

A GENTLEMAN FROM MISSISSIPPI

By THOMAS A. WISE
Novelized From the Play by Frederick R. Toombs

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(CHAPTER X Continued.)

"I know how to stop those rumors, for I'm sure it's Peabody's work, he thinking Langdon will hear the talk and mistrust me," began Haines, when in came Senator Langdon himself, his face beaming contentedly. Little did the junior senator from Mississippi realize that he was soon to face the severest trial, the most vital crisis, of his entire life.

Cullen responded to the senator's cheery greeting of "Mornin', everybody!"

"Senator," he asked Cullen, "my paper wants your opinion on the question of the election of senators by



"That concerns future senators."

popular vote. Do you think the system of electing senators by vote of state legislatures should be abolished?"

The Mississippian cocked his head to one side.

"I reckon that's a question that concerns future senators and not those already elected," he chuckled.

Haines laughed at Cullen, who thrust his pad into his pocket and hurried away.

"It is today that I appear before the ways and means committee, isn't it?" Langdon queried of his secretary.

"Yes," said Haines, consulting his memorandum book. "At 11 o'clock you go before ways and means to put forward the needs of your state on the matter of the reduction of the tariff on aluminum hydrates. The people of Mississippi believe it has actually put back life into the exhausted cotton lands. In Virginia they hope to use it on the tobacco fields."

"Where does the pesky stuff come from?" asked the senator.

"From South America," coached the secretary. "The south is in a hurry for it, so the duty must come down. You'll have to bluff a bit, because Peabody and his crowd will try to make a kind of bargain—wanting you to keep up iron and steel duties. But you don't believe that iron and steel need help, you will tell them, don't you see, so that they will feel the necessity of giving you what you want for the south in order to gain your support for the iron and steel demands."

The office door opened and Senator Peabody appeared.

"Peabody," whispered the secretary. Instantly the Mississippian had his cue. His back to Peabody, he rose, brought down his fist heavily upon the desk and expounded oratorically to Haines:

"What we can produce of aluminum hydrates, my boy, is problematical, but the south is in a hurry for it, and the duty must come down. It's got to come down, and I'm not going to do anything else until it does."

The secretary stretched across the desk.

"Excuse me, senator; Senator Peabody is here," he said loudly and surprisedly, as though he had just sighted the boss of the senate.

The Mississippian turned.

"Oh, good morning, senator. I was just talking with my secretary about that hydrate clause."

Peabody bowed slightly.

"Yes, I knew it was coming up," he said, "so I just dropped over. I'm not opposed to it or any southern measure, but it makes it more difficult for me when you southern people oppose certain Pittsburg interests that I have to take care of."

Langdon smiled.

"I've never been in Pittsburg, but they tell me it looks as if it could take care of itself."

The visitor shrugged his shoulders.

"That's true enough, but give and take is the rule in political matters, Langdon."

This remark brought a frown to Langdon's face.

"I don't like bargaining between gentlemen, Peabody. More important still, I don't believe American politics has to be run on that plan. Why can't we change a lot of things now that we are here?"

Langdon became so enthused that he paced up and down the room as he spoke.

"Peabody, you and Stevens and I," continued Langdon, "could get our friends together and right now start to make this great capital of our great

country the place of the 'square deal,' the place where give and take, bargain and sale, are unknown. We could start a movement that would drive out all secret influences."

The secretary noticed Peabody's involuntary start.

"The newspapers would help us," went on Langdon. "Public opinion would be with us, and both houses of congress would have to join in the work if we went out in front, led the way and showed them their plain duty. And I tell you, Senator Peabody, that the principles that gave birth to this country, the principles of truth, honesty, justice and independence, would rule in Washington."

"If Washington cared anything about them, Langdon," interjected the Pennsylvanian.

"That's my point," cried the Mississippian—"let us teach Washington to care about them!"

"Langdon, Langdon," said Peabody patronizingly, "you've seized on a bigger task than you know. After you reform Washington you will have to go on and reform human nature, human instincts, every human being in the country, if you want to make politics this angelic thing you describe. It isn't politics, it's humanity, that's wrong," waving aside a protest from Langdon.

"Anyway your idea is not constitutional, Langdon," continued Peabody. "You want everybody to have a share in the national government. That wouldn't meet the theory of centralization woven into our political system by its founders. They intended that our government should be controlled by a limited number of representatives, so that authority can be fixed and responsibility ascertained."

"You distort my meaning," cried Langdon. "And, senator, I would like to ask why so many high priced constitutional lawyers who enter congress spend so much time in placing the constitution of the United States between themselves and their duty, sir, between the people and their government, sir, between the nation and its destiny? I want to know if in your opinion the constitution was designed to throttle expression of the public will?"

"Of course not. That's the reason you and I, Langdon, and the others are elected to the senate," added Peabody, starting to leave. Then he halted. "By the way, senator," he said, "I'll do my best to arrange what you want regarding aluminum hydrates for the sake of the south, and I'll also stand with you for Altacoola for the naval base. Our committee is to make its report tomorrow."

Langdon observed the penetrating gaze that Peabody had fixed on him. It seemed to betray that the Pennsylvanian's apparently careless manner was assumed.

"Hm!" coughed Langdon, glancing at Haines. "I'm not absolutely con-

vinced."

"Congress has some-thing to say"—and half whispered to the secretary:

"Mah young friend, don't let Senator Langdon get switched away from Gulf City by them cheap skates from Altacoola. Now, if you'll get th' senator to vote fo' Gulf City we'll see—I'll see, sah, as an officer of th' Gulf City Lan' company—that you get taken care of."

Haines' eyes opened wide.

"Go on, colonel; go on with your offer," he said.

"Well, I'll see that a block of stock, sah—a big block—is set aside fo' Senator Langdon an' another fo' you too. We've made this arrangement else-where. We'll outbid Altacoola every time. They're po' sports an' hate to give up."

"So Altacoola is bidding, too?" excitedly asked Haines.

"Why, of co'se it is. Ah yo' as blind as that o' ah yo' foolin' with me?" questioned Teifer suspiciously.

"Seems to me yo' ought to know more about that end of it than a fellah clear from th' gulf."

"Certainly, certainly," mumbled Haines impatiently as he endeavored to associate coherently, intelligently, in his mind these startling new revelations of Teifer with certain incidents he had previously noted in the operations of the committee on naval affairs.

Then he looked across at the mayor and smiled. Apparently he had heard nothing to amaze him.

"Colonel," he returned calmly, dropping into a voice that sounded of pity for the gray hairs of the lobbyist, "about fifty men a day come to me with propositions like that. There is nothing doing, colonel. I couldn't possibly interest Senator Langdon, because he has the faculty of judging for himself, and he would be prejudiced against either town that came out with such a proposition."

"Lan' speculation is legitimate," protested the colonel cunningly.

Haines agreed.

"Certainly—by outsiders. But it's d—d thievery when engaged in by any one connected with putting a bill through. If I were to tell Senator Langdon what you have told me it would decide him unalterably in favor of Altacoola. Senator Langdon, sir, is one of the few men in Washington who would rather be thought a fool



"My boy, the duty must come down."

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mitted to Altacoola until I'm sure it's the best place. I'll make up my mind today definitely, and I think it will be for Altacoola."

The boss of the senate went out, glaring venomously at Haines, slamming the door.

A moment later a page boy brought in a card. "Colonel J. D. Teifer, Gulf City," read the senator.

"Bud," he remarked to the secretary, "I'm going to send my old acquaintance, Teifer, mayor of Gulf City, in here for you to talk to. He'll want to know about his town's chances for being chosen as the naval base. I must hurry away, as I have an appointment with my daughters and Mrs. Spangler before going before ways and means."

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE TRAIL OF THE "INSIDERS."

COLONEL J. D. TELFER (J. D. standing for Jefferson Davis, he explained proudly to Haines) proved a warm advocate of the doubtful merits of Gulf City as a hundred million dollar naval base. His flushed face grew redder, his long white hair became disordered, and he tugged at his white mustache continually as he waxed warmer in his efforts to impress the senator's secretary.

"I tell you, Mr. Haines, Gulf City, sah, leads all the south when it comes to choosin' ground fo' a naval base. Her vast expanse of crystal sea, her miles upon miles of silv'ah sands, her protected by a natural harbor and th' islands of Mississippi sound, make her th' only spot to be considered. She's God's own choice and the people's, too, for a naval base."

"But unfortunately congress also has something to say about choosing it," spoke Haines.

"To be shuah they do," said Gulf City's mayor, "but—"

"And there was a man here from Altacoola yesterday," again interrupted the secretary, "who said that Gulf City was fit only to be the state refuge for aged and indigent frogs."

"Say, they ain't a man in Altacoola wot can speak th' truth," indignantly shrieked the old colonel, almost losing control of himself, "because their heads is always a-buzzin' and a-hummin' from th' quinine they have to take to keep the fever away, sah."

The mayor sat directly in front of Haines, at the opposite side of his desk. Regain- ing his composure, he suddenly leaned forward and half whispered to the secretary:

"Mah young friend, don't let Senator Langdon get switched away from Gulf City by them cheap skates from Altacoola. Now, if you'll get th' senator to vote fo' Gulf City we'll see—I'll see, sah, as an officer of th' Gulf City Lan' company—that you get taken care of."

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than a greater in a cable with a that."

The mayor of Gulf City jumped to his feet, his face blazing in rage, not in shame.

"Seems to me yo're mighty fresh, young man," he blustered. "What kind of politics is Langdon playin'?"

"Not fresh, colonel; only friendly. I'm just tipping you off how not to be a friend to Altacoola. As to his politics, the senator will answer you himself."

A scornful laugh accompanied Teifer's reply.

"Altacoola, huh! I reckon yo' must be a fool, after all. Why, everybody knows of the speculatin' in land around Altacoola, and everybody knows it ain't outsiders that's doin' it. It's the insiders, right here in Washington. If yo' ain't in, yo' can easy get a latched key. Young man, yo'll find out things some day, and yo'll drop to it all."

"I guess I was too late with yo', Thats about the size of it. I guess Altacoola 'll talk to yo'," went on the mayor. "If that feller Fairbrother of Altacoola had been able to hold his tongue maybe I wouldn't know so much. But now I know what's what. I know this—that yo're either a big fool or—an insider. Yo're a nice young feller. I have kind-a taken a fancy to yo'. I like to see yo' young fellers get along and not miss yo' chances. Come, my boy, get wise to yo'rself, get wise to yo'rself! Climb on to the band wagon with yo' friends."

Bud concluded that he might be able to get more definite information out of Teifer if he humored him a bit.

"I tell you, colonel," he finally said, "those are pretty grave charges yo're making, but I'll tell you confidentially, owing to your liking for me, that it is not yet too late to do something for Gulf City. Now, just suppose you and I dine together tonight early, and we'll go over the whole ground to see how things lie. Will you?"

The colonel held out his hand, smiling broadly. He felt that at last he had won the secretary over; that the young man was at heart anxious to take money for his influence with the senator.

"All right, my boy, yo're on. We'll dine together. Yo' are absolutely certain that it won't be too late to get Senator Langdon?"

"Get wise to yo'rself! Get wise!" "Absolutely positive. I wouldn't make a mistake in a matter like this, would I, unless I was what you said I was—a fool?"

"Of course not. Oh, yo're a slick one. I like to do business with folks like yo'. It's mighty educatin'!"

"Thanks," answered Bud dryly. "It's certain that Langdon won't decide which place he's for until tomorrow. I promise you that he won't decide until after I have my talk with you."

"Yo' see," said Teifer, "I asked that question because, as yo' probably know, Congressman Norton and his crowd is pretty close to Senator Langdon."

Haines cut him short with a gasp of surprise.

"Norton!"

Teifer, wrinkling his forehead incredulously, looked at Haines. "Surest thing you know, my boy."

Bud turned his head away in thought. "Oh, leave the Norton outfit to me, I'll fool them," he finally said.

"Good."

Teifer shook the secretary's hand heartily.

"Yo're no fool, my boy. Anybody can see that—after they get to know yo' all. That's what comes of bein' one of them smooth New Yorkers. They bear

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