



54-40 OR FIGHT

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SYNOPSIS.

Senator John Calhoun is invited to become secretary of state in Tyler's cabinet. He declines, but if he accepts Texas and Oregon must be added to the Union. He sends his secretary, Nicholas Ritz, to see the Baroness von Ritz, spy of the British ambassador, Pakenham, to call at his apartments. While searching for the baroness's home, a carriage drives up and Nicholas is invited to enter. The occupant is the baroness, and she asks Nicholas to assist in evading pursuers. Nicholas notes that the baroness has lost a slipper. She gives him the remaining slipper as a pledge that she will tell Calhoun what he wants to know regarding England's intentions toward Mexico. As secretary Nicholas gives her a ticket for intended for his sweetheart, Elizabeth Churchill. Calhoun becomes secretary of state. He orders Nicholas to Montreal on state business, and the latter plans to be married that night. The baroness says she will try to prevent the marriage. A drunken congressman whom Nicholas asks to assist in the wedding arrangements sends the baroness's slipper to Elizabeth, by mistake, and the wedding is declared off. Nicholas finds the baroness in Montreal, she having succeeded, where he failed, in discovering England's intention regarding Oregon. She tells him that the slipper he had in his possession contained a note from the attaché of Texas to the British ambassador, saying that if the United States did not annex Texas within 20 days, she would lose both Texas and Oregon. Nicholas meets a naturalist, Von Rittenhofen, who gives him information about Oregon. The baroness and a British warship disappear from Montreal simultaneously. Calhoun orders Nicholas to lead a party of settlers bound for Oregon. Calhoun excites the jealousy of Senator Vicerio and thereby secures the signature of the Texas attaché to a treaty of annexation. Nicholas starts for Oregon. He wins the race over the British ship. A British warship is given with the baroness as a passenger. She tells Nicholas that she played a note in the slipper which caused the breaking off of his marriage, and that she intends to return to Washington to repair the damage she has done. Nicholas decides to follow her.



"Fifty-Four Forty or Fight! That's Us!"

CHAPTER XXX.—Continued.

The captain stood at the head of the front team, his hand resting on the yoke as he leaned against the bowed neck of one of the oxen. The men and women were thin almost as the beasts which dragged the wagons. These latter stood with lolling tongues even thus early in the day, for water hereabout was scarce and bitter to the taste. So, at first almost in silence, we made the salutations of the desert. So, presently, we exchanged the news of east and west.

There is to-day no news of the quality which we then communicated. They knew nothing of Oregon. I knew nothing of the east. A national election had been held, regarding which I knew not even the names of the candidates of either party, not to mention results. All I could do was to guess and to point to the inscription on the white top of the foremost wagon: "Fifty-Four Forty or Fight!"

"Is Polk elected?" I asked the captain of the train.

He nodded. "He shore is," said he. "We're comin' out to take Oregon. What's the news?"

My own grim news was that Oregon was ours and must be ours. I shook hands with a hundred men on that, our hands clasped in stern and silent grip. Then, after a time, I urged other questions foremost in my own mind. Had they seen a small party east-bound?

Yes, I had answer. They had passed this light outfit east of Bridger's post. There was one chance in a hundred they might get over the South pass that fall, for they were traveling light and fast, with good animals, and old Joe Meek was sure he would make it through. The women? Well, one was a preacher's wife, another an old Gypsy, and another the most beautiful woman ever seen on the trail or anywhere else.

Then they began to question me regarding Oregon. How was the land? Would it raise wheat and corn and hogs? How was the weather? Was there much game? Would it take much labor to clear a farm?

Of course it came to politics. Yes, Texas had been annexed, somehow, not by regular vote of the senate. There was some hitch about that. My leader reckoned there was no regular treaty. It had just been done by joint resolution of the house—done by Tyler and Calhoun, just in time to take the feather out of old Polk's cap! The treaty of annexation—why, yes, it was ratified by congress, and everything signed up March 3, just one day before Polk's inaugural! Polk was on the warpath, according to my gaunt leader. There was going to be war as sure as shooting, unless we got all of Oregon.

"Do you see that writin' on my wagon top?" asked the captain. "Fifty-Four Forty or Fight. That's us!"

And so they went on to tell us how this cry was spreading, south and west, and over the north as well; although the Whigs did not dare cry it quite so loudly.

And so at last we parted, each the better for the information gained, each to resume what would to-day seem practically an endless journey. Our farewells were as careless, as confident, as had been our greetings. Thousands of miles of unsettled country lay east and west of us, and all around us, our empire, not then won.

I made the journey across the South pass, the snow being now beaten down on the trails more than usual by the west-bound animals and vehicles. Of all these now coming on, none would get farther west than Fort Hall that

year. Our own party, although over the Rockies, had yet the plains to cross. I was glad enough when we staggered into old Fort Laramie in the midst of a blinding snowstorm. Winter had caught us fair and full. I had lost the race!

Here, then, I must winter. Yet I learned that Joe Meek had outfitted at Laramie almost a month earlier, with new animals; had bought a little grain, and, under escort of a cavalry troop which had come west with the wagon train, had started east in time, perhaps, to make it through to the Missouri. In a race of 1,000 miles, the baroness had already beaten me almost by a month! Further word was, of course, now unobtainable, for no trains or wagons would come west so late, and there were then no stages carrying mail across the great plains. There was nothing for me to do except to wait and eat out my heart at old Fort Laramie, in the society of Indians and trappers, half-breeds and traders. The winter seemed years in length, so gladly I make its story brief.

It was now the spring of 1846, and I was in my second year away from Washington. Glad enough I was when in the first sunshine of spring I started east, taking my chances of getting over the plains. At last, to make the long journey also brief, I did reach Fort Leavenworth, by this time a five months' loser in the transcontinental race.

As to the baroness, she had long since left Fort Leavenworth for the east. I followed still with what speed I could employ. I could not reach Washington now until long after the first buds would be out and the croppers growing green on the gallery of Mr. Calhoun's residence. Yes, green also on all the lattices of Elmhurst mansion. What had happened there for me?

CHAPTER XXXI.

The Payment.

What man seeks in love is woman; what woman seeks in man is love.—Housaye.

When I reached Washington it was indeed spring, warm, sweet spring. In the wide avenue the straggling trees were doing their best to dignify the city, and flowers were blooming everywhere. Wonderful enough did all this seem to me after thousands of miles of rude scenery of bare valleys and rocky hills, wild landscapes, seen often through cold and blinding storms amid peaks and gorges, or on the drear, forbidding plains.

Used more, of late, to these wilder scenes, I felt awkward and still half savage. I did not at once seek out my own friends. My first wish was to get in touch with Mr. Calhoun, for I knew that so I would most quickly arrive at the heart of events.

He was away when I called at his residence on Georgetown Heights, but at last I heard the wheels of his old omnibus, and presently he entered with his usual companion, Dr. Samuel Ward. When they saw me there, then indeed I received a greeting which repaid me for many things!

This over, we all three broke out in laughter at my uncouth appearance. I was clad still in such clothing as I could pick up in western towns as I hurried on from the Missouri eastward; and I had as yet found no time for barbers.

"We have had no word from you, Nicholas," said Mr. Calhoun presently, "since that from Laramie, in the fall of eighteen forty-four. This is in the spring of eighteen forty-six! Meantime, we might all have been dead and buried and none of us the wiser. What a country! 'Tis more enormous than the mind of any of us can grasp."

"You should travel across it to learn that," I grinned.

"Many things have happened since you left. You know that I am back in the senate once more?"

I nodded. "And about Texas?" I began.

"Texas is ours," said he, smiling grimly. "You have heard how? It was a hard fight enough—a bitter, selfish, sectional fight among politicians. But there is going to be war. Our troops crossed the Sabine more than a year ago. They will cross the Rio Grande before this year is done. The Mexican minister has asked for his passports. The administration has ordered Gen. Taylor to advance. Mr. Polk is carrying out annexation with a vengeance. Seeing a chance for more territory, now that Texas is safe from England, he plans war on helpless and deserted Mexico! We may hear of a battle now at any time. But the war with Mexico may yet mean war with England. That, of course, endangers our chance to gain all or any of that great Oregon country. Tell me, what have you learned?"

I hurried on now with my own news, briefly as I might. I told them of the ships of England's navy waiting in Oregon waters; of the growing suspicion of the Hudson bay people; of the changes in the management at Fort Vancouver; of the change also from a conciliatory policy to one of half hostility. I told them of our wagon trains going west, and of the strength of our frontiersmen; but offset this, justly as I might, by giving facts also regarding the opposition these might meet.

"Precisely," said Calhoun, walking up and down, his head bent. "England is preparing for war! How much are we prepared? It would cost us the revenues of a quarter of a century to go to war with her to-day. It would cost us 50,000 lives. We would need an army of 250,000 men. Where is all that to come from? Can we transport our army there in time? But had all this bluster ceased, then we could have deferred this war with Mexico; could have bought with coin what now will cost us blood; and we could also have bought Oregon without the cost of either coin or blood. Delay was what we needed! All of Oregon should have been ours!"

"But, surely, this is not all news to you?" I began. "Have you not seen the Baroness von Ritz? Has she not made her report?"

"The baroness?" queried Calhoun. "That stormy petrel—that advance

agent of events! Did she indeed sail with the British ships from Montreal? Did you find her there—in Oregon?"

"Yes, and lost her there! She started east last summer, and beat me fairly in the race. Has she not made known her presence here? She told me she was going to Washington."

He shook his head in surprise. "Trouble now, I fear! Pakenham has back his best ally, our worst antagonist."

"That certainly is strange," said I. "She had five months the start of me, and in that time there is no telling what she has done or undone. Surely, she is somewhere here, in Washington! She held Texas in her shoes. I tell you she holds Oregon in her gloves to-day!"

I started up, my story half told.

"Where are you going?" asked Mr. Calhoun of me. Dr. Ward looked at me, smiling. "He does not inquire of a certain young lady—"

"I am going to find the Baroness von Ritz!" said I. I flushed red under my tan, I doubt not; but I would not ask a word regarding Elizabeth.

Dr. Ward came and laid a hand on my shoulder. "Republics forget," said he, "but men from South Carolina do not. Neither do girls from Maryland. Do you think so?"

"That is what I am going to find out."

"How, then? Are you going to Elmhurst as you look now?"

"No, I shall find out many things by first finding the Baroness von Ritz." And before they could make further protests I was out and away.

I hurried now to a certain side street, of which I have made mention, and knocked confidently at a door I knew. The neighborhood was asleep in the warm sun. I knocked a second time, and began to doubt, but at last heard slow footsteps.

There appeared at the crack of the door the wrinkled visage of the old serving woman, Threlka. I knew that she would be there in precisely this way, because there was every reason in the world why it should not have been. She paused, scanning me closely, then quickly opened the door and allowed me to step inside, vanishing as was her wont. I heard another step in the half-hidden hallway beyond, but this was not the step which I awaited; it was that of a man, slow, feeble, hesitating. I started forward as a face appeared at the parted curtains. A glad cry welcomed me in turn. A tall, bent form approached me, and an arm was thrown about my shoulder. It was my whilom friend, our ancient scientist, Van Rittenhofen! I did not pause to ask how he happened to be there. It was quite natural, since it was wholly impossible. I made no wonder at the Chinese dog Chow, or the little Indian maid, who both came, stared, and silently vanished. Seeing these, I knew that their strange protector must also have won through safe.

"Ach Gott! Gesegnet Gott! I see you again, my friend!" Thus the old doctor.

"But tell me," I interrupted, "where is the mistress of this house, the Baroness von Ritz?"

He looked at me in his mild way. "You mean my daughter Helena?"

"Now at last I smiled. His daughter! This at least was too incredible. He turned and reached behind him to a little table. He held up before my eyes my little blanket clasp of shell. Then I knew that this last and most impossible thing also was true, and that in some way these two had found each other! But why? What could he now mean?"

"Listen now," he began, "and I shall tell you. I was in the street one day. When I walk alone, I do not much notice. But now, as I walk, before my eyes on the street, I see what? This—this, the Tah Gook! At first, I see nothing but it. Then I look up. Before me is a woman, young and beautiful. Ach! what should I do but take her in my arms!"

"It was she; it was—"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Fine Growth of Potatoes.

A remarkable potato has attracted some attention at Annbank, in Ayrshire, Scotland. Amongst some rose bushes which Mr. Morran, the station master, got from France, one potato plant appeared, which he allowed to come to maturity. When it was dug in the autumn of last year it was found that there were at the root 48 potatoes which weighed fully 14 pounds. The potato is of fine quality, with shallow eyes and a beautiful skin.

As He Understood It.

Jason Juby (telling of his trip to New York)—An' another interestin' sight wuz them there curb brokers doin' business.

Hiram Whiffle—Seems to me I once heard tell us them fellers—what do they do?

Jason Juby—Why, they buy all the seats in the stock exchange and then sell 'em again to suckers at a dollar or two higher price.—Illustrated Sunday Magazine.

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According to a statement before a meeting of the Women's Foreign Missionary society of the Presbytery of Washington an interesting statement regarding the money spent for chewing gum and that given to charity was made. The speaker was Miss Mary W. Kerr of Harrisburg, Pa., in connection with the topic of "Frozen Finance in Missions." In urging the society to be more liberal in its contributions to charitable work, she said:

"For every \$3,000 contributed to charity, \$17,000 is spent for chewing gum."

The statement passed almost unnoticed except by a few, who saw the pertinence and logic of the remark.

Perhaps Not.

An instructor in a church school where much attention was paid to sacred history, dwelt particularly on the phrase "And Enoch was not, for God took him." So many times was this repeated in connection with the death of Enoch that he thought even the dullest pupil would answer correctly when asked in examination: State in the exact language of the Bible what is said of Enoch's death.

But this was the answer he got: "Enoch was not what God took him for."—Brooklyn Life.

Laundry work at home would be much more satisfactory if the right Starch were used. In order to get the desired stiffness, it is usually necessary to use so much starch that the beauty and fineness of the fabric is hidden behind a paste of varying thickness, which not only destroys the appearance, but also affects the wearing quality of the goods. This trouble can be entirely overcome by using Defiance Starch, as it can be applied much more thinly because of its greater strength than other makes.

Dark Days Coming.

"Say, Jim, here's a preacher in New York who says men should sew, cook, wash the dishes and get their own breakfast."

"What's the use of rubbing it in? Guess we all know we'll have to pretty soon."

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Seems to Be Wrong.

Howell—Whatever is his right.

Powell—But suppose a fellow soaks you with his left?

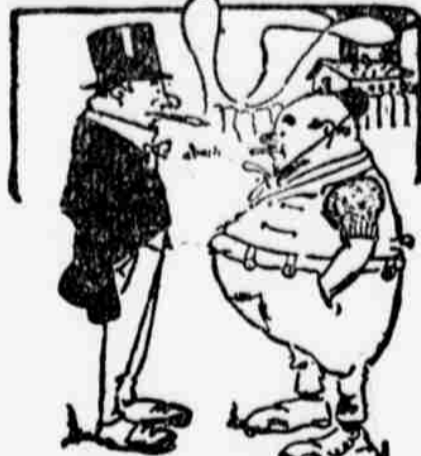
Hamlins Wizard Oil is recommended by many physicians. It is used in many public and private hospitals. Why not keep a bottle on hand in your own home?

He Was a Judge.

Geraldine—I am just twenty-two.

Gerald—Verdict set aside.

DIPLOMATIC.



The Man—I think you are the worst-looking tramp I have ever seen.

The Tramp—I'm only in the presence of such uncommon good looks that I look so bad.

School Boys' Garden.

An admirable scheme to have a school boys' garden next year, has been planned by the authorities of Ealing, N. Y. Last summer a hundred boys made good as farmers of vacant lots, and it is now proposed to place practically all such unused property in the city under cultivation, the pupils of the public schools to be the gardeners and to reap the profits from their products.

Up to Him.

Tom—I'm dead sore. I lost \$5 to-day. I feel like somebody ought to kick me.

Tess (absently)—Why don't you ask father for my hand tonight—he's right in the library.

Too Costly.

"When I want to flatter a man I ask him for advice."

"I take it for granted that you never want to flatter a lawyer."

Something in a Name.

Ella—He's very narrow.

Stella—What do you expect of a flat?

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