

THE GRAFTERS

By FRANCIS LYNDE

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CHAPTER XVII. THE CONSPIRATORS.

It was chiefly due to Portia's urgings that Kent took Ormsby into his confidence...

A little practice-play in municipal politics made the need apparent. It came in the midst of things, basing itself upon the year-long triumph of agrarianism in the state.

Late in the summer an ordinance was proposed by the terms of which a single corporation was to be given a franchise granting a complete monopoly of the streets for gas and water mains and transit rights of way.

In this struggle, as giving him the chance to front the enemy in a fair field, David Kent flung himself with all the ardor of a born fighter.

Figuratively speaking, Portia stood in the wings and applauded. Also, she saw that her protégé had reached the point where he needed grooming for whatever race lay before him.

On the porch of the Brentwood apartment house was David Kent. With the striking of the city hall clock at nine Mrs. Brentwood had complained of the glare of the electric crossing-lamp and had gone in, leaving the caller with Penelope in the hammock on one side of him and Ellinor in a basket chair on the other.

"I am glad you won for the league, of course; everybody must be glad of that," she said. "But I hope the Argus didn't report your speeches correctly. If it did, you have made a host of bitter enemies."

"What does a man—a real man—care for that?" This from the depths of the hammock.

"I, at least, can afford to be careless," said Kent. "I am not running for office, and have nothing else to lose, politically or otherwise."

"Can any man say that truthfully?" Ellinor queried.

"I think I can. I have given no hostages to fortune."

"But I think you owe it to yourself to be more careful in your public utterances," she insisted. "If these men on the other side are only half as unprincipled as your accusations make them out to be, they would not stop short of personal violence."

Kent felt in his pocket. "I have no cigar."

"You may smoke your pipe," she said; and when she had passed behind him to her chair she made another concession: "Let me fill it for you— you used to."

"He gave her the pipe and tobacco, and by a curious contradiction of terms began to wonder if he ought not to go. Notwithstanding his frank defiance of Brookes Ormsby, and his declaration of intention in the sentimental affair, he had his own notions about the sanctity of a betrothal."

He let the question go unanswered—and stayed. But he was minded to fling the biggest barrier he could lay hands on in the way of possible disloyalty by saying good things of Ormsby.

"I owe you much for my acquaintance with him," he said, when the subject was fairly introduced. "He has been making all kinds of a good friend to me, and he promises to be more."

"Isn't your debt to Penelope, rather than to me?" she returned.

"No, I think not. You are responsible, in the broader sense, at all events. He did not come west for Penelope's sake. Then he took the plunge: 'May I know when it is to be—or am I to wait for my bidding with the other and more formally invited guests?'"

She laughed, a low little laugh that somehow grated upon his nerves. "You shall know—when I know."

"Forgive me," he said quickly. "But from something Ormsby said—"

"He should not have spoken of it; I have given him no right," she said coldly.

"You make me twice sorry: once if I am a trespasser, and again if I have unwittingly broken a confidence."

He rose and said good-night, and was half-way to the next corner before he realized how inexcusably abrupt his leave-taking had been.

When he did realize it, he was of two minds whether to go back or let the apology excuse another call the following evening. Then the insistent prompting seized him again; and when next he came to a competent sense of things present he was standing opposite the capitol building, staring fixedly up at a pair of lighted windows in the second story.

They were the windows of the governor's room; and David Kent's brain cleared suddenly. In the earliest beginnings of the determinate plan to wrest the Trans-Western out of the grasp of the Junto he had known that it must come finally to some desperate duel with the master-spirit of the ringsters. Was Jasper Bucks behind those lighted windows—alone?

Kent had not meant to make the open attack until he should have a weapon in his hands which would arm him to win. But now as he stood looking up at the beckoning windows a mad desire to have it out once for all with the robber-in-chief sent the blood tingling to his finger-tips. True, he had nothing as yet in the oil-field conspiracy that the newspapers or the public would accept as evidence of fraud and corruption. But on the other hand, Bucks was only a man, after all; a man with a buccaner's record, and by consequence vulnerable beneath the brazen armor of assurance. If the attack were bold enough—

Kent did not stop to argue it out. When a man's blood is up the odds against him shrink and become as naught. Two minutes later he was in the upper corridor of the capitol, striding swiftly to the door of the lighted room.

Recalling it afterward he wondered if the occult prompting which had dragged him out of his chair on the

Brentwood porch saw to it that he walked upon the strip of matting in the tile-paved corridor and so made his approach noiseless. Also, if the same silent monitor bade him stop short of the governor's office: at the door, namely, of the public anteroom, which stood ajar?

A low murmur of voices came from beyond, and for a moment he paused listening. Then he boldly went within, crossing the anteroom and standing fairly in the broad beam of light pouring through the open door of communication with the private office.

Four men sat in low-toned conference around the governor's writing-table, and if any one of them had looked up the silent witness must have been discovered. Kent marked them down one by one: the governor; Hendricks, the secretary of state; Rumford, the oil man; and Senator Duvall. For five pregnant minutes he stood looking on, almost within arm's reach of the four; hearing distinctly what was said; seeing the papers which changed hands across the table. Then he turned and went away, noiselessly as he had come, the thick-piled carpet of the anteroom muffling his footsteps.

It was midnight when he reached his quarters in the Clarendon and flung himself full length upon the bed, sodden with weariness. For two hours he had tramped the deserted streets, striving in sharp travail of soul to fit the invisible, chance-given weapon to his hand. When he came in the thing was done, and he slept the sleep of an outworn laborer.

CHAPTER XVIII. DOWN, BRUNO!

For six days after the night of revelations Kent dived deep, personally and by paid proxy, in a sea of secrecy which, for the five pregnant minutes in the doorway of the governor's office, might easily have proved fathomsless.

On the seventh day the conflagration broke out. The editor of the Belmont Refiner was the first to smell the smoke and to raise the cry of "Fire!" but by midnight the wires were humming with the news and the entire state was ablaze.

The story as it appeared under the scare headlines the next morning was crisply told. An oil company had been formed with Senator Duvall at its head. After its incorporation it was ascertained that it not only held options on all the most valuable wells in the Belmont region, but that its charter gave it immunity from the laws requiring all corporations to have their organizations, officers, and operating headquarters in the state. By the time the new company was three days old it had quietly taken up its options and was the single big fish in the pool by virtue of its having swallowed all the little ones.

Then came the finishing stroke which had set the wires to humming. On the sixth day it was noised about that Senator Duvall had transferred his controlling interest to Rumford—otherwise to the Universal Oil company; that he had served only as a figurehead in the transaction, using his standing, social and political, to secure the charter which had been denied Rumford and his associates.

It had been managed very skillfully; the capping of the wells by the Universal's agent, the practical sealing up of the entire district, being the first public intimation of the result of Duvall's treachery and the complete triumph of a foreign monopoly.

The storm that swept the state when the facts came out were cyclonic, and it was reported, as it needed to be, that Senator Duvall had disappeared. Never in the history of the state had public feeling risen so high; and there were not lacking those who said that if Duvall showed himself his life would not be safe in the streets of the capital.

It was after the Argus had gone to press on the night of explosions that Editor Hildreth sought and found David Kent in his rooms at the Clarendon, and poured out the vitals of his wrath.

"Say, I'd like to know if you cuc-call this giving me a fair show!" he demanded, flinging into Kent's sitting room and dropping into a chair. "Did I, or did I not understand that I was to have the age on this oil business when there was anything fit to print?"

Kent gave the night editor a cigar and was otherwise exasperatingly perturbable.

"Keep your clothes on, and don't accuse a man of disloyalty until you have all the documents in the case," he said. "I didn't know, until I saw your bulletin a few hours ago, that the thing had been pulled off. In fact, I've been too busy with other things to pay much attention to the Belmont end of it."

"The ded-devil you have!" sputtered Hildreth, chewing savagely on the gift cigar. "I'd like to know what business you had to mix up in other things to the detriment of my news column. You were the one man who knew all about it; or at least you did a week or two ago."

"Yes; but other and more important things have intervened. I have been desperately busy, as I say."

"Well, you've lost your chance to get your grip on the capitol gang, anyway; that is one comfort," growled the editor, getting what consolation he could out of Kent's apparent failure. "They played it too fine for you."

"Did they?" said Kent. "It looks pretty much that way, doesn't it? Duvall is the scapegoat, and the only one. About day after tomorrow Bucks' organ, the Tribune, will come out with an 'inspired' editorial whitewashing the entire capitol outfit. It will show how Rumford's application for the charter was refused, and how a truly good and beneficent state government has been hoodwinked and betrayed by one of its most trusted supporters."

went to get his dressing-gown from the wardrobe in the bedroom. When he came back he said: "Hildreth, you have taken me at my word thus far, and you haven't had occasion to call me either a knave or a fool. Do it a little longer and I'll put you in the way of setting off a set-piece of pyrotechnics that will double discount this mild little snarl-cracker of the Belmont business."

"Can't you do it now?"

"No; the time isn't ripe yet. We must let the Tribune's coat of white-wash dry first."

Hildreth wriggled in his chair. "Kent, if I thought it would do any good, I'd cuc-curse you out; I would for a fact. You are too blamed close-mouthed for any newspaper use."

But Kent only laughed at him. In spite of weariness, Kent was up betimes the next morning. He had a wire appointment with Blasfield Huncnicott and two others in Gaston, and he took an early train to keep it. The ex-local attorney met him at the station with a two-seated rig; and on the way to the western suburbs they picked up Frazee, the county assessor, and Orpton, the appraiser of the Apache Building and Loan association.

"Huncnicott has told you what I am after," said Kent, when the survey party was made up. "We all know the property well enough, but to have it all fair and above board, we'll drive out and look it over so that our knowledge may be said to be fully up to date."

Twenty minutes afterwards the quartet was locating the corner of a square in Gaston's remotest suburb; an "addition" whose only improvements were the weathered and rotting street and lot stakings on the bare, brown plain.

"Lots 1 to 56 in block 10, Guilford & Hawk's addition," said Kent, reading from a memorandum in his notebook. "It lies beautifully, doesn't it?"

"Yes; for a chicken farm," chuckled the assessor.

"Well, give me your candid opinion, you two; what is the property worth?" The Building and Loan man scratched his chin.

"Say \$50 for the plot—if you'll fence it."

"No, put it up. You are having a little boom here now; give it the top boom price, if you like."

The two referees drew apart and laid their heads together.

"As property is going here just now, \$50 for the inside lots, and \$100 apiece for the corners; say three thousand for the plot. And that is just about three times what anybody but a land-crazy idiot would give for it." It was Frazee who announced the decision.

"Thank you both until you are better paid. Now we'll go back to town and you can write me a joint letter stating the fact. If you think it will get you disliked here at home, make the figure higher; make it high enough so that all Gaston will be dead sure to approve."

"You are going to print it?" asked the Building and Loan appraiser.

"I may want to. You may shape it to that end."

"I'll stand by my figures," said Frazee. "It will give me a little chance to get back at the governor. I had it assessed as unimproved suburban property at so much the lot, but he made a kick to the board of equalization and got it put in as unimproved farm land at \$50 an acre." Then, looking at the watch: "We'd better be getting back, if you want to catch the accommodation. Won't you stay over and visit with us?"

"I can't, this time; much obliged," said Kent; and they drove to the Building and Loan office where the joint letter of appraisal was written and signed.

TO BE CONTINUED.

Miscellaneous Reading.

THE TEXAS OIL FIELDS.

Interesting Description of the Great Wells at Humble.

Rock Hill Herald: When I visited the Humble oil field I promised myself that I would not say much about it to my friends for two reasons. First, because I knew it would be impossible for me to give them any adequate idea of what I saw, and second, I knew if I could it would sadly impair my reputation for veracity—I have learned long ago that if a man wants to establish and sustain a reputation for truthfulness he must not only tell the truth but a reasonable truth. However, in a moment of enthusiasm and in a burst of confidence I did say something about it to a group of friends, and the next thing I knew I had promised the editor to write him an article, but with the understanding that I was to assume none of the responsibility if the veracity of the said article is called into question.

Humble is seventeen miles north of Houston, Tex., in a part of the state that is perfectly flat and slightly boggy. On Tuesday morning, April 18th, at 6 o'clock, Capt. D. D. Peden, an old South Carolinian, but now an elder in the First Presbyterian church of Houston, took charge of me and started with me for Humble. At that early hour a train of six coaches was crowded and we could scarcely find a seat. Another train of seven coaches runs at 10 o'clock and they tell me it is always a perfect jam. A little after 7 we stepped off at the Humble railroad station, a mile and a half from the oil field. A unique sight met my eyes. I saw a town which had sprung up almost in a day. On the first of January there were only a few farm cottages in all that country. Now there are four thousand people living at the station and on the field together. The houses are built of newly sawn rough plank standing endwise. They have their hotels, court house, jail, etc., all built of the same material.

We had an excellent breakfast in one of the hotels. Many of the people are living in tents and cooking and eating in the open air. It is no uncommon thing to see a cook stove right out in the open, with a pipe running some ten feet high. The whole place was throbbing with life. Every fellow seemed bent on business. There were the raw-boned Texas ponies with their huge saddles and brawny-looking men, in high boots, galloping here and there on them. There were the fine teams of draft horses and mules pulling their heavy loads of pipes through mud and mire two feet deep. The whole scene struck me as a type of the wild and woolly west.

Mr. J. W. Sullivan, a man with a great big body and a great big heart, and a friend of Capt. Peden's, took charge of us upon our arrival. He knew everything about the place and it seemed to me that he knew everything. He had been there since the first well was sunk. We were soon in a surry with a half-breed Indian for a driver. He had a splendid team and it was well that he did for the roads were terrible. We were soon on the field and it was a wonderful sight.

The oil area is so far confined to a district about two miles long and a mile and a half wide, but the greater majority of the wells are on an area of a half mile square. There are several hundred of these wells. For the beneficiary of those who never saw an oil well I had better describe it briefly. First of all a derrick is built about seventy feet high. It is about 15 or 20 feet square at the bottom and 6 or 8 feet square at the top. This is built to hold the boring machinery and is for raising and lowering the pipe that is put into the well. You can imagine how several hundred of these derricks, built of heavy lumber, would look on a flat surface of land a half mile square. The wells are sunk very much after the fashion of our deep wells that are used to supply the city with water. The pipe they put into them, I should say, is from three to four inches in diameter. They go from 1,050 to 1,150 feet deep before they strike oil. It takes some weeks to sink a well and it costs from four to six thousand dollars per well. Several new wells were being bored while I was there. Of course some of these wells do not strike oil and all the money invested is lost. Some strike salt water and nothing else and that money is lost. All of them strike more or less natural gas at a depth of 800 feet. This gas is often the source of a great deal of annoyance and danger to those sinking the wells. It has destroyed several wells that gave great promise.

A few days before I was there a Mr. Underwood was sinking a well. When he reached about 800 feet the gas began to blow out and sand and mud began to fly as high as the tree tops. The gas became ignited from the fire in the boiler. What followed resembled a small sized volcano. When it was all over the only thing that was left of the well and machinery was a hole in the ground about 25 or 30 feet in diameter. The derrick, the engine, the pumps and the pipes were all many hundreds of feet under ground—no mortal man knows how many.

There is gas mixed with all the oil that comes up. This is separated from the oil by being passed through a peculiar kind of tank. They make use of a great deal of this gas, it is piped to the engines and used for fuel. All the machinery on the field is driven by engines supplied by this gas. But they cannot consume even a small part of it. The rest is piped to a safe distance from the well and set on fire. You will see dozens of these gas pipes with three or four inches in diameter, with three or four inches in diameter, with a flame blazing into the air, that is 25 or 30 feet long. They must make a

beautiful sight at night. But what a fearful waste! However, there is nothing else to do. They cannot preserve it and to let it escape would mean destruction to property and asphyxiation for the workmen. But I have said nothing about the oil itself.

The wells are of two kinds, those that flow and those that have to be pumped. The former are called gushers. The day before I was there they struck oil in a well and it spouted out as high as the tree tops. It was falling near a gas engine and there was danger of a terrible fire. A man ran to shut off the gas, but he was too late, the oil had already ignited. The poor fellow was covered with the burning oil and burned to death on the spot. His hat was still lying there. However, a great fire was averted. Mr. Sullivan showed me several of these gushers that were spouting 7,000 barrels of oil a day. A barrel is forty gallons. Of course they do not all yield that much. Some have a capacity of only a few hundred barrels a day. The first well was sunk January 7th of this year and it was estimated that up to the 15th of April the field had yielded three and a half million barrels. They tell me it is now the greatest oil field in the world.

Perhaps you would like to know what they do with all this oil. Of course they could never get barrels enough to put it in. Indeed I did not see a single barrel. First of all they have a six inch pipe running from Humble to Sabine City on the Gulf of Mexico. It is a distance of about 125 miles. This carries about 12,000 barrels a day. In Sabine it is loaded on board ships. Another six inch pipe line to Sabine is in course of construction and will be completed by the middle of June. The rest of the oil is pumped into great earthen reservoirs that are anywhere from a hundred feet to a hundred yards square and ten to twelve feet deep. There are dozens of these reservoirs. A foot or two of water is pumped into them first so that the oil will not sink into the ground. Then the oil is pumped in. Of course the oil floats on the water. A great deal of oil is soaked up by the sand on the sides of the reservoir and is lost, but they do not seem to mind that, as it is worth only 25 cents a barrel aboard the cars. From the reservoirs run six inch pipe lines to the railroad. Then a six inch pipe elevated some twelve feet runs along the railroad track for hundreds and hundreds of yards. From this pipe tank-line cars are loaded by the hundred. Last month the railroad carried away from the Humble oil field an average of thirteen thousand barrels a day. I forgot also to mention that they have one pipe line going into Houston where the oil that it carries is loaded on cars. I have forgotten how much that carries a day. Some of these cars go eight miles below Houston on the Buffalo Bayou and unload their oil on barges, which carry it to Sabine City on the Gulf.

It may be asked what is finally done with all of this oil. Some of it is refined and used for lighting or lubricating oil. A great deal of it is used in the crude state for fuel by ocean steamers and by railroad engines. The Southern Pacific road, on which I went from New Orleans to Houston, and which goes on to San Francisco, does not use a pound of coal on its passenger or freight engines. They use only oil which costs about 25 cents per barrel. There is no dust, no cinders, and no smoke on this road. They very aptly call it an open window route. The locomotives look very much like those that burn coal, only where we see the coal on the tender they have an oil tank that holds about 3,000 gallons. But this letter is long enough, perhaps too long. I got back to Houston about 12 o'clock with the feeling that I had never had a six hours crowded so full of interest, pleasure and information before. Of course I would never have gotten one tenth of the pleasure and information out of the trip if it had not been for my clever guide, Mr. J. W. Sullivan, and my genial companion, Captain D. D. Peden, a South Carolina gentleman of the old school.

W. L. LINGLE.

Sailor's Story of Andaman Island Marriage.

The day was warm for March. The sailor sat in an ice cream saloon eating ice cream and lady cake.

"The queerest marriage I ever seen, miss," he said, "was in the Andaman Islands. But maybe you ain't interested in marriages?"

He laughed, as men always laugh over his joke, and the pretty waitress permitted herself to smile.

"The islanders in them islands," he said, "is dwarfs. Four feet, on the average. Very fierce and ugly. 'If a young islander wants a girl for his wife he asks her parents for her. They never refuse. They take the girl and hide her in the forest. There the lad must find her before morning. If he finds her she's his. If he don't she ain't.'"

"Of course, I don't need to tell you that if the girl wants the young feller she sees to it that he finds her all right."

"And vice versa. 'Here is how the marriage ceremony is performed. The lad climbs up a slim young tree and the girl climbs up another close to him. Her clothes don't bother her in climbin'—clothes never bother an Andaman islander. Well, up they go, and as they near the top their weight bends the slim trees over toward each other and the lad and the girl's heads touch and the girl's from below a shout goes up, for the head touching has done the business. The ceremony is finished. The young folks' troubles have begun.'—Chicago Chronicle.

BATTLES AND SKIRMISHES

In South Carolina During the Revolutionary War's Struggle.

From Moore's Life of Lacey: June 28, 1778.—Battle of Fort Moultrie. Commanders, Colonel Moultrie and Sir Peter Parker.

Feb. 3, 1779.—Battle of Port Royal. Col. Moultrie defeated Maj. Gardner.

June 30, 1779.—Battle of Stone Ferry. Moultrie and Prevost.

April 14, 1780.—Battle of Monck's Corner. General Huger defeated by Colonel Tarleton.

April 1, 1780.—Battle of Brandon's Defeat, Union District. Colonel Brandon defeated by the Tories.

May 6, 1780.—Battle of Lanier's Ferry. Santee, White and Tatoul.

May 12, 1780.—Battle of Great Savannah, near Nelson's Ferry. Marion recaptured 150 Continentals.

September 1, 1780.—Battle of Stallions, York District. Brandon and the Tories. Love's sister killed.

September 21, 1780.—Battle of Wauhatchie, Lancaster District. Major Dade defeats the Tories.

September 25, 1780.—Battle of Bigger's Ferry. Sumter and Rawdon.

October 7, 1780.—Battle of King's Mountain. Campbell and Ferguson.

October 25, 1780.—Battle of Tarotte Swamp. Wm. Sumter's district. Marion and Tyne.

October 17, 1780.—Battle of White's Bridge, near Georgetown. Gilbert Marion defeated Metton and Baresfield.

November 11, 1780.—Battle of Fish Dam Ford. Sumter and Wemyss.

November 20, 1780.—Battle of Blackstock. Sumter and Tarleton.

Dec. 3, 1780.—Greene takes the command of Southern Army.

December 4, 1780.—Battle of Ryeley Mills. Colonels Washington and Rugeley.

January 17, 1781.—Battle of the Cowpens. Morgan and Tarleton.

January 29, 1781.—Battle at Georgetown. Marion and Campbell. Success incomplete.

Battle of Socaste Swamp. Horry and Campbell.

February 19, 1781.—Battle of Friday's Fort. Sumter and Marion.

Battle of White's Bridge, near Sampt. Horry and Galney.

March 1, 1781.—Battle of Wiboow Swamp. Marion and Watson.

March 2, 1781.—Battle of Mount Hope. Marion and Watson.

March 3, 1781.—Battle of Big Savannah. Sumter and Marion.

March 17, 1781.—Battle of Black River Bridge, below Kingstree. Marion and Watson.

March 6, 1781.—Battle of Scape Hoar, near Ratcliffe Bridge. Sumter and Fraser.

March 10, 1781.—Battle of Sampt Bridge, near Georgetown. Marion and Watson.

April 12, 1781.—Battle of Balfour, on the Pocolago. Colonel Harden and

April 22nd or 23d, 1781.—Battle of Fort Watson, near the Mackay.

April 25, 1781.—Battle of Hobkirk Hill. Greene and Rawdon.

May 11, 1781.—Battle of Orangeburg. Sumter takes that post.

May 17, 1781.—Battle of Fort Mott. Marion and McPherson.

May 14, 1781.—Battle of Nelson's Ferry. Horry and Marion.

May 15, 1781.—Battle of Fort Granby. Lee and Maxwell.

May 21, 1781.—Battle of Fort Galphin, Silver Bluff. Lee and

From 22 of May to the 18th of June, 1781.—Siege of Ninety-Six. Greene and Cruger.

June 6, 1781.—Battle of Georgetown, Winyah Bay. Marion takes Georgetown.

July 1, 1781.—Battle of Congaree Ford. Lee and Rawdon.

July 16, 1781.—Battle of Waxbo.

August 19, 1781.—Battle of Quinby's Bridge, near Biggin Church. Sumter and Coates.

August 25, 1781.—Battle of Waxbo. Marion and Fraser.

August 30, 1780.—Battle of Parker's Ferry. Marion and Fraser.

September 8, 1781.—Battle of Eutaw. Greene and Stewart.

September 10, 1781.—Battle of Black Mingo. Marion and

November 1, 1781.—Battle of Hay's Station. Marion's district. Hay and Bill Cunningham.

1781.—Battle of Strawberry Ferry. Wade Hampton and

January 22, 1782.—Near Monck's Corner. Sumter took forty prisoners and fourteen wagon loads of goods.

August 26, 1782.—Battle of Combhee. Laurens fell.

1782.—Battle of Wombaw, St. Thomas. Marion and

September 10, 1782.—Battle of John's Island. Colonel Wilmot, last man killed in the Revolution, and Lieut. Moore wounded.

Battles—Dates Unknown.

Battle of Telerping.

Battle of Cloud Creek.