

The House of the Black Ring

By F. L. Pattee

Ring

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CHAPTER X—Continued.

Then he heard a low growl over the ridge and sat up with a start. Another shower was coming up. The lightning, at first mere spurts of light across the west gleamed red and sinister through the smoke. The wind plunged over the ridges in wild panic, bellowing and shrieking. It fell upon the rickety old mill and wrenched it with violence till it groaned and rattled and roared. The thunder grew louder with every peal; the lightning flickered and streamed balefully. Young Jim seemed oblivious of it. He heaped the wood over and ran upon his fire, and continued a steady contemplation of the flames. Then some subtle magnetism drew up his glance and there she was in the doorway, looking him full in the eyes.

"I'm not just sure that the mill's safe in all this wind." She came up to the fire, so near to him that he could have touched her. There seemed to be a wistful note in her voice.

"Oh, it's stood worse blows than this. In the winter, when the leaves are off, the winds sweep down these valleys fearfully."

"It'll put out our fire, won't it?" "Shouldn't wonder; but we can have one inside. Let it go. Believe I'll get in some slabs while I have a chance. He fell to the work with energy. "Aren't you afraid of thunder?" he called out cheerily. "I hope not, for this is going to be an old rattler, 10 times worse than the other."

"No-o, I'm not afraid." There was the slightest note of doubt in the tone. No wonder, the surroundings were indeed strange and fearsome—the shuddering old mill; the intense darkness; the fire, lighting everything weirdly; and the nearing crash and bellow of the storm.

"This will cool off the Run, won't it?" she asked almost eagerly. "Sure. We'll get out in the morning all right." He was flying back and forth between the slab pile and the mill.

"I hope we can," she echoed with a suspicion of wistfulness. "But can't I help?"

"Oh, no; I've got enough. Better come in now. Hear the rain come down the valley there? Glorious, ain't it? I just love a night like this. The storm was indeed breaking upon them in full force. The thunder, with crash after crash, broke over their very heads; then it belted and roared and tumbled from ridge to ridge. The continuous volley with its rip and roar was deafening. The lightning, almost blood red from the smoke, shook its fingers in their very faces. The rain came, not in drops but in sheets. It roared on the mill roof as if hurled from a steamer hose. It hurried down the wind in the wrath, dashing wild floods as from buckets. There seemed nothing in the whole landscape save water and blinding gleams and crashing noises. The fire by the brook struggled fitfully for a time and then blazed out. The stream began to rise by leaps and bounds until it was almost by the door.

The mill roof had been well made; it leaked only here and there, and they kept dry. Jim had a roaring fire in the stove, which made the little room very cozy. He chuckled, as he looked at the slabs and fed them into the flames, while she sat on a bench and watched him. His confidence and cheery good fellowship were contagious. What a glorious, self-reliant fellow he was! The thunder and lightning were nothing to be nervous about; he laughed at them. And, somehow, despite the wildness and the crash without, she did not feel frightened or even ill at ease.

At length the storm began to subside. The thunder rolled off into the east; the lightning came in sheets rather than in blinding bolts; the rain began to slacken. In an hour it was all over.

"Did you sleep any?" he asked suddenly. "I had just got to sleep when it began to thunder."

"Well, it's all over now. You must get some more sleep; it's a long time before morning. Say, I'm going inside the mill this time. If you want anything, pound on the boards. Good night."

Before she could answer he was gone. She lay down again in the bunk, drew up the lap robe and the next thing she was conscious of was the sound of voices outside. It was broad daylight.

"So, you're at the bottom of this, heigh? Where is Rose?" It was her father's voice, angry and threatening. "She's in the mill." Rose sprang out instantly.

"This is a pretty trick." She could see at a glance that he was angry, through and through. "Here Amos and Ab and I've been hunting these mountains all night long, and your mother's almost wild, and you up here with that scam."

"Why, father he—"

"I don't want to hear a word about it—not a word. If he's up here, then it's on account of you. I know that. He's scammed up here after you, and got you in ahead of that fire on purpose to show off. I ain't a doubt he set it himself. I'm going to look into this pret-t-y close, young man. Now, you start. Clear out of here this minute. I can take my daughter home alone. His anger almost choked him. Young Jim shouldered his ax without a word and turned to start.

"Wait Mr. Farthing. Here, father—" "Not another word. I—"

"Father, I'm going to speak." There was a flash in her eyes and a ring in her voice that silenced the man. "Mr. Farthing was here in the mountains to look after his wood lot. He met me wholly by accident in the valley down here. If he hadn't, I think I would have left him until for I wouldn't have left him until it was too late. He knew the way into this valley, and we came just in time. And there was no way out last night. You know that. You've got no right to speak as you did."

"We'll go home," he said gruffly. "Come along with me."

"Not till I thank Mr. Farthing. She went impulsively to where the young man was standing and took his hand. "I want to thank you for what you have done, Mr. Farthing. I owe you everything."

"Oh, it's nothing," he said with affected carelessness, but there was a look on his face that even the squre noticed.

"Come along, Rose," he said with an angry snap.

"Good-bye, Mr. Farthing." She turned and waved her hand at him grithly.

"Good-bye," he echoed, then he plunged over the ridge toward the Wild Meadows.

The two strode on in silence till they reached the face of the valley. Suddenly a cry of horror burst from her lips. She halted instantly and rubbed her eyes. The valley, which

yesterday lay a great mass of vegetation through which one could see for only a few rods in any direction, lay swept as clean almost as a room. A few scattered snags, still smoking feebly, a blackened log here and there, but aside from these nothing but fire cracked rocks and bare earth. They could see the whole length of the valley to the Black Log road, and it was a mere blackened trough in which the flooded stream was visible its entire length.

"It made clean work, didn't it?" she said at length.

"Yes," he mumbled.

"Ah, there's the buggy." She stopped again near a heap of twisted iron.

"Yes, I imagine how we felt when we found that. We looked every inch of this valley over for what was left of you and Pomp. Found the Amos and Ab. Hello-o-o-o! Found her! Now get in."

They drove in silence down the valley and out through the gaps. Rose knew her father, and she realized that the less she said in his present mood the better it would be. Only once did the old man speak, and that was when they were almost home.

"Remember, Rose, what you promised me." He turned and looked her full in the eyes. "You can't break that, not if you are my daughter."

She did not answer. She was looking with far eyes out over the horizon which lay veiled and dim on the horizon.

CHAPTER XI

LONA HELLER.

Even in the remotest mountain cabin one may find comeliness—roundness of face, and lustre of eyes, and perfection of color and mould of feature. But beauty is quite another thing. It is an atmosphere rather than a contour and a color; it is a subtle blending of all things together; and it is more. There is heredity in it—the cumulative charm of a long line of fair mothers and fairer daughters. The essence of it eludes analysis; it is the bouquet of rare wine, indescribable and indefinable. When one finds it in the wilderness it whispers of old times. It is the full blown Jacqueminot among the jungle thorns. There has been a rude transplanting; there is a romance to tell, though perchance it has been forgotten.

No one could deny that Lona Heller possessed beauty—a wild, barbaric type of beauty, perhaps, yet one that attracted attention instantly and held it by a force that was little short of uncanny. A single glance marked her as an exotic, a child of the South, of the Latin lands—with cheeks of pale olive with eyes such as only the daughters of the Mediterranean ever possess, and with hair abundant and soft and glistening in its perfect blackness. With the sun full upon it, it was still an absolute black. The supple figure, lithe and cat-quick, the arms rounded for the dance, for the fling of the tambourine or the castanets, the feet and limbs light as the daughter of Herodias, the neck and head for toss and coquettish pose—every line and feature was of this earth, a joy to see, but of the moment alone. A curious type for old Poppy Miller's cabin in the Run, a type clearly not evolved amid the Seven Mountains.

It would require that the valley folk, who had caught only glimpses of this girl, whispered among themselves, and no wonder that Tom Farthing, alive and 21, went home from the Run in a flutter. He spent a day in searching for a pretext for seeing her again, and he found one.

It would require tact, he mused, to conquer her shyness. Doubtless he would find difficulty in seeing her at all; for she was wild as a forest creature and as timid. But the evening changed the face of things. She had not avoided him at all; she had been self-possessed and at her ease; and there had been in her every attitude and intonation the staidness of one who is condescending graciously. He was the man and she the daughter of the house. It mystified him and haunted him. As he walked home through the twilight he could think of nothing else. How could a woman like that exist here? Poppy Miller's, in that squalid cabin?

That was the beginning of visits. He went almost every night. He carried her water from the creek; he sawed her wood; he walked with her in the twilight. He was as wax in her hands, and on an April day. As by an impulse she dropped her aloofness and reserve and made a comrade of him. It took his breath away. It sent him home powerless to banish her from his thoughts.

He was as wax in her hands, and he changed with her every mood, and her moods were infinite. Now he was joyous and confident—he could win her yet, for she loved him, it must be; then swiftly he would despair, for she was entirely his. He was as wax in her hands, and he changed with her every mood, and her moods were infinite. Now he was joyous and confident—he could win her yet, for she loved him, it must be; then swiftly he would despair, for she was entirely his.

Once he found her dressed in a strange, clinging costume of yellow, brilliant and glittering, her arms bare to the shoulders, and her feet in curious sandals. Her hair was knotted in wild, gipsy fashion. A dash of color at the throat—a crown, a sparkle of beads at the throat—she could only stare at her.

"Don't you like the dress?" she called.

"But what is it?"

"Just a dress. See?" She sprang up and spun around till the short skirt swung and she said, "You never saw me dance, look!" She caught up a tambourine-like thing with fluttering streamers, flung up her arms in joyous abandon, and glistened and flashed and spun. Her eyes were full upon him. They seemed unnaturally large and brilliant, and always looking straight into his. A moment and she sank upon the rock.

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breath, but he did not move or speak. "What all that 'The Fling,' she volunteered.

"We? But who—?"

"The witches' fling." Did you like it?"

"It was beautiful, beautiful!" he half whistled, still looking full at her. There seemed to him no past nor future, no here nor there, only now and her—and it was enough just to look.

"Ah, see!" With her arm flung about her head, and the ribbons flashing and twisting, she was dancing swiftly backward toward the path. He tried to follow her, but he seemed to have no power to move. Her eyes were still full upon him.

"Lona," he called.

"Good-bye." She waved the streamers gaily, then disappeared into the house. Would she come back? He watched the door eagerly until the twilight had deepened into the darkness, but he saw her no more.

The next day was Saturday. He went down earlier than usual; the sun was still in sight over the ridge, though dimmed by the smoke to a mere plate of brass. The old cabin lay dead and deserted. The blinds were drawn close; there was not even a smoke. He hesitated a moment, then rapped at the back door, and after a long wait he rapped again. No one there. He turned and scanned the path to the creek. Ah! as he turned again, there she was, not two steps away. She had opened the door without noise. He jumped almost guiltily.

"Why—why—why you here?" he almost gasped.

"Come in," she said gravely.

"Why, no. Perhaps we can—"

"Come in." He followed her without a word.

The kitchen was quite dark when she closed the door. A few coals glowed in the stone fireplace, but they furnished no light. Without a word she threw on a handful of something that rustled softly; then he heard no sound. The silence was awkward.

"That's been a fine day," he observed at random.

"Yes."

"And the spring fever?"

"No."

"I have. Had to drive myself to work. Jim's had it, and it makes him blue. It makes father work. I never saw him work so."

"No one has no reply. Then the flame leaped up about the twilight. It climbed rapidly, and lighted up the whole apartment.

He saw only the girl. She was sitting on a stool at the side of the hearth, and the fire brought out every detail. Then she turned and looked at him. Her eyes were full upon him. They seemed unnaturally large and brilliant, and always looking straight into his. A moment and she sank upon the rock.

"Let's sit awhile," she proposed, sinking upon a limestone fragment. He looked at her with a puzzled look, then arranged one of the buckets for a seat. A fringe of ragged cedars gave them almost the seclusion of a room. For a time neither spoke. A strange new mood was upon her, and it awed him.

The sun disappeared, snuffed out even before it reached the horizon. The dull bellow of the Run, swelled high with its spring flood, came up steadily from below. The twilight, vague and unreal amid the half-seen smoke, was deepening fast. A chorus of frog voices splattered shrilly from along the stream; robins and blackbirds were in full swing with their evening songs.

"What's the matter, Lona?" he asked, after a while. "You're not like yourself."

"No; you're not."

"How am I different?"

"I don't know; but don't you get lonesome here? Say, why don't you get out more? Why don't you?"

"Oh, the valley people! They're cattle!"

"But, Lona, you forget; I'm one of them, and so are you."

"I'm not!" She turned and faced him defiantly.

"What do you mean?"

"And you're not; you're different."

"Different?"

"You're like me—and we hate 'em. We just hate 'em!"

"Lona, you're a look in the girl's eyes that frightened him."

(Continued Next Week)

The Queen's Jewels.

When the queen of the English parliament she wore, for the first time, the handsome necklace that has been manufactured for her out of the cuttings of the Cullinan diamond. Exactly how many necklaces of one kind and another she possesses she would herself be puzzled to say. Indeed, she has had many cases of jewels cases could say with any degree of certainty. It was stated a few years ago that she possessed 32 tiaras, and since that time she has inherited a large portion of the magnificent collection of jewels possessed by her mother, the late queen of Denmark. She has, however, from time to time made considerable presents of her private jewelry to several members of the royal family, including her daughters, the Princess of Wales and Princess Alexandra of Teck. She still, however, possesses one of the largest collections of precious stones in the world and probably only the tsarina and the queen of Spain can surpass her in this respect. All her jewels are contained in large, burglar-proof cases so arranged in sets that the queen can make up her mind almost at a glance what she will wear on any given occasion. These cases, of course, are all carefully numbered and their contents cataloged; the Hon. Charlotte Knollys alone possesses the master key to them, and this never leaves her for an instant.

Woman: thou loveliest gift that here below Man can receive, or Providence bestow! To thee the earliest offerings belong: Of opening eloquence, or youthful song; Lovely partaker of our dearest joys; Thyself a gift whose pleasure never ceases— Whose loss is such, as through life's tedious way No rank can compensate, no wealth repay.

Thy azure beams a ray of heavenly light To cheer the darkness of our earthly night; Hall: Enslaver! at thy changing glance Boldness recedes, and timid hearts advance. Monarchs forget their scepter and their sway, And sages melt in tenderness away.

HER FIRST MEMORIAL DAY.

By Amy Merrils.

When Lucille Morgan reached her new home in southern Ohio just before the civil war broke out, her young heart was a very storm center of rebellion. The Imperious southern beauty, walled against her fate, which in the form of yellow fever had devastated the dear old plantation home and sent her, an heiress, but parentless, to her only living relatives, an uncle and aunt. She shivered at their undemonstrative reception, at the severity of the substantial farmhouse and the simple service of the household. And most of all was she disgusted with the undemocratic customs of the north.

On the plantation the overseer was an evil to be endured and utilized, but not to be received on terms of equality.

Yet here Henry Willis, the strapping, square shouldered, clear eyed young man who managed Uncle Johnson's great farm, ate at the same table with the family and drove with them to school on Sundays. And when the garrulous aunt told her that Henry had been a waif, taken from the county poorhouse, Lucille's proud little head was held more aggressively high than ever.

It was Henry Willis who shed the first rays of sunshine in Lucille's saddened life. He broke the best horses on the farm for her to ride. He initiated her into the beauties of northern woodlands. When she spoke hungrily of the opalescent fireplaces at the plantation, he banished the cheerless box stove from her room and built a tiny fireplace in its stead. She longed for the flowers and the birds and the sunshine, and Henry built a great flower box in her south window and sent her a basket of flowers to Cincinnati on business for Uncle Johnson. And he knew she was grateful, for when he rode up to the house from the frosty fields he could see her dark brown head among the blooming plants.

When the war clouds gathered, Lucille was the most miserable girl in Ohio. She hated those cold blooded northerners who could not understand the right of the white race to exact service from the black. She wished she had a man and could don the gray uniform. She even thought she might write to President Davis and offer her small fortune and her services as nurse to the cause. And, oh, how she despised the stolid young fellows, drilling and drilling, and waiting orders to join the federal forces. Probably she incorrectly measured the grim strength and determination of these northern lads, so different from the dashing, impetuous chivalry of her southern friends.

Then came the most dreadful days of all, when Henry walked into the farm house clad in the fateful blue uniform. He had never told them of his intention, and he had always refrained from discussing the vexed question. Perhaps that is one reason the girl had learned to care for him. Under her breath she had sung a tender refrain:

"He loves me and he will not take arms against me, dear soldier."

She straight into the room where everything spoke of his tender thoughtfulness. She walked to the window where the flowers bloomed riotously and the bird cowered madly. Then he came to her. She turned on him passionately.

"How dare you come to me in that uniform?"

He never flinched, but took both of her hands in his.

"It is the hardest part of all, Lucille, dear—to face you with that look in your eyes. This is harder than the thought of battles and wounds and prisons. But I could do nothing else—and be a man—not even for your love, the dearest thing in the world to me."

The girl seemed turned to stone, and to the man at her side this was worse than an outburst of passionate reproach.

"Not fighting against your people and your principles, Lucille, but for my flag and my president. They can't need me, and Lucille, Lucille, can't you understand? Can't you say something?"

"Then the girl turned and looked at him with cold, pitiless eyes and he said, 'Yes, I can say just this—I hate you and I hope I may never look on your face again.'"

Then she turned back to the window, but the bird had stopped singing and the flowers seemed to bow their heads in sympathy.

Henry walked down the narrow stairway; then came the murmur of voices, a long, shivering sob, and she knew that Aunt Johnson had parted with her. She was as glad to hear as if he had been her firstborn.

The weeks dragged drearily into months, brightened at the Johnson farm only by rare letters from southern camps. The kindly farmer and his wife, who were as dear to her as their boy, who had started in as a private. They talked bravely of the day when he should come home with straps on his shoulder. Then came a message from Libby prison and—silence. The war was over, the wounded and the well came home, and there came also silent soldiers who were laid to rest in the village cemetery. But Henry was among neither the well nor the wounded nor yet the voiceless soldiers. But from the Johnson farm home came a fourth month a prayer, man a heart broken sigh, for those who lay in the trenches to the south—the unknown dead.

After a fashion the farm was worked, but the crops were as dried, by the old couple seemed never to rally from their loss. And then came the bitter winter, which brought pneumonia and peace to them both.

Lucille was alone. The villagers and neighboring farmers whispered that now the haughty beauty would probably sell out the old place and go back to her beloved south, but her lawyers knew better. A strange whim seized the girl to keep the place just as it had always been. She hired a competent man and wife to assist her and went to the work in a fashion that made the critical neighbors open their eyes; not that she cared what they said or thought. She had made no friends among the village women except until a few of his old comrades had brought back the flag draped coffin.

Lucille drew up her face sharply.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Davis. Are you going far? May I take you in the buggy?"

The young widow raised her eyes in surprise at the gentle tones. The village girls had never understood nor cared to know the little rebel.

She went to the cemetery to put some flowers and a fresh flag on my husband's grave."

Ah, the thrill of pride, strong, yet

pitiful, in that word husband, Lucille's lips quivered, then she said firmly, "Let me drive you over. I shall be very glad."

Without a word the other woman accepted the unexpected offer. Side by side they rode to the city of the dead, and Lucille, with white face and dim eyes, watched while the widow decked the grass grown mound.

"Why do you cry?" she asked suddenly, as she saw Lucille's tears. "You have no grave to mourn over."

"Perhaps that is the reason," whispered Lucille, so softly that the other woman hardly caught the words.

When she reached the farm the afternoon shadows fell against the cheery living room, but she passed swiftly to the stairs. In the south window the flowers bent their heads toward the sweet spring air. She stripped every blossom and with eager, trembling fingers twined them with soft green. Then she went back to the sitting room. Over the reverend haircloth sofa hung Henry's picture, an oil painting done from the only photograph Aunt Johnson had owned. Softly Lucille crossed the room and hung the picture. Next she drew from her pocket a tiny flag—the flag he had loved—and fastened it in the wreath. With that act the last vestige of pride seemed to die out, and she fell sobbing on the great sofa.

If only I had told him that I loved him. But he thought—oh, what must he have thought, when he was dying?" she moaned.

A step sounded in the hall without and the sitting room door swung open. Lucille sprang to her feet, terrified and humiliated that any stranger should look upon her grief. She faced the intruder with much of her old imperiousness, but at the first glance her arms dropped limply to her side, a hand seemed to press upon her throat, her heart, and she could not speak.

Instantly he was at her side. His eyes glanced from her face, white and starting, to the wreath and flag under the picture.

"It was wrong, I know, Lucille, but when I heard the dear old folks were dead I did not see the use in coming back. You had said—"

Her hand was on his lips, but he took it gravely in his own and went on: "I tried to lose myself way out in Kansas, but you seemed to call me, and I had to come. Is it all right?"

"Oh, Henry, my heart was calling for you all the time, only I would not admit it until today."

And Henry Willis, looking up at the tiny flag nestling under his picture, understood. The bitter question was buried forever between them.

The Sentry's Lucky Song.

The power of a song is something wonderful at times. This is well illustrated by a story, and a true one, told not long ago.

Two Americans who were crossing the Atlantic met in the cabin on Sunday night to sing hymns. As they sang the last hymn, "Jesus, Lover of My Soul," one of them heard an exceedingly rich and beautiful voice behind him. He looked around, and although he did not know the face, he thought that he knew the voice. So when the music ceased he turned and asked the man if he had been in the civil war. The man replied that he had been a confederate soldier.

"Where you at such a place on such a night?" asked the first.

"Yes," he replied, "and a curious thing happened that night which this hymn has recalled to my mind. I was posted on sentry duty near the edge of a wood. It was a dark night and very cold, and I was a little frightened because the enemy was supposed to be very near. About midnight, when everything was very still and I was feeling homesick and miserable and weary, I thought that I would comfort myself by praying and singing a hymn. I remember singing this hymn:

"All my trust on Thee is stayed,
All my help from Thee I bring,
Cover my defenseless head
With the shadow of Thy wing."

"After singing that a strange peace came down upon me, and through the long night I felt no more fear."

"Now," said the other, "listen to my story. I was a federal soldier and was in the wood that night with a party of men. I saw you sitting, although I did not see your face. My men had their rifles focused upon you, waiting the word to fire, but when you sang out:

"Cover my defenseless head
With the shadow of Thy wing."

I said, 'boys, lower your rifles; we will go home.'"—Pittsburg Gazette.

For Our Dead—May 30.

Flowers for our dead!
The delicate wild roses faintly red,
The valley lily bells as purely white
As shines their honor in the vernal light,
All bloom that be
As fragrant as their fadless memory!
By tender hands entwined and garlanded,
Flowers for our dead!

Praise for our dead!
For those that followed and for those that led,
Whether they felt death's burning acco-
rd,
When brothers drew the fratricidal blade
Or closed undaunted eyes
Beneath the Cuban or Philippine skies!
While waves our brave bright banner
Overhead

Praise for our dead!
Love for our dead!
O hearts that droop and mourn, be comforted!
The forsaken path through the abyss of pain,
The final hour of travail not in vain,
For freedom's morning smile
Brothers across the seas from isle to isle.
By reverent lips let this fond word be
Love for our dead!
—Clinton Scollard in Collier's Weekly.

Last Shots of the Old Sixth Corps.
From the Washington Post.

The last shots of the famous old Sixth Corps were fired by the Second Vermont Infantry. At least that is the claim made by its men. This regiment participated in all the battles of this unit, whose insignia was a Greek cross, serving from first to last in the Second brigade of the Second division. Its final fighting was during the skirmishing with the rear guard of the vanishing Johnnies at Ball's creek. The regiment had 700 men engaged at the battle of the Wilderness, where Colonel Newton Stone fell dead from his horse and where Lieutenant Colonel John S. Tyler, who succeeded him, received a mortal wound. Out of a total enrollment of 1,181 the regiment lost 224 men in killed and mortally wounded.

Memorial Day as a Holiday.
New York state made Memorial day a legal holiday in 1873, and Connecticut took similar action in 1875. Many other states followed. This action on the part of the state legislatures was a concession to the public demand and enabled the bars and public offices to close and give the employes an opportunity to observe the day.

One on the Giant.
"Cy" Sullivan is the biggest man in congress; that is, if one takes count physically. Morris Shepard, of Texas, is one of the smallest; that is, if he is measured on the same lines. They were sitting together at one of the Pennsylvania avenue hotels the other night.

"Morris," said the New Hampshire giant, "why don't you grow? You talk to me about the whales the South produces in avoirdupois. Pity you don't send some of them up here. Look at you. Why, I could slather a dime's worth of butter over you and swallow you."

"And should you," replied Shepard, "like Alexander Stephens once replied to the same suggestion from Butler, you would have more brains in your stomach than you have in your head."