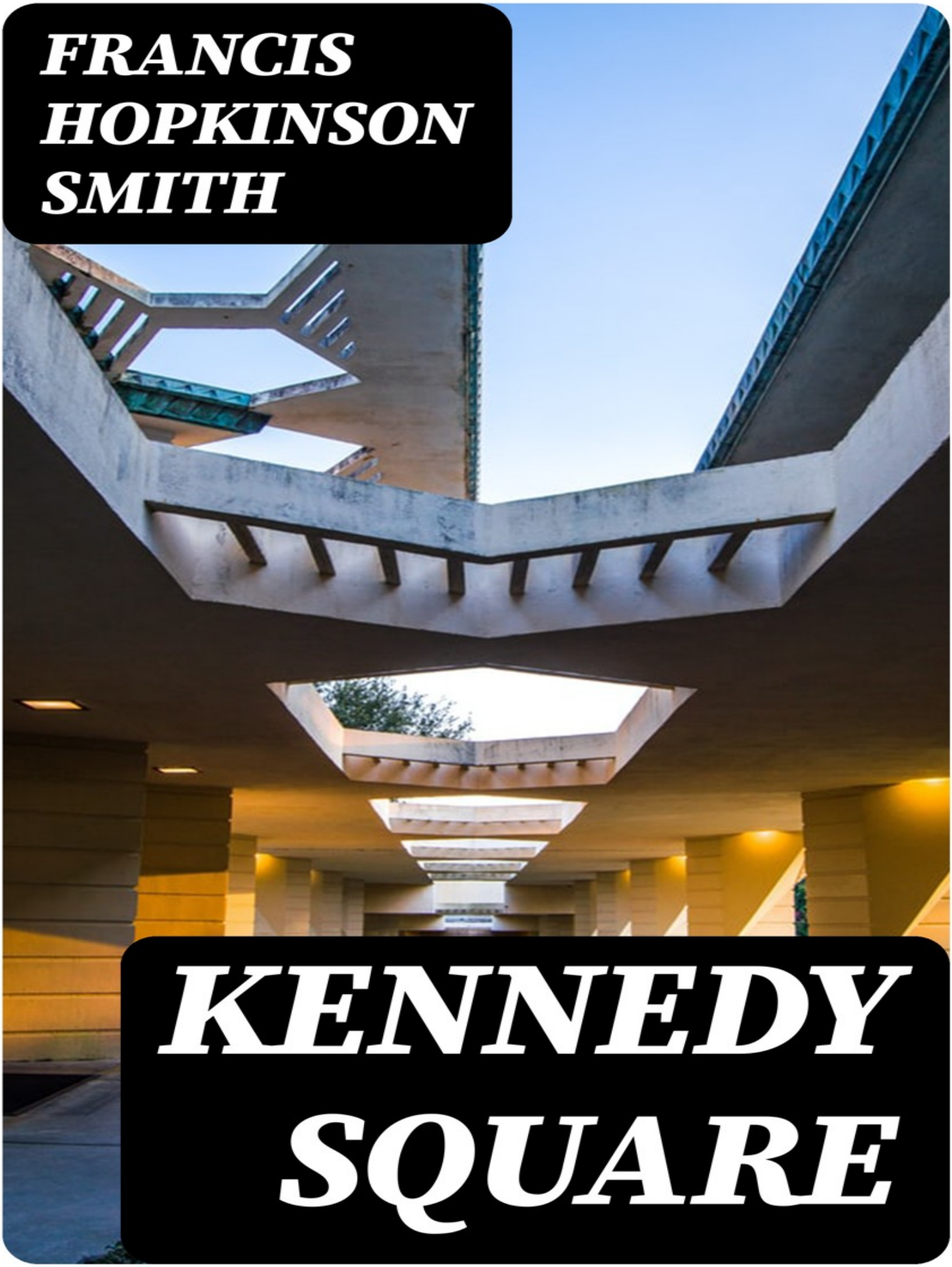
FRANCIS HOPKINSON SMITH



KENNEDY SQUARE

Francis Hopkinson Smith

Kennedy Square

EAN 8596547217664

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I

Table of Contents

On the precise day on which this story opens—some sixty or more years ago, to be exact—a bullet-headed, merry-eyed, mahogany-colored young darky stood on the top step of an old-fashioned, high-stoop house, craning his head up and down and across Kennedy Square in the effort to get the first glimpse of his master, St. George Wilmot Temple, attorney and counsellor-at-law, who was expected home from a ducking trip down the bay.

Whether it was the need of this very diet, or whether St. George had felt a sudden longing for the out-of-doors, is a matter of doubt, but certain it is that some weeks before the very best shot in the county had betaken himself to the Eastern Shore of Maryland, accompanied by his guns, his four dogs, and two or three choice men of fashion—young bloods of the time—men with whom we shall become better acquainted as these chronicles go on—there to search for the toothsome and elusive canvas-back for which his State was famous.

That the darky was without a hat and in his shirt-sleeves, and it winter—the middle of January, really—the only warm thing about him being the green baize apron tied about his waist, his customary livery when attending to his morning duties—did not trouble him in the least. Marse George might come any minute, and he wanted to be the first to welcome him.

For the past few weeks Todd had had the house to himself. Coal-black Aunt Jemima, with her knotted pig-tails,

capacious bosom, and unconfined waist, forty years his senior and ten shades darker in color, it is true, looked after the pots and pans, to say nothing of a particular spit on which her master's joints and game were roasted; but the upper part of the house, which covered the drawing-room, dining-room, bedroom, and dressing-room in the rear, as well as the outside of the dwelling, including even the green-painted front door and the slant of white marble steps that dropped to the brick sidewalk, were the especial property of the chocolate-colored darky.

To these duties was added the exclusive care of the master himself—a care which gave the boy the keenest delight, and which embraced every service from the drawing off of St. George Wilmot Temple's boots to the shortening of that gentleman's slightly gray hair; the supervision of his linen, clothes, and table, with such side issues as the custody of his well-stocked cellar, to say nothing of the compounding of various combinations, sweet, sour, and strong, the betrayal of whose secrets would have cost the darky his place.

“Place” is the word, for Todd was not St. George's slave, but the property of a well-born, if slightly impoverished, gentleman who lived on the Eastern Shore, and whose chief source of income was the hiring out to his friends and acquaintances of just such likely young darkies as Todd—a custom common to the impecunious of those days.

As Mr. Temple, however, did not come under either one of the above-mentioned classes—the “slightly impoverished gentleman” never having laid eyes on him in his life—the negotiations had to be conducted with a certain formality.

Todd had therefore, on his arrival, unpinned from the inside of his jacket a portentous document signed with his owner's name and sealed with a red wafer, which after such felicitous phrases as—“I have the distinguished honor,” etc. —gave the boy's age (21), weight (140 pounds), and height (5 feet 10 inches)—all valuable data for identification in case the chattel conceived a notion of moving further north (an unnecessary precaution in Todd's case). To this was added the further information that the boy had been raised under his master's heels, that he therefore knew his pedigree, and that his sole and only reason for sparing him from his own immediate service was his own poverty and the fact that while under St. George's care the boy could learn how “to wait on quality.”

As to the house itself—the “Temple Mansion,” as it was called—that was as much a part of Kennedy Square as the giant magnolias gracing the park, or the Noah's Ark church, with its quaint belfry and cracked bell, which faced its shady walks. Nobody, of course, remembered how long it had been built—that is, nobody then alive—I mean the very date. Such authorities as Major Clayton were positive that the bricks had been brought from Holland; while Richard Horn, the rising young scientist, was sure that all the iron and brass work outside were the product of Sheffield; but in what year they had all been put together had always been a disputed question.

That, however, which was certain and beyond doubt, was that St. George's father, old General Dorsey Temple, had purchased the property near the close of the preceding century; that he had, with his characteristic vehemence,

pushed up the roof, thrust in two dormer windows, and smashed out the rear wall, thus enlarging the dining-room and giving increased space for a glass-covered porch ending in a broad flight of wooden steps descending to a rose-garden surrounded by a high brick wall; that thus encouraged he had widened the fireplaces, wainscoted the hall, built a new mahogany spider-web staircase leading to his library on the second floor, and had otherwise disported himself after the manner of a man who, having suddenly fallen heir to a big pot of money, had ever after continued oblivious to the fact that the more holes he punched in its bottom the less water would spill over its top. The alterations complete, balls, routs, and dinners followed to such distinguished people as Count Rochambeau, the Marquis de Castellux, Marquis de Lafayette, and other high dignitaries, coming-of-age parties for the young bloods—quite English in his tastes was the old gentleman—not to mention many other extravagances which were still discussed by the gossips of the day.

With the general's death—it had occurred some twenty years before—the expected had happened. Not only was the pot nearly empty, but the various drains which it had sustained had so undermined the family rent-roll that an equally disastrous effect had been produced on the mansion itself (one of the few pieces of property, by the way, that the father had left to his only son and heir unencumbered, with the exception of a suit in chancery from which nobody ever expected a penny), the only dry spots in St. George's finances being the few ground rents remaining from his

grandmother's legacy and the little he could pick up at the law.

It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that certain changes and deteriorations had taken place inside and out of the historic building—changes which never in the slightest degree affected the even-tempered St. George, who had retained his own private apartments regardless of the rest of the house—but changes which, in all justice to the irascible old spendthrift, would have lifted that gentleman out of his grave could he have realized their effect and extent. What a shock, for instance, would the most punctilious man of his time have received when he found his front basement rented for a law office, to say nothing of a disreputable tin sign nailed to a shutter—where in the olden time he and his cronies had toasted their shins before blazing logs, the toddies kept hot on the hearth! And what a row would he have raised had he known that the rose-garden was entirely neglected and given over to the dogs and their kennels; the library in the second story stripped of its books and turned into a guest-chamber, and the books themselves consigned to the basement; the oak-panelled dining-room transformed into a bedchamber for St. George, and the white-and-gold drawing-room fronting the street reduced to a mere living-room where his son and heir made merry with his friends! And then the shrinkages all about! When a room could be dispensed with, it was locked up. When a shingle broke loose, it stayed loose; and so did the bricks capping the chimneys, and the leaky rain-spouts that spattered the dingy bricks, as well as the cracks and crannies that marred the ceilings and walls.

And yet so great was Todd's care over the outside fittings of the house—details which were necessarily in evidence, and which determined at a glance the quality of the folks inside—that these several crumblings, shake-downs, and shrinkages were seldom noticed by the passer-by. The old adage that a well-brushed hat, a clean collar, polished shoes, and immaculate gloves—all terminal details—make the well-dressed man, no matter how shabby or how ill-fitting his intermediate apparel, applied, according to Todd's standards, to houses as well as Brummels. He it was who soused the windows of purple glass, polished the brass knobs, rubbed bright the brass knocker and brass balls at the top and bottom of the delightful iron railings, to say nothing of the white marble steps, which he attacked with a slab of sandstone and cake of fuller's-earth, bringing them to so high a state of perfection that one wanted to apologize for stepping on them. Thus it was that the weather-beaten rainspouts, stained bricks, sagging roof, and blistered window-sashes were no longer in evidence. Indeed, their very shabbiness so enhanced the brilliancy of Todd's handiwork that the most casual passers-by were convinced at a glance that gentlefolk lived within.

On this particular morning, then, Todd had spent most of the time since daylight—it was now eight o'clock—in the effort to descry his master making his way along the street, either afoot or by some conveyance, his eyes dancing, his ears alert as a rabbit's, his restless feet marking the limit of his eagerness. In his impatience he had practised every step known to darkydom in single and double shuffle; had patted juba on one and both knees, keeping time with his heels to

the rhythm; had slid down and climbed up the railings a dozen times, his eyes on the turn in the street, and had otherwise conducted himself as would any other boy, black or white, who was at his wits' end to know what to do with the next second of his time.

Aunt Jemima had listened to the racket until she had lost all patience, and at last threw up the basement window:

“Go in an' shet dat do'—'fo' I come up dar an' smack ye—'nough ter make a body deef ter hear ye,” she called, her black shining face dividing the curtains. “How you know he's a-comin'?”

Todd leaned over the railing and peered down: “Mister Harry Rutter done tol' me—said dey all 's a-comin'—de jedge an' Doctor Teackle an' Marse George an' de hull kit an' bilin'. Dey's been gone mos' two weeks now,—dey's a-comin' I tell ye—be yere any minute.”

“I b'liebe dat when I sees it. Fool nigger like you b'liebe anything. You better go inside 'fo' you catch yo' dea'f. I gin ye fair warnin' right now dat I ain't gwineter nuss ye,—d'ye yere?—standin' out dar like a tarr-pin wid yo' haid out. Go in I tell ye!” and she shut the window with a bang and made her way to the kitchen.

Todd kept up his double shuffle with everything going—hands, feet, and knees—thrashed his arms about his chest and back to keep up the circulation and with a final grimace in the direction of the old cook maintained his watch.

“I spec's it's de fog dat's kep' 'em,” he muttered anxiously, his feet still in action. “Dat bay boat's mos' allus late,—can't tell when she'll git in. Only las' week—Golly!—dar he is—DAT'S HIM!”

A mud-bespattered gig was swinging around the corner into the Square, and with a swerve in its course was heading to where Todd stood.

The boy sprang down the steps:

“Yere he is, Aunt Jemima!” he shouted, as if the old cook could have heard him through three brick walls.

The gig came to a stand-still and began to unload: first the dogs, who had been stowed under their master's feet since they left the steamboat wharf, and who with a clear bound to the sidewalk began scouring in mad circles, one after another, up and down Todd's immaculate steps, the four in full cry until the entire neighborhood was aroused, the late sleepers turning over with the remark—“Temple's at home,” and the early risers sticking their heads out of the windows to count the ducks as they were passed out. Next the master: One shapely leg encased in an English-made ducking boot, then its mate, until the whole of his handsome, well-knit, perfectly healthy and perfectly delightful body was clear of the cramped conveyance.

“Hello, Todd!” he burst out, his face aglow with his drive from the boat-landing—“glad to see you! Here, take hold of these guns—-easy now, they won't hurt you; one at a time, you lunkhead! And now pull those ducks from under the seat. How's Aunt Jemima?—Oh, is that you aunty?” She had come on the run as soon as she heard the dogs. “Everything all right, aunty—howdy—” and he shook her hand heartily.

The old woman had made a feint to pull her sleeves down over her plump black arms and then, begrudging the delay, had grasped his outstretched hand, her face in a broad grin.

“Yes, sah, dat's me. Clar' to goodness, Marse George, I's glad ter git ye home. Lawd-a-massy, see dem ducks! Purty fat, ain't dey, sah? My!—dat pair's jes' a-bustin'! G'long you fool nigger an' let me hab 'em! G'way f'om dere I tell ye!”

“No,—you pick them up, Todd—they're too heavy for you, aunty. You go back to your kitchen and hurry up breakfast—waffles, remember,—and some corn pone and a scallop shell or two—I'm as hungry as a bear.”

The whole party were mounting the steps now, St. George carrying the guns, Todd loaded down with the game—ten brace of canvas-backs and redheads strung together by their bills—the driver of the gig following with the master's big ducking overcoat and smaller traps—the four dogs crowding up trying to nose past for a dash into the wide hall as soon as Todd opened the door.

“Anybody been here lately, Todd?” his master asked, stopping for a moment to get a better grip of his heaviest duck gun.

“Ain't nobody been yere partic'ler 'cept Mister Harry Rutter. Dey alls knowed you was away. Been yere mos' ev'ry day—come ag'in yisterday.”

“Mr. Rutter been here!—Well, what did he want?”

“Dunno, sah,—didn't say. Seemed consid'ble shook up when he foun' you warn't to home. I done tol' him you might be back to-day an' den ag'in you mightn't—'pended on de way de ducks was flyin'. Spec' he'll be roun' ag'in purty soon—seemed ter hab sumpin' on his min'. I'll tu'n de knob, sah. Yere—git down, you imp o' darkness,—you Floe!—you Dandy! Drat dem dogs!—Yere, YERE!” but all four dogs were

inside now, making a sweepstakes of the living-room, the rugs and cushions flying in every direction.

Although Todd had spent most of the minutes since daylight peering up and down the Square, eager for the first sight of the man whom he loved with an idolatry only to be found in the negro for a white man whom he respects, and who is kind to him, he had not neglected any of his other duties. There was a roaring wood fire behind brass andirons and fender. There was a breakfast table set for two—St. George's invariable custom. “Somebody might drop in, you know, Todd.” There was a big easy-chair moved up within warming distance of the cheery blaze; there were pipes and tobacco within reach of the master's hand; there was the weekly newspaper folded neatly on the mantel, and a tray holding an old-fashioned squat decanter and the necessary glasses—in fact, all the comforts possible and necessary for a man who having at twenty-five given up all hope of wedded life, found himself at fifty becoming accustomed to its loss.

St. George seized the nearest dog by the collar, cuffed him into obedience as an example to the others, ordered the four to the hearth rug, ran his eye along the mantel to see what letters had arrived in his absence, and disappeared into his bedroom. From thence he emerged half an hour later attired in the costume of the day—a jaunty brown velveteen jacket, loose red scarf, speckled white waistcoat—single-breasted and of his own pattern and cut—dove-gray trousers, and white gaiters. No town clothes for St. George as long as his measure was in London and his friends were good enough to bring him a trunk full every

year or two. “Well-cut garments may not make a gentleman,” he would often say to the youngsters about him, “but slip-shod clothes can spoil one.”

He had drawn up to the table now, Todd in white jacket hovering about him, bringing relays of waffles, hot coffee, and more particularly the first of a series of great scallop-shells filled with oysters which he had placed on the well-brushed hearth to keep hot while his master was dressing.

Fifty he was by the almanac, and by the old family Bible as well, and yet he did not look it. Six feet and an inch; straight, ruddy-checked, broad-shouldered, well-rounded, but with his waist measure still under control; slightly gray at the temples, with clean-shaven face, laughing eyes, white teeth, and finely moulded nose, brow, and chin, he was everything his friends claimed—the perfect embodiment of all that was best in his class and station, and of all that his blood had bequeathed him.

And fine old fellows they were if we can believe the historians of the seventeenth century: “Wearing the falchion and the rapier, the cloth coat lined with plush and embroidered belt, the gold hat-band and the feathers, silk stockings and garters, besides signet rings and other jewels; wainscoting the walls of their principal rooms in black oak and loading their sideboards with a deal of rich and massive silver plate upon which was carved the arms of their ancestors;—drinking, too, strong punch and sack from 'silver sack-cups'—(sack being their favorite)—and feasting upon oysters and the most delicious of all the ducks of the world.”

And in none of their other distinguishing qualities was their descendant lacking. In the very lift of his head and

brace of his shoulders; in the grace and ease with which he crossed the room, one could see at a glance something of the dash and often the repose of the cavalier from whom he had sprung. And the sympathy, kindness, and courtesy of the man that showed in every glance of his eye and every movement of his body—despite his occasional explosive temper—a sympathy that drifted in to an ungovernable impulse to divide everything he owned into two parts, and his own half into two once more if the other fellow needed it; a kindness that made every man his friend, and a courtesy which, even in a time when men lifted their hats to men, as well as to women, had gained for him, the town over, the soubriquet of “Gentleman George”; while to every young girl and youth under twenty he was just “dear Uncle George”—the one man in all Kennedy Square who held their secrets.

But to our breakfast once more. All four dogs were on their feet now, their tails wagging expectantly, their noses at each of his knees, where they were regaled at regular intervals with choice bits from his plate, the snapping of their solemn jaws expressing their thanks. A second scallop-shell was next lifted from the hearth with the tongs, and deposited sizzling hot on a plate beside the master, the aroma of the oysters filling the room. These having disappeared, as had the former one, together with the waffles and coffee, and the master's appetite being now on the wane, general conversation became possible.

“Did Mr. Rutter look ill, Todd?” he continued, picking up the thread of the talk where he had left it. “He wasn't very well when I left.”

“No, sah,—neber see him look better. Been up a li'l' late I reckon,—Marse Harry mos' gen'ally is a li'l' mite late, sah—” Todd chuckled. “But dat ain't nuthin' to dese gemmans. But he sho' do wanter see ye. Maybe he stayed all night at Mister Seymour's. If he did an' he yered de rumpus dese rapscallions kicked up—yes—dat's you I'm talkin' to”—and he looked toward the dogs—“he'll be roun' yere 'fo' ye gits fru yo' bre'kfus'. Dey do say as how Marse Harry's mighty sweet in dat quarter. Mister Langdon Willits's snoopin' roun' too, but Miss Kate ain't got no use fer him. He ain't quality dey say.”

His master let him run on; Aunt Jemima was Todd's only outlet during his master's absence, and as this was sometimes clogged by an uplifted broom, he made the best use he could of the opportunities when he and his master were alone. When “comp'ny” were present he was as close-mouthed as a clam and as noiseless as a crab.

“Who told you all this gossip, Todd?” exclaimed St. George with a smile, laying down his knife and fork.

“Ain't nary one tol' me—ain't no use bein' tol'. All ye got to do is to keep yo' eyes open. Be a weddin' dar 'fo' spring. Look out, sah—dat shell's still a-sizzlin'. Mo' coffee, sah? Wait till I gits some hot waffles—won't take a minute!” and he was out of the room and downstairs before his master could answer.

Hardly had he slammed the kitchen door behind him when the clatter and stamp of a horse's hoofs were heard Outside, followed by an impatient rat-a-tat-tat on the knocker.

The boy dropped his dishes: “Fo' Gawd, dat's Mister Harry!” he cried as he started on a run for the door. “Don't nobody bang de do' down like dat but him.”

A slender, thoroughly graceful young fellow of twenty-one or two, booted and spurred, his dark eyes flashing, his face tingling with the sting of the early morning air, dashed past the obsequious darky and burst into Temple's presence with the rush of a north-west breeze. He had ridden ten miles since he vaulted into the saddle, had never drawn rein uphill or down, and neither he nor the thoroughbred pawing the mud outside had turned a hair.

“Hello, Uncle George!” Temple, as has been said, was Uncle George to every girl and youth in Kennedy Square.

“Why, Harry!” He had sprung from his seat, napkin in hand and had him by both shoulders, looking into his eyes as if he wanted to hug him, and would the first thing he knew. “Where are you from—Moorlands? What a rollicking chap you are, and you look so well and handsome, you dog! And now tell me of your dear mother and your father. But first down with you—here—right opposite—always your place, my dear Harry. Todd, another shell of oysters and more waffles and coffee—everything, Todd, and blazing hot: two shells, Todd—the sight of you, Harry, makes me ravenous again, and I could have eaten my boots, when I got home an hour ago, I was so hungry. But the mare”—here he moved to the window—“is she all right? Spitfire, I suppose—you'd kill anything else, you rascal! But you haven't tied her!”

“No—never tie her—break her heart if I did. Todd, hang up this coat and hat in the hall before you go.”

“That's what you said of that horse you bought of Hampson—ran away, didn't he?” persisted his host, his eyes on the mare, which had now become quiet.

“Yes, and broke his leg. But Spitfire's all right—she'll stand. Where will I sit—here? And now what kind of a time did you have, and who were with you?”

“Clayton, Doctor Teackle, and the judge.”

“And how many ducks did you get?” and he dropped into his chair.

“Twenty-one,” answered St. George, dry-washing his white shapely hands, as he took his seat—a habit of his when greatly pleased.

“All canvas-backs?”

“No—five redheads and a mallard.”

“Where did you put up?” echoed Harry, loosening his riding-jacket to give his knife and fork freer play.

“I spent a week at Tom Coston's and a week at Craddock. Another lump of sugar, Todd.”

The boy laughed gently: “Lazy Tom's?”

“Lazy Tom's—and the best-hearted fellow in the world. They're going to make him a judge, they say and—”

“—What of—peach brandy? No cream in mine, Todd.”

“No—you scurrilous dog—of the Common Court,” retorted St. George, looking at him over the top of his cup. “Very good lawyer is Tom—got horse sense and can speak the truth—make a very good judge.”

Again Harry laughed—rather a forced laugh this time, as if he were trying to make himself agreeable but with so anxious a ring through it that Todd busied himself about the table before going below for fresh supplies, making excuse

of collecting the used dishes. If there were to be any revelations concerning the situation at the Seymour house, he did not intend to miss any part of them.

“Better put Mrs. Coston on the bench and set Tom to rocking the cradle,” said the young man, reaching for the plate of corn pone. “She's a thoroughbred if ever I saw one, and does credit to her blood. But go on—tell me about the birds. Are they flying high?—and the duck blinds; have they fixed them up? They were all going to pot when I was there last.”

“Birds out of range, most of them—hard work getting what I did. As to the blinds, they are still half full of water—got soaking wet trying to use one. I shot most of mine from the boat just as the day broke,” and then followed a full account of what the party had bagged, with details of every day's adventures. This done, St. George pushed back his chair and faced the young man.

“And now you take the witness-stand, sir—look me in the eyes, put your hand on your fob-pocket and tell me the truth. Todd says you have been here every day for a week looking as if you had lost your last fip-penny-bit and wild to see me. What has happened?”

“Todd has a vivid imagination.” He turned in his seat, stretched out his hand, and catching one of the dogs by the nose rubbed his head vigorously.

“Go on—all of it—no dodging the king's counsellor. What's the matter?”

The young man glanced furtively at Todd, grabbed another dog, rubbed their two ears together in play, and in

a lowered voice, through which a tinge of sadness was only too apparent, murmured:

“Miss Kate—we've had a falling out.”

St. George lowered his head suddenly and gave a low whistle:—“Falling out?—what about?”

Again young Rutter glanced at Todd, whose back was turned, but whose ears were stretched to splitting point. His host nodded understandingly.

“There, Todd—that will do; now go down and get your breakfast. No more waffles, tell Aunt Jemima. Bring the pipes over here and throw on another log... that's right.” A great sputtering of sparks followed—a spider-legged, mahogany table was wheeled into place, and the dejected darky left the room for the regions below.

“So you two have had a quarrel! Oh, Harry!—when will you learn to think twice before you speak? Whose fault was it?” sighed St. George, filling the bowl of his pipe with his slender fingers, slowly tucking in each shred and grain.

“Mine.”

“What did you say?” (Puff-puff.)

“Nothing—I couldn't. She came in and saw it all.” The boy had his elbows on the table now, his cheeks sunk in his hands.

St. George looked up: “Drunk, were you?”

“Yes.”

“Where?”

“At Mrs. Cheston's ball last week.”

“Have you seen her since?”

“No—she won't let me come near her. Mr. Seymour passed me yesterday and hardly spoke to me.”

St. George canted his chair and zigzagged it toward the blazing hearth; then he said thoughtfully, without looking at the young man:

“Well, this is a pretty kettle of fish! Have you told your father?”

“No—he wouldn't understand.”

“And I know you didn't tell your mother.” This came with the tone of positive conviction.

“No—and don't you. Mother is daft on the subject. If she had her way, father would never put a drop of wine on the table. She says it is ruining the county—but that's mother's way.”

St. George stooped over, fondled one of the dogs for a moment—two had followed Todd out of the room—settled back in his chair again, and still looking into the fire, said slowly:

“Bad business—bad business, Harry! Kate is as proud as Lucifer and dislikes nothing on earth so much as being made conspicuous. Tell me exactly what happened.”

“Well, there isn't anything to tell,” replied the young fellow, raising his head and leaning back in his chair, his face the picture of despair. “We were all in the library and the place was boiling-hot, and they had two big bowls, one full of eggnog and the other full of apple-toddy: and the next thing I knew I was out in the hall and met Kate on the stairs. She gave a little smothered scream, and moaned—'Oh, Harry!—and you promised me!'—and then she put her hands to her face, as if to shut me out of her sight. That sobered me somewhat, and after I got out on the porch into the night air and had pulled myself together, I tried to find

her and apologize, but she had gone home, although the ball wasn't half over.

“Then this was not the first time?” He was still at the hot coals, both hands outfanned, to screen his face from the blaze.

“No—I'm sorry to say it wasn't. I told her I would never fail her again, and she forgave me, but I don't know what she'll do now. She never forgives anybody who breaks his word—she's very queer about it. That's what I came to see you about. I haven't slept much nights, thinking it over, and so I had the mare saddled, as soon as it got light, hoping you would be home. Todd thought you might be—he saw Dr. Teackle's Joe, who said you were all coming to-day.”

Again there was a long pause, during which Temple continued to study the coals through his open fingers, the young man sitting hunched up in his chair, his handsome head dropped between his shoulders, his glossy chestnut hair, a-frouze with his morning ride, fringing his collar behind.

“Harry,” said St. George, knocking the ashes slowly from his pipe on the edge of the fender, and turning his face for the first time toward him,—“didn't I hear something before I went away about a ball at your father's—or a dance—or something, when your engagement was to be announced?”

The boy nodded.

“And was it not to be something out of the ordinary?” he continued, looking at the boy from under his eyelids —“Teackle certainly told me so—said that your mother had already begun to get the house in order—”

Again Harry nodded—as if he had been listening to an indictment, every word of which he knew was true.

St. George roused himself and faced his guest: “And yet you took this time, Harry, to—”

The boy threw up both hands in protest:

“Don't!—DON'T! Uncle George! It's the ball that makes it all the worse. That's why I've got no time to lose; that's why I've haunted this place waiting for you to get back. Mother will be heart-broken if she finds out and I don't know what father would do.”

St. George laid his empty pipe on the table and straightened his body in the chair until his broad shoulders filled the back. Then his brow darkened; his indignation was getting the better of him.

“I don't know what has come over you young fellows, Harry!” he at last broke out, his eyes searching the boy's. “You don't seem to know how to live. You've got to pull a shoat out of a trough to keep it from overeating itself, but you shouldn't be obliged to pull a gentleman away from his glass. Good wine is good food and should be treated as such. My cellar is stocked with old Madeira—some port—some fine sherries—so is your father's. Have you ever seen him abuse them?—have you ever seen Mr. Horn or Mr. Kennedy, or any of our gentlemen around here, abuse them? It's scandalous, Harry! damnable! I love you, my son—love you in a way you know nothing of, but you've got to stop this sort of thing right off. And so have these young roysterers you associate with. It's getting worse every day. I don't wonder your dear mother feels about it as she does. But she's always been that way, and she's always been right

about it, too, although I didn't use to think so.” This last came with a lowered voice and a deep, indrawn sigh, and for the moment checked the flow of his wrath.

Harry hung his head still lower, but he did not attempt to defend himself.

“Who else were making vulgarians of themselves at Mrs. Cheston's?” St. George continued in a calmer tone, stretching his shapely legs until the soles of his shoes touched the fender.

“Mark Gilbert, Tom Murdoch, Langdon Willits, and—”

“Willits, eh?—Well, I should expect it of Willits. He wasn't born a gentleman—that is, his grandfather wasn't a gentleman—married his overseer's daughter, if I remember right:—but you come of the best blood in the State,—egad!—none better! You have something to maintain—some standard to keep up. A Rutter should never be found guilty of anything that would degrade his name. You seem to forget that—you—damn me, Harry!—when I think of it all—and of Kate—my sweet, lovely Kate,—and how you have made her suffer—for she loves you—no question of that—I feel like wringing your neck! What the devil do you mean, Sir?” He was up on his feet now, pacing the room, the dogs following his every movement with their brown agate eyes, their soft, silky ears straightening and falling.

So far the young fellow had not moved nor had he offered a word in defence. He knew his Uncle George—better let him blow it all out, then the two could come together. At last he said in a contrite tone—his hands upraised:

“Don't scold me, Uncle George. I've scolded myself enough—just say something to help me. I can't give Kate up—I'd sooner die. I've always made a fool of myself—maybe I'll quit doing it after this. Tell me how I can straighten this out. She won't see me—maybe her father won't. He and my father—so Tom Warfield told me yesterday—had a talk at the club. What they said I don't know, but Mr. Seymour was pretty mad—that is, for him—so Tom thought from the way he spoke.”

“And he ought to be mad—raging mad! He's only got one daughter, and she the proudest and loveliest thing on earth, and that one he intends to give to you”—Harry looked up in surprise—“Yes—he told me so. And here you are breaking her heart before he has announced it to the world. It's worse than damnable, Harry—it's a CRIME!”

For some minutes he continued his walk, stopping to look out of the window, his eyes on the mare who, with head up and restless eyes, was on the watch for her master's return; then he picked up his pipe from the table, threw himself into his chair again, and broke into one of his ringing laughs.

“I reckon it's because you're twenty, Harry, I forgot that. Hot blood—hot temper,—madcap dare-devil that you are—not a grain of common-sense. But what can you expect?—I was just like you at your age. Come, now, what shall we do first?”

The young fellow rose and a smile of intense relief crept over his face. He had had many such overhaulings from his uncle, and always with this ending. Whenever St. George let out one of those big, spontaneous, bubbling laughs straight from his heart, the trouble, no matter how serious, was over.

What some men gained by anger and invective St. George gained by good humor, ranging from the faint smile of toleration to the roar of merriment. One reason why he had so few enemies—none, practically—was that he could invariably disarm an adversary with a laugh. It was a fine old blade that he wielded; only a few times in his life had he been called upon to use any other—when some under-dog was maltreated, or his own good name or that of a friend was traduced, or some wrong had to be righted—then his face would become as hot steel and there would belch out a flame of denunciation that would scorch and blind in its intensity. None of these fiercer moods did the boy know;—what he knew was his uncle's merry side—his sympathetic, loving side,—and so, following up his advantage, he strode across the room, settled down on the arm of his uncle's chair, and put his arm about his shoulders.

“Won't you go and see her, please?” he pleaded, patting his back, affectionately.

“What good will that do? Hand me a match, Harry.”

“Everything—that's what I came for.”

“Not with Kate! She isn't a child—she's a woman,” he echoed back between the puffs, his indignation again on the rise. “And she is different from the girls about here,” he added, tossing the burned match in the fire. “When she once makes up her mind it stays made up.”

“Don't let her make it up! Go and see her and tell her how I love her and how miserable I am. Tell her I'll never break another promise to her as long as I live. Nobody ever holds out against you. Please, Uncle George! I'll never come to you for anything else in the world if you'll help me this

time. And I won't drink another drop of anything you don't want me to drink—I don't care what father or anybody else says. Oh, you've GOT to go to her!—I can't stand it any longer! Every time I think of Kate hidden away over there where I can't get at her, it drives me wild. I wouldn't ask you to go if I could go myself and talk it out with her—but she won't let me near her—I've tried, and tried; and Ben says she isn't at home, and knows he lies when he says it! You will go, won't you?”

The smoke from his uncle's pipe was coming freer now—most of it escaping up the throat of the chimney with a gentle swoop.

“When do you want me to go?” He had already surrendered. When had he ever held out when a love affair was to be patched up?

“Now, right away.”

“No,—I'll go to-night,—she will be at home then,” he said at last, as if he had just made up his mind, the pipe having helped—“and do you come in about nine and—let me know when you are there, or—better still, wait in the hall until I come for you.”

“But couldn't I steal in while you are talking?”

“No—you do just as I tell you. Not a sound out of you, remember, until I call you.”

“But how am I to know? She might go out the other door and—”

“You'll know when I come for you.”

“And you think it will be all right, don't you?” he pleaded. “You'll tell her what an awful time I've had, won't you, Uncle George?”

“Yes, every word of it.”

“And that I haven't slept a wink since—”

“Yes—and that you are going to drown yourself and blow your head off and swallow poison. Now off with you and let me think how I am to begin straightening out this idiotic mess. Nine o'clock, remember, and in the hall until I come for you.”

“Yes—nine o'clock! Oh!—you good Uncle George! I'll never forget you for it,” and with a grasp of St. George's hand and another outpouring of gratitude, the young fellow swung wide the door, clattered down the steps, threw his leg over Spitfire, and dashed up the street.

CHAPTER II

Table of Contents

If Kate's ancestors had wasted any part of their substance in too lavish a hospitality, after the manner of the spendthrift whose extravagances were recounted in the preceding chapter, there was nothing to indicate it in the home of their descendants. No loose shutters, crumbling chimneys, or blistered woodwork defaced the Seymour mansion:—the touch of the restorer was too apparent. No sooner did a shutter sag or a hinge give way than away it went to the carpenter or the blacksmith; no sooner did a banister wabble, or a table crack, or an andiron lose a leg, than up came somebody with a kit, or a bag, or a box of tools, and they were as good as new before you could wink your eye. Indeed, so great was the desire to keep things up that it was only necessary (so a wag said) to scratch a match on old Seymour's front door to have its panels repainted the next morning.

And then its seclusion:—while its neighbors—the Temple mansion among them—had been placed boldly out to the full building line where they could see and be seen, the Seymours, with that spirit of aloofness which had marked the family for generations, had set their dwelling back ten paces, thrown up a hedge of sweet-smelling box to screen the inmates from the gaze of passers-by, planted three or