THE KING OF NO-LAND.

BY B. L. FARJEON.

IX.

(Continued.)

Thus they talked and whispered, and as our ingenious brethern in the West would say, innuendoed. For our Western brethren—who also have their Quamoclits—are great at the turning of nouns into verbs.

But these Quamoclits did still greater mischief. Some of them had newspapers of their own, or were employed on newspapers, and the King's refusal of the hand of the Princess Calla was a pet theme in their leading articles and special correspondence. They stretched it wantonly as they would a piece of India rubber, until they made rents and holes in it. In a very short time it was twisted out of all resemblance to itself.

There was another tribe in No-land to whom this dish was like the spice of Arabia. Whortleberry was the name of this tribe. These Whortleberries also possessed a newspaper or two, and in the columns of their papers the dish was served up in a hundred ways, with the very hottest seasoning.

Some of these papers fell into the hands of King Sassafras. Some of the remarks which were made concerning him came to his knowledge.

"Good God!" he cried; "is it possible that I can be such a monster?"

Stung in the tenderest part of him—his manhood—he threw aside all counsel, and in direct opposition to the Confidential Worryers, he read and studied what was written about him. The more he read the more he was distressed. The more he heard the more he grived. Had he, in his royal station, possessed a friend like Coltsfoot, he might have turned some of the experience he was gaining to good account; but he was surrounded by flatterers and fawners and court parasites, who would have been well content to see him spend his life as his father had done. He blushed when he was told that his person was sacred, that he, above all, other men, was watched over by a special Providence, and that he was hedged round by divinity.

"If this be true," he mused, "I am something more than human."

He trembled from sensitive shame, for he knew that it was false.

"And yet," he thought, pursuing his reflections, "did not the barbarian ruler who lately visited No-land arrogate to himself the title of King of Kings? It is monstrous—monstrous and wicked! Surely that title can only be held by the Great and Merciful King who rules over all!"

But if he mentally protested against being held up as a kind of sacred symbol—if he set aside (as he did, with scorn) besides that his nights were more divine than those of other men, he was filled with just indignation by what he read concerning himself in the papers owned by the Whortleberries. According to these organs, he was either the feeblest foe that ever breathed, with soul so warped by the pursuit of sensual and sensuous pleasure as to be deaf and blind to the misery which surrounded him, or he was directly responsible and accountable for all the evil and suffering which existed in the land.

"If either of these be true," he mused with troubled soul, "I am indeed less than human—more akin to brute than man."

He said to Coltsfoot,

"What is your opinion of kings, Coltsfoot?"

It was rarely that Coltsfoot was in a light humor, but he happened to be so upon this occasion.

"I myself," he said, with a light laugh, "happened to put that very question once to an amiable cynic. He answered that that they were necessary evils."

Every nerve in Sassafras's body tingled, quivered with pain. Although Coltsfoot had but repeated the words of another man, and although he had spoken lightly, a slight dash of scorn in the speaker's tone tinged them with a personal bitterness.

"Of our King, now," continued Sassafras, controlling his agitation, "Sassafras? What do you think of him?"

"I have never seen him."

"But," insisted Sassafras, "you have your idea concerning him. What do you think of him?"

"At the best," replied Coltsfoot, shrugging his shoulders, "he is nothing more than a puppet. Set aside the pomp and glitter which surrounds him, and he becomes, in himself and by himself, utterly insignificant."

The tone of indifference in which this was uttered stung Sassafras more deeply even than Coltsfoot's previous utterance.

"Is your opinion general?" he asked.

"No; some few would express themselves in similar terms; a larger number would be more violent in the same direction. On the other hand, there are many thousands who regard King Sassafras with an admiration which approaches idolatry. There are ladies in the fashionable world who would think it no extravagance to kiss the ground he walks upon, and who see in him qualities so transcendent as to seriously warp their moral sense. To their minds, a king sanctifies whatever he touches. Let me tell you a story that is current. Some years since a prince of another land was sent upon his travels; he was a person distinguished for good humor and amiability of disposition. He traveled the world, and opportunities were given to him of seeing what no other man had seen in a lifetime, and he was received everywhere with grand demonstrations, and was cordially welcomed. In a certain flourishing city, a dependency of the empire of which he was a representative, the fashionable men and women—especially the latter—went almost mad in the ecstasy of their admiration. Towels that he wiped his hands upon were torn into fragments, and the pieces were taken home by the ladies as relics; the ends of the cigarettes he smoked were picked up as he threw them away, and religiously preserved. It would be the same, I doubt not, with our own King Sassafras. He is to them a visible god, whom they worship, not with indifference and languor, as most of them worship in the churches, but with an enthusiasm which is as lamentable as it is extravagant."

Coltsfoot paused for a few moments; his light mood had passed away, and he was now serious and thoughtful. "It may be said by many unprejudiced lookers-on that these are harmless follies; I differ from them. The persons who practice them are seriously in earnest, and they belong to the classes which set the fashions for the people—the fashions in conduct and behavior at home and in the streets—the fashions in dresss (in itself an educator), and even in morals, a convertible word, unfortunately, nowadays. The lowly are taught always to aspire, to look up, and they look up to these persons and aspire to their follies. I would promote mirth, pleasure, and rational enjoyment by every means in my power; but I would set my heel upon these sinful extravagances which are practiced by persons whose education and position should teach them how to make better use of the advantages they enjoy. There are in life sweeter fashions than those to follow."

"Is the King to blame for all these things?" said Sassafras, with a downcast look.

"He is but a young man," replied Coltsfoot; "it would be most unjust to say that he is responsible for the bad systems which have grown out of the lust for pleasure and ease. He is much to be pitied."

"Truly," said Sassafras, gravely. "I think so too. See here what they say about him."

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H. C. Frost, Brussels street.
J. McArthur & Co., do.
—— White, City Road.
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James McKinney, Main street.
Mrs. Perkins, corner Carmarthen and Mecklenburg.
L. Currie, corner Carmarthen and St. Andrews.
R. Patchell, corner Carmarthen and Britain.
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J. King, Princess street.
J. B. Lorrimer, corner Orange and Carmarthen.
J. D. McAvity, Bustin's Corner.
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