

## The Red Silk Handkerchief.

— BY —

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The yellow afternoon sun came in through the long blank windows of the room wherein sat the Superior Court of the State of New York, Part II., (Gillespie, Judge. The hour of adjournment was near at hand, a dozen court-loungers slouched on the hard benches in the attitudes of cramped carelessness which mark the familiar of the halls of justice. Beyond the rails sat a dozen lawyers and lawyer's clerks, and a dozen weary jurymen. Above the drowsy silence rose the nasal voice of the junior counsel for the defence, who in a high monotone, with his faint eyes fixed on the paper in his hand, was making something like a half a score of "requests to charge."

Nobody paid attention to him. Two lawyers' clerks whispered like mischievous schoolboys, hiding behind a pile of books that towered upon a table. Junior counsel for the plaintiff chewed his pencil and took advantage of his opportunity to familiarize himself with certain neglected passages of the New Code. The crier, like a half-dormant old spider, sat in his place and watched a boy who was fidgeting at the far end of the room, and who looked as though he wanted to whistle.

The jurymen might have been dream-men, vague creations of an Autumn afternoon's doze. It was hard to connect them with a world of life and business. Yet, gazing closer, you might have seen that one looked as if he were thinking of his dinner, and another as if he were thinking of the lost love of his youth; and that the expression on the faces of the others ranged from the vacant to the inscrutable. The oldest juror, at the end of the second row, was sound asleep. Every one in the court room, except himself, knew it. No one cared.

Gillespie, J., was writing his acceptance of an invitation to a dinner set for that evening at Delmonico's. He was doing this in such a way that he appeared to be taking copious and conscientious notes. Long years on the bench had whitened Judge Gillespie's hair and taught him how to do this. His seeming attentiveness much encouraged the counsel for the defence, whose high-pitched tone rasped the air like the buzzing of a bee that has found its way through the slats of the blind into some darkened room, of a summer noon, and that, as it seeks egress, raises its shrill scandalized protest against the idleness and the pleasant gloom.

"We request y'r Honour t' charge: First, 't' forcible entry does not constitute trespass, unless intent's proved. Thus, 't' a man rolls down a bank—"

But the judge's thoughts were in the private supper-room at Delmonico's. He had no interest in the sad fate of the hero of the supposititious case, who had been obliged, by a strange and ingenious combination of accidents, to make violent entrance, incidentally damaging the persons and property of others, into the lands and tenements of his neighbor.

And further away yet the droning lawyer had set a-travelling the thoughts of Horace Walpole, clerk for Messrs. Weedon, Snowden and Gilfeather; for the young man, with his elbows on the table, his head in his hands, a sad half-smile on his lips, and his brown eyes looking through vacancy to St. Lawrence County, New York.

He saw a great, shabby old house, shabby with the awful shabbiness of a sham grandeur laid bare by time and mocked of the pitiless weather. There was a great sham Grecian portico at one end; the white paint was well-nigh washed away, and the rain-streak-

ed wooden pillars seemed to be weeping tears of penitence for having lied about themselves and pretended to be marble.

The battened walls were cracked and blistered. The Grecian temple on the hillock near looked much like a tomb, and not at all like a summer-house. The flower-garden was so rank and rugged, so overgrown with weed and vine, that it was spared the mortification of revealing its neglected maza, the wonder of the county in 1820. All was sham, save the decay. That was real; and by virtue of its decrepitude the old house seemed to protest against modern contempt, as though it said: "I have had my day. I was built when people thought this sort of thing was the right sort of thing; when we had our own little pseudo-classic renaissance in America. I lie between the towns of Aristotle and Sabine Farms. I am a gentleman's residence, and my name is Montevista. I was built by a prominent citizen. You need not laugh through your lattices, you smug new Queen Anne cottage, down there in the valley! What will become of you when the falsehood is found out of your imitation bricks and your tiled roof of shingles, and your stained glass that is only a sheet of transparent paper pasted on a pane? You are a young sham; I am an old one. Have some respect for age!"

Its age was the crowning glory of the estate of Montevista. There was nothing new on the place except a third mortgage. Yet had Montevista villa put forth a juster claim to respect, it would have said: "I have had my day. Where all is desolate and silent now, there was once light and life. Along these halls and corridors, the stories of my being, pulsed a hot-blooded joyous humanity, fed with delicate fare, kindled with generous wine. Every corner under my roof was alive with love and hope and ambition. Great men and dear women were here; and the host was great and the hostess was gracious among them all. The laughter of children filled my gaudily decked stucco. To-day an old man walks up and down my lonely drawing-rooms, with bent head, murmuring to himself odds and ends of tawdry old eloquence, wandering in a dead land of memory, waiting till Death shall take him by the hand and lead him out of his ruinous house, out of his ruinous life."

Death had indeed come between Horace and the creation of his spiritual vision. Never again should the old man walk, as to the boy's eyes he walked now, over the creaking floors, from where the Nine Muses simpered on the walls of the south parlour to where Homer and Plutarch, equally simpering, yet simpering with a difference—severely simpering—faced each other across the room. Horace saw his father stalking on his accustomed round, a sad, familiar figure, tall and bent. The hands were clasped behind the back, the chin was bowed on the black stock; but every now and then the thin form drew itself straight, the fine, clean-shaven aquiline face was raised, beaming with the ghost of an old enthusiasm, and the long right arm was lifted high in the air as he began, his sonorous tones a little tremulous in spite of the restraint of old-time pomposity and deliberation—

"Mr. Speaker, I rise,"—or, "If your Honour please!"

The forlorn, hopeless earnestness of this mockery of life touched Horace's heart; and yet he smiled to think how different were the methods and manners of his father from those of brother Hooper, whose requests still droned up to the reverberating hollows of the roof, and there were lost in a subdued boom and snarl of echoes such as a court-room only can begot.

Two generations ago, when the Honorable Horace Kortlandt Walpole was the rising young lawyer of the State—when he was known as "the

Golden-Mouthed Orator of St. Lawrence County," he was in the habit of assuming that he owned whatever court he practised in; and, as a rule, he was right. The most bullock-brained of country judges deferred to the brilliant young master of law and eloquence, and his "requests" were generally accepted as commands, and obeyed as such. Of course the great lawyer, for form's sake, threw a veil of humility over his deliverances; but even that he rent to shreds when the fire of his eloquence once got fairly aglow.

"May it please your Honour! Before your Honour exercises the sacred prerogative of your office—before your Honour performs the sacred duty which the State has given into your hands—before, with that lucid genius to which I bow my head, you direct the minds of these twelve good men and true in the path of strict judicial investigation, I ask your Honour to instruct them that they must bring to their deliberations that impartial justice which the laws of our beloved country—of which no abler exponent than your Honour has ever graced the bench,—which the laws of our beloved country guarantee to the lowest as well as to the loftiest of her citizens—from the President in the Executive Mansion to the humble artisan at the Forge—throughout this broad land, from the lagoons of Louisiana to where the snow-clad forests of Maine burl defiance at the descendants of Tory refugees in the barren wastes of Nova Scotia!"

Horace remembered every word and every gesture of that speech. He recalled even the quick upward glance from under the shaggy eyebrows with which his father seemed to see again the smirking judge catching at the gross bait of flattery; he knew the little pause which the speaker's memory had filled with the applause of an audience long since dispersed to various silent country graveyards; and he wondered pityingly if it were possible that even in his father's prime that wretched allusion to old political hatreds had power to stir the fire of patriotism in the citizen's bosom.

"Poor old father!" said the boy to himself. The voice which had for so many years been but an echo was stilled wholly now. Brief victory and long defeat were nothing now to the golden mouthed orator.

"Shall I fail as he failed?" thought Horace. "No! I can't. Haven't I got her to work for?"

And then he drew out of his breast pocket a red silk handkerchief, and turned it over in his hand with a movement that concealed and caressed at the same time.

It was a very red handkerchief. It was not vermilion, nor "cardinal," nor carmine,—a strange Oriental idealization of blood red which lay well on the soft, fine, luxurious fabric. But it was an unmistakable, a shameless, a barbaric red.

And as he looked at it, young Hitchcock, of Hitchcock & Van Rensselaer, came up behind him and leaned over his shoulder.

"Where did you get the handkerchief, Walpole?" he whispered; "you ought to hang that out for an auction flag, and sell out your case."

Horace stuffed it back in his pocket.

"You'd be glad enough to buy some of them, if you got the show," he returned; but the opportunity for a prolonged contest of wit was cut short.

The judge was folding his letter, and the nasal counsel, having finished his reading, stood gazing in doubt and trepidation at the bench, and asking himself why his Honour had not passed on each point as presented. He found out.

"Are you prepared to submit those requests in writing?" demanded Gillespie, J., sharply and suddenly. He knew well enough that that poor little nasal, nervous junior counsel would never have trusted himself to speak ten consecutive sentences in court without

having every word on paper before him.

"Yo-yes," the counsel stammered, and handed up his careful manuscript.

"I will examine these to night," said his Honour, and, apparently, he made an endorsement on the papers. He was really writing the address on the envelope of his letter. Then there was a stir, and a conversation between the judge and two or three lawyers, all at once, which was stopped when his Honour gave an Olympian nod to the clerk.

The crier arose.

"He! ye! he! ye! he! ye!" he shouted with perfunctory vigour. "Wah—wah—wah!" the high ceiling slapped back at him; and he declaimed, on one note, a brief address to "Awperns han bins" in that court, of which nothing was comprehensible save the words "Monday next at eleven o'clock." And then the court collectively rose, and individually put on hats for the most part of the sort called queer.

All the people were chattering in low voices; chairs were moved noisily, and the slumbering juror opened his weary eyes and troubled himself with an uncalled-for effort to look as though he had been awake all the time and didn't like the way things were going, at all. Horace got from the clerk the papers for which he had been waiting, and was passing out, when his Honour saw him and hailed him with an expressive grunt.

Gillespie, J., looked over his spectacles at Horace.

"Shall you see Judge Weedon at the office? Yes? Will you have the kindness to give him this—yes! If it's no trouble to you, of course."

Gillespie, J., was not over careful of the feelings of lawyers' clerks, as a rule; but he had that decent disinclination to act ultra præsriptum which marks the attitude of the well-bred man toward his inferiors in office. He knew that he had no business to use Weedon, Snowden & Gilfeather's clerk as a messenger in his private correspondence.

Horace understood him, took the letter, and allowed himself a quiet smile when he reached the crowded corridor.

What mattered, he thought, as his brisk feet clattered down the wide stairs of the rotunda, the petty insolence of office now? He was Gillespie's messenger to-day; but had not his young powers already received recognition from a greater than Gillespie? If Judge Gillespie lived long enough he should put his gouty old legs under Judge Walpole's mahogany, and prose over his port—yes, he should have port, like the relic of mellow old days that he was—of the times "when your father-in-law and I, Walpole, were boys together."

Ah, there you have the spell of the Red Silk Handkerchief!

It was a wonderful tale to Horace; for he saw it in that wonderful light which shall shine on no man of us more than once in his life—on some of us not at all. Heaven help us!—but, in the telling, it is a simple tale:—

"The Golden-Mouthed Orator of St. Lawrence," was at the height of his fame in that period of storm and stress which had the civil war for its climax. His misfortune was to be drawn into a contest for which he was not equipped, and in which he had little interest. His sphere of action was far from the battle-ground of the day. The intense localism that bounded his knowledge and his sympathies had but one break—he had tasted in his youth the extravagant hospitality of the South, and he held it in grateful remembrance. So it happened that he was a trimmer—a moderationist he called himself—a man who dealt in optimistic generalities, and who thought that if everybody—the slaves included—would only act temporarily and reasonably, and view the matter from the standpoint of pure policy, the dif-