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MY INVESTMENT IN THE FAR WEST.

(From Blackwood's Magazine.)

"A golden opportunity, sir; Fortune knocking at your door, as she knocks but once in a man's lifetime; and if you refuse to let her in, excuse me, sir, but you will repent it—you will."

Such were the persuasive words of Colonel Coriolanus Sling, as he cracked his fibbers and sipped his cherry in the snug dining room of my villa at Stanford Hill. The Colonel, as his name indicates pretty clearly, was an eminent citizen of the model republic, not long arrived on British ground, and the bearer of an introductory letter from my esteemed friend Cassius Corkey, a late Secretary of Legation. I had given a little dinner in honor of my new acquaintance; the repast had gone off pleasantly enough, and the ladies had left us four gentlemen to our wine and politics, when the Colonel uttered the above remarks.

It was early autumn, and, if the flower-beds of the garden were somewhat faded, the shrubberies of Magnolia Villa had still a cheerful aspect; and the lawn, as seen through the French windows, was smooth and trim as a gigantic piece of Genoa velvet. Not a weed, not a withered leaf, marred the neatness of the bright gravel of the walks; the fountain was in full play, liberally sprinkling the gold-fish in the little marble basin; and the transparent walls of the conservatory showed a wealth of many-tinted flowers within. There may be larger and more stately residences than Magnolia Villa, but I flatter myself that few proprietors could make more of four and a half acres of ground, imperial measurement, than your humble servant, George Bulkeley. We were, as I have said, four in company—the Colonel; young Tom Harris of the Stock Exchange; a friend and countryman of the Colonel's, by name Dr. Titus A. C. Bett, and myself.

"Why, Colonel Sling?" answered I, doubtfully, "I don't quite know about that. The distance, you see, is great, and the risk may be—"

"Nothing at all," interrupted my guest, warmly; "I pledge you the honor, sir, of a free-born citizen of the United States, nothing at all.—The plan, sir, is ripe, and ready to drop into your mouth spontaneously; and I may safely assure you, sir, that nothing but my gratitude for your hospitality would have induced me to promulgate a scheme so out-and-out advantageous as the Great Navroo and Nebraska Railroad will eventually be."

"I had always had it in my power to follow the Colonel through all the windings of an argument. His eloquent diction was occasionally too much for me; but the drift of what he said was pretty clear, and I was greatly struck with it.

Tom Harris, who had been staring at the Colonel with his round eyes very wide open, here ventured to say that he supposed there would be considerable expenditure before any returns could be expected.

"Guess you'd better shut up," said, or rather sneezed, Dr. Titus A. C. Bett. "I have documents in my pocket to substantiate the number of miles metalled, and the bridges, and the viaducts, and general plant. A mere flea-bite of outlay, sir, would suffice to establish another of those mighty arteries of communication in respect to which America, it's pretty much admitted, wins the world; and none but a soft-hearted, sir, would have the least diffidence about it."

The Doctor and the Colonel were compatriots, one being a Boston man and the other a New-Yorker, but they were very unlike each other in aspect and manner. For whereas the Colonel was six feet two inches high, at the very least computation, and had a eagle beak, keen dark eyes, and a forest of black hair streaming around his shaggy face; the Doctor was, with the man of five feet three, or thereabouts, with weak eyes, spectacles, a head almost bald, and a little wizened countenance. Furthermore, the Colonel was a soft-spoken man, with conciliatory manners and a peculiarly honeyed tone; and the Doctor was a particularly angry wasp, meddled and buzzed in society like an angry wasp, and kept a silver box full of quids in his coat-pocket. These two were partners. In natured people were malicious enough to say that the Colonel's department was cajolery, and the Doctor's bullying, in the joint interest of the firm.—I gave no ear to these unkind rumors, and indeed I justly considered the Colonel to be a man of superior abilities and remarkable eloquence. He did not omit, on this occasion, to spread a little soothing balm on the wounds which his countryman's rudeness had inflicted.

"Excuse the worthy Doctor," he murmured, in bland accents, to Tom Harris, whose face was very red with awkward indignation, "he is accustomed to the free discussions of our colonial country, where the restrictive etiquette of older

and more despotic lands is spurned beneath the boot-heels of enlightenment. Do not be riled, I beseech you, at the freedom of his remarks; truth inspires them. You do not know, gentlemen, (here the orator's voice swelled into a sonorous fulness)—"you cannot know—the resources of our glorious country: none but American citizens can fully appreciate the mines of profitable produce always awaiting the civilising pick-axe of the hardy western pioneer. But never, never since first our Pilgrim Fathers began to improve the Indians off the face of nature—never since Manhattan changed its name to New Amsterdam, afterwards to be New York—has such a speculation as this, of which I am the felicitous herald, been going a-begging.—Hail, Columbia, happy land! as our inspired bard, who whips your Swan of—ahem!" And here the Colonel ended in some confusion, and hid his fluent lips for a moment in his wine-glass.

Tom Harris was quite appeased. He was not a bright personage, Tom, but he did very well on the Stock Exchange, to which he may be said to have been born and bred. He was the only son of the well-known old Peter Harris, the man who made so much, as a war, at the time of the Nore mutiny. He, Tom—not old Peter—had inherited a great deal of money; and though he set up for a sporting man, and generally hedged so artfully, and made up such ingenious books on the races that his alternative was between great losses and small ones, he was richer than when he came into his father's fortune.—For money accrues to money, as a snow-ball gathers in rolling; and it no more requires a genius to thrive in the Stock Market than it does to rule in a Cabinet, if Chancellor Oxeastern tells the truth. And Tom had married a young lady of property, Miss Mungie, daughter of Chutnee and Mungie, or rather of the junior partner in that great firm. Tom Harris, therefore, was wild for lucrative investments, and so, in a qualified way, was I; and money was plentiful in the City, as the Times correspondent daily informed the reading public. We therefore already began to nibble at the tempting bait which the Colonel placed before us so dexterously.

"But," said I, "is the traffic certain to be remunerative? The line runs through rather a thinly-peopled tract of country, doesn't it?"

Colonel Coriolanus Sling stepped his leathery gait upon the polished mahogany with an emphasis that made the glasses ring. "Sir," said he, "you are the most sensible man I have met in this benighted—I mean this beautiful kingdom. You have hit the exact point, my dear Mr. Bulkeley, on which the eligibility of the whole affair pivots, only you must look at it from that sublimely piercing elevation from which the American intellect surveys it. Sir, we must create a population; sir, we must found cities; sir, it must be ours to people the western solitudes and to implant the germs of a nascent commerce; a new learning, a fresh community, where now the coon and the prairie dog dwell unmolested and alone; and, sir, future ages will derive to us colossal statues of imperishable brass: while in this we shall realize the applause of our consciences and of our bankers." Here the Colonel stopped, overpowered by his feelings, and blew his nose with a martial dissonance.

"By Jove!" said Tom Harris, "I'll speak to old Muggins about it; if he says 'all right,' I'll take a thousand shares in the concern."

"Muggins, sir!—ho! ho! Muggins!" demanded the Doctor, waspishly: "is Muggins, sir, a fit judge when such an enterprise is in question—an enterprise to reflect eternal honor, sir, on its spirited and high-faluting projectors, with the finger of ignominy to point at the craven that draws back. Muggins! some stony-hearted London capitalist—some toad-eater at the beck of a bloated aristocracy—some miserable hanger of the gilded saloons of a Chancellor of the Exchequer. (The doctor was not very particular as to the authenticity of the accusations he flung broadcast.) "Muggins, indeed!"

Tom Harris was an ingenious youth. He looked excessively ashamed of his allusion to Muggins' and was quite borne down by the volubility of his transatlantic opponent. Thus it came about that a meeting was arranged for the next day at Colonel Sling's chambers, at which we were to discuss the propriety of forming a company to work out the concession of the Navroo and Nebraska Railway, of which our American friends were the fortunate owners. I was an older man than Tom Harris, and had necessarily seen more of the world. And I had been bit; as the phrase goes, once or twice, by Mexican Debentures, Spanish Deferred, and unsaleable Scrip. I therefore asked, as delicately as I could, why my new acquaintances had not raised among the enlightened capitalists of their own country a sufficient amount to pay all preliminary expenses, thus keeping the golden fruit among Americans. But the Colonel had an answer ready for me. He frowned, pursed up his mouth, bit his lips, and assumed very much the

air of a conspirator.

"Hush!" he uttered, in tragic tones; then rushing to the door, whisked it open, putting to rout Adolphus the page, who always is listening at keyholes, in spite of repeated corporal punishment. Adolphus scuttled away across the hall in great dismay, and the Colonel returned to his seat with an expression that Iago might have envied. "Hush!" said he, "walls have eardrums, and spies are always on the watch to report the words of Columbia's children. It is well known that your arbitrary Government has long adopted the wicked maxim due to the crafty forethought of your Pitt, Earl of Holland, that America's danger is England's opportunity."

I could not help laughing as I answered, "I am afraid, Colonel, your memory has not rendered the passage in exactly its original form."

"Excuse me," croaked the Doctor, "but nothing is more wonderful than the ignorance which prevails in Britain, with regard to the sayings and doings of your grantees and public persons."

"Allow me, Doctor," said the Colonel, oracularly, "to finish my explanation. You see, gentlemen, we might have offered this concession in Wall street in the Empire City, and Wall street would have snapped it up; yes, sir, as an alligator would chew pork."

This was a forcible simile, but it did not quite content us. "Why didn't you?" was trembling on the lips of both Tom Harris and myself, but politeness restrained us from uttering what our looks must have plainly said.

The Colonel answered our looks thus: "Because, squires, there was this difficulty in the way—Buck, you know, is our old man."

"I beg your pardon," said Tom, reddening again; "but I don't quite catch your meaning.—Buck, did you call the gentleman?"

"Buck! the old man! White House—deputations—soirees—soft snows," explained the Doctor; and then we discovered that President Buchanan was the object of the discourse.

"Well," pursued the Colonel, "Buck's very far gone—notice to quit—time nearly up. His successor is sure to be Abe Lincoln, if the little giant don't beat him at the election. Nobody else has got a chance. Caucuses all at work! dark as moles. Now, sir, we have plugged the platform."

"You've done what?" exclaimed Tom Harris.

"We've made it all safe, and Lincoln stands to win," exclaimed the Colonel, condescendingly. "Now we suppose these Southerners mean to take rusty if they get an anti-slavery man, like old Abe, to be President over them; and though our folks are screamers, and that's a fact, the South's an ugly customer, and our line of railway is too close to Missouri State to be safe, if owned by Northerners. But in the smartest row the South can make, you Britishers are sure to be handled as tenderly as a heaver handled a squirrel's skin; and so it's best the property should be in the name of British subjects, not free citizens. Don't you see?"

"We did see, and we resented that on the morrow we would sit the matter thoroughly."

"Try the Claret, Colonel," said I; "you have been drinking nothing but sherry, and this is Chateau Margaux that I got at Bilkington's sale. These are pretty good peaches, Doctor, of my own growing."

"Don't talk of peaches," said the Doctor, wincing; "I will own, was anything but no agreeable guest; you must cross the broad Atlantic before you talk of peaches, I reckon. I've fed pigs with better than your dukes and ears could show.—I've bought in the market twenty-nine peaches for thirty cents, I have. We do crowd over you in peaches, as in most, only your national vanity won't permit you to see it."

The Colonel jumped from his chair. "You be quiet," said he; "the Doctor is a glowing patriot, Mr. Bulkeley; but I know he admires your delightful sagacity, embellished by art and high-faluting taste, as much as I do myself. Some day, as a director of the Navroo and Nebraska you may, if you please, build a palace on the site of Magnolia Villa that will take the shine out of the sumptuous halls of your nobility.—But enough of business. Gentlemen, if you have liquored sufficiently, we will join the ladies."

We did join the ladies. We found them stretching over the lawn in the cool of a September evening, and presently we all went in to coffee. I noticed that the Colonel was very polite and attentive, not only to my wife, but to young Mrs. Harris, who was exceedingly stupid and plain of feature. As for Mrs. and Miss Jarman, they were entertained by the Doctor with an amusing dissertation on the difference between America and England, and especially between London and New York. If Mrs. Jarman had hitherto cherished a belief in the pre-eminence of London, as she apparently had, she must have received a considerable shock as the Doctor informed her that Belgravia was but a poor place to Fourth and Fifth Avenue, and that we were benighted creatures in all matters of elegance and taste.

"Not a mahogany door, I guess, have I seen in this smoky beggarly town of yours," said Dr. Bett, with both thumbs in the pockets of his black satin vest; "and as for silver knockers and bell-pulls, I might as well look for liberty in your institutions, or for sincerity in your press. The helps are enough to disgust all free-born men; to see them in plush and powder, with goldsticks and nosebags, standing behind the gilt vehicles of an effete aristocracy, is alone a spectacle that beats earthquakes; and your Life Guards would sing small, I guess, by the side of the Brooklyn Volunteers."

The Colonel, however, could be complimentary and gentle, if his brother republican could not; and so well did he play his cards, that when the company drove off, and the last grinding of their carriage-wheels upon the gravel had died away, my wife and daughters turned to me with beaming faces, and began to sing the praises of their departed guest.

"A most superior, well-informed, gentlemanly man, is Colonel Sling," said the partner of my joys, emphatically.

"A delightful man!" piped Georgiana, my eldest.

"Quite an Admiral Crichton," said Selina, my second, who is a bit of a blue.

"Delightful! he has so much conversation, and makes one laugh so," cried arches Lucy, the third and youngest of my daughters.

So he had pleased them all, and I admit, he had pleased me too; but he mostly showed his tact in winning the suffrages of the feminine members of my household. For Mrs. Bulkeley is not a cipher by any means even in my business transactions, and she has an amiable habit of warning me against entering into commercial relations with any one she mistrusts or dislikes.

The next day beheld assembled in the showy Pall Mall chambers of Colonel Sling the same quartette that had closed around the mahogany in Magnolia Villa on the preceding day. Tom Harris and I drove down there together from the City, and we found the two Americans awaiting us with a hearty welcome. There were maps on a great table, and plans, and minerals, and parchments, and heaps of papers, carefully stacked and dorquetted, and files of letters with great red seals to them that would have carried conviction home to the most incredulous. And the Colonel after the first salutations were over, and after tenderly inquiring about the health of my wrinkled, commenced a brief explanation of the exact position of the Navroo and Nebraska Railway—its position, I mean, in a pecuniary point of view, not its geographical position. The latter, we ascertained by a glance at his map, to be in the free State of Iowa, skirting Missouri, and with one terminus in Illinois State and the other in Nebraska Territory. But information now came showering upon us, and the Colonel was extremely careful to prove every fresh axiom which he laid down by an appeal to documents of the most incontrovertible character. There was the original concession of the line, approved by the State Legislature, signed by the Governor, registered by the State's law officers and by the Federal attorney of the district. There were similar documents, to which the autobiographies of the governors of Nebraska and Illinois were attached. There were the reports of surveyors, the accounts of contractors, subcontractors, architects, mechanists, and iron-masters. Moreover, there were specimens of minerals found in the immediate neighborhood of the line, and within the liberal grant of land which the State had made—which specimens the Colonel showed us, in rather a careless way, as mere incidental advantages. But the eyes of Tom Harris and myself sparkled at the sight; for although we were not adepts in geology, we knew iron ore, and copper ore, and limestone, and hornblende, and fine marble, when we saw them; and visions of mines and quarries to be worked at vast profit, or leased for high rentals flitted brilliantly before us. What wonder that on hearing the generous terms on which the two American gentlemen were willing to admit us to full participation of their advantages, Tom and I shook hands most heartily with Doctor and Colonel, and devoted ourselves from that moment to the establishment of the projected company. And then Colonel Coriolanus rang the bell for lunch, and we all drank, over and over again, in creaming bumpers of Chequot, prosperity and success to the Navroo and Nebraska Railway. Two days after, out came our prospectus to dazzle the City. A more flowery manifesto, or one more fertile in temptations, I have seldom seen. It proved, moreover, as plainly as that two and two make four, that the investment was as secure as the bank, if not more so, and a hundred-fold more remunerative. Never was there such a railway; never were there directors so open, so respectable, so conscientious, so experienced; never was there a line on which the expenses were so trifling, the traffic so enormous, or the dividend so princely, as that of the Navroo and Nebraska. Iowa was a State of bound-

less fertility, of inexhaustible resources—cereal, mineral, commercial. The line would be part of a main highway to the Far West, and the Old World and the New World pour tribute into the cornucopia of its matchless wealth.—Cities were to spring up, fair and flourishing provinces were the blossom where the virgin soil now awaited the spade and the ploughshare; we were to carry tobacco, madder, corn, cattle, immigrants and ore. The gigantic fortunes we were to make were thrown into the shade by the benefits we were to confer on posterity and our contemporaries. unborn millions were to canonize the projectors of the Grand Navroo and Nebraska; and we were not only to insure for ourselves the smiles and blessings of ages yet to come, but were to feather our nests pretty handsomely in a few short months. Not only were we to take rank as philanthropists of the first water, but to rig the market as well. Nor were the advantages of the new railroad confined to the eminent and clear-sighted capitalists who had first embarked in it. Not in that good cause the widow's mite was welcome.—Never, it was pointed out, was so admirable an opportunity offered to ladies of limited income, to struggling professional men, to free yet gentry others, to double or triple their little store by means of the splendid dividends, the bonuses, premiums, and other good things, to be expected from the Company. Who has not read many such glowing proclamations as this, promising to realize the dreams of an El Dorado for the lucky speculator, bolstering up each statement by an imposing array of figures, and always concluding by the recommendation that (to prevent disappointment) immediate application be made at the office for shares. We had a secretary and cashier, and Dr. Titus A. C. Bett was so kind as to undertake the latter responsible position; while the celebrated Wyldrake Fiam, Esq., a gentleman who had been connected with a good many companies in his time, was happily secured for the former situation. Sir George Gullings, M.P., a rich banker who had earned his baronetcy by his long course of voting for a Whig Ministry, was our chairman, and of course, Tom Harris, Colonel Sling, and I, were among the managing directors. We took a great many shares amongst us; but, of course, by far the greater number were submitted to public competition, and the frequency of the money market but with tolerable success. But there were some wary old fish who retired so much as to nibble at the glittering bait, and increase amongst them was old Muggins, that veteran stockbroker of whom Tom Harris had made mention at my table. Muggins was a character, and deservedly outspoken. One day I met him at the Royal Exchange, and taking him playfully by the button, I asked him why he gave our Company the cold shoulder.

"Mr. Bulkeley, sir, I'll tell you," said Muggins, with a frown: "I stick your Company, sir, because I can't afford to lose my property: duck-and-drake fashion among those swindling Yankooks. I hate lubbers, sir, and this is worse, for it is a cruel robbery."

"Sir, sir? Mr. Muggins!" said I, choking with anger. "What did this remarkable man proceed to say. Just this:

"George Bulkeley, I have known you from a boy, and you are an honest man, though not very bright. (I was speechless at this outburst).—When I call this affair a swindle, I don't impute blame to you, for I am aware that you are a duke, not a dipper. But I don't pay you for losing some pen-feathers out of your wings as you will do; I keep my eye for the poor wretches who will be plucked here, and who can least spare the little savings or capital your fine prospectus has wheedled them into investing.—I mean the widows and old maids, the half-pay officers, the needy clergyman, that your Company is to ruin. I wish I could see your American friends in the pitiful I know! Good day."

And off he went, leaving me very angry, but a little dismayed as well. After all, old Muggins passed for an oracle in the city; and seriously, had I examined sufficiently into the foundation of all the alluring statements we had published with the sanction of our names?—What Muggins had said about the widows and poor helpless folks gave me an unpleasant twinge in my heart, and conscience came and whispered "George Bulkeley, the accomplice of rogues, is not very far from being a rogue himself, is he? I made a bold resolution. I determined to go out myself to America, and, on the spot, thoroughly to investigate the condition and prospects of the line of railway. When I broached this proposal at the next meeting of the Board, Colonel Sling and the Doctor were found to be violently opposed to it, and to be inclined to resent such interference on my part as an insult.—And the influence of the two Americans was very considerable with the committee, partly because the transatlantic gentlemen had a custom of putting down and pooh-poohing whatever