

Van Rensselaer Wiggin, Diplomat

(By Duffield Osborne.)

The name of Van Rensselaer Wiggin could hardly have adorned the diplomatic list of any country that holds its foreign service a profession. This, on its face, shows the advantage of being a citizen of a land where everybody is as good as everybody else to the extent of being able, by the magic of election or appointment, to fill any position as well as the next fellow. With such truths in mind you will understand how the facts worked to the end.

Abijah Wiggin had made money—no end of it—in pork and Chicago. Later, he came to New York to spend it and get an adequate quid pro quo. He was a widower then, and "Society" graciously consented to waive a few things and accept him. It did better. It married him into an impecunious and distant branch of an unexceptional family, and, in the course of time, Van Rensselaer Wiggin appeared upon the scene and grew and cut a swathe of ex-ceding breadth.

He began by going to Harvard, and he stayed there just three months. Then he concluded that he liked business better, and brought his six-foot of bulging brawn back to New York, to the deep regret of the athletic authorities of his inchoate alma mater. He didn't like business quite well enough, to injure his health by too much work between meals, and he soon found many and more or less original ways of employing his hours.

That the ways he chose were not wicked or disreputable was to his credit, considering the possibilities. There were golf clubs and horses and yachts and automobiles and several dozen kinds of loafing, and girls—Van Rensselaer Wiggin had a peculiarly soft spot in his heart for girls, and his candor and flower bills are said to have been record-breaking.

His taste was distinctly catholic, but nobody bothered much about it until one day, having graciously tipped his twenty-fourth year, he informed Wiggin, Sr., that he contemplated a matrimonial alliance with a most beautiful, cultured and refined young person, who officiated as cashier of a "Kidd's Restaurant."

He felt that his innate sense of appreciation qualified him as judge of the first attribute, his sojourn at Cambridge of the second, and his recognized social position of the third; but, somehow, his arguments were not convincing to the head of the house of Wiggin.

He reasoned with Van Rensselaer, and Van Rensselaer explained how far love soared above reason. Then Wiggin, Sr., intimated, with a delicacy hardly to be expected, that it was not complimentary to ask some woman to marry one until one had accomplished something in the way of establishment.

This was a new idea to Van Rensselaer. The necessity of self-establishment had never occurred to him, but, despite his exceptional opportunities, he was no fool, and he caught the inference. Naturally the shock was severe, but love does not balk at such obstacles. He announced his readiness to work for himself—and he, and Abijah Wiggin showed his appreciation of the resolve by volunteering to find the employment. Van Rensselaer was far too confident that "the Governor was a good sort" to suspect hostile diplomacy.

Turning to the job at a point some time prior to its conference with the line of Wiggin, Jr., it appears that, about a year before, he had pleased His Gracious Majesty, the Sultan of Morocco, to do unpleasant things to certain of his subjects. Possibly the subjects deserved it, but since several of them were prepared to swear that they had once contemplated becoming citizens of the Great Republic beyond the seas, why, of course, the incident assumed international proportions, and it devolved upon the President of the United States to appoint a special commissioner to Morocco under penalty of losing the Moorish-American vote.

He appointed the Hon. Thomas Jefferson Strothers, who had been besieging the White House for a year with so many letters of endorsement from leading citizens of Bald Ridge, Kentucky, and thereabouts that there was no room in his valise for a return ticket. The Hon. Strothers had struck for a first-class mission, and dropped gradually until a fourth-class post-office would have been acceptable—only, having sat in at the national table-game where people knew how to play it, he had not reached the point of quite weakening on his bluff. Therefore he accepted the special mission to Fez with most patriotic self-sacrifice and most profound if unexpressed exultation.

Naturally, he needed a secretary, if only to support the dignity of his post, and here is where the lines come together. Abijah Wiggin had, in the course of his career, been helpful to many men. Usually the sacrifice on his part was trifling, if existent, but big fellows often know where there is money to be found, and wise big fellows realize the value of retainers whose obligations and hopes combine to make them faithful. One can never tell just who is going to be in a position to be useful, and inexpensive personal favors often count for much more than spectacular public benefactions.

Therefore when Abijah Wiggin learned that the Hon. Thomas Jefferson Strothers was about to sail for Gibraltar, he not only suggested the appointment of Van Rensselaer as secretary to the new diplomat, but he backed his suggestion with a strictly private offer to pay the secretary's salary out of his own pocket. Probably the special commissioner would have granted the request in grateful remembrance of past favors, but the salary proposition clinched it, and thus Abijah Wiggin was enabled to announce to his son and heir the brilliant future that opened before him.

ed ungrateful and cowardly to the last degree, and then the Governor was a deuced good sort, and he seemed so wrapped up in "the splendid opening that his strong influence at Washington had secured," that Van Rensselaer hadn't the heart to disappoint him. Especially did he feel this when his father spoke so pleasantly of Miss Stoffmeyer, and of how wise it was for young people to separate for a while at that particular point of their engagement, if only to realize how necessary they were to each other's happiness. Mr. Wiggin had even gone to the extent of lunching at the Kidds establishment one day and of meeting the young lady, when Van Rensselaer paid the check, and making several agreeable but non-committal remarks to her. Possibly the old man realized how convenient such an introduction might turn out to be. There were interesting things he might find occasion to say to Miss Stoffmeyer during Van Rensselaer's absence; and, as they walked away, arm in arm, he suggested the wisdom of not announcing the engagement to Mrs. Wiggin until the return from Morocco. Of course men could talk such things over rationally, but women were apt to be prejudiced and, well, it might take a little time and diplomacy to bring Mrs. W. to see it all as they did.

"Diplomacy, my boy," he enforced with a most friendly wink. "That's what we're sending you across the pond to learn." Therefore Van Rensselaer Wiggin became a diplomat and he and the Hon. Thomas Jefferson Strothers sailed, and Abijah Wiggin and Elizabeth Boorace Van Rensselaer Wiggin saw them off with resignation and with tears as seemed meet to each.

Miss Stoffmeyer did not see Van Rensselaer off, because Wiggin, Sr., suggested that, all considered, it might not be diplomatic. The voyage from New York to Gibraltar is not apt to be eventful, and, although the Mediterranean steamers of the North German Lloyd are well laden with feminine beauty—beauty possessing an inherent affinity for the South and sunshine and flowers and green things—Van Rensselaer Wiggin preserved a commendable constancy. Not that he made himself a recluse. He was too receptive a nature for that; but his steamer affairs progressed only the merest shade beyond what such situations demanded in common politeness. Van Rensselaer Wiggin was conscious of his own virtue in this respect.

Then came the trip over to Tangier, and then the arduous but most entrancing journey to Fez. The Arabian Nights had wrapped him once more in their luminous veil, and, though the culture was barbaric and the Orientalism decadent, yet the illusion bore its dreamers far from twentieth century conventionalism—back into the turbulent license of a most picturesque past. By the time the white walls and minarets and towers loomed up upon the horizon, and their horses, snuffing provender and rest, forgot to tempt whip and spur, New York had faded away, until Abijah Wiggin and Miss Mae Stoffmeyer seemed to dance sarabands through some former and vague incarnation.

This is the magic of the East. Its reality is more depressing, as Mr. Thomas Jefferson Strothers soon learned, when he sought to advance the object of his mission. There were formal delays ere his presentation was accomplished, and that was hardly the beginning. The Sultan was most affable, and his hospitality took shape on lines that seemed to forebode a negotiation of years. Evidently the first thing, from his point of view, was to get acquainted—not merely superficially, but on a basis of heart to heart friendship. All allusions to business he waived gravely aside. That would be settled quite to his guest's satisfaction by a long line of officials, who would take it up in rotation. In fact, he would see that it was so settled, but meanwhile his pleasure in the society of his American visitors brooked no interference from dull duty.

He feasted them, he gave barbaric games and weird musicals and spectacular dances in their honor, he organized grand hunts, he even suggested a special massacre of a certain tribe of his subjects who were a little behind in their taxes, and he seemed pained when the Hon. Strothers showed lack of interest in such entertainment. Altogether the special envoy fell deeper and deeper into ennui and disgust as the days and weeks and months slipped innocuously by; grew irritable and blustering and prayerful, all of which showed that he was not both in the manner of diplomacy, despite the inference of national traditions. You see there was never a big gun could carry to Fez from the sea, which weakened the backing of bluster and irritation, while, as for the most pathetic prayers, His Majesty was well-immune.

Here was where Van Rensselaer Wiggin bore everlasting witness to the stock from which he sprung. He may not have been—he might never have been hoped to be—a diplomat in the European sense, but he had the one quality that goes further in diplomacy than cunning and many years of training. He could make friends, and he could make them out of the most unpromising material. There were dignified old Moors in the city of Fez who held it part of their ritual to spit at and curse fluently such "Christian dogs" as might pass them along the narrow streets. Even the special envoy, he plunged gaily into their sports, enjoyed it when he failed to please, and gently deprecating when he began, as the santon did, to catch on. Really, there was no holding out against such a magazine of good spirits and insistent sociability, so the people of Fez, being human, succumbed.

Fez was "the mad infidel." That was how they compromised with their consciences; and when he began to pick up a vocabulary of stray Moorish words and signified the acquisition by such unpardonable insults as inquiring about the health of his friends' wives, even then they graciously refused to understand his inquiries, and calmed their injured feelings with the soothing narghileh.

As for Van Rensselaer, he frankly liked it all. He thought of Miss Mae Stoffmeyer occasionally, and still congratulated himself on his constancy. There were even stray pangs of regret, once in a while, when he pictured her making brisk and dreary change through all the long days, waiting for him, her far-away lover, to hear her triumphantly into that social sphere which her character and beauty so well fitted her to adorn. Such contemplations, however, tended to melancholy, and Van Rensselaer was hostile to melancholy both by temperament and by philosophy. Was he not devoting himself to his country's interests—that great Republic, whose children must never fail her in such patriotic sacrifice? It was hard, but inevitable, that Mae should bear her share of the burden, in the delaying of her hopes, even as he, Van Rensselaer, had put his love bravely aside until his works might prove him worthy to enter upon his heart's heritage. And then something happened. Van Rensselaer was strolling in the cool of the afternoon along one of the more retired streets of the Moorish capital. Being retired, it was even more narrow than the narrow thoroughfares. High walls, windowless and once white, seemed to compress it interminably. For five minutes he had not met a soul and the din of the market-place had died away in the distance. Suddenly, the shuffle of feet came to his ears, far off at first, then nearer. He stopped and, in a moment, a strange procession swept around the turn just ahead.

First came two muscular negroes, equipped with efficient-looking whips, with long lashes of flat leather. Van Rensselaer gathered their manner that they claimed right of way. He flattened himself against the wall, and they passed at a slow trot, scowling. Evidently he was expected to do even more than stand aside and smile agreeably. Then followed an elderly and very stout black in a most gorgeous costume. The pace was too hot for this dignitary to waste much time upon Van Rensselaer, but he grunted something that sounded disparaging. After him, a closed litter swung by on the necks of four slaves, who ran heavily, with eyes fixed upon the ground, as if the burden they bore were no light one; and then a crowd of litter-bearers, scowling at their weight, romped gaily along. By this time Van Rensselaer had caught the notion that he was not to stare, and, though the certain of the first litter vibrated gently as it passed, there was little temptation to offend Moorish etiquette until the second was directly in front of him. Then—perhaps it was only a puff of wind—one of the curtains seemed to be thrown back and, for a single instant, he saw, reclining upon cushions of silk and damask, an angel straight from Paradise. To be sure, all he caught was a fore-arm exquisitely modelled in very light brown and resting on its elbow to sustain a daintily small head with a pair of great languishing black eyes burning over a snowy veil. They looked straight into Van Rensselaer's for a fraction of an instant, and Van Rensselaer's tender heart melted then and there and forever. Did the eyes or hand signal to him ever so slightly, or was the coyness but a start of agitation? The curtain fell in place, the litter had passed, and four soldiers who brought up the rear of the company were glaring at the stranger and clutching their yataghans as if doubtful whether to stop and administer rebuke.

Later Van Rensselaer came to realize that the episode of the fluttering curtain had not caught their notice, since the street was very narrow and they came several paces behind. It was merely his own evident interest in the litters themselves that excited disapproval; this, as I say, he came to realize later. For the moment, his head might have been severed from his shoulders without disturbing the ecstasy that thrilled him. He would have died as in a trance. Fortunately for the comity of nations, he lived. The soldiers doubtless concluded that the Christian pig knew no better, that delay to kill him would necessitate their having to run very fast to overtake their charges, and that no especial harm had been done anyhow.

Ah! how little these blinded heathen comprehended the thing that had happened! That Van Rensselaer Wiggin, secretary to the Hon. Thomas Jefferson Strothers, special commissioner of the President of the United States of America to His Imperial Highness the Sultan of Morocco, had seen with his own eyes and loved in his heart of hearts (from which the image of Miss Mae Stoffmeyer had incontinently vanished)—whom? He gazed long after the cortege. He gazed long at the corner of white wall around which it, at last, disappeared. This, then, was what fate had held in store for him!—a consuming passion for a daughter of the palm. He wondered vaguely what the views of his father would be on the subject, but he did not care very much. It was all too overpowering, too soul-filling, to admit any consideration of parental prejudice. There were empires to be won on the Sahara, there were graves, and then so cheerful a person as Van Rensselaer Wiggin thought of graves you could begin to realize how hard he was hit. One dream chased another through the tumbling surf that had been his mind. Would he become a Mohammedan? He admitted wearily that he would, if apostasy was necessary. Then he shook himself mentally dry and walked back to his lodgings, and, as he walked, determination took shape. This was the time he meant to win—at any cost, but whom? and how?

Contrary to traditional symptoms in desperate affairs of the heart, his appetite showed no signs of reflex action. He ate well and he thought hard all through the evening meal, and if the bewitchment of the Hon. Thomas Jefferson Strothers was left for this once unvanquished by his companion's buoyant spirits, surely that is but a light charge to lay to young love. Van Rensselaer thought. Identification was necessary first of all, and who so sure to identify as Abdallah ibn Musa, collector of the imperial

customs (and his own perquisites); a man of high eminence and guileful tact, of notorious piety and infinite information concerning his neighbors, and, above all, one of the most firmly attached of Van Rensselaer Wiggin's new-made friends. The collector of imperial customs and the secretary of the American commissioner sat facing each other. Coffee had been served and they drank together in dignified silence. Also they smoked. The secretary sat cross-legged like his host; from all which it may be seen how admirably Van Rensselaer had progressed. I am in doubt as to whether Wiggin, Sr., and Miss Mae Stoffmeyer would have been more astonished or more gratified could they have peeped in upon the illumined scene. Alas for Miss Mae and for the constance of man! In her case, at least, full knowledge could have brought no measure of gratification. Here sat the lover who had so bravely surrendered the light of her presence that he might become worthy of the presence of her light—here sat he, a prey to the weird enchantments of the East, seeking the aid of a turbaned heathen to win for him a trossered bride. Van Rensselaer Wiggin had told his tale with a fervor and enthusiasm that won pardon for a degree of vagueness. Abdallah had smoked and listened, bending his head gravely from time to time. Nothing in his demeanor showed that the story interested him or appeared strange in his sight, unless it was the deepening of the shadow in his big, dark eyes, or the flash that shot through them once or twice. At last Van Rensselaer ceased speaking and began to smoke in silence. He had learned enough of Moorish etiquette to understand that that was the thing to do until his host might be pleased to express his views. Perhaps it was five minutes before Abdallah ibn Musa took the narghileh from his lips. "Was the Christian dog eager to send his soul to Eblis before its time and his head to blacken over the palace gate?" That was what Van Rensselaer gathered was the gist of his friend's comment. He answered that, as he had lost his heart so irretrievably, the rest made really very little difference to him; in fact, that he had a sort of notion a man couldn't lose his heart with any credit unless he lost his head too. Ibn Musa smiled grimly. One reason Van Rensselaer liked him was that he had more sense of humor than most Moors. Also he had given indications several times of what the American diagnosed as quite an occidental spirit of sportiness. He stroked his beard reflectively. "Did his altogether despicable and ultimately doomed companion realize upon whom he had cast his audacious eyes?" Van Rensselaer admitted that he didn't, and added that he didn't care the Moorish equivalent of a tinker's dam.

A something in Abdallah's nature seemed to respond to the last sentiment. He smiled less grimly than before and, fixing his eyes on Van Rensselaer, he asked him to say what he considered fitting punishment for a Christian dog who dared to gaze unblinded at the light of no less glorious a radiance than the favorite wife of his, Ibn Musa's, all-conquering master; the blessed of the Prophet, the Prince of the Believers, the Shadow of God upon Earth, the thrice benignant and just and terrible Sultan of Morocco? Van Rensselaer sat aghast, and, starting as Abdallah had intended his disclosure should be, his lip curled with something like scorn at its obvious effect. Van Rensselaer had been accurate when he thought he discerned what he termed "sportiness" in his friend's character. Evidently the Moor, while both expecting and desiring to put an end to the absurd pretensions of the foreigner, had little patience with timidity. He did not quite understand, and it was natural enough that he did not. As I have said, Van Rensselaer was a pretty decent sort of chap in several ways. At last he gathered himself together. "The favorite wife of—of the Sultan?" he asked vaguely. Ibn Musa bowed, the scornful smile still curling his lip. "How many has he?" asked Van Rensselaer. Ibn Musa raised his hands and elevated his shoulders slightly. "The blessed Emir-ul-Eumennin had not confided to him a matter which it would be so obviously indecent to consider or discuss, and his servant valued his reputation and his head much too highly to seek knowledge in such fields. But he has more than one!" persisted Van Rensselaer. "Surely, most surely; many more," said Ibn Musa, startled out of his contempt by so ridiculous a question. Van Rensselaer leaned forward eagerly. "Yes," he said. "That's what I've always understood about His Majesty. You say my girl is his favorite. Does that mean she's the first one he married?" Ibn Musa looked hopelessly mystified by this line of examination. "By no means," he said at last. "There were doubtless wives in the imperial harem who outranked the effulgent Amineh in seniority. She was Van Rensselaer's pre-put feelings burst into a prodigious sigh and his face brightened. "That's all I want to know," he said. "I don't believe in chasing after another chap's wife, but if the old reprobate had a wife living when he married Amineh, or whatever her name is, why I hold she isn't his wife at all, and he deserves to lose her all right and he's going to."

It is more than doubtful if Abdallah ibn Musa even began to grasp the line of Van Rensselaer's logic. What he did gather was that the romance was on again, and he at once reinstated his friend in his good opinion as to a thoroughly game sport. He went on to detail, in a perfunctory way, the hopelessness of the quest and the almost certain ruin it would bring, but Van Rensselaer was himself again and snapped his fingers at peril. Abdallah need not get himself in any trouble; in fact, he must not. All Van Rensselaer wanted was a few tips that would surely not involve the Moor, and he could bet his last cent wild horses wouldn't drag names from the son of Wiggin through

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he be unfortunate enough to get caught. Then Abdallah ibn Musa rose up and embraced him. Himself and his slaves and his wealth were all his friend's to deal with as he would and to be an aid to him in his adventure. The scene of romantic appreciation in the soul of the true believer responded in a great burst to that same romance claiming kinship from the heart of the accursed infidel. Consultation as to ways and means fell naturally first in order, and here Van Rensselaer deferred naturally to the other's views. A Moor should know Moorish methods better than he. Therefore he listened respectfully while the collector of imperial customs evolved strategy thatarked back to "The days of good Haroun al Raschid." He was not sure that he caught it all very closely, but it seemed that Abdallah had a wife or a female slave who was on intimate terms with a slave in the Sultan's seraglio. There would be delicate soundings, impassioned messages, and a meeting. After that, what was to be would be. Abdallah puffed violently on the narghileh. His dignified composure was gone; his eyes flashed fire; his hands moved rhythmically. He detailed the gossip of the harems as to the Hour-like beauty of Amineh. Her face was as the full moon; her eyes were stars of the first magnitude; her mouth a ripe pomegranate; her neck a great column of alabaster; her arms chains of love. It was detailed to a degree—a thousand and one charms, each more alluring than the rest, and ending with the fabulous price she was said to have cost at Constantinople. Though Van Rensselaer found it quite impossible to recognize his adored amid the mazes of oriental imagery, yet he could not but admit that the description sounded flattering to her as a woman and to his own taste as a connoisseur. Above all, it was veritably an Arabian Night. Two days passed, during which the lover dreamed much and thought a little. Among his thoughts Miss Mae Stoffmeyer occasionally insisted upon obtruding herself, much to her fiancé's disquietude. From the standpoint of the pretty decent sort of chap he was, Van Rensselaer did not like to contemplate himself in the role of a recreant to love's vows, nor did self-characterization as "a rank cad" seem quite to fill the measure of a tribulation. From dreams and thoughts, however, he was soon swept by an evening message. He was to come to his friend at once. Abdallah, silent and self-contained as usual, led him within. The inevitable coffee and narghileh appeared, but only a sip and a few whiffs—the merest sop to conventional hospitality—imposed upon the lov-

er's impatience. Then Abdallah told his story at length—at very great length—which, reduced to its lowest terms, came to this. There was no God but God, and Mohammed was his prophet. In that moment of the street the fair Amineh also had been seen and loved. The interest of her tiring story had been won by the discreet emissary of Ibn Musa, and suitable tales of the manly beauty and wealth and power and passion of her infidel adorer had been poured into her ears, until mutes and bowstrings and headsmen lost all their terrors. She would grant this lover an interview, come what would. He should look upon her unveiled. Van Rensselaer was not very clear in his mind whether the poor girl was not laboring under an impression that he was the Sultan of America, whom the fame of her beauty had inspired to journey to Fez in disguise in order to snatch her thence to adorn the throne of the world. It all sounded a little bit that way, as Abdallah told the story; but the interview, at least, was to be a reality, and, were his love dead, which it was not, or the perils ten times as great as they assuredly were, he would have harbored no thought of withdrawal. Therefore he thanked Abdallah many (Continued on page 7.)

HE MEANT EVERY WORD HE SAID

Ex - Reeve's Rheumatism Cured by Dodd's Kidney Pills.

Was so Crippled that He Could Hardly Get Around and Could Get No Relief from Doctors or Medicines.

Dresden, Ont., March 13.—(Special).—"Dodd's Kidney Pills cured me of Rheumatism slick and clean." Mr. W. G. Cragg, the well-known merchant and ex-reeve of this place was the speaker and he evidently meant every word he said. "It was the inflammatory kind of Rheumatism I had and it crippled me up so that I could hardly get around to do my work in my store. I had the best doctors and everything in the line of medicines I could get of, but nothing even gave me relief. "Then I tried Dodd's Kidney Pills and six boxes cured me completely." Dodd's Kidney Pills cure Rheumatism by curing the Kidneys. Rheumatism is caused by Uric Acid in the blood. If the Kidneys are right they will strain all the Uric Acid out of the blood and the Rheumatism will go with it.