54-40 OR FIGHT

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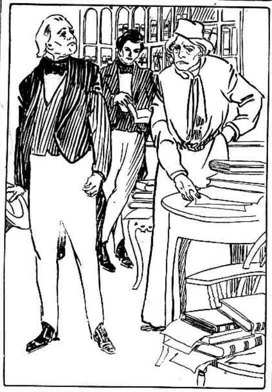

"I Don't Pretend to Know Now All You Mean."

CHAPTER 1.

The Makers of Maps.

There is scarcely a single cause in which a woman is not engaged in some way fomenting the suit.—Juvenal.

"Then you offer me no hope, doctor?"

The gray mane of Dr. Samuel Ward waved like a fighting crest as he made answer:

"Not the sort of hope you ask." A moment later he added: "John, I am ashamed of you."

The cynical smile of the man I called my chief still remained upon his lips, the same drawn look of suffering still remained upon his gaunt features; but in his blue eye I saw a glint which proved that the answer of his old friend had struck out some unused spark of vitality from the deep, cold flint of his heart.

"I never knew you for a coward, Calhoun," went on Dr. Ward; "nor any of your family. I give you now the benefit of my personal acquaintance with this generation of the Calhouns. I ask something more of you than faint-heartedness."

The keen eyes turned upon him again with the old flame of flint which a generation had known—a generation, for the most part, of enemies.

"Did not Saul fall upon his own sword?" asked John Calhoun. "Have not devoted leaders from the start of the world till now sometimes rid the scene of the responsible figures in lost fights, the men on whom blame rested for failures?"

"Cowards!" rejoined Dr. Ward. "Cowards, every one of them! Were there not other swords upon which they might have fallen—those of their enemies?"

"It is not my own hand—my own sword, Sam," said Calhoun. "Not that. You know as well as I that I am already marked and doomed, even as I sit at my table to-night. A walk of a wet night here in Washington—a turn along the Heights out there when the winter wind is keen—yes, Sam, I see my grave before me, close enough; but how can I rest easy in that grave? Man, we have not yet dreamed how great a country this may be. We must have Texas. We must have also Oregon. We must have—"

"Free?" The old doctor shrugged his shoulders and smiled at the arch pro-slavery exponent.

"Then, since you mention it, yes!" retorted Calhoun fretfully. "But I shall not go into the old argument of those who say that black is white, that south is north. It is only for my own race that I plan a wider America. But then—" Calhoun raised a long, thin hand. "Why," he went on slowly, "I have just told you that I have failed. And yet you, my old friend, whom I ought to trust, condemn me to live on!"

"Yes," he said, at length, "I condemn you to fight on, John;" and he smiled grimly.

"Why, look at you, man!" he broke out fiercely, after a moment. "The type and picture of combat! Good bone, fine bone and hard; a hard head and bony; little eye, set deep; strong, wiry muscles, not too big—fighting muscles, not dough, clean limbs; strong fingers; good arms, legs, neck; wide chest—"

"Then you give me hope?" Calhoun flashed a smile at him.

"No, sir! If you do your duty, there is no hope for you to live. If you do not do your duty, there is no hope for you to die. John Calhoun, for more than two years to come—perhaps five years—six. Keep up this work—as you must, my friend—and you die as surely as though I shot you through as you sit there. Now, is this any comfort to you?"

A gray pallor overspread my master's face. That truth is welcome to no man, morbid or sane, sound or ill; but brave men meet it as this one did.

"Time to do much!" he murmured to himself. "Time to mend many broken vessels, in those two years. One more fight—yes, let us have it!"

But Calhoun the man was lost once more in Calhoun the visionary, the fanatic statesman. He summed up, as though to himself, something of the situation which then existed at Washington.

"Yes, the coast is clearer, now that Webster is out of the cabinet, but Mr. Upshur's death last month brings in new complications. Had he remained our secretary of state, much might have been done. It was only last October he proposed to Texas a treaty of annexation."

"Yes, and found Texas none so eager," frowned Dr. Ward.

"No; and why not? You and I know well enough. Sir Richard Pakenham, the English plenipotentiary here, could tell if he liked. England is busy in Texas. Texas owes large funds to England. England want Texas as a colony. There is fire under this smoke talk of Texas dividing into two governments, one, at least, under England's gentle and unselfish care!

"And now, look you," Calhoun continued, rising, and pacing up and down, "look what is the evidence. Van Zandt, charge d'affaires in Washington for the Republic of Texas, wrote Secretary Upshur only a month before Upshur's death, and told him to go carefully or he would drive Mexico to resume the war, and so cost Texas the friendship of England! Excellent Mr. Van Zandt! I at least know what the friendship of England means. So, he asks us if we will protect Texas with troops and ships in case she does sign that agreement of annexation. Cunning Mr Van Zandt! He knows what that answer must be to-day, with England ready to fight us for Texas and Oregon both, and we wholly unready for war."

"But, John, another will have to make it, the one way or the other," said his friend.

"Yes!" The long hand smote on the table.

"President Tyler has offered you Mr. Upshur's portfolio as secretary of state?"

"I have not yet accepted," said Calhoun. "If I do, it will be to bring Texas and Oregon into this Union, one slave, the other free, but both vast, and of a mighty future for us. That done, I resign at once."

"Will you accept?"

Calhoun's answer was first to pick up a paper from his desk. "See, here is the dispatch Mr. Pakenham brought from Lord Aberdeen of the British ministry to Mr. Upshur just two days before his death. Judge whether Aberdeen wants liberty—or territory! In effect he re-asserts England's right to interfere in our affairs. We fought one war to disprove that England has said enough on this continent. And England has meddled enough."

Calhoun and Ward looked at each other, sober in their realization of the grave problems which then beset American statesmanship and American thought. The old doctor was first to break the silence. "Then do you accept? Will you serve again, John?"

"Listen to me. If I do accept, I shall take Mr. Upshur's and Mr. Nelson's place only on one condition—yes, if I do, here is what I shall say to England regarding Texas. I shall show her what a Monroe doctrine is; shall show her that while Texas is small and weak, Texas and this republic are not. This is what I have drafted as a possible reply. I shall tell Mr. Pakenham that his chief's avowal of intentions has made it our imperious duty, in self-defense, to hasten the annexation of Texas, cost what it may, mean what it may! John Calhoun does not shilly-shally.

"That will be my answer," repeated my chief at last.

"Yes, I shall have Texas, as I shall have Oregon, settled before I lay down my arms, Sam Ward. No, I am not yet ready to die!" Calhoun's old fire now flamed in all his mien.

"The situation is extremely difficult," said his friendly slowly. "It must be done; but how? We are as a nation not ready for war. You as a statesman are not adequate to the politics of all this. Where is your political party, John? You have none. You have outrun all parties. It will be your ruin, that you have been honest!"

Calhoun turned on him swiftly. "You know as well as I that mere politics will not serve. It will take some extraordinary measure — you know men—and, perhaps, women."

"Yes," said Dr Ward, "and a precious silly lot they are."

Calhoun nodded, with a thin smile. "As it chances, I need a man. Ergo, and very plainly, I must use a woman."

"There are two women in our world to-day," said Calhoun. "As to Jackson, the old fool was a monogamist, and still is. Not so much so Jim Polk of Tennessee. Never does he appear in public with eyes other than for the Dona Lucrezia of the Mexican legation! Now, one against the other—Mexico against Austria—"

Dr. Ward raised his eyebrows in perplexity.

"That is to say, England, and not Austria," went on Calhoun coldly. "The ambassadress of England to America was born in Budapest! So I say, Austria; or perhaps Hungary, or some other country, which raised this strange representative who has made some stir in Washington here these last few weeks."

"Ah, you mean the baroness!" exclaimed Dr Ward. "Tut! Tut!"

Calhoun nodded, with the same cold, thin smile. "Yes," he said, "I mean Mr Pakenham's reputed mistress, his assured secret agent and spy, the beautiful Baroness von Ritz!"

He mentioned a name then well known in diplomatic and social life, when intrigue in Washington, if not open, was none too well hidden.

"Gay Sir Richard!" he resumed. "You know, his ancestor was a brother-in-law of the duke of Wellington. He himself seems to have absorbed some of the great duke's fondness for the fair. Before he came to us he was with England's legation in Mexico. 'Twas there he first met the Dona Lucrezia. 'Tis said he would have remained in Mexico had it not been arranged that she and her husband, Senor Yturrio, should accompany Gen. Almonte in the Mexican ministry here. On these conditions, Sir Richard agreed to accept promotion as minister plenipotentiary to Washington!"

"That was nine years ago," commented Dr. Ward.

"Yes, and it was only last fall that he was made envoy extraordinary. He is at least an extraordinary envoy! Near 50 years of age, he seems to forget public decency; he forgets even the Dona Lucrezia, leaving her to the admiration of Mr. Polk and Mr. Van Zandt, and follows off after the sprightly Baroness von Ritz. Meantime, Senor Yturrio also forgets the Dona Lucrezia, and proceeds also to follow after the baroness—although with less hope than Sir Richard has taste! The Baroness von Ritz has brains and beauty both. It is she who is England's real envoy. Now, I believe she knows England's real intentions as to Texas."

Dr. Ward screwed his lips for a long whistle, as he contemplated John Calhoun's thin, determined face.

"I do not care at present to say more," went on my chief, "but do you not see, granted certain motives, Polk might come into power pledged to the extension of our southwest borders—"

"Calhoun, are you mad?" cried his friend. "Would you plunge this country into war? Would you pit two peoples, like cocks on a floor? And would you use women in our diplomacy?"

Calhoun now was no longer the friend, the humanitarian. He was the relentless machine; the idea; the single purpose, which to the world at large he had been all his life in congress, in cabinets on this or the other side of the throne of American power. He spoke coldly as he went on:

"In these matters it is not a question of means, but of results. If war comes, let it come; although I hope it will not come. As to the use of women—tell me, why not women? Why anything else but women? It is only playing life against life; one variant against another. That is politics, my friend. I want Pakenham. So, I must learn what Pakenham wants. Does he want Texas for England, or the Baroness von Ritz for himself?"

Ward still sat and looked at him. "My God!" said he at last, softly; but Calhoun went on:

"Why, who has made the maps of the world, and who has written pages in its history? Who makes and unmakes cities and empires and republics to-day? Woman, and not man! Are you so ignorant—and you a physician, who know them both? Gad, man, you do not understand your own profession and yet you seek to counsel me in mine!"

"Strange words from you, John," commented his friend, shaking his head; "not seemly for a man who stands where you stand to-day."

"Strange weapons—yes. If I could always use my old weapons of tongue and brain I would not need these perhaps. Now you tell me my time is short. I must fight now to win. I have never fought to lose. I cannot be too nice in agents and instruments."

The old doctor rose and took a turn up and down the little room, one of Calhoun's modest menage at the nation's capital, which then was not the city it is to-day. Calhoun followed him with even steps.

"Changes of maps, my friend? Listen to me. The geography of America for the next 50 years rests under a little roof over in M street to-night—a roof which Sir Richard secretly maintains. The map of the United States, I tell you, is covered with a down counterpane a deux, to-night. You ask me to go on with my fight. I answer, first I must find the woman. Now, I say I have found her, as you know. Also, I have told you where I have found her. Under a counterpane! Texas, Oregon, these United States under a counterpane!"

Dr. Ward sighed as he shook his head. "I don't pretend to know now all you mean."

Calhoun whirled on him fiercely, with a vigor which his wasted frame did not indicate as possible.

"Listen, then, and I will tell you what John Calhoun means—John Calhoun, who has loved his own state, who has hated those who hated him, who has never prayed for those who despitefully used him, who has fought and will fight, since all insist on that. It is true Tyler has offered me again to-day the portfolio of secretary of state. Shall I take it? If I do, it means that I am employed by this administration to secure the admission of Texas. Can you believe me when I tell you that my ambition is for it all—all, every foot of new land, west to the Pacific, that we can get, slave or free? Can you believe John Calhoun, pro-slavery advocate and orator all his life, when he says that he believes he is an humble instrument destined, with God's aid, and through the use of such instruments as our human society affords, to build, not a wider slave country, but a wider America?"

"It would be worth the fight of a few years more, Calhoun," gravely answered his old friend. "I admit I had not dreamed this of you."

"History will not write it of me, perhaps," went on my chief. "But you tell me to fight, and now I shall fight, and in my own way. I tell you, that answer shall go to Pakenham. And I tell you Pakenham shall not dare to take offense at me. War with Mexico we possibly, indeed certainly, shall have. War on the northwest, too, we yet may have unless—" He paused; and Dr. Ward prompted him some moments later, as he still remained in thought.

"Unless what, John? What do you mean—still hearing the rustle of skirts?"

"Yes!—unless the celebrated Baroness Helena von Ritz says otherwise!" replied he grimly.

"How dignified a diplomacy have we here! You plan war between two embassies on the distaff side!" smiled Dr. Ward.

Calhoun continued his walk. "I do not say so," he made answer; "but, if there must be war, we may reflect that war is at its best when woman is in the field!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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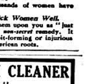

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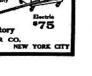
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