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Dunns Rock Lodge No. 267



A. F. & A. M.

Meets Friday on or before the full moon in each month, at 2 p. m. Visiting Masons are cordially invited

to meet with us, sptly W. M. MAXWELL, Sec'y.

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I. O. O. F.

Meets every Monday night at 8 o'clock. Visiting brothers are cordially invited to visit us.

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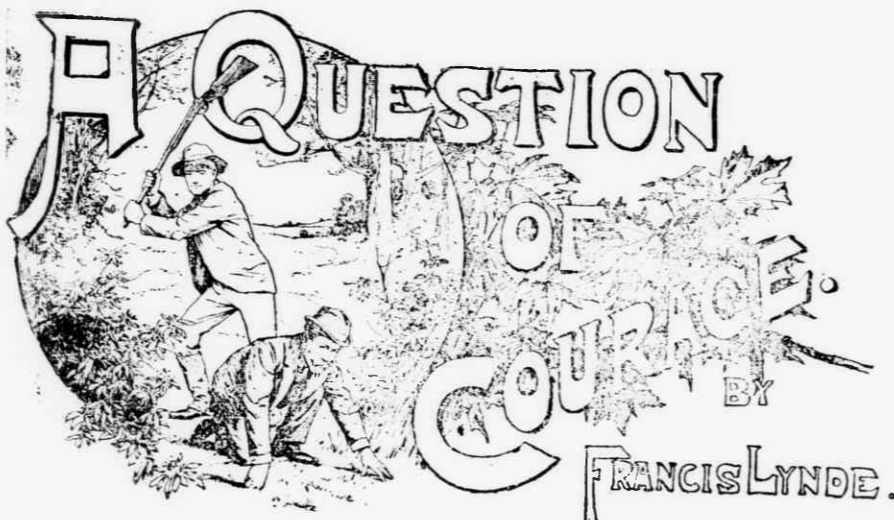
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I.

A VACATION VAGARY.

"Whatever brought you to Tregarthen, Mr. Ringbrand? It seems to me to be the last place in the world where an author could hope to find material."

"Who has been accusing me of any such intention, Mrs. Ludlow?"

"Why, an accusation isn't necessary; everyone knows that when an author can be induced to exchange the literary atmosphere of his respected Boston, or his beloved New York, for the prosaic surroundings of a dingy little coal-mining village in the Tennessee mountains, there must be a stronger motive than a mere sight-seer's curiosity."

"Perhaps you are right. And yet I think you are a little severe; if one were seeking inspiration, what could be more uplifting than that?"—waving his hand with a comprehensive gesture toward the moonlit picture of valley and mountain framed by the pillars of the veranda. "But I assure you, as I said a moment ago, I couldn't give a sensible reason for coming here—inasmuch as I did not know that you were hibernating in Tregarthen. I'm not sure which was the more surprised when we met this morning, Ludlow or myself. I had lost track of you years ago."

"But we hadn't of you—thanks to the magazines. And that brings me back; what can you find worth studying here?"

Ringbrand laughed. "You positively refuse to be diverted, don't you? Perhaps I couldn't find anything, but from the little I've seen of place and people I should say there was a perfect mine of story-telling material if one would take the trouble to develop it."

"I can't see where you would find it."

"That's because you live here; you're unable to get the perspective of unfamiliarity on the quaintness of the people or the beauty of the scenery. The things that are curious and interesting to a newcomer are commonplace to you, because you see them every day."

"I'm sure it's very nice of you to put it in that way; one likes to be told that one comes short of genius only in unfamiliarity. But you haven't told me yet why you came to Tregarthen."

"Mrs. Ludlow, you're positively incorrigible. I assure you I left New York a week ago with only one clearly-defined idea; that was that I was over-worked and weary and needed a vacation. Everybody goes to Europe and to the resorts in summer, and I wanted to get away from the crowd; if you please, you may call that a reason for my coming south. My ticket ran out at Nashville, but the quiet of your beautiful capital city didn't compensate for the unspeakable heat, so I took to the road again, with Asheville for a destination."

"That's all beautifully clear and reasonable up to a certain point, Mr. Ringbrand. Now, if you will only tell me what possessed you to leave your comfortable parlor car to come away up here on a coal train, I'll be satisfied."

The shadow on the veranda prevented the lady from seeing the look of embarrassment that flitted across the face of her visitor, and his hesitation in replying was fortunately covered by the entrance of his host. "Sit down here, Mrs. Ludlow," he said; "Mrs. Ludlow has been in the confessional for the last half hour, and I was just upon the point of concocting a pure fabrication to account for my being in Tregarthen. Can't you explain to her that a man may sometimes do unaccountable things?"

"One would think an explanation wouldn't be necessary," replied Ludlow, cynically, tossing his hat into the hall and drawing up a chair. "Let's see, how long have we been married, Helen?"

"Long enough to make me very curious and inquisitive, as Mr. Ringbrand is just finding out. He confesses that he didn't know we were here, and he can't give any plausible reason for giving up his trip to Asheville."

"I'm not surprised; if the Tregarthen Coal & Iron company could get along without a superintendent for a month or such matter, I believe I'd go off and do something unaccountable myself; it's a part of my creed that a man should be totally irresponsible on a vacation. But see here, Ringbrand, if you're going to stay in Tregarthen you've got to come to us; I'm not going to have you put up at that miserable excuse for a hotel down in the village. You'll die of dyspepsia in a week."

"You are Good Samaritans," replied Ringbrand, laughing; "I've got it already—dyspepsia, I mean. Why, Mrs. Ludlow, you've no conception of what they've been making me eat down there! For breakfast I had salt bacon, biscuits and potatoes; for dinner there were potatoes, biscuits and salt bacon; and for supper they varied the bill of fare by leaving out the potatoes. And the biscuits—upon my soul, you never saw anything like them in your life!"

"Oh, yes, I have," responded the lady, cheerfully; "let me describe them; they were about half an inch thick, and when you took one between your thumb and finger, so, you could press the grease out of the edge. But didn't they give you any coffee?"

"I think not; I certainly had some thing to drink, but I'm quite positive

it wasn't coffee. Indeed, now that you mention it, I remember having made a note of it with the intention of asking the landlady to define it for me."

"I don't know what we've been thinking of, to let you stay there at all," interposed Ludlow. "If you'll excuse us for a few minutes, my dear, we'll just step down and get Ringbrand's luggage to-night—I suppose you travel in a grip, don't you, Hugh?"

"Yes, or at least in two of them; they're not heavy, though."

Two days earlier, while his train was stopping at Chilwance Junction to transfer passengers to the Harmony Valley branch, Hugh Ringbrand had seen a girl descend from the through train and cross the platform to the accommodation. She was strikingly beautiful, after a type quite unfamiliar to the student; and the passing glimpse he had of her face made him wish that he might study it at leisure. It suddenly occurred to him that there was nothing in his purposeless plans to prevent it; and he hastily transferred himself and his belongings to a seat in the other train, whence he could continue his observations. The study once begun, the beauty of her face grew upon him, pushing him swiftly to the conclusion that nothing short of acquaintance would enable him to complete his character-sketch; and, not being a commercial traveler, the simpler method of obtaining the desired degree of intimacy did not suggest itself. On the contrary, he could think of no better expedient than to leave the train at the young lady's destination, trusting to the chapter of accidents for further help. The absurdity of this hastily-approved design appealed to his sense of humor when the conductor asked for his fare and he was unable to tell the official where he wanted to go.

"I have no ticket," he said, "but I will pay to the end of the line. How much is it?"

"To Kingville, sah?"

"Yes, that's the place—Kingville. It's singular how these names escape one, isn't it?"

"Oh, I dunno," replied the man; "I forget sometimes, m'self. Two dollars and forty cents. There's your change."

The accommodation was a mixed train of empty coal and iron cars towing a single passenger coach; and on its slow progress up the valley Ringbrand had ample opportunity to analyze his subject so far as simple observation would serve him. Before they reached Tregarthen he had a fair mental picture of the oval face lighted by eyes of

a dusky hue rarely seen in the Anglo-Saxon types; and he had even gone so far as to try to transfer it from his mental camera to a leaf of his note-book. The pencil-picture was fairly good, from a technical point of view, but when he saw how the black-and-white suggestion failed to give even a hint of the transparency of her complexion, or of the changeful expression that came and went on her face as she turned the leaves of her book, he tore it up and dropped the fragments out of the window. The book suggested an idea, and he got up and walked down the aisle, catching the title in passing. "St. Elmo," he mused; "that's healthy, but it's no indication of character; I suppose every young woman reads Miss Evans. She's reading intelligently, though; anyone can see that; she doesn't look as if she'd be guilty of skimming. How the mischief am I ever to find out who she is? Hello! she's putting the book away; this must be her stopping-place."

The train was slowing into Tregarthen, and Ringbrand got his luggage ready for a strategic pursuit. It was quite dark by this time, and he did not mean to lose sight of her until he was quite sure of her destination. When the train stopped she tripped lightly up the aisle, and Ringbrand followed, reaching the car door in time to see the conductor help her down the steps; but when he attempted to get off, the man

"Hold on," he exclaimed; "this ain't your town; we ain't half way there yet."

"That's all right. I want to stop here. I've changed my mind," protested Ringbrand, trying to get past him.

"Well, jest hold on a minute; don't be in such a turrible rush; I collected your fare to Kingville, an' I've got too much of your money."

"Hang your fare! I don't want it. Let me get off."

"All right, cap'n; jest as you say," replied the over-zealous conductor, swinging Ringbrand's valise to the platform. "There you are, right side up with care."

As he had feared, the slight delay lost him his opportunity; when his glance searched the small platform, his traveling companion had disappeared, and he was not the man to make hap-hazard inquiries about her of the struggling baggage men at the station. When the train had departed, he saw the glare of an iron furnace a short distance farther up the track, and the twinkling lights of a town on the hillside above the station. While he was wondering if there

was a hotel, a decrepit old negro hobbled up to him, hat in hand.

"Cyar' yo' baggage up to de hotel sah? Yes, sah; t'ank yo', sah. Right long dish yere way, sah."

"Got a good hotel here, an' de?" inquired Ringbrand, as they toiled up the steep hillside.

"Right sma't good hotel, sah; yes, sah; t'ank yo', sah. It's de one what Gin'ral Jackson yoasted to top at when he's gwine to Washin'ton, fo' de war."

Ringbrand had not been long enough in east Tennessee to know that every hostelry within 100 miles of the crossing of the Clinch river made a similar claim, but the conceit struck him as being a quaint one, and it occurred to him that the ancient negro was probably an old resident and therefore acquainted with most of the families in the neighborhood.

"Did you see Miss—Miss—Montague get off the train just now, an' de?" he inquired, nonchalantly, hazarding a guess at the name in the hope that his guide would correct him.

"Who, me? No, sah; t'ank yo', sah. I doesn't know any lady o' dat name, sah. Didn't see no lady git off de train; no, sah."

That grapping hook having come up empty, Ringbrand was compelled to await further developments; and as he smoked his after-supper cigar in the dingy little office of the hotel, he tried to convince himself that the present adventure was only another example of the persistent obstinacy with which he had pursued other quests in the study of his art. The effort may have been wholly successful, but the conclusion did not enable him to finish the picture of the girl's face, which haunted him even after he had gone to sleep amid the dismal furnishings of Gen. Jackson's room.

The following morning he was fortunate enough to stumble upon Ludlow, who was an old friend and one of his college classmates. The meeting afforded the plainest possible solution of the author's problem, but he seemed somehow quite unable to frame the simple inquiries which would have

solved it. He reasoned that Ludlow would misunderstand his motives; that he would be accused of falling in love with a pretty face; that if it would be indelicate to question strangers about the girl's identity, it would be impertinence to ask his friend. So it happened that two days slipped by without bringing him any nearer to the object of his visit to Tregarthen, and he was beginning to hold himself in derision, when a lucky chance brought him the opportunity for which he was waiting. It was on the day following his installation at Ludlow's, and he was return-



"Cyar' yo' baggage up to de hotel, sah?"

ing from a visit to the furnace with his host. They stepped aside at a narrow place in the hill side road to let a buggy pass. Ringbrand lifted his hat in deference to his friend's salutation to the occupants of the vehicle, and nearly let it fall when he realized that he was face to face with the object of his search.

"Who are they?" he asked, as soon as they had driven on.

"That's Col. Latimer and his daughter Hester," replied Ludlow. "By the way, if you want to make character studies, there's a good chance for you. The colonel's an old-time southern gentleman of the school that you authors are always attempting to portray and can't. Here's the opportunity of your life to get a picture that'll be as good as a photograph."

"I should be delighted to improve it," responded Ringbrand; "can you suggest the means?"

"Nothing easier; though I fancy it'll be to our detriment. The colonel's one of our directors, and he was the original owner of the Tregarthen coal lands; his hospitality is as wide as the heavens. If I introduce you he'll be carrying you off to 'The Laurels,' and we'll lose you."

"Don't be too sure of that; I'm pretty comfortable where I am. But I should like to make the colonel's acquaintance. Where is 'The Laurels'?"

"It's up on the mountain, just where you see that clear space beyond the mine-opening. It's an old-fashioned Tennessee home—wide verandas, big rooms, Japanese floor-cases, and all that. You could get a lot of good material out of the place—not to mention the colonel and his son and Miss Hester."

"Yes, I suppose I could; but Ludlow, be a good fellow, now, and drop the idea that I'm an uneducated interloper, going about with a Paul Pry nose and a reporter's note-book. Don't you see that a hint of such a thing would be likely to prejudice her from the start?"

"Prejudice whom? Miss Hester? What's she got to do with it?"

"Why, nothing, of course—that is, nothing that I—that she—hang it all, Ludlow, I believe I'm about to make a fool of myself!"

Ludlow stopped and gazed in open-mouthed wonder at his friend. "Well, I'm blest if you don't break the record, Hugh! I thought it struck me pretty suddenly, but phaw! my case wasn't a circumstance to this. I've heard of love at first sight, but this is the instantaneous photograph kind. Why, you couldn't have got more than a glimpse of her as they passed us!"

"I—we—that is to say—I've seen her before," stammered Ringbrand.

"Oh! now I begin to understand; that's what brought you to Tregarthen. I thought Helen's prophetic soul didn't mislead her. Well, tell me the rest of it; I've got your fate in my hand, and you might as well make an ally of me as the snail."

Ringbrand told his small story frankly, concluding with a plea for privacy. "I'd rather you wouldn't tell even Mrs. (Continued on page 8.)"