it from falling out."

"Gee! I'm not that anxious to keep my hair!"—Houston Post.

The Rest She Needed.

"Yes," said Mrs. Popley, "I'm going to take the children away to the country for a month or so."

"You'll take your servant girls with you, of course," said Mrs. Nixdore.

"Most assuredly not! I need a rest myself."—Philadelphia Press.

Nervous.

"Jiggy got an awful scare last night."

"What was it?"

"His youngest boy fell out of bed."

"What did Jiggy do?"

"He woke up and screamed 'Earthquake!'"—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

As Others See Us.

The Maid—Now there's Fred Higgins. He's a man after my own heart.

The Man—Well, he's scheduled for a bitter disappointment.

The Maid—Why do you say that?

The Man—Because you are heartless.



Permanent Trellis of Wire.

The scarcity of bean poles forces me to resort to other means of giving support to my lima beans, says a gardener in Farm and Fireside. At one time I thought we could get around the difficulty by planting the newer bush limas. The latter however have never given me more than a fraction of the crop that I can and do get from my "pole" limas, and now I plant the latter exclusively. They are trained to a post, wire and string trellis.

Posts should be set firmly, and not too far apart. I use galvanized wire of fair strength and find it good for a number of years. It has to stand quite a strain, as the load of thrifty vines is very heavy, and I, therefore, give as much support, by supplementary stakes (between the posts), as is convenient. The wires are made to rest in a crotch at the upper end of the pole or stake.

To make the trellis still stronger, I

now put several rows side by side, and connect the posts and stakes across the rows by cross strips fastened high enough to allow the horse in cultivating to pass under it.

For each row I stretch two wires, one about six inches above the ground surface, the other about five feet from the ground. Common binder twine is wound zigzag around the two wires. It makes a useful and quite ornamental support for the limas, and the vines take readily, particularly and remarkably so, to the strings, even without much assistance or coaxing on the part of the grower.

Superiority of the Mule.

The mule is less nervous than the horse and therefore loses less energy in useless fretting. In fact, one of the chief characteristics of the mule is his ability to take care of himself under all circumstances, says Farming. Much of the apparent shirking which is charged against the mule is an inborn tendency to husband his strength and make every effort count. The result of this instinctive care on the part of the mule is that he is able to turn out more work than would be possible for a horse of the same weight under the same conditions. The mule instinctively avoids holes, sharp obstacles, barbed wire fences and various other forms of danger which are not so successfully avoided by horses. It is a matter of common observation that in instances where mules run away they seldom injure themselves to any serious extent.

Fumigation to Protect Orchards.

In Germany some interesting experiments have recently been made in the protection of orchard trees against a night frost by means of fumigation. A part of an orchard in bloom was thus successfully guarded against an April frost by the dense smoke of naphthalene. But the experiment was very expensive, fifty kilograms of naphthalene being consumed by seven flames in one hour. Later a new preparation of chemicals was tried, producing a comparatively large volume of smoke with the expenditure of only two kilograms of the material per hour. These trials are under the direction of an experimental gardening association.

Pulling Old Fence Posts.

Fasten chain to post close to the ground, pass it over the wheel of an

ordinary corn planter, hitch team to chain and go ahead. It doesn't damage the wheel and the broad tire keeps it from sinking into the ground.

Setting Fence Posts.

Some farmers argue that it is best to set posts early in the fall, when the ground is solid. Of course, a post carefully set at any time will remain in its place, but the fall season is really a much worse time than in the spring. Digging the hole makes the soil loose, and if done in the fall it has not time to become compact again. Water filters down through the loose soil, which will raise the post a little every year until it throws it out altogether. If the soil has time to settle it absorbs less moisture, and after the first year, if the heaving out has not already begun, it will rarely begin.

Anthrax and Earth Worms.

From recent experiments it is certain that earth worms are responsible for conveying the spores and anthrax from various buried carcasses to the surface of the earth and thus bringing about a reinfection. This process of reinfection was urged by M. Louis Pasteur, but without success.

Home-Made Corn Sheller.

This is a cheap way to make a good corn sheller. Get a poplar plank six inches wide, one inch thick and three

feet long. Dress the plank smooth; drive some 8-penny nails into the plank to within one inch of the heads; put them one-half inch apart in rows in a square six inches each way.

Bees and Smoking.

Many times bees are smoked more than is necessary; perhaps, because not every one knows that during a nectar flow some honey is lost every time a hive is opened, says Farming. When bees are smoked they fill themselves with honey and if so much smoke is used that most of the bees in the hive at that time take honey, it will be more than an hour before it is redeposited into the cells and the regular work resumed. Bees sometimes gather nectar enough to make a pound of honey an hour, so one can see that it would be quite a loss if every colony in a fair sized apiary were smoked enough to interrupt the work for one hour.

To Ripen Cream.

Cream left to itself will become sour spontaneously. This is the result of the growth of lactic acid bacteria, which feed upon the milk sugar, and as a final process convert it into a lactic acid. Other forms of bacteria are always present in cream; some have little or no effect in the ripening process, while others, if allowed to develop, produce undesirable and often obnoxious flavors. To cultivate and develop these "wild" germs is called "spontaneous" ripening, and is often attended with uncertainty. Good butter making demands the use of a "starter," either home-made or a pure culture. The former should be made of selected skim milk.

Keeping Hogs Clean.

To give the pigs a thorough scrubbing may appear to be labor thrown away, but if two lots of pigs are treated alike in every respect, except that one lot receives a thorough scrubbing with soap once in a while, there will be a marked difference in favor of the hogs that are washed when the time for slaughter arrives. A clean bed of straw with a dry house, so as to afford them comfort at night, will also promote thrift and growth. The hog is naturally a cleanly animal and enjoys a bath. If considered a filthy animal, that devours filthy food, it is because of the treatment given. Hogs will select clean and wholesome food if given the opportunity to do so.

Value of a Silo.

It is very important to provide some means by which the dairy cow can be supplied with good food at all seasons of the year in order that she may yield milk most economically. Such medium may be found in the silo which furnishes a place for the storing of food in the form of silage. It is a well-known fact that the nearest an ideal food that can be obtained for the dairy cow is good pasture; but for several months in the year green pasture is not available. At such times the best substitute are corn silage and such roots as mangels and turnips. Corn yields an average of twice as much dry matter per acre as root crops; and since the latter involve much more labor, and greater expense, silage is far more economical.

How to Grow Rhubarb.

Have the ground on which rhubarb is grown very rich. It requires well-rotted manure. Divide the roots, allowing one tuber to the hill. This should be done every other year. Keep the dirt hoed up loosely around them and as soon as the first leaves come and begin to droop over on the ground, cut them off; this will start the stalks to growing the taller and straighter. All stalks should be cut when they begin to droop toward the ground. Never pull them, for if you do, you take with them the shoots for the next stalks and also break the small roots that help nourish the plant. Cut them one inch above the ground. Always cover with about three inches of straw in the fall. Follow these rules and your pieplant will yield abundantly till frost kills it.

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