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THE HARSH TREATMENT OF CICERO TRUBY

(Written for THE OUTLOOK.)

[CONCLUDED.]

"Mawnin', Mars Julius! How's yore health, an' how's yore fambly? I hope you-uns is right peart dis mawnin'."

The old man bowed very low, and then, putting his head on one side with an ingratiating grin, advanced toward Mickle holding out a long envelope, once white, but now very grimy with handling.

"What's this?" asked the lawyer, eyeing both the envelope and its bearer with extreme disfavor, and making no motion toward taking what Cicero offered him. "What are you trying to impose on the long suffering public with now, you old hypocrite? Some sort of a subscription paper, I'll be bound. But 'taint any good coming here with it. I've got other use for my money than supporting you and your family in idleness. Just you go to work old man. You'll find it easier in the long run than totin' these subscription papers 'round."

"B-b-but, Mars Julius," stuttered Cicero, in his eagerness to set himself right, "you-uns is mistaken. Dis yere aint no 'scription paper. De ole man aint tryin' to 'pose on nobuddy nor nuffin. Jest you look at de dockymunts what's inside dis yere en'lope, an' den you'll feel right down sorry dat you spoke so ha'sh to ole uncle Cicero. 'Deed you will, sah."

Yielding to the old man's importunity, and being, indeed, somewhat stirred to curiosity by his air of mystery and importance, Mickle took the dirty envelope rather gingerly, and proceeded to acquaint himself with its contents.

He was so long in doing this, and was so utterly oblivious of Cicero Truby all the while, that the latter gentleman became very uneasy. He coughed slightly from time to time, ducked his head, rolled his eyes, grinned, sniggered, scraped with his feet, dropped his hat and, in getting down after it, knocked over a tall wooden stool, which fell with a tremendous clatter. But still the lawyer did not look up from the papers he was reading through so carefully.

At length Cicero could stand it no longer. He must talk or burst.

"I war jist gwine to obsarve, Mars Julius, how restraordinary hit war dat I met up wid dat yere en'lope," said he in a wheedling tone.

The lawyer looked up from his reading and replied with significant emphasis: "Yes, Cicero, you have a great reputation for finding things in a peculiar way. You found these papers, I reckon, about two months ago, and now I'd like to know where you found 'em and what you've been doing with 'em all the time."

"For de Lawd's sake, Mars Julius, don't go an' 'spicion nothin' 'gainst Cicero befo' he hab time to 'splain hisself. I'll jist expound to you torrectly how dat vere en'lope never git hyar befo' dis."

"Very well, Cicero, go a-head with your explanatory remarks and don't lie, if you can help it."

"Wall, you see, Mars Julius, 't war all erlong ob dis yere ole coat dat I'se got on. Dis coat uster b'long to Mr. Dewey, an' he an' I had a promulgation 'bout hit 'way back in las' Jinerwerry, an' he done promise hit to me, ez soon ez he war froo wid hit. But he kep' a wearin' hit, an' a wearin' hit, an' I 'gun to git mighty skeered, I did, for fear he'd jest natchelly wear de coat out. An' besides all dat, I war a needin' hit powerful bad at de same identikeler time. So every now an' den I'd jist 'mind him of his promise, an' he'd say:—'Jest you wait, Cicero, leetle bit longer. Ise 'most ready to shed dis yere gyarment, an' dis yere ole body, too. Shan't hab no use for 'em much mo.' Den he'd look sorter mo'nful an' go off'mutterin' somepin' 'bout dat 'pore foolish boy, Robert.' Wall, things went on 'bout like dat ontwel—"

"Oh, come, come!" exclaimed Mickle, impatiently, "what is the use of all that? Tell me about these papers, if you know anything to tell."

"Just you hole on, Mars Julius. Don't be oneasy, Ise a-comin' to dat. Ez I war sayin',—things went on dat a-way ontwel de fust of April—a week, I reckon, arter ole Mis' Dewey died. I war jist a-passin' one ebenin' 'bout half an hour by sun, when I seed dis yere ole coat a-hangin' on de palin' ob de gyardin' fence back ob Mr. Dewey's house. Hit war on de behine-mos' part ob de gyardin', an' de outside ob de fence."

At this point Mickle stamped his foot and swore with such energy that the old man fell into one of his stuttering fits and could not get on for several minutes. At last he managed to take up his story again where he had been scared out of it.

"Dis yere coat hung on de palin' jist natchelly pintin' right towards my han', an, says I to myself, 'Cicero Truby, you ongrateful ole nigger, whaffur you been thinkin' dat Mr. Dewey warn't gwine to gib you dis yere coat? See dar, now, he 'member how you been axin' for dat coat a heap ob times, an' he think p'raps you'se 'shamed to ax agin. So he jist hung hit on dis yere palin', right where you'd git hit in a kinder modest, easy way widout hurtin' yore pride. Now ain't dat kind? I says to myself, Arter dat good ole man hab tooken all dis yere strubble, you ain't gwine to dis'pint him, is you, Cicero?'"

"But I thought you and old man Dewey had a right smart quarrel last winter."

"Dat are a fact, Mars Julius. He done use some 'spressions to me, sah, dat no gemmun 'ud use to annudder. But when I seed dis yere coat, I jist ferguv him to onct, for I knowed he had 'pented ob his corndue', an war wishin' to pour balm on dis pore wounded heart ob mine."

"More likely he felt like pouring hot

turpentine on your rascally old black pate, Cicero. What are you fooling around this way for, anyhow? Why don't you own up at once that you stole the coat?"

"Stole dat coat? Mars Julius, I is suprised. What kind ob a low-down nigger does you take me to be, sah? To hear you say dat arter I'se been an' tooken you into my cornferunce do hurt my feelin's powerful bad. I ain't never said nothin' like dat to you, now has I? No, sah, I wouldn't use no such onrespecful langwidge to no white man."

"Well well, old man, go on with your story. If you tell me the truth about these papers I won't be hard on you for stealing the coat."

Old Cicero cast a furtive glance at Mickle's impassive countenance, and recognized the fact that his ingenious fiction had been entirely thrown away. He therefore laid aside the air of offended dignity which sat somewhat uneasily upon him, and resumed his wheedling tone.

"He, he, he! Now ain't dat keen ez a briar? Can't no nigger, nor white man needer, fool Mars Julius. I tells my ole woman jist day befo' yistiddy dat Mars Julius Mickle ain't no low-down, oneddicated lawyer. Don't ketch him studyin' no law-books, says I, 'cause he knows what's in 'em all right plum froo frum beginin' to end. Yes, sah, dat's what I tole my ole woman."

Mr. Mickle received this tribute with just the slightest possible smile of gratified vanity, and thus encouraged Cicero went on.

"When I foun' dese papers in de pockit ob dis yere coat, mos' de fust thing I thought ob war to fotch dem right to you, torectly, for I said to myself, dar ain't nobuddy in dis yere kentry dat un'erstan' dockymunts like Mars Julius. But when I done heerd de very nex' mawnin' dat ole man Dewey war daid, I war dat 'stonished I fergit all 'bout de papers an'—what you think? I jist went clar off down to Alabam', a-visitin' my brudder, an' toted dem wid me. Now, ain't dat de mos' fergitfullest you ebber heah tell ob?"

"But what made you bring 'em back at all?"

The old man wagged his head mysteriously, edged a step nearer to the lawyer, and replied:—

"De troof ob de matter am, Mars Julius, dat I ain't had no luck since dese papers come into my persession."

"Why, how is that Cicero?"

"Wall, dis spring I 'lowed dat I'd go into de well-diggin' business, an I done git me a fine win'lass, an' right smart of rope, an' two ob de best dirt buckets you ebber seed. Den I hires me a good strong han' to dig, while I pulls up de bucket an' empties de dirt. What you think? De berry secon' day we war wukkin' dat fool digger-nigger leggo de rope befo' I catch de bucket fair, an' down she go, blim! top ob his head.

Smashed dat nice bucket all to splinters. Den arter dat I cotch de roomatiz an' de misery in my breas', an' de ole woman broke her laig, an' I done los' de bes' shoat I had an'—"

"There, that's enough. Don't tell any more. I reckon you deserved all the bad luck you had. Now, be off with you and take care how you *find* things after this. You won't get off so easy next time."

At the door Cicero turned about and made a grasp at his last straw of hope.

"Reckon you'll git a heap o' money for takin' kyar ob dose paper, Mars Julius," said he insinuatingly.

Mr. Mickle seemed to be absorbed in examining the papers once more.

"Don't you s'pose you could uffo'd to gimme 'bout a quarter for bringin' back—"

"Get out!" said Mickle disgustedly.

Again Robert Dewey sat in his bare little room reading a letter. It was not a beautiful letter to look at. It was badly written and worse spelled. It was worn and soiled from much handling and much jaunting about in Cicero Truby's pocket. But Dewey took no note of these things. His eager eyes were wet with tears and he read as one drinks who has been long denied.

"Poor lonely old man!" he murmured, "and poor mother, too! It never entered my head that they really loved me. If I had known it, perhaps I might somehow have broken down the barrier between us."

"My dear son," the letter said, "I'm afraid your mother and I have made a mistake in the way we tried to bring you up. I should like to make it right, if I could, but I suppose it is too late for that. I leave you what little property there is, and hope it will help to make your life some easier than it has been. When your mother died—it is only about a week ago—she was dreadful set against your havin' it. She said it would only confirm you in your sinful ways. We both agreed to leave it to a college for educating negroes. But now it is borne in on me that we were wrong. It is just as plain to my mind as if your mother had come and told me herself, that she thinks altogether differently now. So I have made a new will, and shall leave it, with this letter, to be delivered to you when I am dead. That will not be very long I guess, for I do not get along well at all without your mother. I hope you will believe, my dear son, that we have loved you all the time, though perhaps we have had a poor way of showing it.

Please excuse all mistakes, and accept best wishes from

Your affectionate father,

JOHN DEWEY."

"Excuse my mistakes, too, dear father and mother, I pray you," said Robert Dewey sadly. "What poor ways we sometimes use of showing that we love each other!"

THE END.