

Sidelights on the Foreign Farmer

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paid for." Mike thought I was joking, but I was merely putting into ordinary talk an absolutely fundamental principle of the English constitutional law by which the king holds his crown.

"We'll have some supper," said Mike. My way of putting things puzzles Mike sometimes. In any case the idea of the king as a protector is new to one whose experience of kings has been governed by Hapsburgs and Romanoffs. It is an idea that has never worked very well anywhere. It is very different from the modern notion that the poor and ignorant and miserable have no protector at all, but by virtue of a sacred principle called democracy, are able to protect themselves.

We had supper of boiled eggs and tea and bread, and the guest crawled out and ate a little, and crawled back again in silence. He reminded one of a hungry and frightened dog.

After supper Mike's brother put a horse in his buggy, and he and I drove four miles to the nearest telephone, Mike lending me a heavy wolf-skin coat, for which I was very thankful. It had become very sharp. When the folks there were routed out of bed there was much more routing out to be done over the phone. Finally I got in touch with the provincial police. The word I got was, "I'll be there as soon as I can get a car; been looking for him all afternoon."

"All right," I said, "I'll wait for you here."

Then I sent Mike's brother home and settled down to wait. They made some tea and it helped a little, but what I really needed was a couple of pieces of bent straw inserted between my upper and lower eyelids. It seemed an interminable time before the purring of the car broke the stillness of the night. At length, however, the policeman arrived, and I bundled into the car with apologies to the good people I had disturbed.

The policeman immediately confided to me that he suspected the wanderer of being a man who had broken jail at Prince Albert I think it was, and whose description he had.

He then sprung on me a description which would fit anybody who hadn't a hare lip or a club foot, and asked me, if his hair was cropped. I replied that I had not noticed his hair and that this was proof enough that it was not cropped. Being excessively tired, and having besides a deep-rooted hatred of these police prepossessions which are the root of half the miscarriages of justice that occur, I continued, "Look here! If he is your man you will know it in a second and you can get him. He's all in. But you will use not a little, but a whole lot of tact, because if he's what I think he is, and you don't, you'll drive out all the wits he has left forever, and have a singularly uncomfortable memory in your official career."

I don't remember my exact words. These are pretty close. I am trying to give my tone of voice in words.

The journey only took about a minute and a half. After overcoming a momentary confusion about east, west, north and south, I gave them the right turning and we drew up in Mike's yard.

The policeman was a large, impressive person, with a rich fruity voice, a returned soldier. So was the chauffeur a returned soldier. Fate had laid its icy hand on the poor lunatic.

"Oh!" he said, covering in the bed, "I know you've come to get me. There is a hole for me."

"We have not come to get you. You have not done anything wrong. We've come to help you home. How are you feeling?"

No articulate answer.

"Had the flu?"

"Yes, very bad, last winter."

"That's the whole trouble. You want to be home, with your wife taking care of you."

elected a king for When a man is in distress and has nobody to turn to he is a king's man. That is the king's job to look after him, that is what he is

My opinion of this policeman was steadily rising. It rose still further when I found he had brought an extra overcoat with him.

The story had all to be gone over again substantially the same as I already had it but less incoherent. The man's terror was gone. We finally bundled him into the car and drove round to my place where I found him some old foot-wear. The car sung off into the night, and before its tune had died away I was under the blankets and asleep myself.

As I discovered afterwards the wanderer had slept all the way to town, what was left of the night when they got there, and most of the next day. When he woke up he was quite rational. His story was verified in every particular except, of course, as to the spy and returned soldier pursuers part of it, which was pure delusion. His clothes were recovered and restored to him, and, for fear the train might excite him again, he was taken home in a motor car.

Whether he got his money back or not I do not know. When he stripped on the river bank he had \$290 in bills on him. This he hid separately in the bush. He told Mike about this money, and Mike told me. He never mentioned it to me nor to the police. I advised Mike to forget about it, that he would go back and get it himself, and it was best nobody should know.

Next day I said to Mike: "That policeman was all right. He acted pretty near human, didn't he?"

"Yes," said Mike, "very different from Russian police."

"How?" said I.

"Oh," he answered, "they would have pulled him out rough and thrown him about."

"Our police have more sense," I said, and added to myself, "sometimes."

"About these spells, Mike," I said. "What are spells?"

He had used the word as if it expressed in English something with which he was familiar. I couldn't get anything out of him. He had not sufficient command of English to explain. What I wished to discover was whether the phenomenon was common among his people. I called the man's condition waking nightmare. He was exhibiting the phenomena of nightmare exactly only he was awake, and his observation and memory of what was actually around him was quite accurate. If a state of this kind was common enough in South Eastern Europe to be referred to by a specialized term, and especially if epidemics of it occurred in times of public unrest and disturbance, it would throw some light upon the curious historical enigma of demoniac possession. The poor creature was undoubtedly possessed with devils, and the moment the actual, real policeman (than whom anything less apostolic could hardly be imagined, though to accuse him of evoking Beelzebub would be equally stupid) came in contact with him, the devils disappeared. Actual touch with the authority of the law dispelled the delusion he was under, and he knew nothing but overmastering physical fatigue. There is one speculation for the curious. Another is whether different races show typically different forms of hysteria. Upon observation of one case no theory can be established, and so far as I am concerned, I sincerely trust that, at whatever detriment to science, it will never fall to my lot to come into similar observational contact with another.

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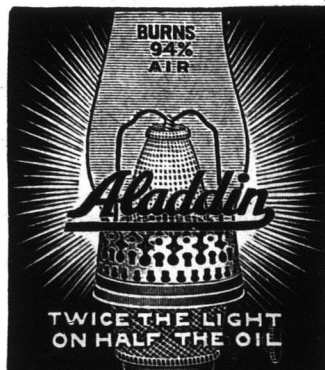
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