

## "MY HAT."

## A YANKEE TALE.

THE following narrative will, probably, be read with some interest, and when it is made known how it came into my possession, the reader will have no more reason than I to doubt its authenticity. Its simplicity and consistency, to say nothing of the very remarkable and suggestive discovery at its close, prove that it is in no way allied to the sensational fictions of wars and rumors of wars, invasions and subjugations, such as those that startled the few and amused the many, in the early part of the summer of 1863.

Business called me to Quebec during the session of the Provincial Legislature. In the Reporters' gallery of the Assembly I formed an acquaintance with a gentleman, who was employed there in the same capacity as myself. Our connection ripened into intimacy. We had both of us seen a considerable portion of this earth's surface, and both our lives, for quiet-going men, had been tinged, to a certain extent, with adventure. We often amused ourselves by the relation of our "experiences." On one occasion my friend commenced the narrative of the incidents which I am about to give. Suddenly stopping, he said, "By the bye, I have this in writing, and you shall see it; and you may make any use you please of it. I will not, if you think it worth while, even restrain you from publication." I avail myself of the permission, and here it is; a tale of smartness not often excelled, ending with a catastrophe not yet fully developed, and at which the world may yet grow pale!

Some months ago I was staying for a time at Ottawa, a delightful city in Central Canada. The hotel in which I resided,—the Russell House,—was, at the same time, honored with the presence of a gentleman, whose name on the hotel book stood thus: *Sir Marmaduke Kelwyn, Bart.* I often pondered over this designation. I fancied that I was tolerably well-acquainted—I mean by repute, of course—with the baronetage of the United Kingdom, but this name I could by no means recall. I took an opportunity to say something to our host on the subject, but only in the way of enquiry.

"He is a Nova Scotian Baronet," said mine host.

"That explains the mystery," said I.

It is quite needless, as positively, there is not a lady in the case, to waste one word on a personal description of Sir Marmaduke. We associated,—the baronet and I,—as strangers generally associate at hotels. We met at the tables, joined in general conversation, exchanged cigars and other little courtesies of hotel life, and knew no more of each other than if oceans had always divided us. But a change was very near at hand. How this originated I cannot very clearly or with certainty define. We probably drifted into intimacy as nations sometimes drift into war. In my own mind I have generally attributed it to a cause that will be set down as the most trifling that ever drew men or minds together. With ladies, in fact, the same circumstance would have produced an exactly contrary effect—divergence in place of cohesion—for where is the woman who, unmoved, can see another woman wearing a bonnet precisely similar to her own? Well, thus occurred an incident—minute enough to be considered ridiculous—which promised to have momentous results, involving nothing less than the fate of nations. The weather had, rather suddenly, set in fine and warm, and in consequence I had resumed my summer hat. The same hat had previously done duty for three or four seasons. Who would have thought that the simple fact of my placing a fresh covering on my apex would lay the foundation of events that might have frightened the world from its propriety? It may be as well to remark that there was nothing very peculiar about this same hat; its architecture was of the "stove-pipe" order; its color light gray; and it was felty and napless. Events proved it had not imparted the latter quality to the head it covered. Sir Marmaduke was standing at the bottom of the stairs when I came down, wearing my hot-weather covering for the first time. As his eye caught the change, a bland smile overspread his countenance; he sprang up stairs. On his return traces of that same smile remained and I observed with more amusement than surprise, that he had donned a hat, a perfect fac-simile of my own! Strange! there was most assuredly an attraction, a fascination, or some other subtle influence of the kind connected with these hats. A something unaccountable, but unmistakeable, told me that the baronet and I were no longer mere casual acquaintances,—that henceforth we were friends. He soon gave me a proof of the change that had so unconsciously stolen over us both. "Come my boy," said he, at the same time slapping me on the shoulder (the disparity of our ages was not so great as, of itself, to warrant such a freedom), "suppose we get down to the river and have a row. I believe you are very fond of the amusement."

I assented, and to the river we went.

When we reached the stream, I engaged the skiff I generally used, and asked my companion if he would allow me to coach him.

"No! no!" said he, "I have heard—(I hear everything)—that you rather pride yourself on your rowing, and I am going to have a turn with you. I'll promise you one thing—if I can't beat you I'll give you a breathing."

I had an inward chuckle over this, never yet having met with an amateur who could do *much more* than beat me. I was in first rate condition too, just then, and I thought that my new friend, sinewy and active as he was, would have been in better trim with a stone or two less flesh.

He refused the offer to take the boat I had fixed on; chose another, almost at random; and in a minute we were at work and well out in the stream.

"Up or down?" bawled he.

"As you please."

"How far off is that big bluff right ahead, down the river?"

"Ten miles."

"Shall we go and have a look at it?"

"By all manner of means."

"Well, then, here's off," said Sir Marmaduke, at the same time going at it in earnest. He, certainly, was a capital rower; and the pace he was doing made me put on steam, and look to my bellows. Not that I had any very great difficulty in keeping well abreast of him, for it was not a chicken he was pitted against; but it seemed to me he kept a good bit of play bottled up, and I took care of myself accordingly. Once or twice, in the course of three or four miles, I had put on a spurt just as a feeler. He did not at all put himself out of the way; rowed stiff and steady; but never let me get half a length ahead. At about five miles down he got a little athwart my bows and threw his oars out of the row-locks. "We have had almost enough of this, haven't we?" said he. "You row well, and I think you will admit that I can do a little bit; make it a drawn match and steer for home."

"By all means," said I, "and I must thank you for sparing me a defeat."

His response, which was very complimentary and very self-denying, it is hardly necessary to repeat. We turned around and rowed quietly along as near together as we could without fouling, chatting as we went. The only incident that occurred on our way home arose from his asking me if I had ever tried to keep clear of a man who could row as well as, or better than myself, and who wanted to catch or foul me. I said that I had once or twice, and he proposed that we should waste a minute or two in a trial. We did so, he was the pursuer, and we had rather a hard tussle of it. A clever sheer, which took me round him as he was coming stern on, ended the chase. In a few minutes more we were ashore and on the way to our quarters. Unimportant as this little affair may appear, it was not got up without an object. It recurred to me very forcibly on an after occasion. As we walked home, the baronet asked me if I could swim. This was with me the weakest among a good many weak points. "I really believe, sir, I could swim for a week if the minnows would be kind enough to jump into my mouth that I might eat and live."

"You are certainly a Crichton," said my friend with a hearty laugh.

We parted, after I had promised to spend the evening in the baronet's apartment.

The present result of our afternoon's amusement was this:—it made the baronet and myself thoroughly acquainted with each other, at least, *so I thought*. He, I now knew, in addition to his title, was a huge merchant, with houses or agencies in London, Halifax, New York, and fifty places beside, and he was also largely engaged in furnishing the Federals with munitions and sinews of war; and he knew that I was "on the press," but at present engaged in the very important, and equally remunerative task of doing nothing.

[In his account of the evening interview my friend observes a very commendable brevity, a proof, that, as events rose in importance, he rose with them, for brevity is a characteristic of great minds on great occasions.]

The evening was spent as per arrangement, and at its conclusion I found myself, to the surprise of no one more than the person principally concerned, under engagement to proceed to the West Indian Islands for the transaction of certain matters of business for my friend Sir Marmaduke Kelwyn.

On the morrow I was to start, and on the morrow I was to receive my instructions.

These instructions were as brief as they were simple:—Encumber yourself with as little luggage as possible—a small valise was to hold all my travelling gear—get on as fast as you can to New York, and lose no time in calling on Mr. —, of — street. That gentleman will secure you a passage and do all that is necessary. You will receive further instructions when you reach your destination.

"My destination—where is that?" said I.

"The West Indies."

"Rather an extended address," I rejoined.

"You will find it all right," said my friend smiling.

I said no more. It would be no use denying the fact—that man held me in the hollow of his hand, and he knew it, if I did not.

The train went at mid-day. I sent my little valise down to the station and the baronet and I walked. As we went he availed himself of the opportunity to give me a little advice and instruction. "In the first place," he said, "as a time like this deranges business, and renders precautions of an unusual and, as it may appear to you, of a singular character, necessary, I will give you a simple means of discovering if the persons you come into contact or are directed to communicate with, are entitled to your confidence. It is a sort of masonic sign, and would have nothing ridiculous about it to one of the craft.

(To be continued.)