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...A... CAREER

By DONALD CHAMBERLIN

Edward Wilkins was a farmer boy who when he was but seven years old showed signs of a towering ambition. Even at that tender age he discerned that, while there were a number of sources of power, the one that covered the widest field was wealth. At any rate, he saw persons living in fine houses and driving about in style, and he not only envied them, but resolved that as soon as he was able to accumulate money it should be the object of his life.

When Edward was fourteen he said good-bye to his father and mother and went to the city to begin a career. Being bright and ready at all times for work, he found a situation and not only kept it, but advanced rapidly. As he grew older there was no desire in him for money in itself, but for the power and prominence it would give him. Except for the first few years he spent in the city, he did not accumulate by saving. The fortune that came to him was the result rather of daring operations, for which he seemed to have a genius.

After awhile Edward Wilkins had accumulated so much money that it seemed impossible he should ever be poor. His safety lay in having so much capital that he could carry through any scheme he undertook. If he wished to buy all the corn in the country and hold it at his own price he was able to do so. Did he choose to buy a railway he could first depress the stock, then purchase it and hold it at his own valuation.

Wilkins had no desire to exercise the power his wealth gave him. He was content with knowing that he possessed it. He did not care for political preferment; he took no interest in influencing the course of the government.

When the great financier was forty years of age he had reached the summit of his ambition. He had acquired enormous power through his wealth, but since the exercise of that power would give him no enjoyment he had come to the end of his desire. He was like Alexander, who complained because there were no more kingdoms to conquer.

When an active brain tires of what has occupied and fed it there comes a craving for something to take its place. One such person will spend years building a sumptuous residence, which is more likely to be a sepulcher than a home. Another will turn author, taking comfort in giving to the world theories for which it has no use. Wilkins, now that he had reached his goal in half a lifetime, began to wonder what would be the end of the other half. After a continued rise to the summit would he descend again to end his career in the valley?

One thing he had lived long enough to recognize. Life appeared to him a constant shifting. Nothing seemed to endure unless it was inanimate, and even that, though slowly, was continually changing its form. There were mountains where there had been valleys and valleys where there had been mountains. Cities had been buried for centuries, forgotten, then uncovered to serve as curiosities. Whole sections of land had slid down into the sea and passed out of sight.

What would become of his great fortune? He knew that after his death it would pass back into the great ocean of wealth. But would he retain it for the rest of his life? Now that he had achieved it he no longer valued it and cared not so much what was to become of it as what was to become of him. Enough to give him the ordinary comforts essential to old age was all he desired. But that much was of great moment to him.

One night he dreamed a vivid dream. He dreamed that he returned to the farm and was a boy again. Yet he possessed all the experience he had acquired. His ambition was gone. He said to himself: "Here I am and here I wish to remain. My body is not as it was, full of life. It is tired. All I desire is rest."

It was a strange dream, this old spirit in a young body. It made a marked impression on him at the time, but gradually passed out of his mind with other forgotten things.

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By J. E. Jones

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An Episode of the Crescent City

By WILLARD BLAKEMAN

It was about 1850 that Arnold Dalmatire, a cotton factor of New Orleans, went to New York on business. In the office of a cotton broker in New York was a boy named Alec Tracy, whose health was very delicate. Indeed, the doctors had given him but a short time to live. Tracy, who was but fifteen years old, was assigned to Dalmatire to perform certain clerical duties and carry messages during the latter's stay in New York. Dalmatire was one of those men generous, sensitive to their honor, that were typical of the south at that time. He took pity on the boy and, suggesting that a southern climate and a change of scene might restore him to health, offered to take him to New Orleans and give him a position in his office there.

Dalmatire was a bachelor about forty years old and soon after his return from New York married a woman half his age, celebrated for her beauty. Gay society is usually encumbered with men who consider women a legitimate prey, though the standard of honor in this respect is doubtless higher than it was. A scion of a noble French house, Albert Durier, whose father had left France during the revolution to escape the guillotine, was at that time prominent socially in New Orleans and became devoted to Mme. Dalmatire. It was not long before his attentions were the subject of remark.

Dalmatire was not himself socially inclined, and his wife went about a good deal without him. For this reason he did not observe Durier being so much with his wife, and there was no one to caution him except Tracy. The young northerner was conscious of the fact that he owed his life to his benefactor and idolized him. When, therefore, he noticed that Dalmatire needed a friend to warn him of the danger in which his wife was being placed he considered how he could do so with the least damage to all concerned.

But the more he thought about it the more clearly he saw the difficulties in the way. Not a word could be spoken without bringing on a rupture in Dalmatire's domestic relations. Tracy believed that the wife was innocent, but imprudent; that she needed to be cautioned, possibly to be withdrawn from the influence of her admirer. This plan, too, he cast aside. Finally he determined to settle the matter with Durier, but in such a way that it would not appear to pertain in any way to the lady.

Meeting Durier at a ball, Tracy, while both were dancing, Durier with Mme. Dalmatire, purposely shoved him. Durier cast an irritated glance at him, but paid no further attention to the matter. Tracy guided his partner again near Durier and brought about another collision. This time he scowled at Durier, as if to accuse him of being at fault in the matter.

As soon as the music stopped the two men went to another room, where each accused the other of purposely running against him in the dance. Tracy was coolly abusive, tantalizing his enemy into a passion. Finally the latter turned on his heels with the words "You shall hear from me" and, seeking a friend, sent a challenge by him. The episode was witnessed by several persons, who gave the cause as it appeared on the surface.

Duelling at that time was the acknowledged method among gentlemen, especially in the south, of settling disputes, and there was a grove not far from the Crescent City where the duels took place. It was arranged that at sunrise the next morning the parties should meet at this grove and settle at the pistol's mouth which of the two men had judged the other in the dance. Whether Durier suspected the real cause did not appear.

But there was one person who saw through Tracy's act and had learned the consequences shortly after the words that passed between the two men. Tracy was living in bachelor rooms at the time, and he had scarcely got home from the ball when who should appear but Mme. Dalmatire.

"This affair between you and Mr. Durier must not take place. Why did you not make your demands on me instead of picking this quarrel with him?"

"I do not understand you, madame."

"She looked at him keenly for a time, then said, 'What do you wish me to do?'"

"Nothing."

"My eyes have been opened. I assure you I am perfectly innocent. I will agree never to receive your enemy again. Apologize to him and end the matter between you and him."

"Are you aware that such a course would expose me to be cut by every friend I have?"

"Oh, heavens!"

"You fear that the real cause of the quarrel will be learned by the world."

"I do."

"Very well. I will send an apology to Durier at once."

She seized his hand and kissed it, then turning left him.

The next day Tracy told his benefactor that he had determined to return to New York. Dalmatire endeavored to dissuade him, but without effect. He departed soon after the episode to escape the contempt of the entire social set of New Orleans. Mme. Dalmatire gave up many of her social ties and devoted herself to her husband.

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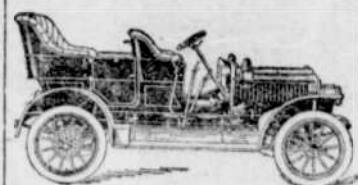


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