

THE PRODIGES OF DON Q.

BY K. and HASKETH PRITCHARD.

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No. 3.

How Don Q.'s Sword Was Drawn for the Queen



up. The chief stood in the centre of the cave, shaken visibly by some fierce emotion. "You have been to Malaga?" he asked abruptly. "Who was the chief guest at your hotel?"

"I saw," said Lator. "A fellow from South America, calling himself Don Costa. He seemed to have an amount of money."

"That is the animal who has permitted himself to insult me. Do Costa! The chief retires, and you think you will know him as the Count of Despero, or as he loves to call himself royally amongst us Spaniards, Gen. Don Basilio."

"No, no. On the contrary, I am deeply gratified at the upshot of our little meeting."

"Can you get at him then?" "As any moment," the chief assured him, with peculiar urbanity. "But how, and where? The royal party has moved, the streets are deserted, and—"

"My dear nephew, if you will trouble yourself to go down upon your knees, and look under my bed, I think you will find our excellent friend there."

"How in the world did you manage to get into the room?" "I was in the most simple manner, my son. I gave him the choice of coming quietly with me and submitting to my wishes, or having his brains blown out over the breakfast table."

"And he came with you?" "Most certainly. He did not even hesitate, and had no time to spare, and told him so."

"But what in the world are you going to do with him?" "I have already told you, my dear nephew, entering very much into his own adventures."

"I am also known to the chief intimately as Don Q.," added the chief suavely. "Why you must have had my message?"

"It brought me here," replied Don Q. "I came to look upon the man who mistook me for a traitor."

"And so the trial opened. Don Q. proved himself a past master in cross-examination, and in an hour the plot against the throne of Spain was laid bare in all its atrocity."

"With a strength of which the young man would not have believed him capable, Don Q. bent down, and raising the body, placed it in a chair. Then, helped by Lator, he bound it in a sitting posture, and fastened the chair to the balcony outside their window, which overlooked a main street through which the procession was to pass."

"A few moments later they had reached the street, and hurried along. Before turning the corner Lator stopped to look back. Over the edge of the balcony with its flapping draperies was visible the great blank face of the Carlist. Lator's eyes were fixed on the high seat of mockery to do honor to her between whom and himself had lain the sword of Don Q."

"How about our bargain, now, senator?" he questioned. "Don Q. raised his foot from the step, bowed punctiliously to the young fellow and answered: 'You are right, senator. Your ransom is remitted for the good service you have rendered to her majesty. I am glad to see you in her name and my own. What do you now desire to do?'"

After the death of Don Luis del Monte no event of great import occurred for long period in the sierras. Certain captures were indeed made, and certain persons of small consequence were held to ransom during those weary months of monotony, for in the course of his long and interesting career as a chief of sequestradores, brigands who held to ransom, Don Q. had had dealings with many sorts and conditions of men. Persons of divers callings had passed through his hands—sportsmen, politicians, merchants, a doctor, a couple of English M.P.'s, a High Church parson of the same nationality, the German Count von Squealotte, an American newspaper proprietor, and many adventurers. But when his men, patrolling the lower passes, lassooed the first of the latter, a young man of a gentleman of a profession with which he had never before come in contact.

Garth Lator was nearer twenty than he cared to own, full of the irrespressible sap of youth, and of a racial blood that made it difficult for him to take things as they came. "Without much delay Don Q. sent for him. Lator was distinctly stirred by the romance of the situation, for the brigand was a man with an ominous record, and the captive looked with a good deal of curiosity at the fragile figure framed in a cloak that croaked and beside the great fire, spreading bloodless hands to the blaze. Was this person the fierce-hearted and terrible character they spoke of in Don Q.'s tales? As usual, a wide soft brim of felt hid his features, and he seemed unaware of the entrance of the party, until Lator stepped suddenly up beside him to the fire.

"Good morning, senator. It is precious cold," he said, and turned to the fire. His two guards sprang forward at the word and thrust him back roughly. Don Q. raised his head and looked full at this unusual prisoner. "Excuse my taking of my hat, senator," the chief spoke at last in smooth, deliberate tones. "As you say, it is cold. I regret that your visit to us should be made in such unpleasant weather. Still we welcome you, for we have been in danger of suffering from dullness lately, and I foresee both pleasure and profit from your society."

"My dear senator—there was regret in the soft sibilant tones that made the last shudder involuntarily—"it is business. I have a terrible reputation to maintain. You must be aware of the enormous value of such a reputation to me as a professional man."

"I see your point of view," Lator said judicially; then he laughed again. "Don Q. regarded him with increasing interest. This young man was certainly of a new type. Lator read the question in his eyes. "Do you know," he said, "before I heard the alternative you have so delicately alluded to, I was congratulating myself on having fallen into your hands?"

"He smiled his quaint smile. 'It's a trifle hard after spending a couple of years in collecting rejection forms that the first really good thing to come in my way should turn out so croakedy.' "You travelled to get local color?" inquired Don Q. "Well, you see, if a fellow hadn't age he has to get experience. Don you think so?"

"I know an author," he began, "who has written a number of books. His own words are seldom left in his own hands, yet his transcriptions of humanity are so original, so vitally true, that the world will be shaken by a new knowledge of it when he publishes them. He has had opportunities of seeing the soul of man."

"Lator pushed back his chair involuntarily. His imagination had divined the truth. "I think, my dear senator, that the thought flashed through him—what thoughts had not those livid-lidded eyes seen? "You are right. I have occupied my will tend to set me right in the person of those who malign me in the plains."

"The queen is already on her way to Malaga, where she is to make a progress through the streets on the 15th. Don Basilio presumes that some infamous plot against her is being prepared. You have heard of this man?"

"You may take my word for it, senator, he is even worse than the world believes him to be. 'It is at the man himself that I must strike!' the chief paused and laid a yellow forefinger on Lator's sleeve. 'Are you well, and would you like service to the Queen, and thereby to cause me to remit your ransom?'"

"I am willing to do the remitting of the ransom, senator," exclaimed Don Q. "I see our way into this man's presence!" "Our way?"

"Yes, we two—alone!" The chief bent forward and whispered for some time into Lator's ear, breaking off at intervals to give way to terrible sibilant paroxysms of laughter.

"The bleak evening had fallen and the lights of La Bien Venida at Malaga were twinkling out upon the chilling air, when a hooded figure entered the courtyard of the hotel. From the door descended, and standing upon the marble steps before the lofty main door, carefully assisted an elderly man to get out of the vehicle. This latter was a very fragile and thin personage, attired in the attire of an elderly member of the English Church. Under his great coat could be seen his apron in white, and a pair of black shoes, and between the white tab at his back and the curly-brimmed hat a beak of nose and a pair of fierce livid-lidded eyes peered forth to arrest the attention of any onlooker.

"I have but one room, Excellency," said Lator. "So, put two beds into it. Be quick!" The landlord turned to Lator. "Senator," he said in a low voice, with a glance over his shoulder at the mysterious figure, "can you not persuade the noble lord to try another hotel. There are many in the city, and I am sure Lator looked gloomily into the man's eyes.

"No power on earth could persuade him," he replied with tragic conviction. "Come, come, lead the way! lead the way!" piped the bishop, perspiringly, in spite of his now halting gait. "The great rooms of La Bien Venida are built round an inner patio, paved in marble, roofed in glass and decorated with many lofty palms. Into this the bishop advanced with his mingling step, followed by the stout hotel-keeper. The sharp, sibilant tones sufficiently raised to attract the attention of a tall and stout man who had been smoking a cigar in one of the adjoining rooms. He came striding out. "What is this noise about?" he asked angrily of the hotelkeeper. "Who is this? Did I not order you to keep the place clear of your pestiferous clients?"

"In an instant the bishop had stepped up in front of him. "Pardon, senator, my coat is black, but it can be pulled off! And I can borrow a sword!"

"The hotel keeper stood aghast that any one should thus address the great Gen. Don Basilio. That truculent personage seemed a good deal surprised himself.

"I do not fight with gnats!" he answered rudely, yet his face, he added, turning away. "But the bishop's active figure was again before him. I have not yet said I will not be brushed away," he cried with sibilant imperiousness, "more especially by an animal like you!"

"Lator, who was enjoying himself hugely, felt it was time to interfere. "You are right, senator, good senator," he went on. "My excuse must be that although I have strong hopes of ultimately surviving, I have not yet entirely mortified the flesh. My fiery temper has ever been a thorn in my side. About to vent his rage in words, he added—"Forget all I have said—I earnestly trust I have not frightened you!"

"The churchman's livid eyelids flickered up at Don Basilio's puffy face and before that gentleman could re-

cover his speech, he was trotting up the stairs, followed by his nephew and the hotel keeper.

"Don Basilio stood still, uncertain how to act. The bishop's plump tones floated down from above. "To be, to be, I will remain. I am ill. And if you refuse me, the bishop will be obliged to appeal to the authorities. Stand at once for—"

"So you see, senator, after all no harm has been done, taking my own part," he said to Lator. "I allowed him to rough-ride over me, and would, at that moment, have had my life for two days."

"Now, can you suggest a suitable illness for a bishop?" I am about to do so for two days."

"Yes, it is an essential part of my plan," he said, "but you will allow me to see if I can do it for you. Don Basilio is no doubt meditating whether he should leave the hotel. If I cross his path too often he may do so. That would be a misfortune, for he is a man of great importance. But if I give out that I am very ill, he will simply indulge in pious platitudes, and will not interfere with my plans. I will allow me to see if I can do it for you."

"The chamber of the bishop was luckily somewhat isolated in consideration of his illness. About two o'clock Don Q. rose and dressed himself in ordinary attire, packing his bishop's costume in his valise, while he requested Lator to be so good as to send Don Basilio out from under the bed."

"That would hardly be in keeping with your character," remonstrated the young man. "I will say that we have telegraphed to the great gout specialist in London, Sir Charles Johnson, and the doctor comes who will trust to your own knowledge rather than to local talent."

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"The lights of the house were low, and as she leaned for a second, a billow mass of chiffon and lace, against the emerald, her heavily-lashed eyelids half closed and she sighed faintly.

"All it was good to be faultlessly dressed from the top of the head to the tip of her shoe all at once—yet once she had engaged in her usual round, she had come, dear nephew."

"What are you going to do?" asked Lator. "First we will concern ourselves with what you are to do," returned the chief. "I have a plan, and I mean to do it. I will descend and partake of desayuno, and do not forget, my dear nephew, to get fresh gloves and a pair of socks."

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stumbled against every day, let me tell you. At the close of the third act, although the play was still to be played, Alberta turned to her companion. "Well, now," she said simply, but so he helped her on with her wrap. "You are not going to the cab, one of the luminations of her face. It was an illumination he had never seen before—such an illumination which he knew instinctively he had no part in. When Hershel, having gotten his hat and coat, joined her in the lobby, and was about to enter a cab, one of the girls' hands went out to his ready arm; but the other dainty handed him his ring.

"I've decided you'd better keep it," she said calmly, while his fingers closed tightly around the jewel. Hershel's face was as white as a sheet. "I might as well have taken your aunt out—old lady's a corker when talk gets going. If I'm not home by the time the curtain goes up, don't get frightened. I'll be here before the bloom of things over."

"Well, if you will want to stay, I'm going out for a whiskey and soda. Hershel laughed unobtrusively, laying his heavy hand on hers, as the curtain dropped on the second act. "You don't seem to care for conversation, do you?" might as well have taken your aunt out—old lady's a corker when talk gets going. If I'm not home by the time the curtain goes up, don't get frightened. I'll be here before the bloom of things over."

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WHILE THE PLAY WAS ON

BY VIRGINIA LELLA WENTZ

They came in rather late—the first act was well under way. The girl, in her soft evening gown, swept quickly down the aisle and took the seat indicated by the usher with serene noiselessness. The man with waxed moustaches and flashy diamond studs followed ostentatiously. He sat down, much to the annoyance of the party directly behind, after unduly pompous remarks. Contentment and composure were in Mr. Hershel's face.

"Mechanically the girl drew out her opera glasses from their bag; but she did not use them. Instead, with a little sigh of content, she leaned back against her wrap, a gorgeous thing, ermine-lined, belonging to her aunt, which she had been coaxing into wearing. The lights of the house were low, and as she leaned for a second, a billow mass of chiffon and lace, against the emerald, her heavily-lashed eyelids half closed and she sighed faintly.

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home to-night," he said in a voice softened with reverence.

"There was actual tears in Alberta's eyes. Homely as the setting was, simple as was the scene, it had reached her to a revelation. After all, that was the real sum of life, was it not, dear God—nothing but a conversation, and a clear unbartered conscience?"

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From time to time one hears of lack of success in fern balls, those bits of greenery from Japan, made by the natives by winding the rhizomes of the fern Davallia bullata about balls of spagnum moss. The trouble usually arises from lack of moisture, of which, without care, are necessary. Try immersing the fern balls in water every few days and leaving them for an hour or more. Occasionally, a little liquid sheep manure mixed with water hastens the growth of the ferns.

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