

The Girdle of the Great

A STORY OF THE NEW SOUTH

By John Jordan Douglass

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CHAPTER XVII.

The Silent Struggle.

Major Graves' letter came duly to Mr. MacDonald's hands for the reason that all Maxine's letters passed through that icy channel, the banker esteeming it an essential part and prerogative of guardianship to exercise this espionage upon his ward's correspondence.

For some reason—perhaps because it bore the railway postmark—Mr. MacDonald carefully (he regretted that he could not do it coldly) heated a small thin paper-knife and inserted it beneath the sealed side of the envelope. Then he removed the letter, softly dropping down his window shades, and lighting a tiny brass lamp, slowly read the Major's message.

"Um-huh," he exclaimed at length, pressing his long white fingers upon his lower lip, "I thought so. I'm not much of a believer in miracles. I knew that girl had a hand in it. In love with that lanky, bankrupt Watkins boy, eh? I must look into that matter. With us MacDonalds money must marry money—the chink and the chink must meet—when it marries at all."

Then he carefully replaced the letter, and resealed the envelope so perfectly that only an expert could have told that it had been tampered with. Mr. MacDonald had long studied the art of covering up his tracks, and prided himself upon his cunning.

Suddenly the chink of silver reached his ear, and he smiled gleefully. It was the voice of his sheep.

He leaved to hear them come tinkling home from the pastures. He loved to see the pale cashier herd them in shining herds.

He arose, opened his private door, and went into the bank-enclosure. Sinking into a chair, he sat studying the cashier's face while he bent over a book. It was an honest face, clear-cut, conscientious. The mouth was firm. There was no shifty light in the deep set eyes; it gleamed steady and clear upon the ledger, revealing only what was right and fair. It dawned upon Mr. MacDonald, as he sat watching the cashier, that he was not the man for his future necessity.

"I must discharge that incompetent," thought the banker, seeking to compromise with his conscience, "and install Gabriel Allen. It is a part of my program—he smacked his lips as if he had just eaten a broiled quab—"an essential part of my program."

Next day, being the last of the month and the only of the year, the cashier was discharged on the ground of incompetency. The poor fellow had a large family dependent upon him and was reduced almost to the point of despair, but Mr. MacDonald had said "Business was Business," and he was forced to go.

Gabriel, who had given up his course at college, was duly installed as cashier. Despite the constant miscarriage of his plans, he entered the bank with a decided thrill of triumph. With the shrewd banker on his side, he would ultimately win Maxine.

Having made that conquest, his happiness would be complete. Not the least enjoyable of victories, however great, would be the defeat of his hated rival, Jerome Watkins.

The doctor's heart, too, was athrob with newborn hope. He would tighten his clutches upon the banker and slowly draw him in. A little bait was all that remained needful.

The doctor, therefore, soon made an unusually large deposit at which the banker smiled broadly and benignly.

One morning, shortly after Gabriel had taken charge, Mr. MacDonald called Maxine into his study, and indicated a chair near his side.

"Sit down a moment, Maxy, dear," he said, cordially. "I have something to say to you." She silently obeyed. "You must be quite lonely here," he ran on stately, "and company—good company—would be very desirable, very delightful. I should not be willing, however, for certain young men to call. For instance, I should very seriously object to—um—at—Jerome Watkins."

"But I have learned that my cashier, Gabriel Allen, has most admirable traits. He has the most decided talent for money making."

to me that he shall not visit my house. But be careful to show Gabriel Allen the utmost courtesy. Try to love him for money's sake. A slight to him shall be considered a slight to me. Am I quite clear?"

"Quite clear, uncle," she replied. "I shall try to treat all your guests with courtesy and respect—till they forfeit the right to such treatment. But as for my affections—even though they be as fragile as roses—why, they are my own to give and refuse."

A bright red spot—a torch of battle—burned either of her fair cheeks into flaming color.

And suddenly recalling that her mother had been, when fully aroused, a matchless mistress of tongue play, the banker wisely dismissed Maxine from his presence.

"Oh, well, just treat Gabriel respectfully for my sake, Maxy," he called conciliatingly as she closed the door.

"Alright, sir, for your sake," she replied.

Maxine went immediately to her room. The interview with her uncle had really impressed her more forcibly than she dared to betray.

All her property was in the banker's hands, and there were always legal loopholes through which the cunning financial fox might slip when hard pressed. She was neither purse-proud nor penurious, but she could no more help being her father's daughter than he could help being his father's son.

The thought of being disinherited by the man who held all of her property was decidedly unpleasant. The elder MacDonald—her father—would have found it so. Money seemed a useless encumbrance till it was on the point of taking its leave. Then it seemed at least a necessary evil.

None of the MacDonalds had ever bade a shining, ground-faced dollar good-bye without the sharpest sting of regret.

But, on the other hand, rose the heritage of the Edinburgh Scholar, and the learning of her forebears towards aestheticism. Somehow in the conflict which rose spontaneously in her soul, these latter stood together allied against the avarice with which neither of them possessed in common.

On rushed the hostile forces, the cannon-wheels of Commercialism grinding into the soft soil of sentiment; the recruits of Aestheticism led by the burning light of the Ancient Scholar. There in her heart they gripped and clung and fought hand in hand. Now the shining lances of Commercialism poised and pierced and drove back the allies.

But ever, when the battle seemed lost by the allies, the light of the ancient scholar would burst through the billowing blackness—a beam too bright to be withstood, burning success from the grip of Defeat.

Again and again the mailed host of the Money-King rushed to the front. Again and again they were repulsed.

The battle ground reeled and rocked beneath their silvery feet. Like Magic they recovered their strength and re-asserted their right. Here gleamed the golden shield of Penuriousness; there a diamond-tipped dagger of shrewd dealing. The victory seemed theirs.

They were strong with the greed of the generations. From miserly old Malcolm MacDonald, clutching his sordid siller on the Scottish highland, down to the girl's father, they were a host to be reckoned with.

In one point only was the line broken; the Ancient Scholar, who had harked back somewhere (mayhap to some studious monk with whom the bonds of marriage had been stronger than the bans of church) left that glaring gap. He, too, was to be reckoned with. And the man who has burned out his life for an ideal, however humble, leaves no easily erasible trace in his blood.

Riverwood and Rocky Heights was exquisitely beautiful.

On a hillside overlooking the river, Jerome and old Sam were plowing. Fired by the fever of education, Ben, old Sam's second son, had bundled up and hustled off to a negro industrial school.

Thus a double burden came to Jerome's shoulders. The farm work had to be done, and in his straightened circumstances the Colonel was unable to employ extra labor.

But to stave continually to this tiresome toil, Jerome, too, had passed through a silent struggle, not with Commercialism, but with passionate pride which had been in the blood of the Watkinses since the days of William the Conqueror.

A firm believer in the ideals and aspirations of the New South, loving the soil of his native state, thrilled by its traditions and touched by the deep paths of its dark literature, he was nevertheless appalled by the mental labor to which he—a representative of the New South—had been reduced. Yet he recognized that this was the only possible, indeed, through which he himself had chosen to pass.

But, however strong his determination, and however clearly he might foresee his reward in the ultimate issue, there was still in his constitution the latent germ of chivalry, which could scarcely be warring charges of the sixteenth century, and the shining coach of the old regime, supplanted by a trace-worn plow-horse, without a pang of wounded pride.

Was the result worth the effort? Did the mountains appear grander because one had climbed too slowly to conceive their height? Was it necessary for the young eaglet to live in a little barnyard with vaunting fowls in order to require strength of wing?

Jerome could no more have accepted his laborer's lot without a struggle than one of his forebears could have ridden a mule at tourney without swearing.

The love of the soil—the feudal baron's love—he had indeed, that was deeply implanted in his nature; it was a part of his heritage.

He loved the virgin beauty of the land; with childlike joy he watched it blossom into harvest; he was awed by the profound mystery of the seasons which shrouded it into snow or smiled it into warmth and beauty.

But hitherto he had loved and watched and been awed as one apart, like the traveler who gazes wonder-eyed upon the stupendous structure of Cheops, or the geysers hung silver-scangled between earth and sky—miracles of stone and steam; henceforth he was to be vitally and keenly a part of the highest, even when his feet pressed the lowest strata of honest labor. There would he find his strength; there would he come to see that the highest type of citizenship is to be found, not in mental monstrosity, nor in perfection of brute strength, but in well-rounded manhood. He might have studied text books while he plowed—

as he did study the great earth-book underscoring it with his plow—(noble men—the primitive giants—had done that)—but somehow he had conscientious scruples on that point. He held that a man's first duty was to the working hand, however lowly; that the flower of his strength should be given to his vocation, however humble, in his opinion, no man had ever studied astronomy and at the same time run a straight furrow. His idea of labor was an X-Ray; a consuming concentration.

In other words, he was a firm believer in the maxim that whatever was worth doing was worth doing well. He plunged in the day and studied at night.

(To be Continued Tomorrow.)

Bryan Visits Michigan
Detroit, Mich., April 15.—William J. Bryan arrived in Michigan today for a two days' visit. He is to deliver a series of political speeches and at the same time is expected to pour oil on the troubled waters of the Michigan democracy.

For a long time past a movement approaching a revolt has been hatching for the avowed purpose of ousting Daniel J. Campau from his seat as national committeeman. The movement has become so strong as to threaten a serious disaffection among the democrats throughout the state, and it is believed that it is the chief purpose of Mr. Bryan's present visit to settle the factional differences.

After appearing in Grand Rapids, Lansing and Jackson, the Nebraska leader is due to arrive in this city in time to address a mass meeting tomorrow night.

"Night Riders" burned tobacco barns and salted tobacco beds belonging to Lee Lawrence, in Boyle County, Ky., causing \$5000 loss.

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\$57.50 Suit Silk Damask for. \$35.00	\$8.00 Oak Early English Int. Leather Cushions for. \$6.00	\$35.00 Int. Mahg. Frame, extra heavy, Plain Top Leather, for. \$26.50
\$45.00 Suit Silk Damask for. \$26.00	\$11.00 Oak or Int. Mah. Velour Cushions for. \$8.00	\$46.75 Golden Oak Frame, best Tufted Leather for. \$35.00
\$45.00 Suit Leather for. \$30.00	\$12.00 Oak Early English, Velour Cushions for. \$8.75	\$47.50 Golden Oak Frame, best Tufted Leather for. \$35.00
\$20.00 Suit Silk Plush Loose Cushions for. \$21.50	\$14.50 Oak, Velour Cushions, for. \$10.75	\$55.00 Mahg. Frame, Hair Top, best Tufted Leather, for. \$40.00
\$26.50 Suit Silk Plush Loose Cushions for. \$18.75	\$22.50 Oak, best Leather Cushions for. \$16.00	\$57.50 Mahg. Frame, Hair Top, best Tufted Leather, for. \$45.00
	\$23.50 Oak, best Leather Cushions for. \$16.75	\$11.00 Golden Oak Frame, Plain Top, Velour Cover, for. \$8.50
		\$16.50 Golden Oak Frame, Plain Top, Roll Edges, Velour Cover, for. \$11.00
		\$21.50 Golden Oak Frame, Plain Top, Roll Edge, Velour Cover, for. \$15.00
		\$11.00 Box Couch, with self-lifting spring Denim Cover, for. \$7.50

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