

Between Two Fires

By ANTHONY HOPE

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

CHAPTER I.

There were fewer revolutions in South America than usual, and the Panama canal had come to the front in a promising and progressive way, but the Republic of Aureatland was certainly not in a flourishing condition. Although most happily situated (it lies on the coast, rather to the north), and gifted with an extensive territory, nearly as big as North Dakota, it had yet failed to make that material progress which had been hoped by its founders. It is true that the State was still in its infancy, being an offshoot from another and larger realm, and having obtained the boon of freedom and self-government only as recently as 1871, after a series of political convulsions of a violent character, which may be studied with advantage in the well-known history of "The Making of Aureatland," by a learned professor of the Jeremiah P. Jecks University. This profound historian is, beyond all question, accurate in attributing the chief share in the national movement to the energy and ability of the first President of Aureatland, His Excellency President Marcus W. Whittingham, a native of Virginia. Having enjoyed a personal friendship with that talented man, as will subsequently appear, I have great pleasure in publicly endorsing the professor's eulogium. Not only did the President bring Aureatland into being, but he moulded her whole constitution. "It was his genius" (as the professor observes with propriety) "which was fired with the idea of creating a truly modern State, instinct with the progressive spirit of the Anglo-Saxon race. It was his genius which cast aside the worn-out traditions of European dominion, and taught his fellow-citizens that they were, if not all by birth, yet one and all by adoption, sons of freedom." Any mistakes in the execution of this fine conception must be set down to the fact that the President's great powers were rather the happy gift of nature than the result of culture.

To this truth he was himself in no way blind, and he was accustomed to attribute his want of a liberal education to the social ruin brought upon his family by the American Civil War, and to the dislocation thereby produced in his studies.

Starting under the auspices of such a gifted leader, and imbued with so noble a zeal for progress, Aureatland was, at the beginning of her history as a nation, the object of many fond and proud hopes. But in spite of the blaze of glory in which her sun had risen, her prosperity was not maintained. The country was well suited for agriculture and grazing, but the population—a very queer mixture of races—was indolent, and more given to keeping holidays and festivals than to honest labor. Most of them were unintelligent; those who were intelligent made their living out of those who weren't, a method of subsistence satisfactory to the individual, but adding little to the aggregate of national wealth. Only two classes made fortunes of any size—government officials and barkeepers—and even in their case wealth was not great, looked at by an English or American standard. Production was slack, invention at a standstill, and taxation heavy. The President's talents seemed more adapted to founding a State in the shock and turmoil of war, than to the dull details of administration; and although he was nominally assisted by a cabinet of three ministers, and an assembly comprising twenty-five members, it was on his shoulders that the real work of government fell. On him, therefore, the moral responsibility must also rest—a burden the President bore with a cheerfulness and equanimity almost amounting to unconsciousness.

When I first set foot in Aureatland I was landed on the beach by a boat from the steamer at the capital town of Whittingham. I was a young man, entering on my twenty-sixth year, and full of pride at finding myself at so early an age sent out to fill the responsible position of manager at our Aureatland branch. The directors of the bank were then pursuing what may without unfairness be called an adventurous policy, and, in response to the urgent entreaties and glowing exhortations of the President, they had decided on establishing a branch at Whittingham. I commanded a certain amount of interest on the board, inasmuch as the chairman owed my father a sum of money, too small to mention, but too large to pay, and when, led by the youthful itch for novelty, I applied for the post, I succeeded in obtaining my wish at a salary of a hundred dollars a month. I am sorry to say that in the course of a later business dealing the balance of obligation shifted from the chairman to my father, an unhappy event which deprived me of my hold on the company and seriously influenced my conduct in later days. When I arrived in Aureatland the bank had been open some six months, under the guidance of Mr. Thomas Jones, a steady-going old clerk, who was in future to act as chief and cashier under my orders.

I found Whittingham a pleasant little city of about five thousand inhabitants, picturesquely situated on a fine bay, at the spot where the river Marcus debouched into the ocean. The town was largely composed of government buildings and hotels, but there was a street of shops of no mean order, and a handsome square, called the "Piazza 1871," embellished with an equestrian statue of the President. Round about this national monument were a large number of seats, and, hard by, a cafe and bandstand. Here, I soon found, was the center of life in the after-

noons and evenings. Going along a fine avenue of trees for half a mile or so you came to the "Golden House," the President's official residence, an imposing villa of white stone with a gilt statue of Aureatland, a female figure sitting on a ploughshare, and holding a sword in the right hand and a cornucopia in the left. By her feet lay what was apparently a badly planned cannon ball; this, I learned, was a nugget, and from its presence and the name of the palace, I gathered that the President had once hoped to base the prosperity of his young republic on the solid foundation of mineral wealth. This hope had been long abandoned.

I have always hated hotels, so I lost no time in looking round for lodgings suitable to my means, and was fortunate enough to obtain a couple of rooms in the house occupied by a priest, Father Jacques Bonchretien. He was a very good fellow, and though we did not become intimate, I could always rely on his courtesy and friendly services. Here I lived in great comfort at an expense of fifty dollars a month, and I soon found that my spare fifty made me a well-to-do man in Whittingham. Accordingly I had the entire of all the best houses, including the Golden House, and a very pleasant little society we had; occasional dances, frequent dinners, and plenty of lawn tennis and billiards prevented me feeling the tedium I had somewhat feared, and the young ladies of Whittingham did their best to solace my exile. As for business, I found the bank doing a small business, but a tolerably satisfactory one, and if we made some bad debts, we got high interest on the good ones, so that, one way or another, I managed to send home pretty satisfactory reports, and time passed on quietly enough in spite of certain manifestations of discontent among the population. These disturbing phenomena were first brought prominently to my notice at the time when I became involved in the fortunes of the Aureatland national debt, and as all my story turns on this incident, it perhaps is a fit subject for a new chapter.

CHAPTER II.

When our branch was established at Whittingham there had been an arrangement made between ourselves and the government, by the terms of which we were to have the government business, and to occupy, in fact, much that quasi-official position enjoyed by the Bank of England at home. As a quid pro quo, the bank was to lend to the republic the sum of \$500,000 at 6 per cent. The President was at the time floating a loan of one million dollars for the purpose of works at the harbor of Whittingham. This astute ruler had, it seemed, hit on the plan of instituting public works on a large scale as a corrective to popular discontent, hoping thereby not only to develop trade, but also to give employment to many persons who, if unemployed, became centers of agitation. Such at least was the official account of his policy; whether it was the true one I saw reason to doubt later on. As regards this loan, my office was purely ministerial. The arrangements were duly made, the proper guarantees given, and the June after my arrival I had the pleasure of handing over to the President the \$500,000. I learned from him on that occasion, that to his great gratification, the balance of the loan had been taken up.

"We shall make a start at once, sir," said the President, in his usual confident but quiet way. "In two years Whittingham harbor will walk over the world. Don't be afraid about your interest. Your directors never made a better investment."

I thanked his excellency and withdrew with a peaceful mind. I had no responsibility in the matter, and cared nothing whether the directors got their interest or not. I was, however, somewhat curious to know who had taken up the rest of the loan, a curiosity which was not destined to be satisfied for some time.

The works were begun and the interest was paid, but I cannot say that the harbor progressed rapidly; in fact, I doubt if more than \$100,000 ever found their way into the pockets of contractors or workmen over the job. The President had some holes dug and some walls built; having reached that point, about two years after the interview above recorded, he suddenly drew off the few laborers still employed and matters came to a dead stop.

It was shortly after this occurrence that I was honored with an invitation to dine at the Golden House. It was in the month of July. Needless to say, I accepted the invitation, not only because it was in the nature of a command, but also because the President gave uncommonly good dinners, and, although a bachelor had as well ordered a household as I have ever known. My gratification was greatly increased when, on my arrival, I found myself the only guest, and realized that the President considered my society in itself enough for an evening's entertainment. It did cross my mind that this might mean business, and I thought it none the worse for that.

We dined in the famous veranda, the scene of so many Whittingham functions. The dinner was beyond reproach. The President was a charming companion. Though not, as I have hinted, a man of much education, he had had a wide experience of life, and had picked up a manner at once quiet and cordial, which set me completely at my ease. Moreover, he

paid me the compliment, always so sweet to youth, of treating me as a man of the world. With condescending confidence he told me many tales of his earlier days; and as he had been everywhere, his conversation was naturally most interesting. Dinner was over and the table cleared before the President seemed inclined for serious conversation. Then he said suddenly:

"Mr. Martin, this country is in a perilous condition."

"Your excellency," said I, "do you refer to the earthquake?" (There had been a slight shock a few days before.)

"No, sir," he replied, "to the finances. The harbor works have proved far more expensive than I anticipated. I hold in my hand the engineer's certificate that \$903,000 has been actually expended on them, and they are not finished—not by any means finished."

"They certainly were not; they were hardly begun."

"Dear me," I ventured to say, "that seems a good deal of money, considering what there is to show for it."

"You cannot doubt the certificate, Mr. Martin," said the President.

I did doubt the certificate, and should have liked to ask what fee the engineer had received. But I hastily said it was, of course, beyond suspicion.

"Yes," said he steadily, "quite beyond suspicion. You see, Mr. Martin, in my position I am compelled to be liberal. The government cannot set other employers the example of grinding men down by low wages. However, reasons apart, there is the fact. We cannot go on without more money; and I may tell you, in confidence, that the political situation makes it imperative we should go on. Not only my personal honor pledged, but the opposition, Mr. Martin, led by the Colonel, is making itself obnoxious—yes, I may say very obnoxious."

"The Colonel, sir," said I, with a freedom engendered of dining, "is a beast."

"Well," said the President, with a tolerant smile, "the Colonel, unhappily for the country, is no true patriot. But he is powerful; he is rich; he is, under myself alone, in command of the army. And, moreover, I believe he stands well with the Signorina. The situation, in fact, is desperate. I must have money, Mr. Martin. Will your directors make me a new loan?"

I knew very well the fate that would attend any such application. The directors were already decidedly uneasy about their first loan; shareholders had asked awkward questions, and the chairman had found no small difficulty in showing that the investment was likely to prove either safe or remunerative. Again, only a fortnight before, the government had made a formal application to me on the same subject. I cabled the directors, and received a prompt reply in the single word, "Tootsums," which in our code meant, "Must absolutely and finally decline to entertain any applications." I communicated the contents of the cable to Senator Don Antonio de la Casablanca, the minister of finance, who had, of course, communicated them in turn to the President. I ventured to remind his excellency of these facts. He had heard me with silent attention.

"I fear," I concluded, "therefore, that it is impossible for me to be of any assistance to your excellency."

He nodded, and gave a slight sigh. Then, with an air of closing the subject, he said:

"I suppose the directors are past reason. You occupy a very responsible position here for so young a man, Mr. Martin—not beyond your merits, I am sure. They leave you a pretty free hand, don't they?"

I replied that as far as routine business went I did much as seemed good in my own eyes.

"Routine business? Including investments, for instance?" he asked.

"Yes," said I; "investments in the ordinary course of business—discounting bills and putting money out on loan and mortgage over here. I place the money, and merely notify the people at home of what I have done."

"A most proper confidence to repose in you," the President was good enough to say. "Confidence is the life of business; you must trust a man. It would be absurd to make you send home the bills, and deeds, and certificates, and what not. Of course, they wouldn't do that."

Though this was a statement, somehow it also sounded like a question, so I answered:

"As a rule they do me the compliment of taking my word. The fact is, they are, as your excellency says, obliged to trust somebody."

"Exactly as I thought. And you sometimes have large sums to place?"

At this point, notwithstanding my respect for the President, I began to smell a rat.

"Oh, no, sir," I replied, "usually very small. Our business is not so extensive as we could wish."

"Whatever," said the President, looking me straight in the face, "whatever may be usual, at this moment you have a large sum—a very respectable sum—of money in your safe at the bank, waiting for investment."

"How do you know that?" I cried.

"Mr. Martin! It is no doubt my fault; I am too prone to ignore etiquette; but you forget yourself."

I hastened to apologize, although I was pretty certain the President was contemplating a queer transaction, if not flat burglary.

"Ten thousand pardons, your excellency, for my most unbecoming tone, but may I ask how you became possessed of this information?"

"Jones told me," he said, simply.

As it would not have been polite to express the surprise I felt at Jones' simplicity in choosing such a confidant, I held my peace.

(To be continued.)

In the Bank of England there are many silver ingots which have lain untouched for nearly 200 years.



He—I asked her to tell me her age, and she said "23." She—Well—did you? —Brooklyn Life.

"Why do you refer to his fortune as hush money?" Wag—He made it in soothing syrup.—Philadelphia Record.

"Do you leave your valuables in the hotel safe when you go to a summer resort?" "Only when I leave."—Judge.

Stella—Isn't that Mr. Bachelor kind and gentle? Bella—That's just the trouble; he stands without hitching.—Brooklyn Life.

"That man has a very shady business record." "Why, what has he been doing?" "He puts up awnings."—Baltimore American.

Saphedde — A penny for your thoughts, Miss Pert. Miss Pert—They are not worth it. I was merely thinking of you.—Philadelphia Record.

Husband (angrily)—I don't see why I ever married you. You are a fool. Wife (calmly)—Undoubtedly. Otherwise I would have refused you.—Grit.

On An Ocean Liner. The Wife—Shall I have your dinner brought to your room, dear? Husband (feebly)—No. Just order it thrown overboard.—Clipped.

"Out of a job, eh?" "Yeh, de boss said he was losin' money on de things I was makin'." "Dat so? Wot was you makin'?" "Mistakes."—Philadelphia Press.

Dentist (prodding a patient's gum in search of a fragment of root)—Funny, I don't seem to feel it. Patient (ironical in spite of the pain)—You're in luck!—Les Annales.

"Who is it that robs us while we are asleep?" asked the teacher, trying to get the class to spell the word "burglar." "De gas meter!" shouted the boys in unison.—Chicago News.

Assistant—This poet says that the last two verses of his poem may be omitted, if you think it is desirable. Editor—I'll do better than that. I'll omit the whole poem.—Somerville Journal.

"They found a cigar in a safe that had fallen down five stories in San Francisco and wasn't the least bit damaged by fire." "Yes, I've tried to smoke several of those cigars."—Cleveland Leader.

"Really, you know, I don't think Miss Summergal looks at all athletic." "Well?" "Well, you told me she was always engaged in some college sport." "Stupid! I said 'engaged to.'"—Philadelphia Press.

Mistress—What made you angry with the doctor and tell him not to come any more? Bridget—Because he said he thought he would send me to a warmer climate, and I am on ter him.—Los Angeles News.

"Do you think that wealth brings piety?" "No," answered Mr. Dustin Stax. "It doesn't bring happiness. But it gives a man a little bit of option about the kind of worry he will take on."—Washington Star.

"Pa, what's the difference between a profession and a trade?" "The man who works at a trade quits when his eight hours are up. The man who follows a profession has to keep on until his work is done."—Chicago Record-Herald.

"Don't you like to hear the wind whistling through the wood?" asked the poetical one. "Well," replied the practical one, "if I'm out in the forest I do; but if the wood is made up into a \$2 flute, I can't say that I do."—Yonkers Statesman.

"Yes," said the condescending youth, "I am taking fencing lessons." "Good!" answered Farmer Cornstossel. "I allus said you was goin' to turn in an' do somethin' useful. What's your speciality goin' to be—rail, stone or barbed wire?"—Washington Star.

"Well, sir," brusquely inquired the girl's father, "what can I do for you?" "Why—er—I called, sir," stammered the timid suitor, "to see if—er—you would give assent to my marriage to your daughter." "Not a cent, sir! Not a cent! Good-day."—Scissors.

A school teacher, one day during the hour for drawing, suggested to her pupils that each draw what he or she would like to be when grown up. At the end of the lesson one little girl showed an empty slate. "Why," said the teacher, "isn't there anything you would like to be when you grow up?" "Yes," said the little girl, "I would like to be married, but I don't know how to draw it."—Life.

His Reason.

"My dear Mr. Magnate, why don't you sue that fellow who is openly accusing you and your trust of using corrupt methods in business?"

"My dear sir, I would not dignify the fellow's charges with a reply." "No; I suppose a reply wouldn't answer."—Baltimore American.

It is every married man's opinion that all wives are frank.

vexed question solved.

The two sisters had engaged a servant girl. She failed to meet their requirements. They were holding a whispered consultation in the dining-room. "How shall we get rid of her?" whispered one.

At that moment the girl appeared at the door. She carried her grip. She wore her hat. In the other hand was her umbrella.

"If you please," she said, politely, "I'm going now. The place doesn't suit me."—New York Globe and Commercial Advertiser.

Blame for the Grocer.

"I want to complain of the flour you sent me the other day," said Mrs. Newblowed, severely. The grocer assumed an anxious expression, and inquired what was the matter with it. "It was tough," replied the housekeeper accusingly. "My husband simply could not eat the biscuits I made with it."

Deepest Lake on Earth.

The deepest lake in the world is believed to be Lake Baikal, in Siberia. Nine thousand square miles in area, or nearly as large as Lake Erie, it is 4,000 to 5,000 feet deep, so that it contains nearly as much water as Lake Superior.

FITS permanently cured by Dr. Kline's Great Nerve Restorer. Send for FREE \$2 trial bottle and treatise. Dr. R. H. Kline, 141 W. Arch St., Phila., Pa.

Greatest Privilege of Citizenship.

The right to homestead on the public domain is the greatest privilege of American citizenship, says Farming. The right to homestead is co-existent with citizenship. Every citizen over 21 years of age, every immigrant who has declared his or her intention of becoming a citizen, every head of a family, male or female, even though under 21, may locate a tract not to exceed 160 acres and after five years' residence will receive absolute title thereto.

A Curious Silk.

Sicily supplies a curious silk which is spun by the pulina, a Mediterranean shell-fish which has a little tube at the end of its tongue. Out of this tube, spider-fashion, or silkworm-fashion, it spins a silk thread, with which it fastens itself on any rock it fancies. When the pulina moves its silken cable remains behind. This cable, which is called byssus, the Sicilian fishermen gather. Byssus weaves into the softest and shiniest of fabrics, but it is very rare and expensive.

How's This?

We offer One Hundred Dollars Reward for any case of Catarrh that cannot be cured by Hall's Catarrh Cure. F. J. CHENEY & CO., Props., Toledo, O. We, the undersigned, have known F. J. Cheney for the last 15 years, and believe him perfectly honorable in all business transactions and financially able to carry out any obligations made by their firm. WALKER, KINSEAN & MARVIN, Wholesale Druggists, Toledo, O. Hall's Catarrh Cure is taken internally, acting directly upon the blood and mucous surfaces of the system. Price 50c. per bottle. Sold by all Druggists. Testimonials free. Hall's Family Pills are the best.

Wholesale Cutting.

"Yes, we used to sit out on the old porch in the beautiful moonlight. Strange to say, Jack never believed he kissed me as often as I accused him of doing."

"Ah, how did you convince him, dear?"

"Why, the next night I told him to cut a notch in the porch each time he took a kiss."

"How did the scheme work?"

"Very well for a while, but—er—by the end of the week there wasn't any porch left."

What He Took.

A certain thrifty individual, in the hope of getting a gratuitous medical opinion, remarked casually one day to his doctor:

"I say, doctor, what do you do when you've got a cold?"

"I cough," replied the M. D., briefly.

"Ah! Quite so," stammered the other; "but what do you take?"

"I take advice," snapped the son of Esculapius; and the thrifty man took his leave.—Modern Society.

For Coughs and Colds

There is a remedy over sixty years old—Ayer's Cherry Pectoral. Of course you have heard of it, probably have used it. Once in the family, it stays; the one household remedy for coughs and hard colds on the chest. Ask your doctor about it.

"I have had pneumonia three times, and Ayer's Cherry Pectoral has brought me safely through each time. I have just recovered from my last attack, aged sixty-seven. No wonder I praise it."—E. V. HIGGINS, Stevens Point, Wis.

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Ayer's Pills increase the activity of the liver, and thus aid recovery.