FRANCIS LYNDE

THE PRICE

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The Price

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AT CHAUDIÈRE'S

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In the days when New Orleans still claimed distinction as the only American city without trolleys, sky-scrapers, or fast trains—was it yesterday? or the day before?—there was a dingy, cobwebbed café in an arcade off Camp Street which was well-beloved of newspaperdom; particularly of that wing of the force whose activities begin late and end in the small hours.

"Chaudière's," it was called, though I know not if that were the name of the round-faced, round-bodied little Marseillais who took toll at the desk. But all men knew the fame of its gumbo and its stuffed crabs, and that its claret was neither very bad nor very dear. And if the walls were dingy and the odors from the grille pungent and penetrating at times, there went with the white-sanded floor, and the marble-topped tables for two, an Old-World air of recreative comfort which is rarer now, even in New Orleans, than it was yesterday or the day before.

It was at Chaudière's that Griswold had eaten his first breakfast in the Crescent City; and it was at Chaudière's again that he was sharing a farewell supper with Bainbridge, of the *Louisianian*. Six weeks lay between that and this; forty-odd days of discouragement and failure superadded upon other similar days and weeks and months. The breakfast, he remembered, had been garnished with certain

green sprigs of hope; but at the supper-table he ate like a barbarian in arrears to his appetite and the garnishings were the bitter herbs of humiliation and defeat.

Without meaning to, Bainbridge had been strewing the path with fresh thorns for the defeated one. He had just been billeted for a run down the Central American coast to write up the banana trade for his paper, and he was boyishly jubilant over the assignment, which promised to be a zestful pleasure trip. Chancing upon Griswold in the first flush of his elation, he had dragged the New Yorker around to Chaudière's to play second knife and fork at a small parting feast. Not that it had required much persuasion. Griswold had fasted for twenty-four hours, and he would have broken bread thankfully with an enemy. And if Bainbridge were not a friend in a purist's definition of the term, he was at least a friendly acquaintance.

Until the twenty-four-hour fast was in some measure atoned for, the burden of the table-talk fell upon Bainbridge, who lifted and carried it generously on the strength of his windfall. But no topic can be immortal; and when the vacation under pay had been threshed out in all its anticipatory details it occurred to the host that his guest was less than usually responsive; a fault not to be lightly condoned under the joyous circumstances. Wherefore he protested.

"What's the matter with you to-night, Kenneth, old man? You're more than commonly grumpy, it seems to me; and that's needless."

Griswold took the last roll from the joint bread-plate and buttered it methodically.

"Am I?" he said. "Perhaps it is because I am more than commonly hungry. But go on with your joy-talk: I'm listening."

"That's comforting, as far as it goes; but I should think you might say something a little less carefully polarized. You don't have a chance to congratulate lucky people every day."

Griswold looked up with a smile that was almost ill-natured, and quoted cynically: "'Unto everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath.'"

Bainbridge's laugh was tolerant enough to take the edge from his retort.

"That's a pretty thing to fling at a man who never knifed you or pistoled you or tried to poison you! An innocent by-stander might say you envied me."

"I do," rejoined Griswold gravely. "I envy any man who can earn enough money to pay for three meals a day and a place to sleep in."

"Oh, cat's foot!—anybody can do that," asserted Bainbridge, with the air of one to whom the struggle for existence has been a mere athlete's practice run.

"I know; that is your theory. But the facts disprove it. I can't, for one."

"Oh, yes, you could, if you'd side-track some of your own theories and come down to sawing wood like the rest of us. But you won't do that."

Griswold was a fair man, with reddish hair and beard and the quick and sensitive skin of the type. A red flush of anger

crept up under the closely cropped beard, and his eyes were bright.

"That is not true, and you know it, Bainbridge," he contradicted, speaking slowly lest his temper should break bounds. "Is it my fault, or only my misfortune, that I can do nothing but write books for which I can't find a publisher? Or that the work of a hack-writer is quite as impossible for me as mine is for him?"

Bainbridge scoffed openly; but he was good-natured enough to make amends when he saw that Griswold was moved.

"I take it all back," he said. "I suppose the book-chicken has come home again to roost, and a returned manuscript accounts for anything. But seriously, Kenneth, you ought to get down to bed-rock facts. Nobody but a crazy phenomenon can find a publisher for his first book, nowadays, unless he has had some sort of an introduction in the magazines or the newspapers. You haven't had that; so far as I know, you haven't tried for it."

"Oh, yes, I have—tried and failed. It isn't in me to do the salable thing, and there isn't a magazine editor in the country who doesn't know it by this time. They've been decent about it. Horton was kind enough. He covered two pages of a letter telling me why the stuff I sent from here might fit one of the reviews and why it wouldn't fit his magazine. But that is beside the mark. I tell you, Bainbridge, the conditions are all wrong when a man with a vital message to his kind can't get to deliver it to the people who want to hear it."

Bainbridge ordered the small coffees and found his cigar case.

"That is about what I suspected," he commented impatiently. "You couldn't keep your peculiar views muzzled even when you were writing a bit of a pot-boiler on sugar-planting. Which brings us back to the old contention: you drop your fool socialistic fad and write a book that a reputable publisher can bring out without committing commercial suicide, and you'll stand some show. Light up and fumigate that idea awhile."

Griswold took the proffered cigar half-absently, as he had taken the last piece of bread.

"It doesn't need fumigating; if I could consider it seriously it ought rather to be burnt with fire. You march in the ranks of the well-fed, Bainbridge, and it is your *métier* to be conservative. I don't, and it's mine to be radical."

"What would you have?" demanded the man on the conservative side of the table. "The world is as it is, and you can't remodel it."

"There is where you make the mistake common to those who cry Peace, when there is no peace," was the quick retort. "I, and my kind, can remodel it, and some day, when the burden has grown too heavy to be borne, we will. The aristocracy of rank, birth, feudal tyranny went down in fire and blood in France a century ago: the aristocracy of money will go down here, when the time is ripe."

"That is good anarchy, but mighty bad ethics. I didn't know you had reached that stage of the disease, Kenneth."

"Call it what you please; names don't change facts. Listen"—Griswold leaned upon the table; his eyes grew hard

and the blue in them became metallic—"For more than a month I have tramped the streets of this cursed city begging—yes, that is the word—begging for work of any kind that would suffice to keep body and soul together; and for more than half of that time I have lived on one meal a day. That is what we have come to; we of the submerged majority. And that isn't all. The wage-worker himself, when he is fortunate enough to find a chance to earn his crust, is but a serf; a chattel among the other possessions of some fellow man who has acquired him in the plutocratic redistribution of the earth and the fulness thereof."

Bainbridge applauded in dumb show.

"Turn it loose and ease the soul-sickness, old man," he said indulgently. "I know things haven't been coming your way, lately. What is your remedy?"

Griswold was fairly started now, and ridicule was as fuel to the flame.

"The money-gatherers have set us the example. They have made us understand that might is right; that he who has may hold—if he can. The answer is simple: there is enough and to spare for all, and it belongs to all; to him who sows the seed and waters it, as well as to him who reaps the harvest. That is a violent remedy, you will say. So be it: it is the only one that will cure the epidemic of greed. There is an alternative, but it is only theoretical."

"And that?"

"It may be summed up in seven words: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' When the man who employs—and rules—uses the power that money gives him to succor his

fellow man, the revolution will be indefinitely postponed. But as I say, it's only a theory."

Bainbridge glanced at his watch.

"I must be going," he said. "The *Adelantado* drops down the river at eleven. But in passing I'll venture a little prophecy. You're down on your luck now, and a bit hot-hearted in consequence; but some day you will strike it right and come out on top. When you do, you'll be a hard master; tattoo that on your arm somewhere so you'll be reminded of it."

Griswold had risen with his entertainer, and he put his hands on the table.

"God do so to me, and more, if I am, Bainbridge," he said soberly.

"That's all right: when the time comes, you just remember my little fortune-telling stunt. But before we shake hands, let's get back to concrete things for a minute or two. How are you fixed for the present, and what are you going to do for the future?"

Griswold's smile was not pleasant to look at.

"I am 'fixed' to run twenty-four hours longer, thanks to your hospitality. For that length of time I presume I shall continue to conform to what we have been taught to believe is the immutable order of things. After that——"

He paused, and Bainbridge put the question. "Well, after that; what then?"

"Then, if the chance to earn it is still denied me, and I am sufficiently hungry, I shall stretch forth my hand and take what I need."

Bainbridge fished in his pocket and took out a ten-dollar bank-note. "Do that first," he said, offering Griswold the money.

The proletary smiled and shook his head.

"No; not to keep from going hungry—not even to oblige you, Bainbridge. It is quite possible that I shall end by becoming a robber, as you paraphrasers would put it, but I sha'n't begin on my friends. Good-night, and a safe voyage to you."

II

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SPINDRIFT

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The fruit steamer *Adelantado*, outward bound, was shuddering to the first slow revolutions of her propeller when Bainbridge turned the key in the door of the stuffy little state-room to which he had been directed, and went on deck.

The lines had been cast off and the ship was falling by imperceptible inches away from her broadside berth at the fruit wharf. Bainbridge heard the distance-softened clang of a gong; the tremulous murmur of the screw became more pronounced, and the vessel forged ahead until the current caught the outward-swinging prow. Five minutes later the *Adelantado* had circled majestically in mid-stream and was passing the lights of the city in review as she steamed at half-speed down the river.

Bainbridge had no mind to go back to the stuffy state-room, late as it was. Instead, he lighted a fresh cigar and found a chair on the port side aft where he could sit and watch the lights wheel past in orderly procession as the fruit steamer swept around the great crescent which gives New Orleans its unofficial name.

While the comfortable feeling of elation, born of his unexpected bit of good fortune, was still uppermost to lend complacency to his reflections, he yet found room for a compassionate underthought having for its object the man from whom he had lately parted. He was honestly sorry for Griswold; sorry, but not actually apprehensive. He had known the defeated one in New York, and was not unused to his rebellious outbursts against the accepted order of things. Granting that his theories were incendiary and crudely subversive of all the civilized conventions, Griswold the man was nothing worse than an impressionable enthusiast; a victim of the auto-suggestion which seizes upon those who dwell too persistently upon the wrongs of the wronged.

So ran Bainbridge's epitomizing of the proletary's case; and he knew that his opinion was shared with complete unanimity by all who had known Griswold in Printing House Square. To a man they agreed in calling him Utopian, altruistic, visionary. What milder epithets should be applied to one who, with sufficient literary talent—not to say genius—to make himself a working name in the ordinary way, must needs run amuck among the theories and write a novel with a purpose? a novel, moreover, in which the

purpose so overshadowed the story as to make the book a mere preachment.

As a matter of course, the publishers would have nothing to do with the book. Bainbridge remembered, with considerable satisfaction, that he had confidently predicted its failure, and had given Griswold plentiful good advice while it was in process of writing. But Griswold, being quite as obstinate as he was impressionable, had refused to profit by the advice, and now the consequences of his stubbornness were upon him. He had said truly that his literary gift was novelistic and nothing else; and here he was, stranded and desperate, with the moribund book on his hands, and with no chance to write another even if he were so minded, since one can not write fasting.

Thus Bainbridge reflected, and was sorry that Griswold's invincible pride had kept him from accepting a friendly stop-gap in his extremity. Yet he smiled in spite of the regretful thought. It was amusing to figure Griswold, who, as long as his modest patrimony had lasted had been most emphatically a man not of the people, posing as an anarchist and up in arms against the well-to-do world. None the less, he was to be pitied.

"Poor beggar! he is in the doldrums just now, and it isn't quite fair to hold him responsible for what he says or thinks —or for what he thinks he thinks," said the reporter, letting the thought slip into speech. "Just the same, I wish I had made him take that ten-dollar bill. It might have— Why, hello, Broffin! How are you, old man? Where the dickens did you drop from?"

It was the inevitable steamer acquaintance who is always at hand to prove the trite narrowness of the world, and Bainbridge kicked a chair into comradely place for him.

Broffin, heavy-browed and clean-shaven save for a thick mustache that hid the hard-bitted mouth, replaced the chair to suit himself and sat down. In appearance he was a cross between a steamboat captain on a vacation, and an up-river plantation overseer recovering from his annual pleasure trip to the city. But his reply to Bainbridge's query proved that he was neither.

"I didn't drop; I walked. More than that, I kept step with you all the way from Chaudière's to the levee. You'd be dead easy game for an amateur."

"You'll get yourself disliked, the first thing you know," said Bainbridge, laughing. "Can't you ever forget that you are in the man-hunting business?"

"Yes; just as often, and for just as long, as you can forget that you are in the news-hunting business."

"Tally!" said Bainbridge, and he laughed again. After which they sat in silence until the *Adelantado* doubled the bend in the great river and the last outposts of the city's lights disappeared, leaving only a softened glow in the upper air to temper the velvety blackness of the April night. The steamer had passed Chalmette when Broffin said:

"Speaking of Chaudière's reminds me: who was that fellow you were telling good-by as you came out of the café? His face was as familiar as a ship's figure-head, but I couldn't place him."

The question coupled in automatically with the reporter's train of thought; hence he answered it rather more fully and

freely than he might have at another time and under other conditions. From establishing Griswold's identity for his fellow passenger, he slipped by easy stages into the story of the proletary's ups and downs, climaxing it with a vivid little word-painting of the farewell supper at Chaudière's.

"To hear him talk, you would size him up for a bloody-minded nihilist of the thirty-third degree, ready and honing to sweep the existing order of things into the farthest hence," he added. "But in reality he is one of the finest fellows in the world, gone a fraction morbid over the economic side of the social problem. He has a heart of gold, as I happen to know. He used to spend a good bit of his time in the backwater, and you know what the backwater of a big city will do to a man."

"I couldn't hold my job if I didn't," was the reply.

"That means that you know only half of it," Bainbridge asserted with cheerful dogmatism. "You're thinking of the crooks it turns out, 'which it is your nature to.' But Griswold wasn't looking for the crooks; he was eternally and everlastingly breaking his heart over the sodden miseries. One night he stumbled into a cellar somewhere down in the East Side lower levels, looking for a fellow he had been trying to find work for; a crippled 'longshoreman. When he got into the place he found the man stiff and cold, the woman with the death rattle in her throat, and a two-year-old baby creeping back and forth between the dead father and the dying mother—starvation, you know, straight from the shoulder. They say it doesn't happen; but it does."

"Of course it does!" growled the listener. "*I* know."

"We all know; and most of us drop a little something into the hat and pass on. But Griswold isn't built that way. He jumped into the breach like a man and tried to save the mother. It was too late, and when the woman died he took the child to his own eight-by-ten attic and nursed and fed it until the missionary people took it off his hands. He did that, mind you, when he was living on two meals a day, himself; and I'm putting it up that he went shy on one of them to buy milk for that kid."

"Holy Smoke!—and he calls himself an anarchist?" was the gruff comment. "It's a howling pity there ain't a lot more just like him—what?"

"That is what I say," Bainbridge agreed. Then, with a sudden twinge of remorse for having told Griswold's story to a stranger, he changed the subject with an abrupt question.

"Where are you headed for, Broffin?"

The man who might have passed for a steamboat captain or a plantation overseer, and was neither, chuckled dryly.

"You don't expect me to give it away to you, and you a newspaper man, do you? But I will—seeing you can't get it on the wires. I'm going down to Guatemala after Mortsen."

"The Crescent Bank defaulter? By Jove! you've found him at last, have you?"

The detective nodded. "It takes a good while, sometimes, but I don't fall down very often when there's enough money in it to make the game worth the candle. I've been two years, off and on, trying to locate Mortsen: and now that I've found him, he is where he can't be extradited. All the same, I'll bet you five to one he goes back with me in the next

steamer—what? Have a new smoke. No? Then let's go and turn in; it's getting late in the night."

III

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THE RIGHT OF MIGHT

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Two days after the supper at Chaudière's and the clearing of the fruit steamer *Adelantado* for the banana coast, or, more specifically, in the forenoon of the second day, the unimpetuous routine of the business quarter of New Orleans was rudely disturbed by the shock of a genuine sensation.

To shatter at a single blow the most venerable of the routine precedents, the sensational thing chose for its colliding point with orderly system one of the oldest and most conservative of the city's banks: the Bayou State Security. At ten o'clock, following the precise habit of half a lifetime, Mr. Andrew Galbraith, president of the Bayou State, entered his private room in the rear of the main banking apartment, opened his desk, and addressed himself to the business of the day. Punctually at ten-five, the stenographer, whose desk was in the anteroom, brought in the mail; five minutes later the cashier entered for his morning conference with his superior; and at half-past the hour the president was left alone to read his correspondence.

Being a man whose mental processes were all serious, and whose hobby was method, Mr. Galbraith had

established a custom of giving himself a quiet half-hour of inviolable seclusion in which to read and consider his mail. During this sacred interval the stenographer, standing guard in the outer office, had instructions to deny his chief to callers of any and every degree. Wherefore, when, at twenty minutes to eleven, the door of the private office opened to admit a stranger, the president was justly annoyed.

"Well, sir; what now?" he demanded, impatiently, taking the intruder's measure in a swift glance shot from beneath his bushy white eyebrows.

The unannounced visitor was a young man of rather prepossessing appearance, a trifle tall for his breadth of shoulder, fair, with blue eyes and a curling reddish beard and mustache, the former trimmed to a point. So much the president was able to note in the appraisive glance—and to remember afterward.

The caller made no reply to the curt question. He had turned and was closing the door. There was a quiet insistence in the act that was like the flick of a whip to Mr. Galbraith's irritation.

"If you have business with me, you'll have to excuse me for a few minutes," he protested, still more impatiently. "Be good enough to take a seat in the anteroom until I ring. MacFarland should have told you."

The young man drew up a chair and sat down, ignoring the request as if he had failed to hear it. Ordinarily Mr. Andrew Galbraith's temper was equable enough; the age-cooled temper of a methodical gentleman whose long upper lip was in itself an advertisement of self-control. But such a deliberate infraction of his rules, coupled with the stony

impudence of the visitor, made him spring up angrily to ring for the watchman.

The intruder was too quick for him. When his hand sought the bell-push he found himself looking into the muzzle of a revolver, and so was fain to fall back into his chair, gasping.

"Ah-h-h!" he stammered. And when the words could be managed: "So that's it, is it?—you're a robber!"

"No," said the invader of the presidential privacies calmly, speaking for the first time since his incoming. "I am not a robber, save in your own very limited definition of the word. I am merely a poor man, Mr. Galbraith—one of the uncounted thousands—and I want money. If you call for help, I shall shoot you."

"You—you'd murder me?" The president's large-jointed hands were clutching the arms of the pivot-chair, and he was fighting manfully for courage and presence of mind to cope with the terrifying emergency.

"Not willingly, I assure you: I have as great a regard for human life as you have—but no more. You would kill me this moment in self-defence, if you could: I shall most certainly kill you if you attempt to give an alarm. On the other hand, if you prove reasonable and obedient your life is not in danger. It is merely a question of money, and if you are amenable to reason——"

"If I'm—but I'm not amenable to your reasons!" blustered the president, recovering a little from the first shock of terrified astoundment. "I refuse to listen to them. I'll not have anything to do with you. Go away!"

The young man's smile showed his teeth, but it also proved that he was not wholly devoid of the sense of humor.

"Keep your temper, Mr. Galbraith," he advised coolly. "The moment is mine, and I say you shall listen first and obey afterward. Otherwise you die. Which is it to be? Choose quickly—time is precious."

The president yielded the first point, that of the receptive ear; but grudgingly and as one under strict compulsion.

"Well, well, then; out with it. What have you to say for yourself?"

"This: You are rich: you represent the existing order of things. I am poor, and I stand for my necessity, which is higher than any man-made law or custom. You have more money than you can possibly use in any legitimate personal channels: I have not the price of the next meal, already twenty-four hours overdue. I came here this morning with my life in my hand to invite you to share with me a portion of that which is yours chiefly by the right of possession. If you do it, well and good: if not, there will be a new president of the Bayou State Security. Do I make myself sufficiently explicit?"

Andrew Galbraith glanced furtively at the paper-weight clock on his desk. It was nearly eleven, and MacFarland would surely come in on the stroke of the hour. If he could only fend off the catastrophe for a few minutes, until help should come. He searched in his pockets and drew forth a handful of coins.

"You say you are hungry: I'm na that well off that I canna remember the time when I knew what it was to be on short commons, mysel'," he said; and the unconscious lapse into

the mother idiom was a measure of his perturbation. "Take this, now, and be off wi' you, and we'll say no more about it."

The invader of privacies glanced at the clock in his turn and shook his head.

"You are merely trying to gain time, and you know it, Mr. Galbraith. My stake in this game is much more than a handful of charity silver; and I don't do you the injustice to believe that you hold your life so cheaply; you who have so much money and, at best, so few years to live."

The president put the little heap of coins on the desk, but he did not abandon the struggle for delay.

"What's your price, then?" he demanded, as one who may possibly consider a compromise.

"One hundred thousand dollars—in cash."

"But man! ye're clean daft! Do ye think I have——"

"I am not here to argue," was the incisive interruption. "Take your pen and fill out a check payable to your own order for one hundred thousand dollars, and do it now. If that door opens before we have concluded, you are a dead man!"

At this Andrew Galbraith saw that the end was nigh and gathered himself for a final effort at time-killing. It was absurd; he had no such balance to his personal credit; such a check would not be honored; it would be an overdraft, and the teller would very properly— In the midst of his vehement protests the stranger sprang out of his chair, stepped back a pace and raised his weapon.

"Mr. Galbraith, you are juggling with your life! Write that check while there is yet time!"

A sound of subdued voices came from the anteroom, and the beleaguered old man stole a swift upward glance at the face of his persecutor. There was no mercy in the fierce blue eyes glaring down upon him; neither compassion nor compunction, but rather madness and fell murder. The summons came once again.

"Do it quickly, I say, before we are interrupted. Do you hear?"

Truly, the president both heard and understood; yet he hesitated one other second.

"You will not? Then may God have mercy——"

The hammer of the levelled pistol clicked. Andrew Galbraith shut his eyes and made a blind grasp for pen and check-book. His hands were shaking as with a palsy, but the fear of death steadied them suddenly when he came to write.

"Indorse it!" was the next command. The voices had ceased beyond the partition, and the dead silence was relieved only by the labored strokes of the president's pen and the tap-tap of the typewriter in the adjacent anteroom.

The check was written and indorsed, and under the menace of the revolver Andrew Galbraith was trying to give it to the robber. But the robber would not take it.

"No, I don't want your paper: come with me to your paying teller and get me the money. Make what explanation you see fit; but remember—if he hesitates, you die."

They left the private office together, the younger man a short half-step in the rear, with his pistol-bearing hand thrust under his coat. MacFarland, the stenographer, was at his desk in the corner of the anteroom. Ninety-nine times

out of a hundred the unwonted thing, the president's forthfaring with a stranger who had somehow gained access to the private room during the sacred half-hour, would have made him look up and wonder. But this was the hundredth time, and Andrew Galbraith's anxious glance aside was wasted upon MacFarland's back.

Still the president did not despair. In the public lobby there would be more eyes to see, and perhaps some that would understand. Mr. Galbraith took a firmer hold upon his self-possession and trusted that some happy chance might yet intervene to save him.

But chance did not intervene. There was a goodly number of customers in the public space, but not one of the half-dozen or more who nodded to the president or passed the time of day with him saw the eye-appeal which was the only one he dared to make. On the short walk around to the paying teller's window, the robber kept even step with his victim, and try as he would, Andrew Galbraith could not summon the courage to forget the pistol muzzle menacing him in its coat-covered ambush.

At the paying wicket there was only one customer, instead of the group the president had hoped to find; a sweet-faced young woman in a modest travelling hat and a gray coat. She was getting a draft cashed, and when she saw them she would have stood aside. It was the robber who anticipated her intention and forbade it with a courteous gesture; whereat she turned again to the window to conclude her small transaction with the teller.

The few moments which followed were terribly trying ones for the gray-haired president of the Bayou State

Security. None the less, his brain was busy with the chanceful possibilities. Failing all else, he was determined to give the teller a warning signal, come what might. It was a duty owed to society no less than to the bank and to himself. But on the pinnacle of resolution, at the instant when, with the robber at his elbow, he stepped to the window and presented the check, Andrew Galbraith felt the gentle pressure of the pistol muzzle against his side; nay, more; he fancied he could feel the cold chill of the metal strike through and through him.

So it came about that the fine resolution had quite evaporated when he said, with what composure there was in him: "You'll please give me currency for that, Johnson."

The teller glanced at the check and then at his superior; not too inquisitively, since it was not his business to question the president's commands.

"How will you have it?" he asked; and it was the stranger at Mr. Galbraith's elbow who answered.

"One thousand in fives, tens, and twenties, loose, if you please; the remainder in the largest denominations, put up in a package."

The teller counted out the one thousand in small notes quickly; but he had to leave the cage and go to the vault for the huge remainder. This was the crucial moment of peril for the robber, and the president, stealing a glance at the face of his persecutor, saw the blue eyes blazing with excitement.

"It is your time to pray, Mr. Galbraith," said the spoiler in low tones. "If you have given your man the signal——"

But the signal had not been given. The teller was re-entering the cage with the bulky packet of money-paper.

"You needn't open it," said the young man at the president's elbow. "The bank's count is good enough for me." And when the window wicket had been unlatched and the money passed out, he stuffed the loose bills carelessly into his pocket, put the package containing the ninety-nine thousand dollars under his arm, nodded to the president, backed swiftly to the street door and vanished.

Then it was that Mr. Andrew Galbraith suddenly found speech, opening his thin lips and pouring forth a torrent of incoherence which presently got itself translated into a vengeful hue and cry; and New Orleans the unimpetuous had its sensation ready-made.

IV

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IO TRIUMPHE!

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If Kenneth Griswold, backing out of the street door of the Bayou State Security and vanishing with his booty, had been nothing more than a professional "strong-arm man," he would probably have been taken and jailed within the hour, if only for the reason that his desperate cast for fortune included no well-wrought-out plan of escape. But since he was at once both wiser and less cunning than the practised bank robber, he threw his pursuers off the scent by an expedient in which artlessness and daring quite

beyond the gifts of the journeyman criminal played equal parts.

Once safely in the street, with a thousand dollars in his pocket and the packet of bank-notes under his arm, he was seized by an impulse to do some extravagant thing to celebrate his success. It had proved to be such a simple matter, after all: one bold stroke; a tussle, happily bloodless, with the plutocratic dragon whose hold upon his treasure was so easily broken; and presto! the hungry proletary had become himself a power in the world, strong to do good or evil, as the gods might direct.

This was the prompting to exultation as it might have been set in words; but in Griswold's thought it was but a swift suggestion, followed instantly by another which was much more to the immediate purpose. He was hungry: there was a restaurant next door to the bank. Without thinking overmuch of the risk he ran, and perhaps not at all of the audacious subtlety of such an expedient at such a critical moment, he went in, sat down at one of the small marble-topped tables, and calmly ordered breakfast.

Since hunger is a lusty special pleader, making itself heard above any pulpit drum of the higher faculties, it is quite probable that Griswold dwelt less upon what he had done than upon what he was about to eat, until the hue and cry in the street reminded him that the chase was begun. But at this, not to appear suspiciously incurious, he put on the mask of indifferent interest and asked the waiter concerning the uproar.

The serving man did not know what had happened, but he would go and find out, if M'sieu' so desired. "M'sieu'" said

breakfast first, by all means, and information afterward. Both came in due season; and the hungry one ate while he listened.

Transmuted into the broken English of the Gascon serving man, the story of the robbery lost nothing in its sensational features.

"Ah! w'at you t'ink, M'sieu'? De bank on de nex' do' is been rob'!" And upon this theme excited volubility descanted at large. The bank had been surrounded by a gang of desperate men, with every exit guarded, while the leader, a masked giant armed to the teeth, had compelled the president at the muzzle of a pistol to pay a ransom of fifty—one hundred—five hundred thousand dollars! With the money in hand the gang had vanished, the masked giant firing the pistol at M'sieu' the president as he went. Cross-examined, the waiter could not affirm positively as to the shot. But as for the remaining details there could be no doubt.

Griswold ordered a second cup of coffee, and while the waiter was bringing it, conscience—not the newly acquired conscience, but the conventional—bent its bow and sped its final arrow. It was suddenly brought home to the enthusiast with sharp emphasis that to all civilized mankind, save and excepting those few chosen ones who shared his peculiar convictions, he was a common thief, a bandit, an outlaw. Public opinion, potential or expressed, is at best but an intangible thing. But for a few tumultuous seconds Griswold writhed under the ban of it as if it had been a whip of scorpions. Then he smiled to think how strong the bonds of

custom had grown; and at the smile conscience flung away its empty quiver.

Now it was over, however, the enthusiast was rather grateful for the chastening. It served to remind him afresh of his mission. This money which he had just wrested from the claws of the plutocratic dragon must be held as a sacred trust; it must be devoted scrupulously to the cause of the down-trodden and the oppressed. Precisely how it was to be applied he had not yet determined; but that could be decided later.

Meanwhile, it was very evident that the dragon did not intend to accept defeat without a struggle, and Griswold set his wits at work upon the problem of escape.

"It's a little queer that I hadn't thought of that part of it before," he mused, sipping his coffee as one who need not hasten until the race is actually begun. "I suppose the other fellow, the real robber, would have figured himself safely out of it—or would have thought he had—before he made the break. Since I did not, I've got it to do now, and there isn't much time to throw away. Let me see—" he shut his eyes and went into the inventive trance of the literary craftsman —"the keynote must be originality; I must do that which the other fellow would never think of doing."

On the strength of that decision he ventured to order a third cup of coffee, and before it had cooled he had outlined a plan, basing it upon a further cross-questioning of the Gascon waiter. The man had been to the street door again, and by this time the sidewalk excitement had subsided sufficiently to make room for an approach to the truth. The story of an armed band surrounding the bank had been a