



The O'Connors were born to rule.

A RULER OF MEN.

By O. HENRY.

I WALKED the streets of the City of Insolenoe, thirsting for the sight of a stranger face. For the City is a desert of familiar types as thick and alike as the grains in a sand-storm; and you grow to hate them as you do a friend who is always by you, or one of your own kin.

And my desire was granted, for I saw, near a corner of Broadway and Twenty-ninth-street, a little flaxen-haired man with a face like a scaly-bark hickory-nut, selling to a fast-gathering crowd a tool that omnigenously proclaimed itself a can-opener, a screw-driver, a button-hook, a nail-file, a shoe-horn, a watch-guard, a potato-peeler, and an ornament to any gentleman's key-ring.

And then a stall-fed cop shoved himself through the congregation of customers. The vender, plainly used to having his seasons of trade thus abruptly curtailed, closed his satchel and slipped like a weasel through the opposite segment of the circle. The crowd scurried aimlessly away like ants from a disturbed crumb. The cop, suddenly becoming oblivious of the earth and its inhabitants, stood still, swelling his bulk and putting his club through an intricate drill of twirls. I hurried after Kansas Bill Bowers, and caught him by an arm.

Without his looking at me or slowing his pace, I found a five-dollar bill crumpled neatly into my hand.

"I wouldn't have thought, Kansas Bill," I said, "that you'd hold an old friend that cheap."

Then he turned his head, and the hickory-nut cracked into a wide smile.

"Give back the money," said he, "or I'll have the cop after you for false pretences. I thought you was the cop."

"I want to talk to you, Bill," I said. "When did you leave Oklahoma? Where is Reddy McGill now? Why are you selling those impossible contraptions on the street? How did your Big Horn gold-mine pan out? How did you get so badly sunburned? What will you drink?"

"A year ago," answered Kansas Bill, systematically. "Putting up windmills in Arizona. For pin money to buy ceteras with. Salted. Been down in the tropics. Beer."

We foregathered in a propitious place and became Elijahs, while a waiter of dark plumage played the raven to perfection. Reminiscence needs must be had before I could steer Bill into his epic mood.

"Yes," said he, "I mind the time Tom-boo's rope broke on that cow's horns while the calf was chasing you. You had that cow! I'd never forget it."

"The Tropics," said I, "are a broad territory. What part of Cancer or Capricorn have you been honouring with a visit?"

"Down along China or Peru—or maybe the Argentine Confederacy," said Kansas Bill. "Anyway 'twas among a great race of people, off-coloured but progressive. I was there three months."

"No doubt you are glad to be back among the truly great race," I surmised. "Especially among New Yorkers, the most progressive and independent citizens of any country in the world," I continued, with the faculty of the provincial who has eaten the Broadway lotus.

"Do you want to start an argument?" asked Bill.

"Can there be one?" I answered. "Has an Irishman humour, do you think?" asked he.

"I have an hour or two to spare," said I, looking at the safe clock.

"Not that the Americans aren't a great commercial nation," conceded Bill. "But the fault laid with the people who wrote lies for fiction."

"What was this Irishman's name?" I asked.

"Was that last beer cold enough?" said he.

"I see there is talk of further outbreaks among the Russian peasants," I remarked.

"His name was Barney O'Connor," said Bill.

Thus, because of our ancient prescience of each other's trail of thought, we travelled ambiguously to the point where Kansas Bill's story began:

"I met O'Connor in a boarding-house on the West Side. He invited me to his hall-room to have a drink, and we became like a dog and a cat that had been raised together. There he sat, a tall, fine, handsome man, with his feet against one wall and his back against the other, looking over a map. On the bed and sticking three feet out of it was a beautiful gold sword with tassels on it and rhinestones in the handle.

"What is this?" says I (for by that time we were well acquainted). "The annual parade in villification of the ex-slaves of Ireland? And what's the line of march? Up Broadway to Forty-second; thence east to McCarty's cafe; thence—"

"Sit down on the wash-stand," says O'Connor, "and listen. And cast no perversions on the sword. 'Twas me father's in old Munster. And this map, Bowers, is no diagram of a holiday procession. If you look again ye'll see that it's the continent known as South America, comprising fourteen green, blue, red, and yellow countries, all crying out from time to time to be liberated from the yoke of the oppressor."

"I know," says I to O'Connor. "The idea is a literary one. The ten-cent magazines stole it from 'Ridpath's History of the World from the Sandstone Period to the Equator.' You'll find it in every one of 'em. It's a continued story of a soldier of fortune, generally named O'Keefe, who gets to be dictator while the Spanish-American populace cries 'Cospetto!' and other Italian maledictions. I misdoubt if it's ever been done. You're not thinking of trying that, are you, Barney?" I ask.

"Bowers," says he, "you're a man of education and courage."

"How can I deny it?" says I. "Education runs in my family; and I have acquired courage by a hard struggle with life."

"The O'Connors," says he, "are a warlike race. There is me father's sword; and here is the

map. A life of inaction is not for me. The O'Connors were born to rule. 'Tis a ruler of men I want be.' "Barney," I says to him, "why don't you get on the force and settle down to a quiet life of carnage and corruption instead of roaming off to foreign parts? In what better way can you indulge your desire to subdue and maltreat the oppressed?"

"Look again at the map," says he, "at the country I have the point of me knife on. 'Tis that one I have selected to aid and overthrow with me father's sword."

"I see," says I. "It's the green one; and that does credit to your patriotism. And it's the smallest one; and that does credit to your judgment."

"Do ye accuse me of cowardice?" says Barney, turning pink.

"No man," says I, "who attacks and confiscates a country single-handed could be called a coward. The worst you can be charged with is plagiarism or imitation. If Anthony Hope and Roosevelt let you get away with it, nobody else will have any right to kick."

"I am not joking," says O'Connor. "And I've got 1,500 dollars cash to work the scheme with. I've taken a liking to you. Do you want in, or not?"

"I'm not working," I told him; "but how is it to be? Do I eat during the fomentation of the insurrection, or am I only to be Secretary of War after the country is conquered? Is it to be a pay envelope or only a portfolio?"

"I'll pay all expenses," says O'Connor. "I want a man I can trust. If we succeed you may pick out any appointment you want in the gift of the government."

"All right, then," says I. "You can get me a bunch of draying contracts and then a quick-action consignment to a seat on the Supreme Court bench so I won't be in line for the presidency. I wouldn't mind Uncle Joe, but the kind of cannon they chasten their presidents with in that country hurt too much. You can consider me on the pay-roll."

"Two weeks afterward O'Connor and me took a steamer for the small, green, doomed country. We were three weeks on the trip. O'Connor said he had his plans all figured out in advance; but being the commanding general, it consorted with his dignity to keep the details concealed from his army and cabinet, commonly known as William T. Bowers. Three dollars a day was the price for which I joined the cause of liberating an undiscovered country from the ills that threatened or sustained it. Every Saturday night on the steamer I stood in line at parade rest, and O'Connor handed over the twenty-one dollars.

"The town we landed at was named Guayamerita, so they told me. 'No! for me!' says I. 'It'll be little old Hill-dale or Tompkinsville or Cherry Tree



He and the General gave an exhibition that put Kyrle Bellew and Phil Armour in the shade.