

# A GENTLEMAN FROM MISSISSIPPI

By THOMAS A. WISE

Novelized From the Play by Frederick R. Toombs

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(CHAPTER XXVII Continued.)

"The hero of Crawfordsville tried to speak, but he could not. He stared at his hostess, who smiled the smile of the budding debutante. His own open mouthed astonishment was reflected in the faces of Carolina and Hope Georgia as they observed their father's expression. He forgot he was in Washington. He did not know he was a senator. The fact that he had ever even thought of making a speech was furthest from his mind.

What did it all mean? Had Mrs. Spangler gone suddenly insane? His



"Great heavens! I'm late, I'm late!"

thoughts—what did they think? These thoughts surged through his flustered brain. Then it flashed over him—she was joking in some new fashionable way. He turned toward the fair widow to laugh, but her face was losing its smile. A pained expression, a suggestion of intense suffering, appeared in her face.

"Why do you so hesitate, Senator Langdon?" she finally asked in low voice, just loud enough for the two girls to overhear.

The junior senator from Mississippi looked at his hostess. She had entertained him and had done much for his daughters in Washington. She was alone in the world—a widow. He felt that he could not shame her before Carolina and Hope Georgia. His southern

chivalry would not permit that. Then, too, she was a most charming person, and the thought, "Why not—why not take her at her word?" crept into his mind.

"Yes, father, why do you hesitate?" asked Carolina.

Senator Langdon mustered his voice into service at last.

"I've been thinking," he said slowly, "that—"

"That your daughters did not know," interrupted Mrs. Spangler, "of our—"

"The telephone—stairs—is ringing, madam," said a maid who had entered to Mrs. Spangler.

The adventuress could not leave the senator and his daughters alone, though she knew it must be Peabody calling her. At any moment he might remember his speech and leave. Already late, he would still be later, though, because he would have no carriage—hers would purposely be delayed.

"Tell the person speaking that you are empowered to bring me any message—that I cannot leave the dining hall," she said to the maid.

To gain time and to hold the senator's attention Mrs. Spangler asked slowly:

"Well, senator, what was it that you were going to say when I interrupted you a few moments ago?"

Langdon had been racking his brain for some inspiration that would enable him to save the feelings of his hostess and yet indicate his position clearly. He would not commit himself in any way. He would jump up and pronounce her an impostor first.

After a moment of silence his clouded face cleared.

"Mrs. Spangler," he began, "your announcement today I have considered to be—"

"A renunciation," she suggested. The maid returned.

"Mr. Wall says Senator Langdon is wanted at once at the capitol."

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Langdon, springing to his feet and glancing at the clock. "I'm late, I'm late! I hope to God I'm not too late!"

"Mr. Wall says a carriage is coming for Senator Langdon," concluded the maid.

"We must talk this matter over some other time, Mrs. Spangler," the Mississippian cried as he sent a servant for his hat and coat. "I hope that carriage hurries, else I'll try it on the run for the capitol."

"It's a half hour away on foot," said Mrs. Spangler. "Better wait. You'll save time."

But to herself she muttered as though mystified:

"I wonder why Peabody changed his mind so suddenly? Why should he now want the old fool at the capitol?"

The rumble of wheels was heard outside.

"Hurry, father!" cried Hope Georgia. The senator hurried down the stone steps of Mrs. Spangler's residence as rapidly as his weight and the excitement under which he labored would permit.

Opening the coach door, he plunged inside—

to come face to face with Bud Haines, who had huddled down in a corner to avoid observation from the Spangler windows. The driver started his horses off on a run.

Struggling to regain his breath, the senator cried:

"Well, what are you—"

"Never mind now. But first gather in all I say, senator, as we've no time to lose. When I couldn't locate you and I saw you probably wouldn't be at the senate chamber in time to make your speech on the naval base bill I persuaded Senator Milbank of Arkansas to rise and make a speech on the currency question, which subject was in order. He was under obligation to me for some important information I once obtained for him, and he consented to keep the floor until you arrived, though he knew he would earn the vengeance of Peabody. That was over an hour and a half ago. He must be reading quotations from 'Pilgrim's Progress' to the senate by now to keep the floor."

Bud paused to look at his watch. The senator stretched his head out of the window and cried, "Drive faster!"

"Got your speech all right?" called Bud above the din of the rattling wheels.

"Yes, here," was the response, the senator tapping his inner breast pocket.

"Thought maybe she"—cried Bud, jerking his head back in the direction from which they had come.

The Mississippian shook his head negatively and set his jaws determinedly.

The coach swung up to the capitol entrance.

"Tell me," asked Langdon, as both jumped out, "how did you find out that—"

"I phoned the house—gave a name Peabody uses—"

"Great heavens, but how did you know where to phone?"

They were at the door of the senate chamber.

"Norton gave me the tip—for your sake and Carolina's—for old time's sake, he said," was Bud's reply.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

ON THE FLOOR OF THE SENATE.

TOO much occupied in concentrating his thoughts on his speech, Langdon failed to notice the consternation on the faces of Peabody and Stevens as he walked to his seat in the senate. They had failed

to succeed in getting Milbank to conclude and consequently could not push the naval base report through. But they noted the passing of over an hour after their opponent's appointed time and had felt certain that he would not appear at all.

"The boss of the senate" leaned across to Stevens and whispered hurriedly:

"We must tear him to pieces now—discredit him publicly. It's his own fault. Our agents can sell the land to Standard Steel. Our connection with the scheme will be impossible to discover—after we have made the public believe Langdon is a crook."

"But how about our supposed combination to protect the government that Langdon will tell about?" asked Stevens. "We can't deny that, of course."

"No," answered Peabody. "We can't deny it, but we will not affirm it. We will tell interviewers that we prefer not to talk about it."

"It's our only chance," replied Stevens cautiously.

"Yes, and we owe it all to Jake Stelbert," went on Peabody. "That

is my unpleasant duty"—Peabody and Stevens exchanged glances—"to place a matter before this body that to me, as a member of this honorable body, is not only distasteful, but deeply to be regretted."

"There has arisen ground to suspect a member of this body of having endeavored to make money at the government's expense out of land which he is alleged to have desired his own committee to choose as the naval base.

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fellow Telfer will do anything to please Jake. Jake has convinced Telfer that Langdon was responsible for the defeat of Gulf City, and the mayor is wild for revenge."

"The boss of the senate" rose and walked to the rear of the senate chamber to issue orders to two of his colleagues.

"Report of the committee on naval affairs," droned the clerk mechanically. "House bill No. 1109 is amended to read as follows"—And his voice sank to an unintelligible mumble, for every senator present he well knew was aware that the amendment named Altacoola as the naval base site.

Senator Langdon rose in his seat.

"Mr. President," he called.

"Chair recognizes the gentleman from Mississippi," said the presiding officer as he leaned back to speak to Senator Winans of Kansas, who had approached to the side of the rostrum.

The Langdon speech on "The New South and the South of the Future" proved more than a document suited only to a reverent burial in the Congressional Record. Although wearied at the start owing to the exciting happenings of the day, the Mississippian's enthusiasm for his cause gave him strength and stimulation as he progressed. His voice rose majestically as he came to the particular points he wished to accentuate, and even those in the uppermost rows in the galleries could hear his every word.

At the close of his formal speech he began on his statement of the action of the naval affairs committee in buying control of Altacoola land to fortify attempts to rob the government. As he had predicted, the senate did "sit up."

The senate did agree that a new kind of politics had arrived.

During this latter part of the speech many curious glances were directed at Peabody and Stevens, who sat in the same tier of seats, in the middle of the chamber, only an aisle separating them. Through this choice of seat, they could confer without leaving their places. Various senatorial associates of these two men in other deals found it difficult to believe their ears—but was not old Langdon at this moment narrating the amazing transaction on the floor of the senate? Would the statue on the pedestal step down? Would the sphinx of the desert speak the story of the lost centuries? Would honor take the place of expediency in the affairs of state? What might not happen, thought the senate machine, now that Peabody and Stevens had taken to their bosoms what they termed the purple pup of political purity?

Neither did the full portent of the situation escape the attention of the reporters' gallery. Dick Cullen observed to Hansel of the Record:

"Virtue's getting so thick around here it's a menace to navigation."

"Blocking the traffic, eh?" queried Hansel, and both laughed.

"Hello! What's this?" exclaimed Cullen a few minutes later. "Horton has been recognized, when the program was to adjourn when the naval base bill was over with."

Langdon's speech had proved the hit, the sensation of the session. After he concluded, amid resounding applause, in which senators joined, as well as occupants of the galleries, Senator Norton of Montana rose and caught the presiding officer's eye.

"I ask unanimous consent to offer a resolution."

Hearing no objection he continued in a manner that instantly attracted unusual attention:

"It is my unpleasant duty"—Peabody and Stevens exchanged glances—"to place a matter before this body that to me, as a member of this honorable body, is not only distasteful, but deeply to be regretted."

"There has arisen ground to suspect a member of this body of having endeavored to make money at the government's expense out of land which he is alleged to have desired his own committee to choose as the naval base.

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The Oregon Trunk, building up the Deschutes, is owned by John F. Stevens, backed by J. J. Hill. Stevens was formerly chief engineer of the Panama canal and is a trusted adviser of Hill.

The Spokane Irrigation convention was held. It asks Congress for only \$50,000,000 to aid irrigation. The five million dollar resolution was de-

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"I therefore offer this resolution providing for the appointment of an investigating committee to look into these charges."

Langdon was intensely excited over this new development. "Some one has learned something about Peabody or Stevens," he muttered. He feared that the new complication might in some way affect the fate of the naval base—that the south, and Mississippi, might lose it. He rose slowly in his seat, while the senate hummed with the murmur of suppressed voices.

"I ask for more definite information," he began when recognized and after the president of the senate had pounded with the gavel to restore quiet, "so that this house can consider this important matter more intelligently."

Senator Horton rose. He said:

"I will take the liberty of adding that the senator accused is none other than the junior senator from Mississippi."

Langdon's eyes blazed. He strode swiftly into the aisle.

"Mr. President," he cried passionately, "I know this is not the time or place for a discussion like this, but ask that senatorial courtesy permit me to ask"—then he concluded strongly before he could be stopped—"what is the evidence in support of this preposterous charge?"

"This is all out of order," said the presiding officer after a pause, "but in view of the circumstances I will entertain a motion to suspend the rules."

This motion passing, Horton replied to Langdon:

"Your name is signed to a contract with J. D. Telfer, mayor of Gulf City, Miss., calling for 3,000 shares in the Gulf City Land company, and—"

"A lie, a lie!" screamed Langdon.

"That official," went on Horton coolly, "is now in Washington. He has the contract and will swear to conversations with you and your secretary. His testimony will be corroborated by no less a personage than Congressman Norton of your own district, who says you asked him to conduct part of the negotiations."

"And I might add," cried Horton, "that it is known to more than one member of this honorable body that you had drawn up a minority report in favor of Gulf City because of your anger at the defeat of your plan to take the naval base away from Altacoola."

Langdon sank into his chair, bewildered, even stunned. There was a conspiracy against him, but how could he prove it? The ground seemed crumbling from under him—not even a straw to grasp. Then the old fighting blood that carried him along in Beard's van tugged at the valves of his heart, revived his spirit, ran through his veins. He leaped to his feet.

A sound as of a scuffle—a body falling heavily—drew all eyes from Langdon to the rear of the main aisle. An assistant sergeant at arms was lying face downward on the carpet. Another was vainly trying to hold back Bud Haines, who, tearing himself free, rushed down to his chief wailing a sheet of paper in the senator's eyes.

"Read that," gasped the secretary breathlessly, and he hurried away up a side passageway and out to reach

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the aisle, rushing to the press gallery.

Langdon spread the paper before him with difficulty with his trembling hands. Slowly his whirling brain gave him the ability to read. Slowly what appeared to him as a jumbled nothing resolved into orderly lines and words.

"The letter is signed 'Charles Norton.'"

He read and again stood before the senate, which had regained its usual composure after the fallen sergeant at arms had regained his feet and rubbed his bruises.

"I do not think there will be any investigation," he said, with decided effort, struggling to down the emotion that choked him. "I ask this house to listen to the following letter:

"Dear Senator Langdon—When you receive this letter I shall be well on my way to take a steamer for Cuba. I write to ask you not to think too harshly of me, for I will always cherish thoughts of the friendship you have shown me.

"Peabody and Stevens have finally proved too much for me. When they got old Telfer to swear to a forged contract and wanted me to forge your name in the land records at Gulf City, I threw up my hands. Their game will always go on, I suppose, but you gave them a shock when you broke up their Altacoola graft scheme. And I'm glad you did. They cast me aside today, probably thinking they could get me again if they needed me.

"I am going on the sugar plantation of a friend, where I can make a new

start and forget that I ever went to Washington."

Langdon paused deliberately. The senate was hushed. The galleries were stilled. Not even the rustle of a sheet of paper was heard in the reporters' gallery. The Mississippian gazed around the senate chamber. He saw Stevens and Peabody craning their necks across the aisle and talking excitedly to each other.

Then he stepped forward and spoke, waving the paper in the air.

"This letter is signed 'Charles Norton.'"

The old southerner gazed triumphantly at the men who had sought to destroy him. It was with difficulty that the presiding officer could hammer down the burst of handclapping that arose from the galleries.

Senator Horton, however, was not satisfied with Langdon's sudden ascendency.

"How do we know that that letter is not a forgery, a trick," he exclaimed.

"Go get Congressman Norton—if you can—and get his denial," responded Langdon.

The junior senator from Mississippi hurriedly pushed his way out of the senate chamber. His day's work was done.

Down on a broad plantation along the Pearl river an old planter, who has borne his years well, as life goes nowadays, passes his days contentedly. He delights in the romping of his grandchildren as they recite the echoes of the mansion and prides himself on the achievements of their father, Randolph, who has improved the plantation to a point never reached before.

Sometimes he receives a letter from his daughter, Hope Georgia, now Mrs. Haines, telling him of her happy life, or perhaps it is a letter from Carolina, describing the good times she is having in London with the friends she is visiting.

And the old planter goes out on the broad veranda in the warm southern twilight, and he thinks of the days that were. He remembers how the Third Mississippi won the day at Crawfordsville. He thinks of the days when he fought the good fight in Washington. His thoughts turn to the memory of her who went before these many years and whom he is soon to see again, and peace descends on the soul of the gentleman from Mississippi as the world drops to slumber around him.

THE END.

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