

CHAPTER VI

Dick Forrest proved himself no prodigy at the university, save that he cut more lectures the first year than any other student. The reason for this was that he did not need the lectures he cut, and he knew it. His coaches, while preparing him for the entrance examinations, had carried him nearly through the first college year. Incidentally, he made the Freshman team, a very scrub team, that was beaten by every high school and academy it played against.

But Dick did put in work that nobody saw. His collateral reading was wide and deep, and when he went on his first summer cruise in the ocean-going gasoline yacht he had built no gay young crowd accompanied him. Instead, his guests, with their families, were professors of literature, history, jurisprudence, and philosophy. It was long remembered in the university as the "high-brow" cruise. The professors, on their return, reported a most enjoyable time. Dick returned with a greater comprehension of the general fields of the particular professors than he could have gained in years at their class-lectures. And time thus gained, enabled him to continue to cut lectures and to devote more time to laboratory work.

Nor did he miss having his good college time. College widows made love to him, and college girls loved him, and he was indefatigable in his

dancing. He never cut a smoker, a beer bust, or a rush, and he toured the Pacific Coast with the Banjo and Mandolin Club.

And yet he was no prodigy. He was brilliant at nothing. Half a dozen of his fellows could out-banjo and out-mandolin him. A dozen fellows were adjudged better dancers than he. In football, and he gained the Varsity in his Sophomore year, he was considered a solid and dependable player, and that was all. It seemed never his luck to take the ball and go down the length of the field while the Blue and Gold host tore itself and the grandstand to pieces. But it was at the end of heart-breaking, grueling slog in mud and rain, the score tied, the second half imminent to its close, Stanford on the five-yard line, Berkeley's ball, with two downs and three yards to gain--it was then that the Blue and Gold arose and chanted its demand for Forrest to hit the center and hit it hard.

He never achieved super-excellence at anything. Big Charley Everson drank him down at the beer busts. Harrison Jackson, at hammer-throwing, always exceeded his best by twenty feet. Carruthers out-pointed him at boxing. Anson Burge could always put his shoulders to the mat, two out of three, but always only by the hardest work. In English composition a fifth of his class excelled him. Edlin, the Russian Jew, out-debated him on the contention that property was robbery. Schultz and Debret left him with the class behind in higher mathematics; and Otsuki, the Japanese, was beyond all comparison with him in chemistry.

But if Dick Forrest did not excel at anything, he failed in nothing. He displayed no superlative strength, he betrayed no weakness nor deficiency. As he told his guardians, who, by his unrelenting good conduct had been led into dreaming some great career for him; as he told them, when they asked what he wanted to become:

"Nothing. Just all around. You see, I don't have to be a specialist. My father arranged that for me when he left me his money. Besides, I couldn't be a specialist if I wanted to. It isn't me."

And thus so well-keyed was he, that he expressed clearly his key. He had no flare for anything. He was that rare individual, normal, average, balanced, all-around.

When Mr. Davidson, in the presence of his fellow guardians, stated his pleasure in that Dick had shown no wildness since he had settled down, Dick replied:

"Oh, I can hold myself when I want to."

"Yes," said Mr. Slocum gravely. "It's the finest thing in the world that you sowed your wild oats early and learned control."

Dick looked at him curiously.

"Why, that boyish adventure doesn't count," he said. "That wasn't wildness. I haven't gone wild yet. But watch me when I start. Do you know Kipling's 'Song of Diego Valdez'? Let me quote you a bit of it. You see, Diego Valdez, like me, had good fortune. He rose so fast to be High Admiral of Spain that he found no time to take the pleasure he had merely tasted. He was lusty and husky, but he had no time, being too busy rising. But always, he thought, he fooled himself with the thought, that his lustiness and huskiness would last, and, after he became High Admiral he could then have his pleasure. Always he remembered:

"--comrades--

Old playmates on new seas--
When as we traded orpiment
Among the savages--
A thousand leagues to south'ard
And thirty years removed--
They knew not noble Valdez,
But me they knew and loved.

"Then they that found good liquor
They drank it not alone,
And they that found fair plunder,
They told us every one,
Behind our chosen islands
Or secret shoals between,

When, walty from far voyage,
We gathered to careen.

"There burned our breaming-fagots,
All pale along the shore:
There rose our worn pavilions--
A sail above an oar:
As flashed each yearning anchor
Through mellow seas afire,
So swift our careless captains
Rowed each to his desire.

"Where lay our loosened harness?
Where turned our naked feet?
Whose tavern mid the palm-trees?
What quenchings of what heat?
Oh fountain in the desert!
Oh cistern in the waste!
Oh bread we ate in secret!
Oh cup we spilled in haste!

"The youth new-taught of longing,
The widow curbed and wan--
The good wife proud at season,
And the maid aware of man;
All souls, unslaked, consuming,

Defrauded in delays,
Desire not more than quittance
Than I those forfeit days!

"Oh, get him, get him, you three oldsters, as I've got him! Get what
he saws next:

"I dreamed to wait my pleasure,
Unchanged my spring would bide:
Wherefore, to wait my pleasure,
I put my spring aside,
Till, first in face of Fortune,
And last in mazed disdain,
I made Diego Valdez
High Admiral of Spain!"

"Listen to me, guardians!" Dick cried on, his face a flame of passion.
"Don't forget for one moment that I am anything but unslaked,
consuming. I am. I burn. But I hold myself. Don't think I am a dead
one because I am a darn nice, meritorious boy at college. I am young.
I am alive. I am all lusty and husky. But I make no mistake. I hold
myself. I don't start out now to blow up on the first lap. I am just
getting ready. I am going to have my time. I am not going to spill my
cup in haste. And in the end I am not going to lament as Diego Valdez
did:

"There walks no wind 'neath heaven
Nor wave that shall restore
The old careening riot
And the clamorous, crowded shore--
The fountain in the desert,
The cistern in the waste,
The bread we ate in secret,
The cup we spilled in haste.'

"Listen, guardians! Do you know what it is to hit your man, to hit him in hot blood--square to the jaw--and drop him cold? I want that. And I want to love, and kiss, and risk, and play the lusty, husky fool. I want to take my chance. I want my careening riot, and I want it while I am young, but not while I am too young. And I'm going to have it. And in the meantime I play the game at college, I hold myself, I equip myself, so that when I turn loose I am going to have the best chance of my best. Oh, believe me, I do not always sleep well of nights."

"You mean?" queried Mr. Crockett.

"Sure. That's just what I mean. I haven't gone wild yet, but just watch me when I start."

"And you will start when you graduate?"

The remarkable youngster shook his head.

"After I graduate I'm going to take at least a year of post-graduate courses in the College of Agriculture. You see, I'm developing a hobby--farming. I want to do something ... something constructive. My father wasn't constructive to amount to anything. Neither were you fellows. You struck a new land in pioneer days, and you picked up money like a lot of sailors shaking out nuggets from the grass roots in a virgin placer--"

"My lad, I've some little experience in Californian farming," Mr. Crockett interrupted in a hurt way.

"Sure you have, but you weren't constructive. You were--well, facts are facts--you were destructive. You were a bonanza farmer. What did you do? You took forty thousand acres of the finest Sacramento Valley soil and you grew wheat on it year after year. You never dreamed of rotation. You burned your straw. You exhausted your humus. You plowed four inches and put a plow-sole like a cement sidewalk just four inches under the surface. You exhausted that film of four inches and now you can't get your seed back.

"You've destroyed. That's what my father did. They all did it. Well, I'm going to take my father's money and construct. I'm going to take worked-out wheat-land that I can buy as at a fire-sale, rip out the plow-sole, and make it produce more in the end than it did when you fellows first farmed it."

It was at the end of his Junior year that Mr. Crockett again mentioned Dick's threatened period of wildness.

"Soon as I'm done with cow college," was his answer. "Then I'm going to buy, and stock, and start a ranch that'll be a ranch. And then I'll set out after my careening riot."

"About how large a ranch will you start with?" Mr. Davidson asked.

"Maybe fifty thousand acres, maybe five hundred thousand. It all depends. I'm going to play unearned increment to the limit. People haven't begun to come to California yet. Without a tap of my hand or a turn over, fifteen years from now land that I can buy for ten dollars an acre will be worth fifty, and what I can buy for fifty will be worth five hundred."

"A half million acres at ten dollars an acre means five million dollars," Mr. Crockett warned gravely.

"And at fifty it means twenty-five million," Dick laughed.

But his guardians never believed in the wild oats pilgrimage he threatened. He might waste his fortune on new-fangled farming, but to go literally wild after such years of self-restraint was an unthinkable thing.

Dick took his sheepskin with small honor. He was twenty-eighth in his class, and he had not set the college world afire. His most notable achievement had been his resistance and bafflement of many nice girls and of the mothers of many nice girls. Next, after that, he had signalized his Senior year by captaining the Varsity to its first victory over Stanford in five years. It was in the day prior to large-salaried football coaches, when individual play meant much; but he hammered team-work and the sacrifice of the individual into his team, so that on Thanksgiving Day, over a vastly more brilliant eleven, the Blue and Gold was able to serpentine its triumph down Market Street in San Francisco.

In his post-graduate year in cow college, Dick devoted himself to laboratory work and cut all lectures. In fact, he hired his own lecturers, and spent a sizable fortune on them in mere traveling expenses over California. Jacques Ribot, esteemed one of the greatest world authorities on agricultural chemistry, who had been seduced from his two thousand a year in France by the six thousand offered by the University of California, who had been seduced to Hawaii by the ten thousand of the sugar planters, Dick Forrest seduced with fifteen thousand and the more delectable temperate climate of California on a five years' contract.

Messrs. Crockett, Slocum, and Davidson threw up their hands in horror and knew that this was the wild career Dick Forrest had forecast.

But this was only one of Dick Forrest's similar dissipations. He stole from the Federal Government, at a prodigal increase of salary, its star specialist in livestock breeding, and by similar misconduct he robbed the University of Nebraska of its greatest milch cow professor, and broke the heart of the Dean of the College of Agriculture of the University of California by appropriating Professor Nirdenhammer, the wizard of farm management.

"Cheap at the price, cheap at the price," Dick explained to his guardians. "Wouldn't you rather see me spend my money in buying professors than in buying race horses and actresses? Besides, the trouble with you fellows is that you don't know the game of buying brains. I do. That's my specialty. I'm going to make money out of them, and, better than that, I'm going to make a dozen blades of grass grow where you fellows didn't leave room for half a blade in the soil you gutted."

So it can be understood how his guardians could not believe in his promise of wild career, of kissing and risking, and hitting men hot on the jaw. "One year more," he warned, while he delved in agricultural chemistry, soil analysis, farm management, and traveled California with his corps of high-salaried experts. And his guardians could only apprehend a swift and wide dispersal of the Forrest millions when Dick attained his majority, took charge of the totality of his fortune, and actually embarked on his agricultural folly.

The day he was twenty-one the purchase of his principality, that extended west from the Sacramento River to the mountain tops, was consummated.

"An incredible price," said Mr. Crockett.

"Incredibly cheap," said Dick. "You ought to see my soil reports. You ought to see my water-reports. And you ought to hear me sing. Listen, guardians, to a song that is a true song. I am the singer and the song."

Whereupon, in the queer quavering falsetto that is the sense of song to the North American Indian, the Eskimo, and the Mongol, Dick sang:

"Hu'-tim yo'-kim koi-o-di'!

Wi'-hi yan'-ning koi-o-di'!

Lo'-whi yan'-ning koi-o-di'!

Yo-ho' Nai-ni', hal-u'-dom yo nai, yo-ho' nai-nim'!"

"The music is my own," he murmured apologetically, "the way I think it ought to have sounded. You see, no man lives who ever heard it sung. The Nishinam got it from the Maidu, who got it from the Konkau, who made it. But the Nishinam and the Maidu and the Konkau are gone. Their last rancheria is not. You plowed it under, Mr. Crockett, with you bonanza gang-plowing, plow-soling farming. And I got the song from a

certain ethnological report, volume three, of the United States Pacific Coast Geographical and Geological Survey. Red Cloud, who was formed out of the sky, first sang this song to the stars and the mountain flowers in the morning of the world. I shall now sing it for you in English."

And again, in Indian falsetto, ringing with triumph, vernal and bursting, slapping his thighs and stamping his feet to the accent, Dick sang:

"The acorns come down from heaven!
I plant the short acorns in the valley!
I plant the long acorns in the valley!
I sprout, I, the black-oak acorn, sprout, I sprout!"

Dick Forrest's name began to appear in the newspapers with appalling frequency. He leaped to instant fame by being the first man in California who paid ten thousand dollars for a single bull. His livestock specialist, whom he had filched from the Federal Government, in England outbid the Rothschilds' Shire farm for Hillcrest Chieftain, quickly to be known as Forrest's Folly, paying for that kingly animal no less than five thousand guineas.

"Let them laugh," Dick told his ex-guardians. "I am importing forty Shire mares. I'll write off half his price the first twelvemonth. He will be the sire and grandsire of many sons and grandsons for which

the Californians will fall over themselves to buy of me at from three to five thousand dollars a clatter."

Dick Forrest was guilty of many similar follies in those first months of his majority. But the most unthinkable folly of all was, after he had sunk millions into his original folly, that he turned it over to his experts personally to develop along the general broad lines laid down by him, placed checks upon them that they might not go catastrophically wrong, bought a ticket in a passenger brig to Tahiti, and went away to run wild.

Occasionally his guardians heard from him. At one time he was owner and master of a four-masted steel sailing ship that carried the English flag and coals from Newcastle. They knew that much, because they had been called upon for the purchase price, because they read Dick's name in the papers as master when his ship rescued the passengers of the ill-fated Orion, and because they collected the insurance when Dick's ship was lost with most of all hands in the great Fiji hurricane. In 1896, he was in the Klondike; in 1897, he was in Kamchatka and scurvy-stricken; and, next, he erupted with the American flag into the Philippines. Once, although they could never learn how nor why, he was owner and master of a crazy tramp steamer, long since rejected by Lloyd's, which sailed under the aegis of Siam.

From time to time business correspondence compelled them to hear from him from various purple ports of the purple seas. Once, they had to

bring the entire political pressure of the Pacific Coast to bear upon Washington in order to get him out of a scrape in Russia, of which affair not one line appeared in the daily press, but which affair was secretly provocative of ticklish joy and delight in all the chancelleries of Europe.

Incidentally, they knew that he lay wounded in Mafeking; that he pulled through a bout with yellow fever in Guayaquil; and that he stood trial for brutality on the high seas in New York City. Thrice they read in the press dispatches that he was dead: once, in battle, in Mexico; and twice, executed, in Venezuela. After such false flutterings, his guardians refused longer to be thrilled when he crossed the Yellow Sea in a sampan, was "rumored" to have died of beri-beri, was captured from the Russians by the Japanese at Mukden, and endured military imprisonment in Japan.

The one thrill of which they were still capable, was when, true to promise, thirty years of age, his wild oats sown, he returned to California with a wife to whom, as he announced, he had been married several years, and whom all his three guardians found they knew. Mr. Slocum had dropped eight hundred thousand along with the totality of her father's fortune in the final catastrophe at the Los Cocos mine in Chihuahua when the United States demonetized silver. Mr. Davidson had pulled a million out of the Last Stake along with her father when he pulled eight millions from that sunken, man-resurrected, river bed in Amador County. Mr. Crockett, a youth at the time, had "spooned" the

Merced bottom with her father in the late 'fifties, had stood up best man with him at Stockton when he married her mother, and, at Grant's Pass, had played poker with him and with the then Lieutenant U.S. Grant when all the little the western world knew of that young lieutenant was that he was a good Indian fighter but a poor poker player.

And Dick Forrest had married the daughter of Philip Desten! It was not a case of wishing Dick luck. It was a case of garrulous insistence on the fact that he did not know how lucky he was. His guardians forgave him all his wildness. He had made good. At last he had performed a purely rational act. Better; it was a stroke of genius. Paula Desten! Philip Desten's daughter! The Desten blood! The Destens and the Forrests! It was enough. The three aged comrades of Forrest and Desten of the old Gold Days, of the two who had played and passed on, were even severe with Dick. They warned him of the extreme value of his treasure, of the sacred duty such wedlock imposed on him, of all the traditions and virtues of the Desten and Forrest blood, until Dick laughed and broke in with the disconcerting statement that they were talking like a bunch of fanciers or eugenics cranks--which was precisely what they were talking like, although they did not care to be told so crassly.

At any rate, the simple fact that he had married a Desten made them nod unqualified approbation when he showed them the plans and building estimates of the Big House. Thanks to Paula Desten, for once they were

agreed that he was spending wisely and well. As for his farming, it was incontestible that the Harvest Group was unfalteringly producing, and he might be allowed his hobbies. Nevertheless, as Mr. Slocum put it: "Twenty-five thousand dollars for a mere work-horse stallion is a madness. Work-horses are work-horses; now had it been running stock...."