

Political and General Miscellany.

THE MILL PRIVILEGE:

OR, HOW MR. T. OVER-REACHED HIMSELF.

In one of the new towns of Maine some thirty years ago, lived a man named John Tatnall. He was a close-fisted, digging man, and never scrupled to make the best end of a bargain at all points within the limits of written law. He never hesitated to make capital of other people's necessities, and any event that could put a dollar into his till was all right to him.

Once a neighbor lost a fine ox just at the time when he was fulfilling a contract for cutting down and hauling out timber. The contract was worth a thousand dollars, and he was to forfeit one half of it if he did not have all the logs in the river before the snow melted in the spring. The loss of his best ox would ruin him if he could not make his place good. He knew that Tatnall had plenty of oxen, and he went to him and stated his case. Now John Tatnall had a number of oxen which he had bought to place in a drove which he meant to drive to market; so he could have sold one just as well as not. But he saw his neighbor's necessity, and he meant to profit by it. He would not sell unless he could sell a pair, and not then without an enormous price. The poor lumberman begged and entreated, but it was of no avail. There was not another ox for miles and miles about, for Mr. Tatnall had bought them all up. The neighbor could not allow his work to stand still, so he paid Tatnall full double what they were worth, and took them away.

Then it was he happened to think of his odd ox. He knew it was better, by far, than either of those he had bought of Tatnall, and he drove it over to the cattle dealer's to sell it, as he had no use for it. Tatnall offered him twenty dollars for it—just one-fifth of what he had obtained for the yoke he had sold! We will not tell the conversation and bantering that followed. Suffice it to say that Tatnall got the ox, and that in the end he made a profit of just seventy-five dollars off his poor and hard-working neighbor.

That was the character of the man, and all the neighbors knew it. Yet he was respected: for he had money, and many perhaps depended on him for work, though their pittance for such work was begrudgingly in the extreme. Mr. Tatnall's farm was situated upon a large river, and he owned to a great extent on both sides of it. When he bought there he had some faint idea that at some time there would be a mill put up there, and thus greatly enhance the value of his lot, for there was quite a fall in the river where he owned, and a most excellent mill privilege was thus afforded. But he never could build the mill, for he had not the money to spare, nor had he the energy. About two years previous to the opening of our story, some men had come to examine the river, and they talked some of buying and building extensive mill works. Tatnall knew that if such were done, the value of the good land about him would be advanced, and he bought up all he could, so at the present time he owned not less than a thousand acres.

One day, in early spring, just as the ice had broken up, a man called on Tatnall, and wished to examine the mill privilege. His name was Lemuel Farnsworth, and he was a man not more than thirty years of age, full of enterprise and integrity. Mr. Tatnall accompanied his visitor out to the river, and after

examining the premises, the latter expressed himself much pleased with them.

"Oh," exclaimed Tatnall, "this is about the finest privilege in the State. The water power cannot fail, and you see there would be power enough to drive a dozen mills."

"I see," returned Farnsworth, but he did not express all he thought. He merely acknowledged that the privilege was good. "If I buy here," he continued, "I should want some forty or fifty acres of land to go with the water-lot, for I should want lumber enough to put up all my buildings, and some besides, of my own, to commence work on."

"You can have all you want," was Tatnall's reply, and shortly afterwards they returned to the house.

"Now what is your price?" asked Farnsworth, after he had declined to take a glass of rum which had been poured out for him.

"Well," returned Tatnall, thoughtfully, "I haven't thought much of selling, for I have had some idea of getting up a mill there myself."

This was a falsehood; but then Tatnall said such things as naturally as a child laughs when it is pleased.

"But you will sell, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then what would be your price?"

"You mean for the mill privilege and fifty acres of woodland?"

"Yes."

"Well, the water lot is valuable, and we all know that the land is excellent, and then the lumber on it is of the first quality."

"I have seen all that, sir. Now for your price."

"Well, I have thought that if some one would put up a mill there, I would sell the privilege, with land enough for a garden and necessary buildings—say about six acres—for a thousand dollars. And then if you wanted the fifty acres, I should say about seven hundred dollars more."

"But, my dear sir," uttered Farnsworth, in surprise, "do you consider how this mill will enhance the value of your other property? We mean to put up not only a saw-mill, but also a good grist-mill, and a carding and clothing mill, so that we can saw the lumber, grind the grain, card the wool, and dress the cloth for people who come to settle here."

"Then you mean to do it all?" said Tatnall, really surprised, but without showing it.

"Yes sir."

Now Tatnall knew this would be a vast benefit to him. The nearest mill was now six miles off, and even that a poor flimsy concern, put up on a small brook that was dry nearly half the year. From this circumstance people had not settled down upon the rich lands by the river; and the huge trees yet stood upon the finest alluvial soil in that section of the country. Such an establishment, Mr. Tatnall at once saw, would draw quite a village together in a few years, and then his land would make him independently wealthy. But he believed he had the power all in his own hands, and he meant to use it.

"I cannot take a cent less," he said, after a moment's thought. "To be sure, the establishment you speak of will be a benefit to me, but that is no reason why I should sacrifice now. It will also be a benefit to you, for which you can well afford to pay. If you will take the whole for seventeen hundred dollars, you can have it."

"Well," said Mr. Farnsworth, "I have a partner engaged with me in this business, and I must see him first. I will explain the case to him, and next day after to-morrow I will see you again."