

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE THREAD OF G. SELDEN

The Shuttle having in its weaving caught up the thread of G. Selden's rudimentary existence and drawn it, with the young man himself, across the sea, used curiously the thread in question, in the forming of the design of its huge web. As wool and coarse linen are sometimes interwoven with rich silk for decorative or utilitarian purposes, so perhaps was this previously unvalued material employed.

It was, indeed, an interesting truth that the young man, during his convalescence, without his own knowledge, acted as a species of magnet which drew together persons who might not easily otherwise have met. Mr. Penzance and Mount Dunstan rode over to see him every few days, and their visits naturally established relations with Stornham Court much more intimate than could have formed themselves in the same length of time under any of the ordinary circumstances of country life. Conventionalities lost their prominence in friendly intercourse with Selden. It was not, however, that he himself desired to dispense with convention. His intense wish to "do the right thing," and avoid giving offence was the most ingenuous and touching feature of his broad cosmopolitan good nature.

"If I ever make a break, sir," he had once said, with almost passionate fervour, in talking to Mr. Penzance, "please tell me, and set me on the

right track. No fellow likes to look like a hoosier, but I don't mind that half as much as--as seeming not to APPRECIATE."

He used the word "appreciate" frequently. It expressed for him many degrees of thanks.

"I tell you that's fine," he said to Ughtred, who brought him a flower from the garden. "I appreciate that."

To Betty he said more than once:

"You know how I appreciate all this, Miss Vanderpoel. You DO know I appreciate it, don't you?"

He had an immense admiration for Mount Dunstan, and talked to him a great deal about America, often about the sheep ranch, and what it might have done and ought to have done. But his admiration for Mr. Penzance became affection. To him he talked oftener about England, and listened to the vicar's scholarly stories of its history, its past glories and its present ones, as he might have listened at fourteen to stories from the Arabian Nights.

These two being frequently absorbed in conversation, Mount Dunstan was rather thrown upon Betty's hands. When they strolled together about the place or sat under the deep shade of green trees, they talked not only of England and America, but of divers things which increased their

knowledge of each other. It is points of view which reveal qualities, tendencies, and innate differences, or accordances of thought, and the points of view of each interested the other.

"Mr. Selden is asking Mr. Penzance questions about English history," Betty said, on one of the afternoons in which they sat in the shade. "I need not ask you questions. You ARE English history."

"And you are American history," Mount Dunstan answered.

"I suppose I am."

At one of their chance meetings Miss Vanderpoel had told Lord Dunholm and Lord Westholt something of the story of G. Selden. The novelty of it had delighted and amused them. Lord Dunholm had, at points, been touched as Penzance had been. Westholt had felt that he must ride over to Stornham to see the convalescent. He wanted to learn some New York slang.

He would take lessons from Selden, and he would also buy a Delkoff--two Delkoffs, if that would be better. He knew a hard-working fellow who ought to have a typewriter.

"Heath ought to have one," he had said to his father. Heath was the house-steward. "Think of the letters the poor chap has to write to

trades-people to order things, and unorder them, and blackguard the shopkeepers when they are not satisfactory. Invest in one for Heath, father."

"It is by no means a bad idea," Lord Dunholm reflected. "Time would be saved by the use of it, I have no doubt."

"It saves time in any department where it can be used," Betty had answered. "Three are now in use at Stornham, and I am going to present one to Kedgers. This is a testimonial I am offering. Three weeks ago I began to use the Delkoff. Since then I have used no other. If YOU use them you will introduce them to the county."

She understood the feeling of the junior assistant, when he found himself in the presence of possible purchasers. Her blood tingled slightly. She wished she had brought a catalogue.

"We will come to Stornham to see the catalogue," Lord Dunholm promised.

"Perhaps you will read it aloud to us," Westholt suggested gleefully.

"G. Selden knows it by heart, and will repeat it to you with running comments. Do you know I shall be very glad if you decide to buy one--or two--or three," with an uplift of the Irish blue eyes to Lord Dunholm.

"The blood of the first Reuben Vanderpoel stirs in my veins--also I have begun to be fond of G. Selden."

Therefore it occurred that on the afternoon referred to Lady Anstruthers appeared crossing the sward with two male visitors in her wake.

"Lord Dunholm and Lord Westholt," said Betty, rising.

For this meeting between the men Selden was, without doubt, responsible. While his father talked to Mount Dunstan, Westholt explained that they had come athirst for the catalogue. Presently Betty took him to the sheltered corner of the lawn, where the convalescent sat with Mr. Penzance.

But, for a short time, Lord Dunholm remained to converse with Mount Dunstan. In a way the situation was delicate. To encounter by chance a neighbour whom one--for reasons--has not seen since his childhood, and to be equal to passing over and gracefully obliterating the intervening years, makes demand even upon finished tact. Lord Dunholm's world had been a large one, and he had acquired experience tending to the development of the most perfect methods. If G. Selden had chanced to be the magnet which had decided his course this special afternoon, Miss Vanderpoel it was who had stirred in him sufficient interest in Mount Dunstan to cause him to use the best of these methods when he found himself face to face with him.

He beautifully eliminated the years, he eliminated all but the facts that the young man's father and himself had been acquaintances in youth,

that he remembered Mount Dunstan himself as a child, that he had heard with interest of his visit to America. Whatsoever the young man felt, he made no sign which presented obstacles. He accepted the eliminations with outward composure. He was a powerful-looking fellow, with a fine way of carrying his shoulders, and an eye which might be able to light savagely, but just now, at least, he showed nothing of the sulkiness he was accused of.

Lord Dunholm progressed admirably with him. He soon found that he need not be upon any strain with regard to the eliminations. The man himself could eliminate, which was an assistance.

They talked together when they turned to follow the others to the retreat of G. Selden.

"Have you bought a Delkoff?" Lord Dunholm inquired.

"If I could have afforded it, I should have bought one."

"I think that we have come here with the intention of buying three. We did not know we required them until Miss Vanderpoel recited half a page of the catalogue to us."

"Three will mean a 'rake off' of fifteen dollars to G. Selden," said Mount Dunstan. It was, he saw, necessary that he should explain the meaning of a "rake off," and he did so to his companion's entertainment.

The afternoon was a satisfactory one. They were all kind to G. Selden, and he on his part was an aid to them. In his innocence he steered three of them, at least, through narrow places into an open sea of easy intercourse. This was a good beginning. The junior assistant was recovering rapidly, and looked remarkably well. The doctor had told him that he might try to use his leg. The inside cabin of the cheap Liner and "little old New York" were looming up before him. But what luck he had had, and what a holiday! It had been enough to set a fellow up for ten years' work. It would set up the boys merely to be told about it. He didn't know what HE had ever done to deserve such luck as had happened to him. For the rest of his life he would be waving the Union Jack alongside of the Stars and Stripes.

Mr. Penzance it was who suggested that he should try the strength of the leg now.

"Yes," Mount Dunstan said. "Let me help you."

As he rose to go to him, Westholt good-naturedly got up also. They took their places at either side of his invalid chair and assisted him to rise and stand on his feet.

"It's all right, gentlemen. It's all right," he called out with a delighted flush, when he found himself upright. "I believe I could stand alone. Thank you. Thank you."

He was able, leaning on Mount Dunstan's arm, to take a few steps. Evidently, in a short time, he would find himself no longer disabled.

Mr. Penzance had invited him to spend a week at the vicarage. He was to do this as soon as he could comfortably drive from the one place to the other. After receiving the invitation he had sent secretly to London for one of the Delkoffs he had brought with him from America as a specimen. He cherished in private a plan of gently entertaining his host by teaching him to use the machine. The vicar would thus be prepared for that future in which surely a Delkoff must in some way fall into his hands. Indeed, Fortune having at length cast an eye on himself, might chance to favour him further, and in time he might be able to send a "high-class machine" as a grateful gift to the vicarage. Perhaps Mr. Penzance would accept it because he would understand what it meant of feeling and appreciation.

During the afternoon Lord Dunholm managed to talk a good deal with Mount Dunstan. There was no air of intention in his manner, nevertheless intention was concealed beneath its courteous amiability. He wanted to get at the man. Before they parted he felt he had, perhaps, learned things opening up new points of view.

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In the smoking-room at Dunholm that night he and his son talked of their



chance encounter. It seemed possible that mistakes had been made about Mount Dunstan. One did not form a definite idea of a man's character in the course of an afternoon, but he himself had been impressed by a conviction that there had been mistakes.

"We are rather a stiff-necked lot--in the country--when we allow ourselves to be taken possession of by an idea," Westholt commented.

"I am not at all proud of the way in which we have taken things for granted," was his father's summing up. "It is, perhaps, worth observing," taking his cigar from his mouth and smiling at the end of it, as he removed the ash, "that, but for Miss Vanderpoel and G. Selden, we might never have had an opportunity of facing the fact that we may not have been giving fair play. And one has prided one's self on one's fair play."