POOR DOCUMENT

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THE CHOICE

By E. R. PUNSHON

CHAPTER II—(Continued.)

"She is dead," said Michael quite calmly; "you forget we come from Russia, from Moscow."

"So, you see, it is not such a dreadful thing we ask," continued the old man. "Elena Mikhailovna would have married him if she had lived. Yes, yes; Nickolas Andreivitch is a real man. See, here is his photograph."

The still bewildered Annie took the portrait held out to her. It represented a remarkably handsome man, on whose bold, clear-cut features was an expression of great vigor and daring, and who, seated as he was, somehow conveyed an impression of unusual height and physical strength. Certainly, he seemed no common man; and, against her will, even in the midst of her distress and bewilderment, Annie felt a strange kind of thrill as she gazed at the picture. The face seemed to her full of the greatest possibilities, and she laid it down almost with fear, asking herself what such a man might not do when in the grip of a great passion—whether for his country or for, perhaps, some—woman.

"Yes, he is very handsome," she observed.

"It is on him," said the old man solemnly, picking up the picture with an air almost of reverence; "truly it is on him the hopes of Russia rest."

"Well, what have I to do with him," asked Annie. "It is nothing to me." She turned sharply on the old man. "What makes you say such things?" she asked petulantly. "Really, at your age you should be ashamed."

"But you are to take Elena Mikhailovna's place," said the old man. "She is dead, but it is necessary she should live, so you are to take her place."

"Now—what nonsense," stammered Annie; "oh, really—quite ridiculous," she complained.

"Well, listen, little sister," said the old man; "just listen to me, will you? Then I will explain everything. It is this way. You never heard of the firm of Popyaloff Brothers. I suppose? Well, they were the greatest merchants in all South Russia. Also, they were of the party of Freedom, and it was into their hands the Revolutionists placed all the money they could get together, in readiness for the hour when it should be needed. It was all to be invested in England for safety, and under cover of their business the Popyaloffs managed it without suspicion, though it was a huge sum, close on half a million pounds in English money. A month ago the time seemed ripe, and the elder Popyaloff came to England to realize it. Scarcely had he gone when the police arrested his brother, who had stayed behind, and you know what that means. He was shot the next day; and, unfortunately, his brother in England had only just landed when he fell ill of pneumonia and died. You see how awkward? The money had always passed as the private investment of the firm, but fortunately there was a will the elder Popyaloff drew just before his death, leaving everything to his daughter. So it was at once arranged that she should marry Nickolas Andreivitch, who should draw the money in her name and use it for the Revolution. The English banks and lawyers are so strict they would have thrown it all into Chancery for some such arrangement. We thought we had managed very well, but fortune follows misfortune—on the eve of the day we were leaving Moscow. Alenka slipped out after the prohibited furs to buy some gloves, and by God's ill luck a soldier fired at her. When they brought her back she was dying. So by law all the money passed to Misha here, the last of the Popyaloff family—who are consumed to ashes, indeed. But in these days there are many Russian families who have been consumed like that. But Misha is only seventeen, so that it will be four years before he will be of age to draw the money, and we were all in despair. Because your lawyers in England and your banks are so strict, and also one cannot bribe them, we were in despair, all of us; but poor, dying Alenka thought of a way. 'Kolia,' she said to Nickolas Andreivitch, 'you must find another girl and pass her off for me.' Well, little sister, we saw at once that was the best plan, but it was not easy to find a girl who would do. Alenka had been much in England, having been at school at Brighton, and, besides, the other girl had to be of such an age, and tall, and with eyes and hair of color like hers and yours. We were in despair again, and then I thought of you."

"Oh, impossible," exclaimed Annie, breathing fast, her bosom rising and falling. "Only listen to me," she implored.

"No; let me explain," persisted the old man. "You see, no one can possibly suspect, for you will be introduced to the lawyers by Alenka's brother and by myself, an old business connection, as the lawyers know; and finally by Nickolas, whom they have already heard Elena Mikhailovna is engaged to marry."

"But you do not mean I am to personate this dead girl?" Annie cried in horror.

"I assure you, it will be perfectly easy," declared the old man. "No one can suspect for a moment."

"But marry him?" the girl breathed.

"Oh, no not let that trouble you; oh, that is only a matter of form," the old man told her. "Nickolas Andreivitch is a man of honor and, so far as that goes, you will be under the special protection of the committee. The marriage ceremony must be gone through, for the lawyers must see the papers. But that is all; it will remain merely a matter of form."

"Oh, what is the good of talking?" she cried, waving despairing hands. "It is simply impossible."

"Then," said the old man harshly, "your father must die if his daughter will not help him; and as for Madam Ross and your sister, they must just take their chance—they must trust to the mercy of a Cossack who said one he loved the girl, and now has it in his power to do what he likes with her. Well, it is for you to decide; we can do nothing without you."

"Surely you will consent; it is for your own father," said Michael, rising suddenly and putting his hand on hers. "It is for Holy Russia, too. Besides, I am lonely now I have lost my father and my sister, and my uncle, all in a few days. I should like you for a sister in place of dear Alenka," he said timidly.

"Poor boy," she said, looking at him; "but all the same it is impossible."

"Yet I do not think your father expected you would refuse," said the old man softly; and Annie winced and shuddered.

"I will go to Moscow myself," she said. "I will appeal to the authorities; I will petition the Tsar—I will—"

"That is foolish talk," he said quickly; and she was silent.

"Surely you will consent," pleaded Michael. "Indeed, Kolan is a good man, strong and kind. You will [illegible] shall love to have you [illegible] old man, and his coals of fire: "if father's murder- [illegible] at her, like a

"Besides, you will be very rich," interposed Golovin. "You are not rich now." He looked at the shabby room with an air of disdain. "I only wish I had your chance," he said.

"Now do be quiet, Fedor Alexandrovitch," cried the old man. "Anna Paolovna, must your father die, then? That is your last word? And yet it is such a little thing we ask. Why, in a year or two—of course, the whole affair will be only a form—but in a year or two there would be no difficulty in arranging a divorce."

"Oh—a divorce," she muttered, as if the word stunned her.

"But you must decide at once," the old man continued. "For if he is to be saved, the telegram must go today; there is not an instant to lose."

Just as he spoke there came a loud ring at the front door, and Annie started violently.

"Well, listen," she said, her hand pressed hard to her heart.

"Who is it?" they asked all together, with a dread only to be learned in a land where a ring at the front door might very easily be the prelude to arrest and imprisonment; while the old man's start of fear was so violent that he let fall the photograph he had still been holding in his hand.

"I expect it will be my husband," said Annie, with a wild look.

CHAPTER III.

Fred. Dering.

The bell rang again before any one of them found words. At the sound of the repeated summons, Annie looked round in a dull and hesitating manner.

"I must go and open the door," she said.

Golovin took out his cigarette case with an air of decision, opened it, selected a cigarette, and began to smoke. Michael crossed himself twice over, and he looked at Annie with an expression almost of awe. As he watched her, he remembered very clearly, though without knowing why, the face of his sister when she lay dying in far away Moscow.

"Well, it is God's will," said the old man as Annie moved towards the door; and then just as she opened it he said hurriedly, "Do not tell him—do not tell your husband. If you do, we shall take it that you do not wish to do anything to save your father, and to help your mother and your sister."

Annie closed the door behind her, without giving any sign to show she had heard what he said. The old man turned to his two companions.

"Well, how unfortunate," he remarked. "What is to be done now? Will there be any chance of her consenting? At any rate, I trust she says nothing, just now, to this husband of hers, for he might misunderstand our suggestion, and an Englishman who has lost his temper is really a dreadful chucklehead."

Golovin puffed at his cigarette hard, as if he were enjoying it very much. He watched the smoke which he made ascend in rings, and with his eyes intently following one ring as it floated upwards, he said:

"Well, for my part, I think we had better be off."

Michael said nothing, but his head drooped, and one could see that the heavy burden of this weary world already pressed too hard on his young shoulders; for he was not yet old enough to understand that it needs not to understand, but only to trust.

Outside, Annie groped her way along the narrow passage, slowly and with difficulty, as if it were dark night instead of broad daylight. She felt as if she were no longer sure of anything, not even of herself; and yet, mingled with this universal doubt was an assurance of the truth of what had been said to her by the old man whose eyes were so mild, whose mouth was so cruel, and whose voice so merciless. Her sensation was that she and her own life had become unreal, a foolish dream, but it was very real that her dear father lay in deadly peril from which only she could rescue him, and that he had confided to her care those he held dearest.

She thought of her young husband, and how two duties clashed, and two great loves; while she felt with choking horror that if she denied one, it must be her father's dying cry to which she must turn a deaf ear. She thought of her stepmother and half-sister whose fate also was in her hands; and it seemed to her perhaps even more frightful in a wap that in their case her love and duty to her husband was assailed just by a natural tie of kinship with which went little love.

"Well, they must all die," she muttered, torn by horror—"all of them— Oh, Fred!"

For her father Annie had always felt a great affection, a deep and natural love that made her feel as if she must go mad when she thought of this appeal he made to her from the edge of the grave into which he was being thrust, and yet to which appeal it seemed she must be deaf and callous. For there was Fred. Could she go to him and say: "Dear husband, in order to save my father, whom you have never even seen, give me permission to marry another man." A cackle of laughter burst from her at the thought, and again she wrung her hands in terror and despair.

For her stepmother, on the other hand, she had never been able to feel much affection. Her own mother had died while she was a baby, and she had been still in the nursery when Mr. Ross had married again. Madam Ross was a Russian, and a somewhat hard and worldly, though in many ways well meaning, woman. She often told herself she must do her duty by Annie, but the girl's lack of good looks and indisposition to gaiety and social life was a continual disappointment to her. There had been times when she had even reproached Annie for her want of beauty, and had openly lamented the irregular features and the sallow complexion no care would permanently improve. For Catherine, her own and only child, Madam Ross had, on the other hand, an intensity of affection and pride. She was all that Annie was not. Bright, more than pretty, shining in society, attracting the immediate attention of everyone she met, and compelling the admiration of every man, Madam Ross found in her exactly those qualities she most admired. Of this favoritism Annie had always been aware; and as a consequence her affections had concentrated with passionate intensity on her father, whom she said to herself was the only real relative she possessed.

Annie reminded herself that her very sojourn in London had originally had about it something of the quality of an exile. Things had gradually become not altogether pleasant at home. Madam Ross' preference for her own child had grown so marked that Annie's resentment at the unfairness had been openly expressed; while Catherine herself was gifted with a sharp tongue that, secure in her mother's support, she never hesitated to use. Mr. Ross was uneasily aware of the state of things, but while he sympathized with Annie, he idolised his wife, and hardly dared to suggest even to himself that she was acting unjustly. Madam Ross, too, had great influence over her husband, and had no scruples in trying to win him over to her point of view, while Annie—either proudly or sulkily, as one chooses to say—held aloof, disdaining to make any complaint or ask for her father's interference. In the upshot it had been decided that she should go to London to study art, and this had been felt by all parties as a relief, even by Annie, who had yet resented it as an unmerited banishment. She had even let her father see how hurt she felt at the decision; and, angry at what he thought her unreasonableness, for the first time in his life, he had spoken to her sharply. Yet now it was to her, and she felt a sharp pride in the fact, that he turned in his dire extremity.

Though she went so slowly, though she seemed so dazed, her brain worked rapidly enough, and all these thoughts, and a thousand more, passed through her mind before she had traversed the narrow passage leading to the door. She thought she had quite decided. "Fred is my own husband, and he is more to me than father and all the world," she said to herself, and then she paused with her hand already on the latch.

Again she was shaken terribly, a new rush of doubt and fear flooding all her being. She felt she hated her sister with a bitter hatred, she could have torn and beaten the lovely face she remembered so well. None but herself knew how intensely she had longed for the beauty, and the wit, and the social skill Catherine possessed so abundantly; none but herself knew the passion of jealousy that had so often raged in her bosom as she sat, dumb and unregarded, in a corner of the drawing-room and watched Catherine preside at the hissing samovar where she herself should have been, or had watched her drive away, the undisputed queen of some merry sleighing party she herself, again, had hardly been asked to join. Then it had been her deep longing, and even her secret prayer, that some terrible emergency should arise, which would enable her father to see which one of his two daughters cared for him most. Well, now the emergency had arisen, and in his extremity he had turned instinctively to her . . . and it seemed her reply must be a cold rejection of his cry for help.

She was staring with unconscious intensity at the rough and blistered inner surface of the front door. It seemed to her there grew here a semblance of her father's face, not as she remembered it at parting, but contorted with agony, the eyes glazing, the death dew on the brow she had so often kissed. She put up her hand to hide the vision, but saw it only the more clearly. When Madam Ross and Catherine knew that she had rejected her father's appeal, and suffered him to die without an effort to save him, they would say to each other that at last her poor father must have understood what sort of a girl his elder daughter really was . . . She said to herself fiercely that she cared nothing for what they said. Then she reminded herself that her father had entrusted them both to her care, not she to their care; and even while she was proud at the thought, she remembered suddenly that that was only to be after his death. And he was not dead—not yet. But he would be soon, for that old man had said he was to be shot early in the morning of the day after tomorrow unless . . . But there was no unless. Suddenly the bell pealed again, louder than before, and this time there came also a series of loud and impatient knocks.

"Now God help me and show me the right path," she murmured, and breathed all her life, as it were, into the prayer, as she made haste to open the door.

As she had supposed it would be, it was her husband who stood on the step outside; and he did not look in quite the sweetest temper at having been kept waiting so long.

"Wherever have you been?" he grumbled. "I have been knocking and ringing for ten minutes."

"I am sorry," she said meekly.

"Such a confoundedly wet day, too," he grumbled, stepping into the narrow hall.

Annie's husband was a struggling young artist named Fred Dering, who at this time was rather worse than unknown, for he was known as a somewhat disappointing person, who would not follow the advice of men who really knew what the public liked, and which was the shortest road to success. He was often spoken of as brilliant, but was more often still condemned as impracticable; and he was suspected of being on his way to become a failure. His work, too, was really lacking in technical merit, showing plainly the absence of regular training, for he was, in fact, entirely self-taught.

The son of a small tradesman in Manchester, his early education had been received in one of the city board schools, whence his father's increasing prosperity had removed, at about the age of twelve, to a more pretentious, but probably less efficient, establishment in the suburbs of the town. He had not been particularly brilliant as a pupil, having been more intent on his drawing than on his lessons. Consequently, his teachers did their best to stop his drawing altogether, and, pursuing the vicious circle, he, in return, showed a kind of sulky hostility to everything they did try to make him learn. His father strongly supported the schoolmaster in this hostility to the boy's artistic learning; for he wished his son to carry on his business, and he fell into a passion of wrath at the mere idea of his becoming an artist. When it was time for Fred to leave school, Mr. Dering sternly refused his pleadings to be allowed to study art, and insisted on his going behind the counter. He pointed out to him the great truth that if he persevered he might very possibly become a city councillor in time, and perhaps even the Lord Mayor some day, an elevation no artist could hope to attain. When Fred said he would not give a brass button to be Lord Mayor, Mr. Dering's distress was so great that the boy, deeply attached to his father, was obliged to turn round and profess it the one ambition of his life.

All the same, that period in the shop was a dreary time of bondage. Fred really tried hard and did his best, but he was not highly successful. One of his exploits was to refuse to purchase, on the ground that the scheme of coloring was worse than the measles, a "line" of made-up ties that a rival across the way secured and made a huge success of. Another was the production on the back of a bill of a really excellent caricature of one of his father's most influential customers. Unfortunately, that very bill was sent to that very customer for payment, and the caricature was seen and not appreciated. A good customer was lost, and gained by the rival who had profited in the tie business, and even Mr. Dering began to have doubts of his son's eventful occupancy of the Lord Mayor's chair. Things were approaching a crisis, and Mr. Dering had already held several long consultations with the pastor of the Baptist chapel he attended, when a sudden illness, resulting in death, put an end to his perplexities.

Fred mourned his father sincerely, but was none the less rejoiced to make over the bulk of the estate to his mother and young sisters; and, leaving them comfortably established in a larger house than they could quite afford in the most fashionable suburb of Manchester, he departed gaily to London, with unbounded hope in his heart and the £200 he had reserved for himself in his pocket.

But in London he found his lack of training severely handicapped him, while in the joy of freedom there crept into his work an element of the fantastic and the unusual that here and there a connoiseur appreciated, but that the picture dealers looked askance at. One or two had shown signs of taking him up, recognising the promise in his work, so that at first he had made a little money and a few friends; but as the element of the unusual and the unexpected in his work increased, his success diminished. His lack of technical skill gave, too, an opening for every hostile critic who wished to attack him to do so with effect; and he was really in a more critical position than he quite realised when he met Annie Ross, and after a hurried and stormy courtship, married her.

Usually a man of quick perception and sunny temper, he seemed just now not quite himself. He did not observe how strange Annie looked as she opened the door, and he appeared rather more annoyed at having been kept waiting than the occasion quite demanded.

"It is so confoundedly wet," he grumbled again. "I was wet nearly to the skin before."

"I am sorry," she repeated, and added as he moved down the passage towards the sitting room door, "there is someone in there."

"Eh?—who?" he asked.

"Three Russians who knew my father in Moscow," she answered. "They have just come from there."

"Do you know them, then?" he asked. "What do they want?"

"No; I have never seen any of them before," she answered in the same dull, mechanical voice. "I think they want help."

"Help?" he repeated, with an accent of bitterness; "we want help ourselves, I think. I closed up the banking account this morning," he added abruptly.

It was not the first time Russian exiles and refugees had come to the daughter of Paul Ross of Moscow for help and guidance in the strange, vast city wherein the Revolution had stranded them. But though Fred had been sympathetic before, this time he showed some annoyance.

"If you wil go into the kitchen," she observed, "I will get rid of them."

She was astonished at the calmness with which she spoke; astonished that Fred did not understand the significance of the little scrap of paper with the red smudge upon the outside, that she still held in her hand. Fred, slightly ashamed already of the ill-temper he was conscious of having displayed, remarked as he was opening the kitchen door:

"Well, if there is anything we can do in reason, you know. And I daresay they have had a rough time of it, poor beggars."

"Oh, of course, in reason," she agreed, with a hard, strange little laugh; and then, as he glanced back at her: "I will send them to Monsieur Karmaline," she said, naming a Russian journalist and secretary of a society formed to help exiles from Russia.

Fred nodded and went into the kitchen, and Annie turned towards the room in which she had left her three visitors.

"God guide me," she prayed with passion, "God guide me to the right decision."

She let the three Russians out, telling them she could say nothing more just then, and returned to the kitchen where she found Fred standing at the table, leaning over a copy of Illustrated Funniments, a cheap comic paper of the kind which London errand boys largely patronise.

"Hullo, Annie," he said, with a somewhat boisterous cheerfulness, as she came in, "I've got a commission."

"I am glad," she said dully, smoothing with nervous fingers a scrap of dirty and blood-stained paper in her hand. "From Sir William?"

Sir William was a wealthy man of leisure, interested in art and even sometimes in artists, with whom Fred had a slight acquaintance, and from whom he had received that morning a note asking him to call at once. It came to Annie as over an immeasurable gulf of years that when they had read that letter that morning they had been hopeful. But Fred shook his head now.

"No," he said; "Sir William is no good. My commission is from Mr. Pike, the editor of this high-class periodical you see before you."

"But Fred," exclaimed Annie, even in her present state surprised, for she knew how he hated such work as that represented by the paper on the table.

"I went to him from Sir William," Fred continued, "and the worthy Pike was so good as to say that he liked my work and the specimens I showed him, though it rather lacked body. Which is not," said Fred grimly, "a criticism that can be launched against his paper, is it? However, if I can supply the requisite 'body,' I am to do some work for him; big feet, big noses, and the humor of upsetting an old lady, being evidently the points on which I must concentrate my efforts."

"Fred," said Annie, "please tell me what has happened. Then there is something very serious I wish to talk to you about. But tell me first what did Sir William want?"

"Oh, he's a decent old boy," said Fred. "He told me I had remarkable but ill-disciplined talent; and finally, after a lot of jaw—including, by the way, a warning against early and imprudent marriages—offered to pay my expenses if I would go to Italy for a year to study."

"And what did you say?" asked Annie.

"Why, I just refused, of course," Fred answered, rather surprised. "I shouldn't be able to earn a penny while I was away, you know; and, of course, I couldn't ask him to support the two of us—especially after his remarks on the folly of early marriages. So from him I went to see Pike, and I think there may be some kind of opening there. What did you want to tell me?"

"Oh, nothing of any importance," she answered as she slowly put away in her purse a scrap of torn and dirty paper.

But the question roared through her brain whether perhaps God was not already showing her His answer to her prayer that He would guide her aright.

CHAPTER IV.

Muffins for Tea.

Fred turned again to the outspread paper on the table before him, studying it with as much attention as he ever had the masterpiece of some celebrated artist. Annie sat down by the fire and watched him with a sort of dull resentment growing in her mind. It seemed to her that he had accepted too easily her refusal to explain what she had been intending to tell him; she said to herself that it did not appear as if he were much interested in her. She spread out her cold hands to the fire and watched him over her shoulder.

Presently he left the room and then came in again with a pencil and a sketching block. He began to draw, and in a very few minutes, for he was always an extraordinarily rapid workman, had finished a sketch. It represented someone tumbling off a ladder on the head of a woman walking just below, and it was more grotesquely ugly, more blatantly hideous, than anything even in Illustrated Funniments itself.

"Well," he said, tossing it across to Annie, "what do you think of that? Has that got 'body' enough?"

Annie looked at it and tore it viciously across, flinging the bits into the fire.

"I say," he protested, "do you know that was worth five bob—perhaps ten, if old Pike had been in a generous mood?"

She looked at him with blazing eyes, her breath coming fast and heavy.

"Fred!" she panted; "Fred!" And then with an abrupt change of manner she continued, "Tell me just what Sir William said to you."

"Why, I have," Fred answered. "He jawed away a long time—about half what he says about art is all wrong, and the rest is as stale as possible; but, of course, I didn't argue with him. Besides, he really is a jolly decent old boy."

"What did he say when you refused his offer. Did you tell him why?"

"Oh, no," Fred answered, "how could I when he had just been jawing about imprudent marriages? I just thanked him and all that, you know, and he told me to think it over and let him know tomorrow night, if I changed my mind."

"Ah," she said, and turned her face to the fire. Presently she asked: "Well, could it not be managed?"

"Goodness, no," he answered just a trifle irritably.

"But Italy," she said, watching him intently, finding a kind of pleasure in the pain the words caused herself; "think of Italy, of Rome, of Venice. Think how much you could learn—"

"Please don't, Annie," he interrupted in a voice he had never used to her before and that silenced her on the spot. He went on in a more ordinary tone, speaking softly as if afraid his last words had hurt her: "You know it has been the dream of my life—and when I am rich we will go together."

"Yes, when you are rich," she repeated bitterly.

He began to draw again without replying, though his cheeks flushed at her words. Annie bent still nearer the fire till its heat scorched her. In the red embers she seemed to see again that vision of her fathers' face as if he were dying, her fancy had conjured up on the back of the front door. She wondered if it were indeed an answer to her prayer that this offer of Sir William's should have come so close upon the summons to help her father in his extremity. Glancing over her shoulder, she saw that Fred had ceased to draw and was looking dreamily in front of him; and she divined without difficulty that it was to far-off Florence, and to Venice, city of wonder, and to Rome the Immortal, that his thoughts were wandering. She remembered that this was not the first time, nor the second, she had stood in his path. For once before an illustrated paper had offered to send him abroad when they had needed an artist in a sudden emergency, and he had refused that he might stay with her. While again, in their very wedding week, he had refused a commission that would have meant visiting some fever hospitals. He said he could not risk bringing the infection to her, but the man who took the work found it lead to a permanent engagement. She asked herself if it was to be always thus; she pictured herself as the obstacle to his progress; she remembered with a shudder the old saying that the "third time pays for all." All the time she watched him jealously as he dreamed, sitting there with the pencil in his hands; and it seemed to her that he was weighing her against Italy.

"But there should be some way of managing," she said abruptly.

"How could I posibly leave you for a year?" he asked.

"I could go to Manchester to stay with your mother and sisters," she suggested with a great effort.

"Well, I did think of that," he admitted reluctantly.

She put her hand to her lips to hold back the cry of anguish she nearly uttered. That he should have had this idea himself hurt her intolerably.

"No," he continued, shaking his head, "I don't think you would be happy. You know they are a bit sore with me for having given up the business."

"But," she added, hating herself for the words, yet testing him, as it were, as well as forcing herself, "part of the money they have is really yours."

"Not even for you, Annie," he said gravely, "could I ask them to give up a penny of that. You see, it really might have been better for them if I had kept the business on and worked at it; and it would not be fair to alter now arrangements I made then, or when they have already some reason for complaining of me to ask them to make a further sacrifice to get me out of my difficulties."

Annie winced. Had she now become a "difficulty?"

"I promised my father on his death-bed they should not suffer from my longings toward art," Fred continued, noticing this time the slight movement she made; "and the income I made over leaves them no worse off than at his death. And a promise to a dying father is sacred, is it not? above all other considerations," he added.

She did not answer, for she asked herself if the words of a dying father were sacred, what was the appeal of a father asking to be saved from death?

"I must do my duty to my mother and sisters, you know," observed Fred, slightly disturbed at her silence.

"Then, even when one is married," she said slowly, "you think one still has duties to one's own people—first duties?"

"Well—if you like to put it that way," he answered resentfully, biting his fingers.

"Oh, I think you are quite right," she said rising, "I quite agree with you."

(To be continued.)

PREPARE THE MIXTURE YOURSELF AS ADVISED

Recipe is Easily Prepared at Small Cost, and Many Swear By It.

Mix the following by shaking well in a bottle, and take in teaspoonful doses after meals and at bedtime:

Fluid Extract Dandelion, one-half ounce; Compound Kurkon, one ounce; Compound Syrup Sarsaparilla, three ounces. A local druggist in the authority that these simple, harmless ingredients can be obtained at nominal cost from our home druggists.

The mixture is said to cleanse and strengthen the clogged and inactive Kidneys, overcoming Backache, Bladder weakness and Urinary troubles of all kinds, if taken before the stage of Bright's disease.

Those who have tried this say it positively overcomes pain in the back, clears the urine of sediment and regulates urination, especially at night, curing even the worst forms of bladder weakness.

Every man or woman here who feels that the kidneys are not strong or acting in a healthy manner should mix this prescription at home and give it a trial, as it is said to do wonders for many persons.

The Scranton (Pa.) Times was first to print this remarkable prescription, in October, of 1906, since when all the leading newspapers of New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Pittsburg and other cities have made many announcements of it to their readers.

KINGS FOLLOWS ALBERT'S MOVE

Wants New Government to Remove Offensive Partizan Officials

Norton, Kings county, March 17.—There is likely to be a movement of considerable strength in Kings county along the same lines as that taken by the Conservative convention in Albert county as regards the public offices controlled by the local government. It is probable that by means of petitions or a resolution by a party convention the local government will be asked to declare vacant all offices whose present holders have in the past been "offensive partizans," that is who have been active at election times and have used their offices for party purposes.

In the parishes of Norton, Greenwich, Westfield and the river side of Kingston there is a strong feeling among friends of the new administration that the government should promptly get rid of several county office holders, who made themselves obnoxious during the recent campaign as well as during previous elections.

So far as can be learned those who favor this movement do not propose that a clean sweep should be made but would advocate action being taken only in those cases where office holders have clearly forgotten the public interest in attempting to serve partizan ends.

The names of several office holders are receiving frequent mention in this connection, and it is expected that within a few days the agitation will take definite form, and will be brought to the notice of the recently elected members and to other leaders.

C. P. EMPRESSES TO QUIT QUEBEC

Only Wage Reduction of Ship Laborers Will Hold Them

Montreal, March 18—It was stated today at headquarters of the C. P. R. that while it was practically settled that the Empresses would not come to Montreal harbor this summer, owing to the congestion which exists at this port every summer, but it is by no means certain that the company will not determine to use Three Rivers instead of Quebec for big boats.

In preparation for this the company has leased from Three Rivers harbor board 1,000 feet of wharf frontage, on the Bureau wharf there, which has deep water along its river face, and railway connections from either end, so that all that would be necessary to equip the port for the Empresses would be a few sidings and the erection of sheds to handle the freight and passengers.

Superintendent Walsh, of the steamship service, stated that either the Quebec longshoremen must come down to the same scale of pay as obtained in Montreal, or the Empresses would this season sail past the Ancient Capital and dock at Three Rivers, which was founded a century ago by the French with the intention that it be the head of navigation.

ALBERT CONSERVATIVES MODIFY RESOLUTION

Now Ask That Active Partizan Office Holders in Albert County Be Removed from Office.

The resolution passed by the Liberal Conservative Association of Albert county, favoring a complete change of office holders in New Brunswick under the present provincial administration was modified materially at a later session and made to read as follows on motion of Albert J. Steeves, seconded by Duncan Jonah:

Resolved, That whereas practically every office holder under the local administration has, within this county, acted in a partizan manner, some grossly so, during the last campaign and several preceding ones, we deem it only proper that every such incumbent so offending be promptly removed from office.

Of the other resolutions, one moved by C. A. Peck, K. C., and seconded by I. C. Prescott, conveyed the thanks of the association to W. B. Dickson, the retiring president, for his services, attributed the recent victory in part to his master hand in the work of organizing and extended to himself and his colleague, Geo. D. Prescott, warm congratulations on their success in the elections.

Another resolution, moved by B. T. Carter and seconded by A. J. Steeves, expressed confidence in R. L. Borden as leader and his policy.

Another resolution, moved by Capt. J. Cook and seconded by Ira H. Copp, thanked Geo. W. Fowler, M. P., for his services in the late campaign and expressed confidence in him as representative at Ottawa.

A fourth resolution, moved by W. H. Duffy and seconded by Manning Steeves, expressed faith in and devotion to J. D. Hazen and endorsed his platform and congratulated him on his victory.

MORE LIGHT ABOUT MEN WHO SECURED TIMBER LIMITS

Ottawa, March 17—(Special)—Before the public accounts committee today A. W. Fraser of Ottawa was examined in regard to tenders for timber berths. He stated that the Imperial Pulp Co. was composed of Sir Daniel McMillan, lieutenant governor of Manitoba, Theo Burrows, M. P., and Mr. Pattinson, secretary, of Winnipeg. He was acting in several cases for Mr. Burrows. Mr. Fraser said that in some cases he used the name of W. H. Nolan, Montreal in tendering for berths, having the authority of Nolan to do so. He said that he had never received any information in regard to tenders from officer's department.

PREMIER'S HEALTH ALARMS FRIENDS

Condition of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman Regarded Very Serious Unless Soon Improved

EARLY RETIREMENT RUMOR

It Is Believed Likely That Lord Rosebery Will Resume Active Participation in Politicsl Life--House of Lords Now Posing as People's Friends.

(Special Cable to N. Y. Herald.)

London, March 14.—Bulletins regarding the health of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman grow less encouraging and his condition is causing increased anxiety to his relatives and friends. Unless he soon takes a decided turn for the better his state must be regarded as very serious.

The use of the word physical in recording the prime minister's condition Thursday night, for the first time, has a deeper significance than would appear from a casual reading of the doctor's report. It has to be borne in mind that Sir Henry insists upon seeing the bulletins that are issued, and that the doctors are thus prevented from giving an entirely accurate account of his condition.

He eats very well, takes his usual liquids without difficulty and sleeps fairly well, but I fear his heart trouble is complicated with nervous affection and that his return to public life is impossible.

When King Edward returns to London, it is generally believed, Sir Henry's retirement will be announced, and then will come Mr. Asquith's task. I was nearly using the word chance, but the task will be no easy one. The reconstruction of the cabinet, in view of recent happenings, is expected this week. It is even said that Lord Rosebery is returning to active political life. It certainly looks very like it, and his return would be heartily welcomed by a large section of Imperialist Liberals. His speech to the Liberal League Thursday night was most significant, and a study of it gives the key to the situation.

"Conservativism or Socialism."

He was addressing a body which is practically the old Whig section of the Liberal party, the exact opposite to the Radical left wing, and he did not hesitate to face the future. In plain English he foretold that the day was coming when Liberals would have to choose between conservatism and socialism, and he left no doubt as to what his choice would be.

"Socialism," he said, "is the end of all, of empire, faith—religious faith, freedom and property. Socialism is the death blow to all."

Significant words, these, which show that Lord Rosebery has no doubt about the imminence of the menace of socialism. Here you have note of the situation. The Liberal party stands today at the parting of the ways. It has, in its press and on the platform, declared again and again that the labor party was but an advanced section of itself, and, though the labor party vigorously and frequently denied the soft impeachment, it persisted in the declaration, but now it has reached its valley of decision. The gauntlet has again been thrown down to the house of lords, and there is no mistaking the response.

After a debate extending over two nights the lords have thrown out the Scottish Small Holdings bill by a majority of 120. It was rejected at the tail end of last session, and the government reintroduced it in precisely the same form this year, for no other purpose than as a direct challenge to the upper chamber. In the process of filling up the cup they asked the lords to make a solemn recantation. What was the response of their lordships? For a second time they contemptuously rejected the bill. They said it was never meant to be passed and they killed it without any fuss.

Pose as People's Champions.

They are now posing as the people's champions against the arbitrary and ill-considered lawmaking by the house of commons, to carry out the will of the nation when the house of commons willfully or mistakenly acts contrary to it, and to balance the caprices of the lower chamber. The situation is, indeed, funny. Although the government was perfectly well aware of the precise attitude of the majority of the upper house, extreme radicals are going about the parliamentary lobbies saying that the lords have driven a long, stout nail in their own coffin.

The Tories are making merry over the matter and assert that it is not for a measure like the Scotch Small Holdings bill that the people of the country are at all likely to overthrow the authority of the house of lords. The Socialist members in the commons regard the whole matter as an exposure of the hypocrisy of the government in using the measure for tactical purposes while professing a desire for social reform.

The power of cranks in the cabinet would seem to be at an end. They have left an awful legacy of trouble in the shape of the licensing bill, navy estimates and the prospect of old age pensions. Whether the government will be able to carry the burden which it has accumulated already remains to be seen, but it is safe to assume that from this week onward no additions will be made to this burden.

From this week onward the two sections of the party travel by divergent paths. The angle between them may be very slight at first—so slight as to be hardly perceptible—but their ultimate goals are as wide apart as day and night.

ANOTHER PRIZE FIGHTER DIES OF RING INJURIES

St. Joseph, Mo., March 18—"Leck" Allan, a local prize fighter, died today from injuries received last night in a boxing match with Fritz Futzenberger, professionally known as "Young Rhodes," also of St. Joseph. Allan collapsed in the fifth round and was taken out unconscious. Rhodes was arrested today and the coroner will hold an inquest this afternoon.

Officers of the Eagles Lodge, before whom the fight took place, may be arrested.

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