

A Fortune For a Dance

Spirited Bidding For a Partner at a Charity Ball

By HENRIETTA DEERING

During the first half of the nineteenth century, when the patriarchal plantation system existed in the southern states, there were three distinct classes—the planters, the poor whites and the negro slaves. It is questionable if the negro's condition was not preferable to that of the poor white.

Colonel Richard Runlet, of Virginia, was kind to his slaves, and both he and all his family were greatly interested in charity.

A neighboring planter, Oliver Desborough, having had bad luck for several years in succession with his tobacco crop, found himself in pecuniary difficulties. Colonel Runlet assisted him, and when Desborough was sold out under foreclosure of mortgage the colonel bought his plantation and his negroes, paying for them a higher price than he was compelled to pay. But when he discovered that there was a love affair between Desborough's only son, Lawrence, and his own daughter, Constance, he gave the young girl to understand that no union could take place between the two families on account of the Desboroughs' impoverished condition.

Constance was but seventeen and Lawrence twenty. She was too young to defy her father, and her lover had little on which to live, to say nothing of taking care of a wife. Besides, he was an ambitious young man and scorned the idea of remaining in a region where the wealth was inherited, not made, and where he must inevitably be always considered a "poor white." It nearly broke his and the girl's hearts to part, but part they did, he going north to carve out a career.

Lawrence Desborough disappeared from the south in the middle of the century. Out of the wreck of the family fortune his father gave him \$10,000, saying: "My boy, you are young and strong and smart. Use this money to advantage, and some day when you have succeeded come back here and buy back the plantation and those negroes who may not have left it." Lawrence made his parents goodby, and it was a long while before he saw his home again.

Colonel Runlet was one of the few planters who emerged from the war with their plantations intact, though a number of his slaves had drifted elsewhere. The majority, however, remained to work for him for what he could afford to give them. The old plantation life had passed away, and even the colonel, though better off than most of his neighbors, found it difficult to maintain himself. His former gifts to charity could not be continued, but the women of his family worked for the benefit of the poor in those ways to which their sex is peculiarly adapted, getting up fairs and amusements for the purpose of raising money. Constance, now twenty-seven years old and very attractive, was foremost in all such efforts and was worshipped not only by those whom she assisted, but by those who worked with her.

During the winter after the close of the war there was so much misery not only among the lower classes, but among men who lived in affluence, that Constance asked her father a permission to give a masked ball for charity. He consented at once, and every preparation was made to give relief to the occasion. Since the work to be done was far beyond Constance's single powers she invited a number of her friends to become her assistants. The staff was divided into committees, one of which was to search for unique costumes which might be introduced at the ball.

Among the recommendations made by this committee was one that one of the members had read of in a Spanish book. In Granada there was or had been a custom at balls given for the purpose of raising money wherein the privilege of the first dance with any lady was sold to the man who would pay the highest price for it. The committee decided that those ladies who would permit the privilege of this sold with them to be sold should be auctioned off before the dancing began. About a dozen prominent young ladies consulted, among them the hostess, Constance Runlet.

The costumes were of home manufacture, for there was no money with which to buy them. But such labor pains to make the object for which it is undertaken the more enjoyable. Antebellum wardrobes were ransacked, and every available bit of finery that had been stowed away in the south's baggage period was brought out to be turned into dresses for queens, princesses and other historical characters for the women, and kings and noble men for the men. When the influx of guests had ceased there was a flourish by the orchestra (improvised negro musicians), and the King made its way to the dancing hall, where the auctioneer's voice was to be heard.

Colonel Runlet's house was one of those colonial Virginia mansions in which a ballroom was indispensable. In this case the width of the top story was devoted to it. At one end was a dais, on which stood the auctioneer. The ladies whose partnership for the open-

ing dance was to be auctioned mingled with the crowd.

The committee had desired to make a first sale of the hand of Constance Runlet, but Constance would only consent that her turn should be the last instead of first. This was considered a mistake by the committee, for they believed that much of the money to be devoted to the purpose would have been spent, and since Constance was considered the prize of the evening if they began with her they thought they could excite a bidding that would draw forth a goodly sum.

Every young man of that region of the slightest means had been invited, and all were present. There were no northerners, for this was too near to the war to admit of fraternization with the enemy, but every southern man of respectability within fifty miles, rich or poor, had assembled, some of them suitors for one of the young ladies to be auctioned, not only for the dance, but in marriage.

When the hand of Constance was put up some one started it at \$50. A man dressed as Mephistopheles made a second bid of a hundred dollars. A third person offered a hundred and fifty. Mephistopheles astonished every one now by bidding \$500. Here the bidding ceased for awhile, but the auctioneer did not make the sale. It had been arranged that a number of married men, in order to be ready to stimulate the bidding in Miss Runlet's case, should form a pool to be put in one man's hands to be used for this purpose. Presently a man in Louis XV. costume raised the last bid to \$700. Mephistopheles made it a thousand.

Now a wealthy widower was in the pool, who had long wished to marry Constance, and the bidding of the fund had been placed in his hands. He doubled Mephistopheles' bid. The latter raised his a thousand, making the amount offered \$3,000. Louis XV. and Mephistopheles from this point continued to bid against each other till finally the latter offered \$10,000.

By this time the bidders interested everybody, but being masked, no one knew who they were. Cries of "Unmask!" were raised, and finally, after consultation with others who had made up the pool, Louis XV. raised his mask. Mephistopheles remained concealed. This only tended to increase the excitement.

Louis XV. was recognized as General Bernard, who had distinguished himself on the Confederate side during the war. He was fifty years old, well off and considered a desirable partner for a woman over twenty-five years old. He had been spoken of in connection with Constance, and his appearing in this role was received with intense interest. Since Mephistopheles continued to bid the general did the same. Finally, when the amount offered reached \$20,000, after a conference among the members of the pool Colonel Runlet approached Mephistopheles and asked him who he was.

"Incognito," replied the other. "I must request you, sir, to give some evidence of your ability to make good your bid in case you are accorded the privilege for which you are contending."

Mephistopheles thrust his hand into a pocket of his doublet and took out a certified check for \$100,000 on a bank in the nearest city. The colonel with drew and reported what he had seen. Then the bidding continued.

General Bernard continued to raise his bid \$10,000 at every offer, and Mephistopheles continued to go a thousand higher. Since the latter seemed determined to win at any cost the general kept raising him till Mephistopheles had bid \$50,000. Then the general nodded to the auctioneer, signifying that he did not care to go any further in bidding on his opponent. The amount he had gained for the pool was quite enough and had not cost him a cent.

Then a cry arose for Mephistopheles to unmask.

"Not without," cried Runlet's order, he said. Constance advanced and requested him to make himself known. He threw off his cape, then his doublet, revealing the uniform of a United States army officer, with the silver leaf of lieutenant colonel on his shoulders. Then, casting aside his mask, he stood revealed to all as a middle aged stranger whom no guest recognized. Constance gave a cry of joy, and he took her in his arms.

Lawrence Desborough had gone north and had become a northern man. The Colorado gold fever at that time occupied the attention of the nation, and putting his money into what miners called, he sailed around the Horn and sold his stock at an enormous profit. As a commission merchant he had accumulated capital which he invested in mining property. When the war broke out he volunteered in the Federal army. Before the surrender of one of his mines he had made him very rich. As soon as he learned of this he came to claim his former love.

His appearance in United States uniform produced a commotion. Many felt bitter toward him as a southern enemy who had fought against the south, but he had given \$50,000 to the poor in and about his former home, and this tended to alleviate the prejudice against him.

The music struck up for the first dance, a quadrille, and Lawrence Desborough and Constance Runlet danced together, he displaying on his shoulder the insignia of a Federal officer, the only such present.

In time he bought back the plantation of his ancestors and established in it his parents, who were now old people. He married Colonel Runlet's daughter, but since he had become northernized he took her to the more active field to be found in the northern states.

DEADLY OIL TANKS

Ships That Are a Constant Menace to All on Board.

DEATH LURKS IN THE CARGO

Besides the Constant Danger of the Oil Heating and Exploding and Instantly Destroying the Vessel There is Also the Peril of "Fuming."

The most dangerous sort of ship afloat is that particular kind of vessel known as the oil tank, and there isn't a sailorman who will sign on for a voyage in one if he can get a job on board any other class of vessel.

The oil tank is a vessel whose cargo consists of oil, which is carried in great tanks. Two dangers are ever present to all on board—namely, that the oil may heat and explode, which means the instant destruction of the ship, or that it may burst from the tanks, in which case the ship is almost certain to be destroyed by fire.

There is also the remote danger of the oil "fuming." When the oil comes almost impossible. On a "fuming" oil tank no one can remain below deck for more than ten minutes without becoming overcome by the oil fumes, which are a hundred times more deadly to human life than coal gas.

The most terrible tragedies of the ocean have occurred on board these death traps.

A few years ago a Russian oil tank, the Omar, which sailed from Batavia bound for Bombay with 40,000 gallons of oil on board, was sighted in the Pacific by a German tramp steamer named the Vektor Fend. The Omar was flying signals of distress and was sighted by apparently completely disabled. For she was making no head way.

The sea was quite calm, and the captain of the Vektor Fend approached within hailing distance of the disabled ship, but no reply came from her in response to his hail.

Then the captain of the German tramp sent a boat to the silent ship. When the boat's crew reached her decks they saw five men lying on the deck, three of whom were dead. The other two were in a state of collapse, but alive.

The mate of the German tramp, who was in charge of the boat, at once guessed that the oil had "fumed" on board the oil tank, probably at night, and that the two men in a state of collapse were probably the only survivors of the disaster. This subsequently turned out to be the case.

Below the decks, which the crew of the German tramp penetrated with great difficulty and danger to themselves, for the oil was still fuming, six of the oil tank's crew were found dead in their bunks where they had been suffocated by the fumes in their sleep. Three of the crew had succeeded in reaching the deck, but had died subsequently.

The two survivors were the only two on deck when the fumes burst from the tanks and in their efforts to save the others had very nearly perished themselves.

The crew of a Norwegian oil tank named the Helios had a terrible experience a few years ago in mid-Atlantic. During a heavy gale, in which the Helios suffered very rough handling in the mountainous seas, her oil tanks, containing 60,000 gallons of crude oil, burst and flowed into the bunkers, threatening to penetrate in a few minutes into the fireroom.

The crew flung themselves at the pumps like madmen. The oil soon began to fume, and no man could keep at the pumps for more than a few minutes without becoming overpowered. The captain of the Helios ordered that the crew of deck and four of their turn went below every five minutes to work at the pumps.

The fight they made for their lives was one of the most desperate that has ever been waged on the ocean. Directly the tank had burst the fire men had been ordered out of the fire room. There was no time in quench the fires, for the firemen would certainly have been suffocated by the fumes of the oil had they remained below to do so.

For eleven hours the officers and crew of the Helios worked like demons at the pumps, making the most desperate efforts to keep the oil from reaching the fire room. By the end of that time eight of the crew lay unconscious on the deck, overcome partly by exhaustion and partly by the fumes.

It was now only possible to work two of the pumps, and it became certain that, unless help arrived in another hour, the ship, with every living soul on board, would perish. It should be mentioned that every lifeboat on the Helios had been damaged during the storm.

Half an hour passed, and by then only the captain and the mate were working at the pumps. The destruction of the vessel was now only a matter of minutes. It was at this critical juncture that the oil tank was sighted by the Majestic of the White Star line, and twenty minutes later the crew of the doomed ship were safely on board the liner.

As the last man scrambled on board the Majestic from the boat which had been sent to the help of the Helios a mountain of flame sprang from the decks of the oil tank, and a few minutes later the blazing vessel sank below the water.

REED AND CARLISLE.

A Verbal Duel in the House Between the Parliamentary Masters.

Following is an interesting story of an encounter between Reed and Carlisle in his autobiography in the American Magazine.

"Reed was one of the ablest men in either house of congress. Some of his passages with Carlisle when Carlisle was speaker were among the best examples of close forensic reasoning I have ever heard. Both were as fine parliamentary athletes as were ever to be found. I remember vividly a characteristic passage between them.

It was near the end of the session and 3 o'clock in the morning. An appropriation bill was pending. Some one offered an amendment. If it passed some advantage would accrue to the Democrats; if it failed, some advantage to the Republicans. A point of order was raised against it, and Carlisle overruled the point. Reed was on his feet—Reed, 300 pounds, six feet tall. He was the leader on the Republican side. I remember he had just two gestures, one an impressive downward movement with his extended index finger, and in the other during his higher flights he held one great clenched fist high above his head like some colossus. He was a striking figure.

"I contend," he said on the occasion to which I refer, "that the speaker is wrong."

"Carlisle, standing there in the speaker's place, answered, 'I shall be glad to hear the gentleman from Maine'."

"Reed retorted, 'The speaker is wrong for this reason'—and put it in a nutshell.

"And, but the gentleman from Maine is in error because"—and Carlisle stated his contention without a superfluous word.

"Yes," answered Reed, "but Mr. Speaker, for ten or fifteen minutes it was party and thrust, trust and parry. Reed pressing Carlisle from position to position until finally the speaker said:

"The gentleman from Maine is clearly right. The speaker is wrong and reverses his ruling."

FORGED SIGNATURES.

Little Things That Expose the Fraud to Handwriting Experts.

Forgery has a great attraction to a certain element of the criminal world. Some are so skillful in this line of work as to get past the most eagle-eyed bank teller, but always when the microscope is brought into play it is possible to detect the fraud, or, if not the microscope, then more modern testing appliances are used.

Here is a secret divulged by a man who has made a study of handwriting. No person ever yet wrote his name twice alike. In some small or big detail one signature always differs from another. Therefore when the same man's name appears twice alike as it does in the course of business events, when a forger gets after a little while, there must be a matter of tracing. It stands to reason that the exact similarity of the one has been gained in the copying or tracing process.

When a man undertakes to write another man's name in the free hand style of Jim the Postman there is always noticeable to the practiced eye a "cramping" movement or a radical departure from the way in which the name should be written. Such a small thing as the particular position of the dot above the "i" for instance, will reveal forgery or the passing of the "i" or the shading of up or down strokes. A man will overlook the fact that the name he is writing when written by its owner always leaves the straight line at a certain letter and follows it in another certain letter.

Some business men place after their signatures on checks a period, some a comma, some a rough star, others a short or a long dash making the genuineness of the signature depend more upon this slight characteristic than the name itself. —New York Tribune.

Beau Brummel's Impudence
Beau Brummel's favorite dish was roasted capon stuffed with truffles. When he was living almost on the bounty of Mr. Marshall he attended a dinner party at that gentleman's house, taking with him, according to his most impudent custom, one of his favorite dogs. The Beau was helped to a wing of roast capon; but, choosing to fancy that the wing was tough, he delicately seized the end of it with a napkin covered finger and thumb and passed it under the table to his dog with the remark, "Here, Atout, try if you can get your teeth through this, for I'll be — if I can!"

More Likely.
"They say she fell in love with him; while he was filling her teeth."
"No; that's a mistake. She went to him to have some of her teeth filled, but it was when he informed her none of them required filling she fell in love with him." — Judge.

Meeting Sorrow.
Courage for the great sorrows of life and patience for the small ones, and then when you have accomplished your daily task go sleep in peace. God is awake. —Victor Hugo.

Naturally.
"A friend of mine has invented a new electric button."
"Is he doing anything with it?"
"Oh, yes—pushing it." — Baltimore American.

Fear is far more painful to cowardice than death to true courage. —Sir P. Sidney.

The Ruby Heart

A Story of Feudal Times in Germany

By F. A. MITCHEL

The tourist steaming on the river Rhine sees high up on the peaks of either bank ruins of castles that several centuries ago were the homes of feudal barons. One of an imaginative turn of mind may picture those strongholds peopled with gayly dressed men and women, soldiers and servants. There lived the baron, descending now and again to the river, collecting tribute from merchants passing up and down, the lion's share of which he took for himself, distributing the rest among those who did his bidding.

In one of those castles, which now stands out against the sky—a lonely ruin, dwelt the Baron Rudolf Eidenreid. Below it a little stream flows into the Rhine, and the baron had a boat station concealed by overhanging trees a short distance from its mouth. When a craft loaded with merchandise was seen coming a party would go down to this station and get out the boats, and when the merchant came opposite the mouth of the creek would shoot out to levy tribute. Sometimes the merchant would be protected by armed men; then there would be a fight, but the baronial custom usually won, and the merchant would be forced to pay the duty.

Among the Rhine maidens of that time was Bertha, the baron's daughter. At times when her father was not at home, when a merchantman was seen coming, she would take command of the revenue party and lead them to collect the tribute. She was greatly admired by all the men at arms in the castle, who would not willingly permit any harm to come to her. But she was brave as the rest of them, and when she was excited by a contest to protect her was no easy matter, for she would often distance her supporters in moving against an enemy.

So great was Bertha's military ardor that she avowed no man should wed her who could not conquer her. She went so far as to wear on her left breast a ruby cut in the shape of a heart to signify that any man who aspired to her hand must be able to place the point of his sword at the spot underneath which her heart was beating.

One morning a party of horsemen was seen ascending the height on which the castle stood. The baron was away, and when these men entered the postern and stood in the courtyard Bertha, looking from a casement, surveyed their leader. He was a young man slenderly made, but very symmetrical. His face was of an intellectual cast, and his long fair hair fell from beneath his velvet plumed cap over his lace collar. Altogether he formed a very pleasing picture to the eyes of the maiden. But the massive muscles that could wield a lance or a battlesword were wanting, and his was a strength of intellect rather than of flesh. Bertha opened the casement, saluted the young man and asked the reason for his coming. He announced himself as Count Hubert Rheinhart, a messenger of the king, and he had come to demand on the part of his majesty a hundred armed men to join his army to fight against the king of Sweden. Bertha replied that her father was absent, but the messenger and his retinue were welcome to remain in the castle till the baron's return. The count accepted the invitation, and he and his followers were housed and their horses stabled.

Now, the batons of those days usually yielded military service to the king grudgingly. The kingdom, composed of separate provinces, was loose jointed, and the sovereign found it difficult to enforce his decrees. Bertha, knowing that her father would rather rely on his descendants upon unlucky wayfarers, sent a messenger at once advising him of the king's demand, so that he might if he chose remain away until the party, weary with waiting, should go on to collect men and arms elsewhere.

But this was not the only reason for the girl's action. From the moment she caught sight of the fair haired count, the spark of love entered her bosom, and she decided to keep him as long as possible in the castle. So it was that Count Hubert was detained to fall under the spell of one full of woman's witchery re-enforced by great beauty. But the pity of it was that to win her he must be able to touch the target heart on her breast with the point of his sword. Unfortunately, his training was rather in diplomacy than in feats of arms.

When the little god enters the heart he does not always make himself known. Bertha was conscious of a commotion under the ruby, but did not realize what it was. She regarded it as a desire to attract the count as she had attracted other men, give him the opportunity to win her she had given them and beat him at the same game. So she entertained him royally and soon made him forget his errand in the pleasure he took in her company. His escort, being provided with all that was wanted, was in a hurry to go on. Eidenreid, it was thought, that they had no will other than that of their leader, when they treated with great respect. Now and again Baron Eidenreid sent

messenger to ask if the party had gone, and Bertha replied that they were still in the castle.

The young man must have possessed a refinement superior to his fellows of that rude age, for though he noticed from the moment he met the girl that she wore the ruby heart on her left breast, he did not ask why she did so. Though he felt the effect of Cupid's shaft as soon as he saw her, he seemed to be resisting it. This only made her more eager to conquer him.

One evening just before dark a craft was seen floating down the river loaded with merchandise. Bertha, who was with the count, stole away from him and, donning her military costume, descended to the creek, took command of the boats starting to levy tribute and went out to intercept the stranger. There was a fight, in which the latter was worsted, as usual, and the tax paid. Bertha, flushed with the fray, returned to the castle and, ascending a spiral staircase leading to her room, to change her costume, met Count Hubert face to face.

The sight of the girl, her dark eyes flashing with the memory of the fight, her raven hair that had come unloosened and fallen in a coil on her shoulder, her tight fitting costume displaying the grace of her supple figure, was too much for the young lover.

Whatever was the reason for his resistance to the spell he had fallen under, he broke through all reserves, clasped her in his arms and pressed his cheek against hers.

Disengaging herself, she told him the meaning of the ruby heart.

"Alas!" he said. "I am no swordsman. I have been interested in knowledge and my profession is diplomacy. I have neither a taste for arms nor time to perfect myself in their use. Nevertheless I shall avail myself of my only chance."

Although those were rough times and Bertha was a real, not a sham, fighter, she did not mean by wearing the ruby that the man who would win her must stab her in the heart. It was intended to give notice that he must be sufficiently skillful to do so. She told Count Hubert that he must place the point of his rapier upon the ruby, leaving him to infer that if he went further he would kill her. The count was appalled and ready to forego the trial, but Bertha urged him on, saying that she felt perfect confidence in being able to protect herself. Beside himself with a love which he must take so great a risk to gratify, he consented to the meeting, declaring that if through a mishap he killed her he would plunge his weapon into his own heart.

From the staircase Bertha went to her room, where she dressed herself in fencing costume, and instead of the ruby on her heart she wore a heart made of red silk, a much better target than the jewel. Rejoining Count Hubert, the two went to the armory, where, taking up swords that had already been used in such encounters, they put themselves in fencing positions.

Now the count, as has been said, was no swordsman, but a diplomat. Knowing that if he won at all it must be by diplomacy, he sought a plan that would bring him success by a ruse. But no plan suggested itself except one fraught with danger, and he was loath to use it. For an hour he fencled with his antagonist, hoping to tire her out, but at the end of that time she seemed as fresh as ever, while he had lost strength. Then he determined, as a last resort, to put into practice his stratagem. Pressing his antagonist hotly, he forced her to assume the defensive, and when she did so, their swords being crossed, he guided the point of hers into a fleshy part of his right side.

Bertha, horror stricken, withdrew her sword, then dropped it. Hubert stood immovable till he heard the weapon rattle on the floor, then, taking his own sword, he made a dash, made a lunge and touched the red heart on her breast with its tip. Flung his weapon away, he cried exultingly:

"I have won!"

Summoning assistance, Bertha had the count, who was weak from loss of blood, carried to his room. A surgeon was called, but since in those days there was no remedy except blood letting and the patient had quite enough of that there was nothing to do but hump up the wound.

One of the count's escort, hearing that his leader had been stabbed, rushed into the room where Bertha was, bending over the wounded man, seeing his condition, shouted:

"Treason! The prince has been assassinated!"

"The prince!" exclaimed Bertha, aghast.

"Yes, the prince—the crown prince." "Peace," said the wounded man. "I have not been assassinated. I have met with an accident in play." And thus it came out that Count Hubert was the crown prince, who innocently was making a tour with a view to assembling a force to meet the king of Sweden, who had just declared war. Bertha sent at once a messenger to her father urging him to return and when he came announced that she was betrothed to the heir to a kingdom. When the baron learned this he was so pleased that he was ready to forego plan during luckless merchants and march himself at the head of double the force that the king had asked for. Baron Eidenreid never returned to his castle, for he was killed in the war, and his daughter had no need of her former home, because she became crown princess and afterward queen. So the castle fell gradually into decay, which was perhaps just as well for the traffic on the Rhine below. At any rate there were no more customs collectors shooting out from the mouth of the stream beneath the stronghold.