

Mark Twain

The American Claimant



Mark Twain

The American Claimant

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=9962656

Аннотация

"The American Claimant" is a comedy of mistaken identities and multiple role switches—fertile and familiar Mark Twain territory. Its cast of characters include an American enamored of British hereditary aristocracy and a British earl entranced by American democracy. Twain uses this over-the-top comic frame to explore some serious issues as well—such as the construction of self and identity, the role of the press in society, and the moral and social questions raised by capitalism and industrialization in the United States. A unique melange of science fiction and fantasy, romance, farce, and political satire, Twain's least-known comic novel is both thought-provoking and entertaining.

Содержание

Explanatory	4
The Weather in this Book	5
Chapter I	6
Chapter II	15
Chapter III	25
Chapter IV	39
Chapter V	46
Chapter VI	55
Chapter VII	60
Chapter VIII	66
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	68

The American Claimant by Mark Twain

Explanatory

The Colonel Mulberry Sellers here re-introduced to the public is the same person who appeared as Eschol Sellers in the first edition of the tale entitled "The Gilded Age," years ago, and as Beriah Sellers in the subsequent editions of the same book, and finally as Mulberry Sellers in the drama played afterward by John T. Raymond.

The name was changed from Eschol to Beriah to accommodate an Eschol Sellers who rose up out of the vasty deeps of uncharted space and preferred his request – backed by threat of a libel suit – then went his way appeased, and came no more. In the play Beriah had to be dropped to satisfy another member of the race, and Mulberry was substituted in the hope that the objectors would be tired by that time and let it pass unchallenged. So far it has occupied the field in peace; therefore we chance it again, feeling reasonably safe, this time, under shelter of the statute of limitations.

MARK TWAIN

Hartford, 1891

The Weather in this Book

No weather will be found in this book. This is an attempt to pull a book through without weather. It being the first attempt of the kind in fictitious literature, it may prove a failure, but it seemed worth the while of some dare-devil person to try it, and the author was in just the mood.

Many a reader who wanted to read a tale through was not able to do it because of delays on account of the weather. Nothing breaks up an author's progress like having to stop every few pages to fuss-up the weather. Thus it is plain that persistent intrusions of weather are bad for both reader and author.

Of course weather is necessary to a narrative of human experience. That is conceded. But it ought to be put where it will not be in the way; where it will not interrupt the flow of the narrative. And it ought to be the ablest weather that can be had, not ignorant, poor-quality, amateur weather. Weather is a literary specialty, and no untrained hand can turn out a good article of it. The present author can do only a few trifling ordinary kinds of weather, and he cannot do those very good. So it has seemed wisest to borrow such weather as is necessary for the book from qualified and recognized experts – giving credit, of course. This weather will be found over in the back part of the book, out of the way. See Appendix. The reader is requested to turn over and help himself from time to time as he goes along.

Chapter I

It is a matchless morning in rural England. On a fair hill we see a majestic pile, the ivied walls and towers of Cholmondeley Castle, huge relic and witness of the baronial grandeurs of the Middle Ages. This is one of the seats of the Earl of Rossmore, K. G. G. C. B. K. C. M. G., etc., etc., etc., etc., etc., who possesses twenty-two thousand acres of English land, owns a parish in London with two thousand houses on its lease-roll, and struggles comfortably along on an income of two hundred thousand pounds a year. The father and founder of this proud old line was William the Conqueror his very self; the mother of it was not inventoried in history by name, she being merely a random episode and inconsequential, like the tanner's daughter of Falaise.

In a breakfast room of the castle on this breezy fine morning there are two persons and the cooling remains of a deserted meal. One of these persons is the old lord, tall, erect, square-shouldered, white-haired, stern-browed, a man who shows character in every feature, attitude, and movement, and carries his seventy years as easily as most men carry fifty. The other person is his only son and heir, a dreamy-eyed young fellow, who looks about twenty-six but is nearer thirty. Candor, kindness, honesty, sincerity, simplicity, modesty – it is easy to see that these are cardinal traits

of his character; and so when you have clothed him in the formidable components of his name, you somehow seem to be contemplating a lamb in armor: his name and style being the Honourable Kirkcudbright Llanover Marjorihanks Sellers Viscount-Berkeley, of Cholmondeley Castle, Warwickshire. (Pronounced K'koobry Thlanover Marshbanks Sellers Vycount Barkly, of Chumly Castle, Warriksht.) He is standing by a great window, in an attitude suggestive of respectful attention to what his father is saying and equally respectful dissent from the positions and arguments offered. The father walks the floor as he talks, and his talk shows that his temper is away up toward summer heat.

"Soft-spirited as you are, Berkeley, I am quite aware that when you have once made up your mind to do a thing which your ideas of honor and justice require you to do, argument and reason are (for the time being,) wasted upon you — yes, and ridicule; persuasion, supplication, and command as well. To my mind—"

"Father, if you will look at it without prejudice, without passion, you must concede that I am not doing a rash thing, a thoughtless, wilful thing, with nothing substantial behind it to justify it. I did not create the American claimant to the earldom of Rossmore; I did not hunt for him, did not find him, did not obtrude him upon your notice. He found himself, he injected himself into our lives—"

"And has made mine a purgatory for ten years with his tiresome letters, his wordy reasonings, his acres of tedious

evidence,—"

"Which you would never read, would never consent to read. Yet in common fairness he was entitled to a hearing. That hearing would either prove he was the rightful earl — in which case our course would be plain — or it would prove that he wasn't — in which case our course would be equally plain. I have read his evidences, my lord. I have conned them well, studied them patiently and thoroughly. The chain seems to be complete, no important link wanting. I believe he is the rightful earl."

"And I a usurper — a — nameless pauper, a tramp! Consider what you are saying, sir."

"Father, if he is the rightful earl, would you, could you — that fact being established — consent to keep his titles and his properties from him a day, an hour, a minute?"

"You are talking nonsense — nonsense — lurid idiotcy! Now, listen to me. I will make a confession — if you wish to call it by that name. I did not read those evidences because I had no occasion to — I was made familiar with them in the time of this claimant's father and of my own father forty years ago. This fellow's predecessors have kept mine more or less familiar with them for close upon a hundred and fifty years. The truth is, the rightful heir did go to America, with the Fairfax heir or about the same time — but disappeared — somewhere in the wilds of Virginia, got married, and began to breed savages for the Claimant market; wrote no letters home; was supposed to be dead; his younger brother softly took possession; presently

the American did die, and straightway his eldest product put in his claim – by letter – letter still in existence – and died before the uncle in-possession found time – or maybe inclination – to – answer. The infant son of that eldest product grew up – long interval, you see – and he took to writing letters and furnishing evidences. Well, successor after successor has done the same, down to the present idiot. It was a succession of paupers; not one of them was ever able to pay his passage to England or institute suit. The Fairfaxes kept their lordship alive, and so they have never lost it to this day, although they live in Maryland; their friend lost his by his own neglect. You perceive now, that the facts in this case bring us to precisely this result: morally the American tramp is rightful earl of Rossmore; legally he has no more right than his dog. There now – are you satisfied?"

There was a pause, then the son glanced at the crest carved in the great oaken mantel and said, with a regretful note in his voice: "Since the introduction of heraldic symbols, – the motto of this house has been 'Suum cuique'—to every man his own. By your own intrepidly frank confession, my lord, it is become a sarcasm: If Simon Lathers—"

"Keep that exasperating name to yourself! For ten years it has pestered my eye – and tortured my ear; till at last my very footfalls time themselves to the brain-racking rhythm of Simon Lathers! – Simon Lathers! – Simon Lathers! And now, to make its presence in my soul eternal, immortal, imperishable, you have resolved to – to – what is it you have resolved to do?"

"To go to Simon Lathers, in America, and change places with him."

"What? Deliver the reversion of the earldom into his hands?"

"That is my purpose."

"Make this tremendous surrender without even trying the fantastic case in the Lords?"

"Ye – s—" with hesitation and some embarrassment.

"By all that is amazing, I believe you are insane, my son. See here – have you been training with that ass again – that radical, if you prefer the term, though the words are synonymous – Lord Tanzy, of Tollmache?"

The son did not reply, and the old lord continued:

"Yes, you confess. That puppy, that shame to his birth and caste, who holds all hereditary lordships and privilege to be usurpation, all nobility a tinsel sham, all aristocratic institutions a fraud, all inequalities in rank a legalized crime and an infamy, and no bread honest bread that a man doesn't earn by his own work – work, pah!" – and the old patrician brushed imaginary labor-dirt from his white hands. "You have come to hold just those opinions yourself, suppose," – he added with a sneer.

A faint flush in the younger man's cheek told that the shot had hit and hurt; but he answered with dignity:

"I have. I say it without shame – I feel none. And now my reason for resolving to renounce my heirship without resistance is explained. I wish to retire from what to me is a false existence, a false position, and begin my life over again – begin it right –

begin it on the level of mere manhood, unassisted by factitious aids, and succeed or fail by pure merit or the want of it. I will go to America, where all men are equal and all have an equal chance; I will live or die, sink or swim, win or lose as just a man – that alone, and not a single helping gaud or fiction back of it."

"Hear, hear!" The two men looked each other steadily in the eye a moment or two, then the elder one added, musingly, "Ab-so-lutely cra-zy-ab-solutely!" After another silence, he said, as one who, long troubled by clouds, detects a ray of sunshine, "Well, there will be one satisfaction – Simon Lathets will come here to enter into his own, and I will drown him in the horsepond. That poor devil – always so humble in his letters, so pitiful, so deferential; so steeped in reverence for our great line and lofty-station; so anxious to placate us, so prayerful for recognition as a relative, a bearer in his veins of our sacred blood – and withal so poor, so needy, so threadbare and pauper-shod as to raiment, so despised, so laughed at for his silly claimantship by the lewd American scum around him – ah, the vulgar, crawling, insufferable tramp! To read one of his cringing, nauseating letters – well?"

This to a splendid flunkey, all in inflamed plush and buttons and knee-breeches as to his trunk, and a glinting white frost-work of ground-glass paste as to his head, who stood with his heels together and the upper half of him bent forward, a salver in his hands:

"The letters, my lord."

My lord took them, and the servant disappeared.

"Among the rest, an American letter. From the tramp, of course. Jove, but here's a change! No brown paper envelope this time, filched from a shop, and carrying the shop's advertisement in the corner. Oh, no, a proper enough envelope – with a most ostentatiously broad mourning border – for his cat, perhaps, since he was a bachelor – and fastened with red wax – a batch of it as big as a half-crown – and – and – our crest for a seal! – motto and all. And the ignorant, sprawling hand is gone; he sports a secretary, evidently – a secretary with a most confident swing and flourish to his pen. Oh indeed, our fortunes are improving over there – our meek tramp has undergone a metamorphosis."

"Read it, my lord, please."

"Yes, this time I will. For the sake of the cat:"

14,042 SIXTEENTH. STREET,

WASHINGTON, May 2.

It is my painful duty to announce to you that the head of our illustrious house is no more – The Right Honourable, The Most Noble, The Most Puissant Simon Lathers Lord Rossmore having departed this life ("Gone at last – this is unspeakably precious news, my son,") at his seat in the environs of the hamlet of Duffy's Corners in the grand old State of Arkansas, – and his twin brother with him, both being crushed by a log at a smoke-house-raising, owing to carelessness on the part of all present, referable to over-confidence and gaiety induced by overplus of sour-mash – ("Extolled be sour-mash, whatever that may be,

eh Berkeley?") five days ago, with no scion of our ancient race present to close his eyes and inter him with the honors due his historic name and lofty rank – in fact, he is on the ice yet, him and his brother – friends took a collection for it. But I shall take immediate occasion to have their noble remains shipped to you ("Great heavens!") for interment, with due ceremonies and solemnities, in the family vault or mausoleum of our house. Meantime I shall put up a pair of hatchments on my house-front, and you will of course do the same at your several seats.

I have also to remind you that by this sad disaster I as sole heir, inherit and become seized of all the titles, honors, lands, and goods of our lamented relative, and must of necessity, painful as the duty is, shortly require at the bar of the Lords restitution of these dignities and properties, now illegally enjoyed by your titular lordship.

With assurance of my distinguished consideration and warm cousinly regard, I remain

Your titular lordship's

Most obedient servant,

Mulberry Sellers Earl Rossmore.

"Im-mense! Come, this one's interesting. Why, Berkeley, his breezy impudence is – is – why, it's colossal, it's sublime."

"No, this one doesn't seem to cringe much."

"Cringe – why, he doesn't know the meaning of the word. Hatchments! To commemorate that sniveling tramp and his, fraternal duplicate. And he is going to send me the remains. The late Claimant was a fool, but plainly this new one's a maniac.

What a name! Mulberry Sellers – there's music for you, Simon Lathers – Mulberry Sellers – Mulberry Sellers – Simon Lathers. Sounds like machinery working and churning. Simon Lathers, Mulberry Sel – Are you going?"

"If I have your leave, father."

The old gentleman stood musing some time, after his son was gone. This was his thought:

"He is a good boy, and lovable. Let him take his own course – as it would profit nothing to oppose him – make things worse, in fact. My arguments and his aunt's persuasions have failed; let us see what America can do for us. Let us see what equality and hard-times can effect for the mental health of a brain-sick young British lord. Going to renounce his lordship and be a man! Yas!"

Chapter II

COLONEL MULBERRY SELLERS – this was some days before he wrote his letter to Lord Rossmore – was seated in his "library," which was also his "drawing-room" and was also his "picture gallery" and likewise his "work-shop." Sometimes he called it by one of these names, sometimes by another, according to occasion and circumstance. He was constructing what seemed to be some kind of a frail mechanical toy; and was apparently very much interested in his work. He was a white-headed man, now, but otherwise he was as young, alert, buoyant, visionary and enterprising as ever. His loving old wife sat near by, contentedly knitting and thinking, with a cat asleep in her lap. The room was large, light, and had a comfortable look, in fact a home-like look, though the furniture was of a humble sort and not over abundant, and the knickknacks and things that go to adorn a living-room not plenty and not costly. But there were natural flowers, and there was an abstract and unclassifiable something about the place which betrayed the presence in the house of somebody with a happy taste and an effective touch.

Even the deadly chromos on the walls were somehow without offence; in fact they seemed to belong there and to add an attraction to the room – a fascination, anyway; for whoever got his eye on one of them was like to gaze and suffer till he died – you have seen that kind of pictures. Some of these terrors

were landscapes, some libeled the sea, some were ostensible portraits, all were crimes. All the portraits were recognizable as dead Americans of distinction, and yet, through labeling added, by a daring hand, they were all doing duty here as "Earls of Rossmore." The newest one had left the works as Andrew Jackson, but was doing its best now, as "Simon Lathers Lord Rossmore, Present Earl." On one wall was a cheap old railroad map of Warwickshire. This had been newly labeled "The Rossmore Estates." On the opposite wall was another map, and this was the most imposing decoration of the establishment and the first to catch a stranger's attention, because of its great size. It had once borne simply the title SIBERIA; but now the word "FUTURE" had been written in front of that word. There were other additions, in red ink – many cities, with great populations set down, scattered over the vast-country at points where neither cities nor populations exist to-day. One of these cities, with population placed at 1,500,000, bore the name "Libertyorloffskoizalinski," and there was a still more populous one, centrally located and marked "Capital," which bore the name "Freedomolovnaivanovich."

The "mansion" – the Colonel's usual name for the house – was a rickety old two-story frame of considerable size, which had been painted, some time or other, but had nearly forgotten it. It was away out in the ragged edge of Washington and had once been somebody's country place. It had a neglected yard around it, with a paling fence that needed straightening up, in

places, and a gate that would stay shut. By the door-post were several modest tin signs. "Col. Mulberry Sellers, Attorney at Law and Claim Agent," was the principal one. One learned from the others that the Colonel was a Materializer, a Hypnotizer, a Mind-Cure dabbler; and so on. For he was a man who could always find things to do.

A white-headed negro man, with spectacles and damaged white cotton gloves appeared in the presence, made a stately obeisance and announced:

"Marse Washington Hawkins, suh."

"Great Scott! Show him in, Dan'l, show him in."

The Colonel and his wife were on their feet in a moment, and the next moment were joyfully wringing the hands of a stoutish, discouraged-looking man whose general aspect suggested that he was fifty years old, but whose hair swore to a hundred.

"Well, well, well, Washington, my boy, it is good to look at you again. Sit down, sit down, and make yourself at home. There, now – why, you look perfectly natural; aging a little, just a little, but you'd have known him anywhere, wouldn't you, Polly?"

"Oh, yes, Berry, he's just like his pa would have looked if he'd lived. Dear, dear, where have you dropped from? Let me see, how long is it since—"

"I should say it's all of fifteen years, Mrs. Sellers."

"Well, well, how time does get away with us. Yes, and oh, the changes that—"

There was a sudden catch of her voice and a trembling of the

lip, the men waiting reverently for her to get command of herself and go on; but after a little struggle she turned away, with her apron to her eyes, and softly disappeared.

"Seeing you made her think of the children, poor thing – dear, dear, they're all dead but the youngest.

"But banish care, it's no time for it now – on with the dance, let joy be unconfined is my motto, whether there's any dance to dance; or any joy to unconfine – you'll be the healthier for it every time, – every time, Washington – it's my experience, and I've seen a good deal of this world. Come – where have you disappeared to all these years, and are you from there, now, or where are you from?"

"I don't quite think you would ever guess, Colonel. Cherokee Strip."

"My land!"

"Sure as you live."

"You can't mean it. Actually living out there?"

"Well, yes, if a body may call it that; though it's a pretty strong term for 'dobies and jackass rabbits, boiled beans and slap-jacks, depression, withered hopes, poverty in all its varieties—"

"Louise out there?"

"Yes, and the children."

"Out there now?"

"Yes, I couldn't afford to bring them with me."

"Oh, I see, – you had to come – claim against the government. Make yourself perfectly easy – I'll take care of that."

"But it isn't a claim against the government."

"No? Want to be postmaster? That's all right. Leave it to me. I'll fix it."

"But it isn't postmaster – you're all astray yet."

"Well, good gracious, Washington, why don't you come out and tell me what it is? What, do you want to be so reserved and distrustful with an old friend like me, for? Don't you reckon I can keep a se—"

"There's no secret about it – you merely don't give me a chance to—"

"Now look here, old friend, I know the human race; and I know that when a man comes to Washington, I don't care if it's from heaven, let alone Cherokee-Strip, it's because he wants something. And I know that as a rule he's not going to get it; that he'll stay and try – for another thing and won't get that; the same luck with the next and the next and the next; and keeps on till he strikes bottom, and is too poor and ashamed to go back, even to Cherokee Strip; and at last his heart breaks – and they take up a collection and bury him. There – don't interrupt me, I know what I'm talking about. Happy and prosperous in the Far West wasn't I? You know that. Principal citizen of Hawkeye, looked up to by everybody, kind of an autocrat, actually a kind of an autocrat, Washington. Well, nothing would do but I must go Minister to St. James, the Governor and everybody insisting, you know, and so at last I consented – no getting out of it, had to do it, so here I came. A day too late, Washington. Think of that – what little

things change the world's history – yes, sir, the place had been filled. Well, there I was, you see. I offered to compromise and go to Paris. The President was very sorry and all that, but that place, you see, didn't belong to the West, so there I was again. There was no help for it, so I had to stoop a little – we all reach the day some time or other when we've got to do that, Washington, and it's not a bad thing for us, either, take it by and large and all around – I had to stoop a little and offer to take Constantinople. Washington, consider this – for it's perfectly true – within a month I asked for China; within another month I begged for Japan; one year later I was away down, down, down, supplicating with tears and anguish for the bottom office in the gift of the government of the United States – Flint-Picker in the cellars of the War Department. And by George I didn't get it."

"Flint-Picker?"

"Yes. Office established in the time of the Revolution, last century. The musket-flints for the military posts were supplied from the capitol. They do it yet; for although the flint-arm has gone out and the forts have tumbled down, the decree hasn't been repealed – been overlooked and forgotten, you see – and so the vacancies where old Ticonderoga and others used to stand, still get their six quarts of gun-flints a year just the same."

Washington said musingly after a pause:

"How strange it seems – to start for Minister to England at twenty thousand a year and fail for flintpicker at—"

"Three dollars a week. It's human life, Washington – just an

epitome of human ambition, and struggle, and the outcome: you aim for the palace and get drowned in the sewer."

There was another meditative silence. Then Washington said, with earnest compassion in his voice—

"And so, after coming here, against your inclination, to satisfy your sense of patriotic duty and appease a selfish public clamor, you get absolutely nothing for it."

"Nothing?" The Colonel had to get up and stand, to get room for his amazement to expand. "Nothing, Washington? I ask you this: to be a perpetual Member and the only Perpetual Member of a Diplomatic Body accredited to the greatest country on earth do you call that nothing?"

It was Washington's turn to be amazed. He was stricken dumb; but the wide-eyed wonder, the reverent admiration expressed in his face were more eloquent than any words could have been. The Colonel's wounded spirit was healed and he resumed his seat pleased and content. He leaned forward and said impressively:

"What was due to a man who had become forever conspicuous by an experience without precedent in the history of the world? – a man made permanently and diplomatically sacred, so to speak, by having been connected, temporarily, through solicitation, with every single diplomatic post in the roster of this government, from Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to the Court of St. James all the way down to Consul to a guano rock in the Straits of Sunda – salary payable in guano – which disappeared by volcanic convulsion the day before they got

down to my name in the list of applicants. Certainly something august enough to be answerable to the size of this unique and memorable experience was my due, and I got it. By the common voice of this community, by acclamation of the people, that mighty utterance which brushes aside laws and legislation, and from whose decrees there is no appeal, I was named Perpetual Member of the Diplomatic Body representing the multifarious sovereignties and civilizations of the globe near the republican court of the United States of America. And they brought me home with a torchlight procession."

"It is wonderful, Colonel, simply wonderful."

"It's the loftiest official position in the whole earth."

"I should think so – and the most commanding."

"You have named the word. Think of it. I frown, and there is war; I smile, and contending nations lay down their arms."

"It is awful. The responsibility, I mean."

"It is nothing. Responsibility is no burden to me; I am used to it; have always been used to it."

"And the work – the work! Do you have to attend all the sittings?"

"Who, I? Does the Emperor of Russia attend the conclaves of the governors of the provinces? He sits at home, and indicates his pleasure."

Washington was silent a moment, then a deep sigh escaped him.

"How proud I was an hour ago; how paltry seems my little

promotion now! Colonel, the reason I came to Washington is, — I am Congressional Delegate from Cherokee Strip!"

The Colonel sprang to his feet and broke out with prodigious enthusiasm:

"Give me your hand, my boy — this is immense news. I congratulate you with all my heart. My prophecies stand confirmed. I always said it was in you. I always said you were born for high distinction and would achieve it. You ask Polly if I didn't."

Washington was dazed by this most unexpected demonstration.

"Why, Colonel, there's nothing to it. That little narrow, desolate, unpeopled, oblong streak of grass and gravel, lost in the remote wastes of the vast continent — why, it's like representing a billiard table — a discarded one."

"Tut-tut, it's a great, it's a staving preferment, and just opulent with influence here."

"Shucks, Colonel, I haven't even a vote."

"That's nothing; you can make speeches."

"No, I can't. The population's only two hundred—"

"That's all right, that's all right—"

"And they hadn't any right to elect me; we're not even a territory, there's no Organic Act, the government hasn't any official knowledge of us whatever."

"Never mind about that; I'll fix that. I'll rush the thing through, I'll get you organized in no time."

"Will you, Colonel? – it's too good of you; but it's just your old sterling self, the same old ever-faithful friend," and the grateful tears welled up in Washington's eyes.

"It's just as good as done, my boy, just as good as done. Shake hands. We'll hitch teams together, you and I, and we'll make things hum!"

Chapter III

Mrs. Sellers returned, now, with her composure restored, and began to ask after Hawkins's wife, and about his children, and the number of them, and so on, and her examination of the witness resulted in a circumstantial history of the family's ups and downs and driftings to and fro in the far West during the previous fifteen years. There was a message, now, from out back, and Colonel Sellers went out there in answer to it. Hawkins took this opportunity to ask how the world had been using the Colonel during the past half-generation.

"Oh, it's been using him just the same; it couldn't change its way of using him if it wanted to, for he wouldn't let it."

"I can easily believe that, Mrs. Sellers."

"Yes, you see, he doesn't change, himself – not the least little bit in the world – he's always Mulberry Sellers."

"I can see that plain enough."

"Just the same old scheming, generous, good-hearted, moonshiny, hopeful, no-account failure he always was, and still everybody likes him just as well as if he was the shiningest success."

"They always did: and it was natural, because he was so obliging and accommodating, and had something about him that made it kind of easy to ask help of him, or favors – you didn't feel shy, you know, or have that wish – you – didn't – have – to

– try feeling that you have with other people."

"It's just so, yet; and a body wonders at it, too, because he's been shamefully treated, many times, by people that had used him for a ladder to climb up by, and then kicked him down when they didn't need him any more. For a time you can see he's hurt, his pride's wounded, because he shrinks away from that thing and don't want to talk about it – and so I used to think now he's learned something and he'll be more careful hereafter – but laws! in a couple of weeks he's forgotten all about it, and any selfish tramp out of nobody knows where can come and put up a poor mouth and walk right into his heart with his boots on."

"It must try your patience pretty sharply sometimes."

"Oh, no, I'm used to it; and I'd rather have him so than the other way. When I call him a failure, I mean to the world he's a failure; he isn't to me. I don't know as I want him different much different, anyway. I have to scold him some, snarl at him, you might even call it, but I reckon I'd do that just the same, if he was different – it's my make. But I'm a good deal less snarly and more contented when he's a failure than I am when he isn't."

"Then he isn't always a failure," said Hawking, brightening.

"Him? Oh, bless you, no. He makes a strike, as he calls it, from time to time. Then's my time to fret and fuss. For the money just flies – first come first served. Straight off, he loads up the house with cripples and idiots and stray cats and all the different kinds of poor wrecks that other people don't want and he does, and then when the poverty comes again I've got to clear the most

of them out or we'd starve; and that distresses him, and me the same, of course.

"Here's old Dan'l and old Jinny, that the sheriff sold south one of the times that we got bankrupted before the war – they came wandering back after the peace, worn out and used up on the cotton plantations, helpless, and not another lick of work left in their old hides for the rest of this earthly pilgrimage – and we so pinched, oh so pinched for the very crumbs to keep life in us, and he just flung the door wide, and the way he received them you'd have thought they had come straight down from heaven in answer to prayer. I took him one side and said, 'Mulberry we can't have them – we've nothing for ourselves – we can't feed them.' He looked at me kind of hurt, and said, 'Turn them out? – and they've come to me just as confident and trusting as – as – why Polly, I must have bought that confidence sometime or other a long time ago, and given my note, so to speak – you don't get such things as a gift – and how am I going to go back on a debt like that? And you see, they're so poor, and old, and friendless, and—' But I was ashamed by that time, and shut him off, and somehow felt a new courage in me, and so I said, softly, 'We'll keep them – the Lord will provide.' He was glad, and started to blurt out one of those over-confident speeches of his, but checked himself in time, and said humbly, 'I will, anyway.' It was years and years and years ago. Well, you see those old wrecks are here yet."

"But don't they do your housework?"

"Laws! The idea. They would if they could, poor old things,

and perhaps they think they do do some of it. But it's a superstition. Dan'l waits on the front door, and sometimes goes on an errand; and sometimes you'll see one or both of them letting on to dust around in here – but that's because there's something they want to hear about and mix their gabble into. And they're always around at meals, for the same reason. But the fact is, we have to keep a young negro girl just to take care of them, and a negro woman to do the housework and help take care of them."

"Well, they ought to be tolerably happy, I should think."

"It's no name for it. They quarrel together pretty much all the time – most always about religion, because Dan'l's a Dunker Baptist and Jinny's a shouting Methodist, and Jinny believes in special Providences and Dan'l don't, because he thinks he's a kind of a free-thinker – and they play and sing plantation hymns together, and talk and chatter just eternally and forever, and are sincerely fond of each other and think the world of Mulberry, and he puts up patiently with all their spoiled ways and foolishness, and so – ah, well, they're happy enough if it comes to that. And I don't mind – I've got used to it. I can get used to anything, with Mulberry to help; and the fact is, I don't much care what happens, so long as he's spared to me."

"Well, here's to him, and hoping he'll make another strike soon."

"And rake in the lame, the halt and the blind, and turn the house into a hospital again? It's what he would do. I've seen

aplenty of that and more. No, Washington, I want his strikes to be mighty moderate ones the rest of the way down the vale."

"Well, then, big strike or little strike, or no strike at all, here's hoping he'll never lack for friends – and I don't reckon he ever will while there's people around who know enough to—"

"Him lack for friends!" and she tilted her head up with a frank pride— "why, Washington, you can't name a man that's anybody that isn't fond of him. I'll tell you privately, that I've had Satan's own time to keep them from appointing him to some office or other. They knew he'd no business with an office, just as well as I did, but he's the hardest man to refuse anything to, a body ever saw. Mulberry Sellers with an office! laws goodness, you know what that would be like. Why, they'd come from the ends of the earth to see a circus like that. I'd just as lieves be married to Niagara Falls, and done with it." After a reflective pause she added – having wandered back, in the interval, to the remark that had been her text: "Friends? – oh, indeed, no man ever had more; and such friends: Grant, Sherman, Sheridan, Johnston, Longstreet, Lee – many's the time they've sat in that chair you're sitting in—" Hawkins was out of it instantly, and contemplating it with a reverential surprise, and with the awed sense of having trodden shod upon holy ground—

"They!" he said.

"Oh, indeed, yes, a many and a many a time."

He continued to gaze at the chair fascinated, magnetized; and for once in his life that continental stretch of dry prairie which

stood for his imagination was afire, and across it was marching a slanting flamefront that joined its wide horizons together and smothered the skies with smoke. He was experiencing what one or another drowsing, geographically ignorant alien experiences every day in the year when he turns a dull and indifferent eye out of the car window and it falls upon a certain station-sign which reads "Stratford-on-Avon!" Mrs. Sellers went gossiping comfortably along:

"Oh, they like to hear him talk, especially if their load is getting rather heavy on one shoulder and they want to shift it. He's all air, you know, – breeze, you may say – and he freshens them up; it's a trip to the country, they say. Many a time he's made General Grant laugh – and that's a tidy job, I can tell you, and as for Sheridan, his eye lights up and he listens to Mulberry Sellers the same as if he was artillery. You see, the charm about Mulberry is, he is so catholic and unprejudiced that he fits in anywhere and everywhere. It makes him powerful good company, and as popular as scandal. You go to the White House when the President's holding a general reception – sometime when Mulberry's there. Why, dear me, you can't tell which of them it is that's holding that reception."

"Well, he certainly is a remarkable man – and he always was. Is he religious?"

"Clear to his marrow – does more thinking and reading on that subject than any other except Russia and Siberia: thrashes around over the whole field, too; nothing bigoted about him."

"What is his religion?"

"He—" She stopped, and was lost for a moment or two in thinking, then she said, with simplicity, "I think he was a Mohammedan or something last week."

Washington started down town, now, to bring his trunk, for the hospitable Sellerses would listen to no excuses; their house must be his home during the session. The Colonel returned presently and resumed work upon his plaything. It was finished when Washington got back.

"There it is," said the Colonel, "all finished."

"What is it for, Colonel?"

"Oh, it's just a trifle. Toy to amuse the children."

Washington examined it.

"It seems to be a puzzle."

"Yes, that's what it is. I call it Pigs in the Clover. Put them in – see if you can put them in the pen."

After many failures Washington succeeded, and was as pleased as a child.

"It's wonderfully ingenious, Colonel, it's ever so clever and interesting – why, I could play with it all day. What are you going to do with it?"

"Oh, nothing. Patent it and throw it aside."

"Don't you do anything of the kind. There's money in that thing."

A compassionate look traveled over the Colonel's countenance, and he said:

"Money – yes; pin money: a couple of hundred thousand, perhaps. Not more."

Washington's eyes blazed.

"A couple of hundred thousand dollars! do you call that pin money?"

The colonel rose and tip-toed his way across the room, closed a door that was slightly ajar, tip-toed his way to his seat again, and said, under his breath:

"You can keep a secret?"

Washington nodded his affirmative, he was too awed to speak.

"You have heard of materialization – materialization of departed spirits?"

Washington had heard of it.

"And probably didn't believe in it; and quite right, too. The thing as practised by ignorant charlatans is unworthy of attention or respect— where there's a dim light and a dark cabinet, and a parcel of sentimental gulls gathered together, with their faith and their shudders and their tears all ready, and one and the same fatty degeneration of protoplasm and humbug comes out and materializes himself into anybody you want, grandmother, grandchild, brother-in-law, Witch of Endor, John Milton, Siamese twins, Peter the Great, and all such frantic nonsense – no, that is all foolish and pitiful. But when a man that is competent brings the vast powers of science to bear, it's a different matter, a totally different matter, you see. The spectre that answers that call has come to stay. Do you note the

commercial value of that detail?"

"Well, I – the – the truth is, that I don't quite know that I do. Do you mean that such, being permanent, not transitory, would give more general satisfaction, and so enhance the price – of tickets to the show—"

"Show? Folly – listen to me; and get a good grip on your breath, for you are going to need it. Within three days I shall have completed my method, and then – let the world stand aghast, for it shall see marvels. Washington, within three days – ten at the outside – you shall see me call the dead of any century, and they will arise and walk. Walk? – they shall walk forever, and never die again. Walk with all the muscle and spring of their pristine vigor."

"Colonel! Indeed it does take one's breath away."

"Now do you see the money that's in it?"

"I'm – well, I'm – not really sure that I do."

Great Scott, look here. I shall have a monopoly; they'll all belong to me, won't they? Two thousand policemen in the city of New York. Wages, four dollars a day. I'll replace them with dead ones at half the money.

"Oh, prodigious! I never thought of that. F-o-u-r thousand dollars a day. Now I do begin to see! But will dead policemen answer?"

"Haven't they – up to this time?"

"Well, if you put it that way—"

"Put it any way you want to. Modify it to suit yourself, and

my lads shall still be superior. They won't eat, they won't drink – don't need those things; they won't wink for cash at gambling dens and unlicensed rum-holes, they won't spark the scullery maids; and moreover the bands of toughs that ambuscade them on lonely beats, and cowardly shoot and knife them will only damage the uniforms and not live long enough to get more than a momentary satisfaction out of that."

"Why, Colonel, if you can furnish policemen, then of course —"

"Certainly – I can furnish any line of goods that's wanted. Take the army, for instance – now twenty-five thousand men; expense, twenty-two millions a year. I will dig up the Romans, I will resurrect the Greeks, I will furnish the government, for ten millions a year, ten thousand veterans drawn from the victorious legions of all the ages – soldiers that will chase Indians year in and year out on materialized horses, and cost never a cent for rations or repairs. The armies of Europe cost two billions a year now – I will replace them all for a billion. I will dig up the trained statesmen of all ages and all climes, and furnish this country with a Congress that knows enough to come in out of the rain– a thing that's never happened yet, since the Declaration of Independence, and never will happen till these practically dead people are replaced with the genuine article. I will restock the thrones of Europe with the best brains and the best morals that all the royal sepulchres of all the centuries can furnish – which isn't promising very much – and I'll divide the wages and the civil

list, fair and square, merely taking my half and—"

"Colonel, if the half of this is true, there's millions in it – millions."

"Billions in it – billions; that's what you mean. Why, look here; the thing is so close at hand, so imminent, so absolutely immediate, that if a man were to come to me now and say, Colonel, I am a little short, and if you could lend me a couple of billion dollars for – come in!"

This in answer to a knock. An energetic looking man bustled in with a big pocket-book in his hand, took a paper from it and presented it, with the curt remark:

"Seventeenth and last call – you want to out with that three dollars and forty cents this time without fail, Colonel Mulberry Sellers."

The Colonel began to slap this pocket and that one, and feel here and there and everywhere, muttering:

"What have I done with that wallet? – let me see – um – not here, not there – Oh, I must have left it in the kitchen; I'll just run and—"

"No you won't – you'll stay right where you are. And you're going to disgorge, too – this time."

Washington innocently offered to go and look. When he was gone the Colonel said:

"The fact is, I've got to throw myself on your indulgence just this once more, Suggs; you see the remittances I was expecting —"

"Hang the remittances – it's too stale – it won't answer. Come!"

The Colonel glanced about him in despair. Then his face lighted; he ran to the wall and began to dust off a peculiarly atrocious chromo with his handkerchief. Then he brought it reverently, offered it to the collector, averted his face and said:

"Take it, but don't let me see it go. It's the sole remaining Rembrandt that—"

"Rembrandt be damned, it's a chromo."

"Oh, don't speak of it so, I beg you. It's the only really great original, the only supreme example of that mighty school of art which—"

"Art! It's the sickest looking thing I—"

The colonel was already bringing another horror and tenderly dusting it.

"Take this one too – the gem of my collection – the only genuine Fra Angelico that—"

"Illuminated liver-pad, that's what it is. Give it here – good day– people will think I've robbed a' nigger barber-shop."

As he slammed the door behind him the Colonel shouted with an anguished accent—

"Do please cover them up – don't let the damp get at them. The delicate tints in the Angelico—"

But the man was gone.

Washington re-appeared and said he had looked everywhere, and so had Mrs. Sellers and the servants, but in vain; and went on

to say he wished he could get his eye on a certain man about this time – no need to hunt up that pocket-book then. The Colonel's interest was awake at once.

"What man?"

"One-armed Pete they call him out there – out in the Cherokee country I mean. Robbed the bank in Tahlequah."

"Do they have banks in Tahlequah?"

"Yes – a bank, anyway. He was suspected of robbing it. Whoever did it got away with more than twenty thousand dollars. They offered a reward of five thousand. I believe I saw that very man, on my way east."

"No – is that so?"

"I certainly saw a man on the train, the first day I struck the railroad, that answered the description pretty exactly – at least as to clothes and a lacking arm."

"Why don't you get him arrested and claim the reward?"

"I couldn't. I had to get a requisition, of course. But I meant to stay by him till I got my chance."

"Well?"

"Well, he left the train during the night some time."

"Oh, hang it, that's too bad."

"Not so very bad, either."

"Why?"

"Because he came down to Baltimore in the very train I was in, though I didn't know it in time. As we moved out of the station I saw him going toward the iron gate with a satchel in his hand."

"Good; we'll catch him. Let's lay a plan."

"Send description to the Baltimore police?"

"Why, what are you talking about? No. Do you want them to get the reward?"

"What shall we do, then?"

The Colonel reflected.

"I'll tell you. Put a personal in the Baltimore Sun. Word it like this:

"A. DROP ME A LINE, PETE."

"Hold on. Which arm has he lost?"

"The right."

"Good. Now then—

"A. DROP ME A LINE, PETE, EVEN IF YOU HAVE to write with your left hand. Address X. Y. Z., General Postoffice, Washington. From YOU KNOW WHO."

"There – that'll fetch him."

"But he won't know who – will he?"

"No, but he'll want to know, won't he?"

"Why, certainly – I didn't think of that. What made you think of it?"

"Knowledge of human curiosity. Strong trait, very strong trait."

"Now I'll go to my room and write it out and enclose a dollar and tell them to print it to the worth of that."

Chapter IV

The day wore itself out. After dinner the two friends put in a long and harassing evening trying to decide what to do with the five thousand dollars reward which they were going to get when they should find One-Armed Pete, and catch him, and prove him to be the right person, and extradite him, and ship him to Tahlequah in the Indian Territory. But there were so many dazzling openings for ready cash that they found it impossible to make up their minds and keep them made up. Finally, Mrs. Sellers grew very weary of it all, and said:

"What is the sense in cooking a rabbit before it's caught?"

Then the matter was dropped, for the time being, and all went to bed. Next morning, being persuaded by Hawkins, the colonel made drawings and specifications and went down and applied for a patent for his toy puzzle, and Hawkins took the toy itself and started out to see what chance there might be to do something with it commercially. He did not have to go far. In a small old wooden shanty which had once been occupied as a dwelling by some humble negro family he found a keen-eyed Yankee engaged in repairing cheap chairs and other second-hand furniture. This man examined the toy indifferently; attempted to do the puzzle; found it not so easy as he had expected; grew more interested, and finally emphatically so; achieved a success at last, and asked:

"Is it patented?"

"Patent applied for."

"That will answer. What do you want for it?"

"What will it retail for?"

"Well, twenty-five cents, I should think."

"What will you give for the exclusive right?"

"I couldn't give twenty dollars, if I had to pay cash down; but I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll make it and market it, and pay you five cents royalty on each one."

Washington sighed. Another dream disappeared; no money in the thing. So he said:

"All right, take it at that. Draw me a paper." He went his way with the paper, and dropped the matter out of his mind dropped it out to make room for further attempts to think out the most promising way to invest his half of the reward, in case a partnership investment satisfactory to both beneficiaries could not be hit upon.

He had not been very long at home when Sellers arrived sodden with grief and booming with glad excitement – working both these emotions successfully, sometimes separately, sometimes together. He fell on Hawkins's neck sobbing, and said:

"Oh, mourn with me my friend, mourn for my desolate house: death has smitten my last kinsman and I am Earl of Rossmore – congratulate me!"

He turned to his wife, who had entered while this was going on, put his arms about her and said—"You will bear up, for my

sake, my lady – it had to happen, it was decreed."

She bore up very well, and said:

"It's no great loss. Simon Lathers was a poor well-meaning useless thing and no account, and his brother never was worth shucks."

The rightful earl continued:

"I am too much prostrated by these conflicting griefs and joys to be able to concentrate my mind upon affairs; I will ask our good friend here to break the news by wire or post to the Lady Gwendolen and instruct her to—"

"What Lady Gwendolen?"

"Our poor daughter, who, alas!—"

"Sally Sellers? Mulberry Sellers, are you losing your mind?"

"There – please do not forget who you are, and who I am; remember your own dignity, be considerate also of mine. It were best to cease from using my family name, now, Lady Rossmore."

"Goodness gracious, well, I never! What am I to call you then?"

"In private, the ordinary terms of endearment will still be admissible, to some degree; but in public it will be more becoming if your ladyship will speak to me as my lord, or your lordship, and of me as Rossmore, or the Earl, or his Lordship, and—"

"Oh, scat! I can't ever do it, Berry."

"But indeed you must, my love – we must live up to our altered position and submit with what grace we may to its requirements."

"Well, all right, have it your own way; I've never set my wishes against your commands yet, Mul – my lord, and it's late to begin now, though to my mind it's the rottenest foolishness that ever was."

"Spoken like my own true wife! There, kiss and be friends again."

"But – Gwendolen! I don't know how I am ever going to stand that name. Why, a body wouldn't know Sally Sellers in it. It's too large for her; kind of like a cherub in an ulster, and it's a most outlandish sort of a name, anyway, to my mind."

"You'll not hear her find fault with it, my lady."

"That's a true word. She takes to any kind of romantic rubbish like she was born to it. She never got it from me, that's sure. And sending her to that silly college hasn't helped the matter any – just the other way."

"Now hear her, Hawkins! Rowena-Ivanhoe College is the selectest and most aristocratic seat of learning for young ladies in our country. Under no circumstances can a girl get in there unless she is either very rich and fashionable or can prove four generations of what may be called American nobility. Castellated college-buildings – towers and turrets and an imitation moat – and everything about the place named out of Sir Walter Scott's books and redolent of royalty and state and style; and all the richest girls keep phaetons, and coachmen in livery, and riding-horses, with English grooms in plug hats and tight-buttoned coats, and top-boots, and a whip-handle without any whip to it,

to ride sixty-three feet behind them—"

"And they don't learn a blessed thing, Washington Hawkins, not a single blessed thing but showy rubbish and un-american pretentiousness. But send for the Lady Gwendolen – do; for I reckon the peerage regulations require that she must come home and let on to go into seclusion and mourn for those Arkansas blatherskites she's lost."

"My darling! Blatherskites? Remember – noblesse oblige."

"There, there – talk to me in your own tongue, Ross – you don't know any other, and you only botch it when you try. Oh, don't stare – it was a slip, and no crime; customs of a life-time can't be dropped in a second. Rossmore – there, now, be appeased, and go along with you and attend to Gwendolen. Are you going to write, Washington? – or telegraph?"

"He will telegraph, dear."

"I thought as much," my lady muttered, as she left the room. "Wants it so the address will have to appear on the envelop. It will just make a fool of that child. She'll get it, of course, for if there are any other Sellerses there they'll not be able to claim it. And just leave her alone to show it around and make the most of it. Well, maybe she's forgivable for that. She's so poor and they're so rich, of course she's had her share of snubs from the livery-flunkey sort, and I reckon it's only human to want to get even."

Uncle Dan'l was sent with the telegram; for although a conspicuous object in a corner of the drawing-room was a telephone hanging on a transmitter, Washington found all

attempts to raise the central office vain. The Colonel grumbled something about its being "always out of order when you've got particular and especial use for it," but he didn't explain that one of the reasons for this was that the thing was only a dummy and hadn't any wire attached to it. And yet the Colonel often used it – when visitors were present – and seemed to get messages through it. Mourning paper and a seal were ordered, then the friends took a rest.

Next afternoon, while Hawkins, by request, draped Andrew Jackson's portrait with crape, the rightful earl, wrote off the family bereavement to the usurper in England – a letter which we have already read. He also, by letter to the village authorities at Duffy's Corners, Arkansas, gave order that the remains of the late twins be embalmed by some St. Louis expert and shipped at once to the usurper – with bill. Then he drafted out the Rossmore arms and motto on a great sheet of brown paper, and he and Hawkins took it to Hawkins's Yankee furniture-mender and at the end of an hour came back with a couple of stunning hatchments, which they nailed up on the front of the house – attractions calculated to draw, and they did; for it was mainly an idle and shiftless negro neighborhood, with plenty of ragged children and indolent dogs to spare for a point of interest like that, and keep on sparing them for it, days and days together.

The new earl found – without surprise – this society item in the evening paper, and cut it out and scrapbooked it:

By a recent bereavement our esteemed fellow citizen,

Colonel Mulberry Sellers, Perpetual Member-at-large of the Diplomatic Body, succeeds, as rightful lord, to the great earldom of Rossmore, third by order of precedence in the earldoms of Great Britain, and will take early measures, by suit in the House of Lords, to wrest the title and estates from the present usurping holder of them. Until the season of mourning is past, the usual Thursday evening receptions at Rossmore Towers will be discontinued.

Lady Rossmore's comment – to herself:

"Receptions! People who don't rightly know him may think he is commonplace, but to my mind he is one of the most unusual men I ever saw. As for suddenness and capacity in imagining things, his beat don't exist, I reckon. As like as not it wouldn't have occurred to anybody else to name this poor old rat-trap Rossmore Towers, but it just comes natural to him. Well, no doubt it's a blessed thing to have an imagination that can always make you satisfied, no matter how you are fixed. Uncle Dave Hopkins used to always say, 'Turn me into John Calvin, and I want to know which place I'm going to; turn me into Mulberry Sellers and I don't care.'"

The rightful earl's comment – to himself:

"It's a beautiful name, beautiful. Pity I didn't think of it before I wrote the usurper. But I'll be ready for him when he answers."

Chapter V

No answer to that telegram; no arriving daughter. Yet nobody showed any uneasiness or seemed surprised; that is, nobody but Washington. After three days of waiting, he asked Lady Rossmore what she supposed the trouble was. She answered, tranquilly:

"Oh, it's some notion of hers, you never can tell. She's a Sellers, all through – at least in some of her ways; and a Sellers can't tell you beforehand what he's going to do, because he don't know himself till he's done it. She's all right; no occasion to worry about her. When she's ready she'll come or she'll write, and you can't tell which, till it's happened."

It turned out to be a letter. It was handed in at that moment, and was received by the mother without trembling hands or feverish eagerness, or any other of the manifestations common in the case of long delayed answers to imperative telegrams. She polished her glasses with tranquility and thoroughness, pleasantly gossiping along, the while, then opened the letter and began to read aloud:

KENILWORTH KEEP, REDGAUNTLET HALL,
ROWENA-IVANHOE COLLEGE, THURSDAY.
DEAR PRECIOUS MAMMA ROSSMORE:

Oh, the joy of it! – you can't think. They had always turned up their noses at our pretentions, you know; and I

had fought back as well as I could by turning up mine at theirs. They always said it might be something great and fine to be rightful Shadow of an earldom, but to merely be shadow of a shadow, and two or three times removed at that – pooh-pooh! And I always retorted that not to be able to show four generations of American-Colonial-Dutch Peddler– and-Salt-Cod-McAllister-Nobility might be endurable, but to have to confess such an origin – pfew-few! Well, the telegram, it was just a cyclone! The messenger came right into the great Rob Roy Hall of Audience, as excited as he could be, singing out, "Dispatch for Lady Gwendolen Sellers!" and you ought to have seen that simpering chattering assemblage of pinchbeck aristocrats, turn to stone! I was off in the corner, of course, by myself – it's where Cinderella belongs. I took the telegram and read it, and tried to faint – and I could have done it if I had had any preparation, but it was all so sudden, you know – but no matter, I did the next best thing: I put my handkerchief to my eyes and fled sobbing to my room, dropping the telegram as I started. I released one corner of my eye a moment– just enough to see the herd swarm for the telegram – and then continued my broken-hearted flight just as happy as a bird.

Then the visits of condolence began, and I had to accept the loan of Miss Augusta-Templeton-Ashmore Hamilton's quarters because the press was so great and there isn't room for three and a cat in mine. And I've been holding a Lodge of Sorrow ever since and defending myself against people's attempts to claim kin. And do you know, the very first

girl to fetch her tears and sympathy to my market was that foolish Skimperton girl who has always snubbed me so shamefully and claimed lordship and precedence of the whole college because some ancestor of hers, some time or other, was a McAllister. Why it was like the bottom bird in the menagerie putting on airs because its head ancestor was a pterodactyl.

But the ger-reatest triumph of all was – guess. But you'll never. This is it. That little fool and two others have always been fussing and fretting over which was entitled to precedence – by rank, you know. They've nearly starved themselves at it; for each claimed the right to take precedence of all the college in leaving the table, and so neither of them ever finished her dinner, but broke off in the middle and tried to get out ahead of the others. Well, after my first day's grief and seclusion – I was fixing up a mourning dress you see – I appeared at the public table again, and then – what do you think? Those three fluffy goslings sat there contentedly, and squared up the long famine – lapped and lapped, munched and munched, ate and ate, till the gravy appeared in their eyes – humbly waiting for the Lady Gwendolen to take precedence and move out first, you see!

Oh, yes, I've been having a darling good time. And do you know, not one of these collegians has had the cruelty to ask me how I came by my new name. With some, this is due to charity, but with the others it isn't. They refrain, not from native kindness but from educated discretion. I educated them.

Well, as soon as I shall have settled up what's left of the old scores and snuffed up a few more of those pleasantly intoxicating clouds of incense, I shall pack and depart homeward. Tell papa I am as fond of him as I am of my new name. I couldn't put it stronger than that. What an inspiration it was! But inspirations come easy to him.

These, from your loving daughter,
GWENDOLEN.

Hawkins reached for the letter and glanced over it.

"Good hand," he said, "and full of confidence and animation, and goes racing right along. She's bright – that's plain."

"Oh, they're all bright – the Sellerses. Anyway, they would be, if there were any. Even those poor Latherses would have been bright if they had been Sellerses; I mean full blood. Of course they had a Sellers strain in them – a big strain of it, too – but being a Bland dollar don't make it a dollar just the same."

The seventh day after the date of the telegram Washington came dreaming down to breakfast and was set wide awake by an electrical spasm of pleasure.

Here was the most beautiful young creature he had ever seen in his life. It was Sally Sellers Lady Gwendolen; she had come in the night. And it seemed to him that her clothes were the prettiest and the daintiest he had ever looked upon, and the most exquisitely contrived and fashioned and combined, as to decorative trimmings, and fixings, and melting harmonies of color. It was only a morning dress, and inexpensive, but he confessed to himself, in the English common to Cherokee Strip,

that it was a "corker." And now, as he perceived, the reason why the Sellers household poverties and sterilities had been made to blossom like the rose, and charm the eye and satisfy the spirit, stood explained; here was the magician; here in the midst of her works, and furnishing in her own person the proper accent and climaxing finish of the whole.

"My daughter, Major Hawkins – come home to mourn; flown home at the call of affliction to help the authors of her being bear the burden of bereavement. She was very fond of the late earl – idolized him, sir, idolized him—"

"Why, father, I've never seen him."

"True – she's right, I was thinking of another – er – of her mother—"

"I idolized that smoked haddock? – that sentimental, spiritless —"

"I was thinking of myself! Poor noble fellow, we were inseparable com—"

"Hear the man! Mulberry Sel – Mul – Rossmore – hang the troublesome name I can never – if I've heard you say once, I've heard you say a thousand times that if that poor sheep—"

"I was thinking of – of – I don't know who I was thinking of, and it doesn't make any difference anyway; somebody idolized him, I recollect it as if it were yesterday; and—"

"Father, I am going to shake hands with Major Hawkins, and let the introduction work along and catch up at its leisure. I remember you very well in deed, Major Hawkins, although I was

a little child when I saw you last; and I am very, very glad indeed to see you again and have you in our house as one of us;" and beaming in his face she finished her cordial shake with the hope that he had not forgotten her.

He was prodigiously pleased by her outspoken heartiness, and wanted to repay her by assuring her that he remembered her, and not only that but better even than he remembered his own children, but the facts would not quite warrant this; still, he stumbled through a tangled sentence which answered just as well, since the purport of it was an awkward and unintentional confession that her extraordinary beauty had so stupefied him that he hadn't got back to his bearings, yet, and therefore couldn't be certain as to whether he remembered her at all or not. The speech made him her friend; it couldn't well help it.

In truth the beauty of this fair creature was of a rare type, and may well excuse a moment of our time spent in its consideration. It did not consist in the fact that she had eyes, nose, mouth, chin, hair, ears, it consisted in their arrangement. In true beauty, more depends upon right location and judicious distribution of feature than upon multiplicity of them. So also as regards color. The very combination of colors which in a volcanic irruption would add beauty to a landscape might detach it from a girl. Such was Gwendolen Sellers.

The family circle being completed by Gwendolen's arrival, it was decreed that the official mourning should now begin; that it should begin at six o'clock every evening, (the dinner hour,) and

end with the dinner.

"It's a grand old line, major, a sublime old line, and deserves to be mourned for, almost royally; almost imperially, I may say. Er – Lady Gwendolen – but she's gone; never mind; I wanted my Peerage; I'll fetch it myself, presently, and show you a thing or two that will give you a realizing idea of what our house is. I've been glancing through Burke, and I find that of William the Conqueror's sixty-four natural ah– my dear, would you mind getting me that book? It's on the escritoire in our boudoir. Yes, as I was saying, there's only St. Albans, Buccleugh and Grafton ahead of us on the list – all the rest of the British nobility are in procession behind us. Ah, thanks, my lady. Now then, we turn to William, and we find – letter for XYZ? Oh, splendid – when'd you get it?"

"Last night; but I was asleep before you came, you were out so late; and when I came to breakfast Miss Gwendolen – well, she knocked everything out of me, you know—"

"Wonderful girl, wonderful; her great origin is detectable in her step, her carriage, her features – but what does he say? Come, this is exciting."

"I haven't read it – er – Rossm – Mr. Rossm – er—"

"M'lord! Just cut it short like that. It's the English way. I'll open it. Ah, now let's see."

A. TO YOU KNOW WHO. Think I know you. Wait ten days. Coming to Washington.

The excitement died out of both men's faces. There was a

brooding silence for a while, then the younger one said with a sigh:

"Why, we can't wait ten days for the money."

"No – the man's unreasonable; we are down to the bed rock, financially speaking."

"If we could explain to him in some way, that we are so situated that time is of the utmost importance to us—"

"Yes – yes, that's it – and so if it would be as convenient for him to come at once it would be a great accommodation to us, and one which we – which we – which we – wh – well, which we should sincerely appreciate—"

"That's it – and most gladly reciprocate—"

"Certainly – that'll fetch him. Worded right, if he's a man – got any of the feelings of a man, sympathies and all that, he'll be here inside of twenty-four hours. Pen and paper – come, we'll get right at it."

Between them they framed twenty-two different advertisements, but none was satisfactory. A main fault in all of them was urgency. That feature was very troublesome: if made prominent, it was calculated to excite Pete's suspicion; if modified below the suspicion-point it was flat and meaningless. Finally the Colonel resigned, and said:

"I have noticed, in such literary experiences as I have had, that one of the most taking things to do is to conceal your meaning when you are trying to conceal it. Whereas, if you go at literature with a free conscience and nothing to conceal, you can turn out

a book, every time, that the very elect can't understand. They all do."

Then Hawkins resigned also, and the two agreed that they must manage to wait the ten days some how or other. Next, they caught a ray of cheer: since they had something definite to go upon, now, they could probably borrow money on the reward – enough, at any rate, to tide them over till they got it; and meantime the materializing recipe would be perfected, and then good bye to trouble for good and all.

The next day, May the tenth, a couple of things happened – among others. The remains of the noble Arkansas twins left our shores for England, consigned to Lord Rossmore, and Lord Rossmore's son, Kirkcudbright Llanover Marjoribanks Sellers Viscount Berkeley, sailed from Liverpool for America to place the reversion of the earldom in the hands of the rightful peer, Mulberry Sellers, of Rossmore Towers in the District of Columbia, U. S. A.

These two impressive shipments would meet and part in mid-Atlantic, five days later, and give no sign.

Chapter VI

In the course of time the twins arrived and were delivered to their great kinsman. To try to describe the rage of that old man would profit nothing, the attempt would fall so far short of the purpose. However when he had worn himself out and got quiet again, he looked the matter over and decided that the twins had some moral rights, although they had no legal ones; they were of his blood, and it could not be decorous to treat them as common clay. So he laid them with their majestic kin in the Cholmondeley church, with imposing state and ceremony, and added the supreme touch by officiating as chief mourner himself. But he drew the line at hatchments.

Our friends in Washington watched the weary days go by, while they waited for Pete and covered his name with reproaches because of his calamitous procrastinations. Meantime, Sally Sellers, who was as practical and democratic as the Lady Gwendolen Sellers was romantic and aristocratic, was leading a life of intense interest and activity and getting the most she could out of her double personality. All day long in the privacy of her work-room, Sally Sellers earned bread for the Sellers family; and all the evening Lady Gwendolen Sellers supported the Rossmore dignity. All day she was American, practically, and proud of the work of her head and hands and its commercial result; all the evening she took holiday and dwelt in a rich shadow-land peopled

with titled and coroneted fictions. By day, to her, the place was a plain, unaffected, ramshackle old trap just that, and nothing more; by night it was Rossmore Towers. At college she had learned a trade without knowing it. The girls had found out that she was the designer of her own gowns. She had no idle moments after that, and wanted none; for the exercise of an extraordinary gift is the supremest pleasure in life, and it was manifest that Sally Sellers possessed a gift of that sort in the matter of costume-designing. Within three days after reaching home she had hunted up some work; before Pete was yet due in Washington, and before the twins were fairly asleep in English soil, she was already nearly swamped with work, and the sacrificing of the family chromos for debt had got an effective check.

"She's a brick," said Rossmore to the Major; "just her father all over: prompt to labor with head or hands, and not ashamed of it; capable, always capable, let the enterprise be what it may; successful by nature— don't know what defeat is; thus, intensely and practically American by inhaled nationalism, and at the same time intensely and aristocratically European by inherited nobility of blood. Just me, exactly: Mulberry Sellers in matter of finance and invention; after office hours, what do you find? The same clothes, yes, but what's in them? Rossmore of the peerage."

The two friends had haunted the general post-office daily. At last they had their reward. Toward evening the 20th of May, they got a letter for XYZ. It bore the Washington postmark; the note itself was not dated. It said:

"Ash barrel back of lamp post Black horse Alley. If you are playing square go and set on it to-morrow morning 21st 10.22 not sooner not later wait till I come."

The friends cogitated over the note profoundly. Presently the earl said:

"Don't you reckon he's afraid we are a sheriff with a requisition?"

"Why, m'lord?"

"Because that's no place for a seance. Nothing friendly, nothing sociable about it. And at the same time, a body that wanted to know who was roosting on that ash-barrel without exposing himself by going near it, or seeming to be interested in it, could just stand on the street corner and take a glance down the alley and satisfy himself, don't you see?"

"Yes, his idea is plain, now. He seems to be a man that can't be candid and straightforward. He acts as if he thought we – shucks, I wish he had come out like a man and told us what hotel he—"

"Now you've struck it! you've struck it sure, Washington; he has told us."

"Has he?"

"Yes, he has; but he didn't mean to. That alley is a lonesome little pocket that runs along one side of the New Gadsby. That's his hotel."

"What makes' you think that?"

"Why, I just know it. He's got a room that's just across from that lamp post. He's going to sit there perfectly comfortable

behind his shutters at 10.22 to-morrow, and when he sees us sitting on the ash-barrel, he'll say to himself, 'I saw one of those fellows on the train'—and then he'll pack his satchel in half a minute and ship for the ends of the earth."

Hawkins turned sick with disappointment:

"Oh, dear, it's all up, Colonel – it's exactly what he'll do."

"Indeed he won't!"

"Won't he? Why?"

"Because you won't be holding the ash barrel down, it'll be me. You'll be coming in with an officer and a requisition in plain clothes – the officer, I mean – the minute you see him arrive and open up a talk with me."

"Well, what a head you have got, Colonel Sellers! I never should have thought of that in the world."

"Neither would any earl of Rossmore, betwixt William's contribution and Mulberry – as earl; but it's office hours, now, you see, and the earl in me sleeps. Come – I'll show you his very room."

They reached the neighborhood of the New Gadsby about nine in the evening, and passed down the alley to the lamp post.

"There you are," said the colonel, triumphantly, with a wave of his hand which took in the whole side of the hotel. "There it is – what did I tell you?"

"Well, but – why, Colonel, it's six stories high. I don't quite make out which window you—"

"All the windows, all of them. Let him have his choice – I'm

indifferent, now that I have located him. You go and stand on the corner and wait; I'll prospect the hotel."

The earl drifted here and there through the swarming lobby, and finally took a waiting position in the neighborhood of the elevator. During an hour crowds went up and crowds came down, and all complete as to limbs; but at last the watcher got a glimpse of a figure that was satisfactory— got a glimpse of the back of it, though he had missed his chance at the face through waning alertness. The glimpse revealed a cowboy hat, and below it a plaided sack of rather loud pattern, and an empty sleeve pinned up to the shoulder. Then the elevator snatched the vision aloft and the watcher fled away in joyful excitement, and rejoined the fellow-conspirator.

"We've got him, Major – got him sure! I've seen him – seen him good; and I don't care where or when that man approaches me backwards, I'll recognize him every time. We're all right. Now for the requisition."

They got it, after the delays usual in such cases. By half past eleven they were at home and happy, and went to bed full of dreams of the morrow's great promise.

Among the elevator load which had the suspect for fellow-passenger was a young kinsman of Mulberry Sellers, but Mulberry was not aware of it and didn't see him. It was Viscount Berkeley.

Chapter VII

Arrived in his room Lord Berkeley made preparations for that first and last and all-the-time duty of the visiting Englishman – the jotting down in his diary of his "impressions" to date. His preparations consisted in ransacking his "box" for a pen. There was a plenty of steel pens on his table with the ink bottle, but he was English. The English people manufacture steel pens for nineteen-twentieths of the globe, but they never use any themselves. They use exclusively the pre-historic quill. My lord not only found a quill pen, but the best one he had seen in several years – and after writing diligently for some time, closed with the following entry:

BUT IN ONE THING I HAVE MADE AN IMMENSE MISTAKE, I OUGHT TO HAVE SHUCKED MY TITLE AND CHANGED MY NAME BEFORE I STARTED.

He sat admiring that pen a while, and then went on:

"All attempts to mingle with the common people and became permanently one of them are going to fail, unless I can get rid of it, disappear from it, and re-appear with the solid protection of a new name. I am astonished and pained to see how eager the most of these Americans are to get acquainted with a lord, and how diligent they are in pushing attentions upon him. They lack English servility, it is true – but they could acquire it, with practice. My quality

travels ahead of me in the most mysterious way. I write my family name without additions, on the register of this hotel, and imagine that I am going to pass for an obscure and unknown wanderer, but the clerk promptly calls out, 'Front! show his lordship to four-eighty-two!' and before I can get to the lift there is a reporter trying to interview me as they call it. This sort of thing shall cease at once. I will hunt up the American Claimant the first thing in the morning, accomplish my mission, then change my lodging and vanish from scrutiny under a fictitious name."

He left his diary on the table, where it would be handy in case any new "impressions" should wake him up in the night, then he went to bed and presently fell asleep. An hour or two passed, and then he came slowly to consciousness with a confusion of mysterious and augmenting sounds hammering at the gates of his brain for admission; the next moment he was sharply awake, and those sounds burst with the rush and roar and boom of an undammed freshet into his ears. Banging and slamming of shutters; smashing of windows and the ringing clash of falling glass; clatter of flying feet along the halls; shrieks, supplications, dumb moanings of despair, within, hoarse shouts of command outside; cracklings and mappings, and the windy roar of victorious flames!

Bang, bang, bang! on the door, and a cry:

"Turn out – the house is on fire!"

The cry passed on, and the banging. Lord Berkeley sprang out of bed and moved with all possible speed toward the clothes-

press in the darkness and the gathering smoke, but fell over a chair and lost his bearings. He groped desperately about on his hands, and presently struck his head against the table and was deeply grateful, for it gave him his bearings again, since it stood close by the door. He seized his most precious possession; his journaled Impressions of America, and darted from the room.

He ran down the deserted hall toward the red lamp which he knew indicated the place of a fire-escape. The door of the room beside it was open. In the room the gas was burning full head; on a chair was a pile of clothing. He ran to the window, could not get it up, but smashed it with a chair, and stepped out on the landing of the fire-escape; below him was a crowd of men, with a sprinkling of women and youth, massed in a ruddy light. Must he go down in his spectral night dress? No – this side of the house was not yet on fire except at the further end; he would snatch on those clothes. Which he did. They fitted well enough, though a trifle loosely, and they were just a shade loud as to pattern. Also as to hat – which was of a new breed to him, Buffalo Bill not having been to England yet. One side of the coat went on, but the other side refused; one of its sleeves was turned up and stitched to the shoulder. He started down without waiting to get it loose, made the trip successfully, and was promptly hustled outside the limit-rope by the police.

The cowboy hat and the coat but half on made him too much of a centre of attraction for comfort, although nothing could be more profoundly respectful, not to say deferential, than was

the manner of the crowd toward him. In his mind he framed a discouraged remark for early entry in his diary: "It is of no use; they know a lord through any disguise, and show awe of him – even something very like fear, indeed."

Presently one of the gaping and adoring half-circle of boys ventured a timid question. My lord answered it. The boys glanced wonderingly at each other and from somewhere fell the comment:

"English cowboy! Well, if that ain't curious."

Another mental note to be preserved for the diary: "Cowboy. Now what might a cowboy be? Perhaps—" But the viscount perceived that some more questions were about to be asked; so he worked his way out of the crowd, released the sleeve, put on the coat and wandered away to seek a humble and obscure lodging. He found it and went to bed and was soon asleep.

In the morning, he examined his clothes. They were rather assertive, it seemed to him, but they were new and clean, at any rate. There was considerable property in the pockets. Item, five one-hundred dollar bills. Item, near fifty dollars in small bills and silver. Plug of tobacco. Hymn-book, which refuses to open; found to contain whiskey. Memorandum book bearing no name. Scattering entries in it, recording in a sprawling, ignorant hand, appointments, bets, horse-trades, and so on, with people of strange, hyphenated name – Six-Fingered Jake, Young-Man-afraid-of his-Shadow, and the like. No letters, no documents.

The young man muses – maps out his course. His letter of

credit is burned; he will borrow the small bills and the silver in these pockets, apply part of it to advertising for the owner, and use the rest for sustenance while he seeks work. He sends out for the morning paper, next, and proceeds to read about the fire. The biggest line in the display-head announces his own death. The body of the account furnishes all the particulars; and tells how, with the inherited heroism of his caste, he went on saving women and children until escape for himself was impossible; then with the eyes of weeping multitudes upon him, he stood with folded arms and sternly awaited the approach of the devouring fiend; "and so standing, amid a tossing sea of flame and on-rushing billows of smoke, the noble young heir of the great house of Rossmore was caught up in a whirlwind of fiery glory, and disappeared forever from the vision of men."

The thing was so fine and generous and knightly that it brought the moisture to his eyes. Presently he said to himself: "What to do is as plain as day, now. My Lord Berkeley is dead – let him stay so. Died creditably, too; that will make the calamity the easier for my father. And I don't have to report to the American Claimant, now. Yes, nothing could be better than the way matters have turned out. I have only to furnish myself with a new name, and take my new start in life totally untrammelled. Now I breathe my first breath of real freedom; and how fresh and breezy and inspiring it is! At last I am a man! a man on equal terms with my neighbor; and by my manhood; and by it alone, I shall rise and be seen of the world, or I shall sink from sight and deserve it.

This is the gladdest day, and the proudest, that ever poured its sun upon my head!"

Chapter VIII

"GOD bless my soul, Hawkins!"

The morning paper dropped from the Colonel's nerveless-grasp.

"What is it?"

"He's gone! – the bright, the young, the gifted, the noblest of his illustrious race – gone! gone up in flames and unimaginable glory!"

"Who?"

"My precious, precious young kinsman – Kirkcudbright Llanover Marjoribanks Sellers Viscount Berkeley, son and heir of usurping Rossmore."

"No!"

"It's true – too true."

"When?"

"Last night."

"Where?"

"Right here in Washington; where he arrived from England last night, the papers say."

"You don't say!"

"Hotel burned down."

"What hotel?"

"The New Gadsby!"

"Oh, my goodness! And have we lost both of them?"

"Both who?"

"One-Arm Pete."

"Oh, great guns, I forgot all about him. Oh, I hope not."

"Hope! Well, I should say! Oh, we can't spare him! We can better afford to lose a million viscounts than our only support and stay."

They searched the paper diligently, and were appalled to find that a one-armed man had been seen flying along one of the halls of the hotel in his underclothing and apparently out of his head with fright, and as he would listen to no one and persisted in making for a stairway which would carry him to certain death, his case was given over as a hopeless one.

"Poor fellow," sighed Hawkins; "and he had friends so near. I wish we hadn't come away from there – maybe we could have saved him."

The earl looked up and said calmly:

"His being dead doesn't matter. He was uncertain before. We've got him sure, this time."

"Got him? How?"

"I will materialize him."

"Rossmore, don't – don't trifle with me. Do you mean that? Can you do it?"

"I can do it, just as sure as you are sitting there. And I will."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.