

PITCHERY - BIDGERY

The Turning of the Long, Long Lane.

BY MONSIEUR DEMOULIN.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE RUN OF THE BANK.

Not long after the bank opened a number of people came in to deposit money in return for some bank notes which they offered. This was an unusual circumstance. The people also were strange.

Potts wondered what it meant. There was no help for it, however. The gold was paid out, and Potts and his friends began to feel somewhat alarmed.

At the thought of this, Potts presented it self for the first time that their very large circulation of notes might be returned upon them. He communicated this fear to Clark.

'How much gold have you?' 'Very little.'

'Thirty thousand.'

'What'll you do if there is a run on the bank?' 'Oh, there won't be.'

'Why not?' 'My credit is too good.'

'Your credit won't be worth a rush if the people know this.'

'While they talk of persons knocking dropping in. Most of the villagers and people of the neighborhood brought back their notes, demanding gold. By about twelve o'clock the influx was constant.'

Potts began to feel alarmed. He went out and tried to bully some of the villagers. They did not seem to pay much attention to him, however. Potts went back to his parlor, discomfited, raving vengeance on those who had just slighted him. The worst of these was the tailor, who brought in notes to the extent of a thousand pounds, and when Potts ordered him out and told him to wait, he only laughed in his face.

'Haven't you got gold enough?' said the tailor, with a sneer. 'Are you afraid of the bank? Well, old Potts, so am I.'

At this there was a general laughing among the people.

The bank clerks did not at all sympathize with the bank. They were too eager to pay out. Potts had to check them. He called them in his parlor, and ordered them to pay out more slowly.

'They all declared that they couldn't. The day dragged on till at last three o'clock came. Fifteen thousand pounds had been paid out. Potts fell into deep despondency. Clark had remained throughout the whole morning.

'There's going to be a run on the bank,' said he. 'It's only begun.'

Potts' sole answer was a curse. 'What are you going to do?' he asked.

'You'll have to help me,' replied Potts. 'You've got something.'

'I've got fifty thousand pounds in the Plymouth Bank.'

'You'll have to let me have it.'

Clark hesitated.

'I don't know, said he.

'Don't it, man, I'll give you any security you wish. I've got more security than I know what to do with.'

'Well, said Clark, I don't know.

'I want it for a few days. I'll send down stock to my London broker and have it sold. It will give me hundreds of thousands—twice as much as my bank has.'

'I'll pay you up in three days, and that's a tailor worth of all I swear I'll send it all down to-day and have it every day. If there's nothing to be a run, I'll be ready for them.'

'How much have you?' 'I'll send it all down—though I'm devilish sorry,' continued Potts. 'How much? Why, see here, and he pencilled down the following figures on a piece of paper, which he showed to Clark:

California company \$100,000

Mexican bonds 50,000

Guatemala do 20,000

Venezuela do 20,000

\$200,000

'What do you think of that my boy?' said Potts.

'Well, returned Clark, cautiously, I don't like them American names.'

'Why, said Potts, the stock is at a premium. I've been getting from twenty to twenty-five per cent. advance on them. They'll sell for three hundred thousand nearly. I'll sell them all, he cried. 'I'll have gold enough to put a stop to this sort of thing forever.'

'I thought you had some French and Russian bonds,' said Clark.

'I gave those to that devil who had the papers, you know. He conspired to take them, and I was very glad, for they paid less than the others.'

Clark was silent.

'Why man, why are you thinking about it? Don't you know that I'm good for two millions, what with my estate and my stock?'

'But you're an infernal lot.'

'And haven't I notes and other securities from everybody?'

'Yes, from everybody; but how can you get hold of them?'

'The first people of the county?'

'And as poor as rats.'

'London merchants.'

'Who are they? How can you get back your money?'

'Smithers & Co. will let me have what I want.'

'If Smithers & Co. knew the present state of affairs I rather think that they'd back down.'

'Pooh! What! Back down from a man of my means? Nonsense! I know how rich I am, or they never would have begun. Come, don't be a fool. I'll take three days to get gold for my stock, and if you don't help me the bank may stop before I get it. If you'll help me for three days I'll pay you well.'

'How much will you give?'

'I'll give ten thousand pounds—there! I don't mind.'

'Done. Give me your note for sixty thousand pounds, and I'll let you have the fifty thousand for three days.'

'All right. You've got me where my hand's short; but I'll have my mind. When can I have the money?'

'The day after to-morrow. I'll go to Plymouth now, get the money to-morrow, and you can use it the next day.'

'All right; I'll send down John to London with the stock, and he'll bring up the gold at once.'

Clark started off immediately for Plymouth, and not long after John went to London. Potts remained to await the storm which he dreaded.

The next day came. The bank opened late on purpose. Potts put up a notice that it was to be closed that day at twelve, on account of the absence of some of the directors.

At about eleven of the crowd of people began to make their appearance as before. Their demands were somewhat larger than on the previous day. Before twelve ten thousand pounds had been paid. At twelve the bank was shut in the faces of the clamorous people, in accordance with the notice.

Strangers were there from all parts of the county. The village inn was crowded, and a large number of carriages were outside. Potts began to look forward to the next day with deep anxiety. Only five thousand pounds remained in the bank. One man had come with notes to the extent of five thousand, and had only been got rid of by the shutting of the bank. He left, raving vengeance.

To Potts' immense relief Clark made his appearance early on the following day. He had brought the money. Potts gave him his note for sixty thousand pounds, and the third day passed.

By ten o'clock the doors were besieged by the largest crowd that had ever assembled in this quiet village. Another host of lookers on had collected. When the doors were opened they poured in with a rush.

The demands on this third day were very large. The man with the five thousand had fought his way to the counter first, and clamored to be paid. The noise and confusion was overpowering. Everybody was cursing the bank or laughing

at it. Each one felt doubtful about getting his pay. Potts tried to be dignified for a time. He ordered them to be quiet, and assured them that they would all be paid. His voice was drowned in the wild uproar. The clerks counted out the gold as rapidly as possible, in spite of the interruptions of Potts, who on three occasions called them into his parlor, and threatened to dismiss them unless they counted more slowly. His threats were disregarded. They went back, and paid out as rapidly as before. The amounts required ranged from five to ten pounds to thousands of pounds. At last, after paying out thousands, one man came up who had notes to the amount of ten thousand pounds. This was the largest amount that had yet been paid. It was doubtful whether there was so large an amount left. Potts came to see him. There was no help for it; he had to pay to the enemy. He told them that it was within a few minutes of three, and that it would take an hour at least to count out so much. They reacted on him. The next day there would be ample time. It was all the same to him. He was a hero, telling them that the bank could not pay him. This intelligence made the excitement still greater. There was a fierce hubbub, and paid out what they could in spite of the hints and even threats of Potts, till at length the bank clerks had paid forward thirty minutes, and there was a great riot among the people on that account, but they could not do anything. The bank was closed for the day, and both Potts and Clark now waited eagerly for the return of John. He was expected before the next day. He ought to be in by midnight. After waiting impatiently for hours they at length drove out to the country to find him. About twelve miles from Brandon they met him at midnight with a team of horses and a number of men, all of whom were armed.

'Have you got it?' 'Yes, said John, 'what there is of it.'

'What's the amount?' 'I don't know. I'm too tired to explain. Wait till we get home.'

It was four o'clock in the morning before they reached the bank. The gold was taken out and deposited in the vaults, and the three went up to the hall. They brought out heavily laden with gold, and John showed his usual nonchalance.

'Well, Johnnie,' said Potts, after a long silence, 'we've used up the fact. You were a fool for fighting it out so long.'

'I might as well. I was responsible, at any rate.'

'Then my estate would have been gone. Besides, I hoped to fight through this difficulty. In fact, I hadn't anything else to do.'

'Why not?' 'Smithers & Co.'

'Ah! yes.'

'They'll be down on me now. That's what I was afraid of all along.'

'How much do you owe them?' 'Seven hundred and two thousand pounds.'

'The devil! I thought it was only five hundred thousand.'

'It's been growing every day. It's a dreadful dangerous thing to have unlimited credit.'

'Well, you've got something as an offset. The debts due the bank.'

'Johnnie,' said Potts, taking a long breath, 'I don't want to ask you to mind telling me what your capital opinion is their debts isn't worth a rush. A great crowd of people came here for money. I didn't know what to do. I shelved out loyally. I wanted to be known, so as to get into Parliament some day. I did what is called "going home".'

'How much is owing you?' 'The books say five hundred and thirty thousand pounds—and it's double that if I can get any of it. And now Smithers & Co. will be down on me at once.'

'What do you intend to do?'

'I don't know.'

'Haven't you thought?'

'No, I couldn't.'

'Well, I have.'

'What?'

'You'll have to try to compromise.'

'What if they won't?'

'John shrugged his shoulders, and said nothing.

'After all,' resumed Potts hopefully, 'it can't be so bad. The estate is worth two millions.'

'Pooh!'

'Isn't it?'

'Of course not. You know what you bought it for.'

'That's because it was thrown away again.'

'Well, I'll have to be thrown away again.'

'Oh, Smithers & Co. will be easy. They don't care for money.'

'Perhaps so. The fact is I don't understand Smithers & Co. I've tried to see through their little game, but can't begin to do it.'

'Oh, that's easy enough! They know I was rich, and I let me have what money I wanted.'

'John looked doubtful.

'At this moment a rap was heard at the back door.

'There comes Clark,' said he.

Potts opened the door. Clark entered. His face was flushed, and his eyes bloodshot.

'See here,' said he, mysteriously, 'he entered the door.'

'What's the matter with the others anxiously.'

'There's two chaps at the inn. One is the Italian.'

'Langhetti?'

'Yes,' said Clark, 'gloomily, and the other is his mate that fellow that helped him to carry off the gal. They've done it again this time, and my opinion is that these fellows treat the best of us all our troubles. You know whose son it is.'

Potts and John exchanged glances.

'I went after that devil who had my money, and I got it. This time I'll take some one who isn't afraid of the devil. Johnnie, is the dog at the Hall?'

'All right,' said Clark. 'I'll be even with this fellow yet, if he's in league with the devil.'

With these words Clark went out, and left the two together. A glance of savage exultation passed over the face of Potts.

'If he comes back successful,' said he, 'all right, and if he doesn't, why then—' He repeated.

'You forget that I have Smithers & Co. to fall back upon.'

'If your bank breaks there is an end of Smithers & Co.'

'Oh no. I've got this estate to fall back on, and they know it. I can easily explain to them. If they had only seen the amount of my estate, they would have made this sacrifice. You needn't feel troubled about your money. I'll give you security for seventy thousand,' said Potts.

'Clark looked at him with a will, and said, "Well, said he, "it's a risk, but I'll run it."

'There isn't time to get a lawyer now to make out the papers; but whenever you fetch one I'll do it.'

'I'll get one to-day, and you'll sign the papers this evening. In my opinion by that time the bank'll be shut up for good, and you're a fool for your pains. You're simply throwing away what gold you have.'

Potts went down not long after. It was the fourth day of the run. Miscellaneous callers thronged the place, but the amounts were not large. In two hours not more than five thousand were paid out.

At length a man came in with a cart-load of notes.

'How much?' asked the clerk blandly.

'Thirty thousand pounds,' said the man.

Potts heard this and came out.

'Do you want it in gold?'

'Of course.'

'Will you take a draft on Messrs.

Smithers & Co?'

'No, I want gold.'

While Potts was talking to this man another was waiting patiently beside him. Of course this imperative claimant had to be paid or else the bank would have to stop, and this was a casualty which Potts could not yet face with calmness. Before it came to that he was determined to pay out his last shilling.

On paying the thirty thousand pounds it was found that there were only two bags left of two thousand pounds each. The other man who had waited stood while the one who had been paid was making arrangements about conveying his money away.

It was now two o'clock. The stranger said quietly to the clerk opposite that he wanted gold.

'How much?' asked the clerk with the same blandness.

'Forty thousand pounds,' answered the stranger.

'Sorry we can't accommodate you, sir,' returned the clerk.

Potts had heard this and came forward.

'Won't you take a draft on London?'

'Can't,' replied the man; 'I was ordered to get gold.'

'A draft on Smithers & Co?'

'Couldn't take even Bank of England notes,' said the stranger; 'I'm only an agent. If you can't accommodate me I'm sorry, I'm sure.'

Potts was silent. His face was ghastly. As much agony as such a man could endure was felt by him at that moment.

Half an hour afterward the shutters were up; and outside the door stood a wild and riotous crowd, the most numerous which was the case. The Brandon Bank had failed.

CHAPTER L.

THE BANK DIRECTORS.

The bank doors were closed, and the bank directors were left to their own reflections. Clark had been in through the day, and at the critical moment his feelings had overcome his reason, so much so that he felt compelled to go over to the man to get something to drink, whereupon he might refresh himself and keep his wits about him.

Potts and John remained in the bank parlor. The clerks had gone. Potts was in that state of dejection in which the mind is almost insensible. John showed his usual nonchalance.

'Well, Johnnie,' said Potts, after a long silence, 'we've used up the fact. You were a fool for fighting it out so long.'

'I might as well. I was responsible, at any rate.'

'Then my estate would have been gone. Besides, I hoped to fight through this difficulty. In fact, I hadn't anything else to do.'

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