

Si Slocum and the Census Taker.

RAP! RAP! RAP! upon the door of our sanctum. "Come in!" from the occupant of the same, no other than ourself. The rapist opened the door and entered. He was a strapping fellow, six feet two in his boots, and big enough to eat us," had the diet been to his mind and he felt so inclined; and we are no morsel. He was armed, our visitor was, with a huge port-folio, and an ink-bottle, in lieu of a red, red rose, adorned the lapped of his coat. We looked into the face of our visitor, and he looked into the face of the "other feller." What he thought of us we don't know; what we thought of him he probably didn't care a continental red. A grin, semi-sardonic in character, parted his lips, the upper of which a grizzled moustache adorned. That grin we interpreted thus:—"I've got you dead to rights, young feller—hived you—you can't escape." There certainly was no escape for us, whatever his mission, with him between us and the door; but we had a table, at which we were seated, between him and ourself, whatever protection that would have afforded.

With our eyes still fixed upon his, looked down upon us from their towering height, we ejaculated, "Well, sir, your pleasure?" though we had not the look of one bound on a pleasure excursion. A voice of double bass, that sounded as though it came from the regions below answered our query:

"I've come to take your census."

Thereupon he took a chair, took a seat at the table opposite us, took out a handkerchief and wiped his face, and took a glass of water a pitcher of which soothing beverage stood upon the table. He was right on the take. We have no doubt that he would have taken a glass of old rye, and a good stiff one, had we invited him, which we did not do, for three good reasons: In the first place, it didn't occur to us to invite him; in the second place, we had no old rye on hand; in the third place, we wouldn't have invited him to take hold of it if we had had any, our hospitality in that line not extending to entire strangers—at least not until an introduction has been gone through with.

Recovering from the aqueous indulgence, which must have astonished his stomach we were convinced, he opened his portfolio, exposing a quantity of blank forms, ruled in columns, at the head of each of which appeared printed matter.

"So you are one of the census chaps, eh?" we queried.

The double-bass voice said, after its proprietor had taken a pen from out his pocket, and uncorked his ink-bottle:

"Yes; and now let's get into the census business."

"All right. Go ahead; but pray don't incense us," we returned. The joke was lost, its fragrance wasted on the desert air. The census-taker didn't perceive said joke, so intent was he upon the census, and that *did* incense us.

"Let me say to you before I commence," said the deep-toned voice, "that if you refuse to answer any question this blank calls for, or if you lie to me, you do so at the rate of thirty dollars for each refusal and lie. So talk quick, speak the truth and shame the devil, unless you have more money than you know what to do with, and wish to help extinguish the national debt by lying."

"Thirty dollars a lie, eh? What allowance for speaking the truth? Any?"

"No."

"No drawbacks, eh? What sort of a way is this to encourage truth-telling?—Slap goes down thirty dollars against us if we lie a little from delicacy, but not one cent to our credit for the many truths we may tell! This is crow for us and turkey for Uncle Samuel every time."

"You must look at it in another light, sir," said the hoarse-voiced census-taker. "Lying in this matter is a luxury. If you see fit to indulge in it, pay for it, that's all. What's your name?"

"Slokum," we replied, seeing that he was bent upon commencing the interview.

"S-l-o-c-u-m—"

"We don't see it, we k it," broke we in upon him as he proceeded letter by letter with our cognomen in the column headed, "Names." Slokum with a k," we added, with heavy emphasis on the k.

"Oh, k, eh? K—u—or is it o?" he queried, looking up at us.

"You are correct; u is right," we returned.

"What's the name you lead off with?"

"Si for short; Silas in full."

"Any auxiliary names?"

"Nary an auxiliary."

"What year was you born in—the day of the month?"

"On the glorious Fourth! Fourth of July, 1876."

"Lie number one," growled the double-bass voice, and down went a straight mark in the column headed "Lies."

"Hold up!" we exclaimed. Allow us to correct that statement. Any witness on the stand has that privilege. We were thinking of our country's natal day, the anniversary of which is so close at hand."

"Fourth of July, 1826, was the day of our birth." He made an X of the straight mark, and said, "Excused."

"Were you born at home or abroad? I mean, were you born in this country or in a foreign land?"

"No, sir." He looked up at us, as much as to say, explain.

"We first saw daylight on the raging main," we volunteered.

"Where's that?" he asked, and added, "I'm a little lam in geography." We thought so too, and that he was deficient in poetry, also; so came down to hard pan.

"At sea we were born. Upon the deep and dark blue rolling sea, the wind blowing a gale from the nor' nor' west, the waves running mountains high, every thing closed, furling, the ship lying head to the wind, the cook's mate washed overboard—"

"There, that'll do. No matter about the cook's mate, or any other man. How old are you? I forgot that."

"Thirty-one the coming 4th of July."

Down it went—he not appearing to notice anything out of the way in the reckoning.

"Occupation? O, seaman—I forgot—born at sea."

We made no objections to being classed as an old salt, though we couldn't see how being born at sea made us a seaman; on the principle, we suppose, that, born in a stable, we should have been a horse.

"Black or white?" he queried.

"White," we roared out, and somewhat savagely.

He looked at us sharply. We admit that we are no blonde, but a brunette of the deepest dye; still we profess to be of the quality known as the Caucasian. The census taker appeared to be in doubt, but at length marked "W" against our name.

"Married or otherwise," was his next question.

"Otherwise considerably," we answered.

"Old batch or widower?"

"Not any."

C. T. looked up at us. Evidently he was puzzled.

"How's that?" he queried. "What are you?"

"Divorced," we returned.

"Divorced, eh?"

"Yes, that's the fashion nowadays, you know; and one might as well be out of the world as out of the fashion," said we, laughing.

"What was the little unpleasantness?" he asked, evidently interested in our matrimonial affairs. We felt confident he was getting beyond the range of questions allowed him by law to ask, and knew very well that it was none of his business what the little "unpleasantness" was, as he termed it; still we didn't object to letting him know all about it, if it would amuse him.

"Incompatibility of temper, in one instance, was the 'little unpleasantness,'" said we. "In another, incompatibility of tastes. In the third instance—"

"Thunder! three divorces?" he queried, breaking in upon us.

"Three! Seven, man," said we in return.

"S-e-v-e-n-d-i-v-o-r-c-e-s! whew!" he exclaimed, slightly astonished, we thought. Placing his elbows on the table, he laid his thumbs along his lower jaw, and thus supporting his head, looked at us with all the eyes he had; by which expression we mean to convey the idea that he looked at us thoroughly, intently, searchingly, with his two eyes. At length he said in a voice heavier, deeper, hoarser than ever; "I believe that statement to be a d—d lie, sir."

"Your size protects you, sir," said we calmly.

"Do you mean to stand to that statement, sir?" he asked.

"What, that your size—"

"No, them seven divorces."

"Yes sir."

"Won't you take off a divorce?"

"Not a divorce," we said firmly. He said no more on the subject, but made four straight marks in the lie column.

"What are you doing?" we asked, anxiously.

"I'll allow you three divorces, but I

am blown if I allow seven. Four, I mark down as lies," he said brutally.

"As we said before, your size protects you, sir," said we in a freezing manner.

"What pursuit are you engaged in?" he gruffly asked.

"Inasmuch as you put us down as a seaman, we presume we are engaged in nautical pursuits, otherwise we should have said that we are in pursuit of happiness, like all mortals, missing it." He dropped on himself at the mention of "seaman."

"So I did—seamen. That was a queer mistake on my part. What is your business anyhow? How does your income come in?"

"From our *chateaux en Espagne*."

"What's them?" inquired the C. T., rather perplexed.

"Castles in Spain."

"Castles in Spain, eh? How many castles have you in Spain?"

"Oh, they are innumerable. We build them daily."

"Say, look here young feller; this thing's been going on long enough," roared out the C. T. "Your castles are castles in the air, I fancy. Refusal to answer and a lie." Two marks went down against us at thirty dollars a mark.

"Are you the agent of the Slokum family?" asked the C. T.

"Sole agent for the United States and Canada; also Europe, Asia, Africa, and outlying places."

"How many does the family consist of, sir?"

"One. You see the entire family—One and indivisible. Look at him."

"No brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, eh?"

"Brothers and sisters-in-law, lots of 'em, we had, and seven mothers-in-law but escaped them by divorce, and are happy." Four marks—one hundred and twenty dollars—went down against us in the lie column. We uttered no remonstrance, but let the C. T. take our census in his own way, satisfied that he would do so anyhow.

"Got any horses, cattle, or live stock of any kind?"

"Yes; have a hawser, a colt, a ram, two calves, six kids, a deer, a number of hares, and—well we believe that's about all the live stock we possess."

"What's the horse?"

"What horse?"

"Didn't you just say you had a horse, sir?"

"Yes, we said we had a hawser—ha-w-s-e-r."

"Go on, young feller, if you think you can afford to pay for the amusement," said the C. T., "sarkastic."

"You mentioned a colt, I believe," he continued.

"Yes, and here it is," we said, displaying a small-sized Colt.

"H'm! Well, don't let it go off. I know the pace of that breed of colts—it's a killing one. How about that ram, and the calves?"

"The ram is of the hydraulic strain, and the calves—here they are, just below our knees. Here are our kids," and we showed him three pair of Alexander breed. "As for the hares, our head is at your service if you wish to count them."

"We'll lump them. But how about the deer?"

"We decline to answer any questions about her while she continues to reign in this bosom, and is so dear to us."

"She must be a reindeer," said the C. T., with a hoarse laugh. It was the first joke he was guilty of. But as we put it right into his mouth, he deserved no credit therefor.

"See here, young feller," he said sternly, "these yarns about your cattle, and live stock generally, are not exactly lies, they are evasions, and will be charged against you as deliberate lies, at thirty dollars a head. Your troop of hares will cost you fifteen hundred dollars only, as I shall place but fifty marks against you on account of these animals. You have about one hundred and twenty-five lies charged to your account, thus far, and if every body does only a twentieth part as well, the national debt will be lied out of existence, with a dollar or two to spare."

At this moment we experienced a tremendous shock, and heard a heavy fall and crash. Upon looking about us, we found ourself on the floor surrounded by water and the fragments of a pitcher. We had fallen asleep and dreamed all this, and in expiring had carried the pitcher of water down with us. The pitcher was a dead loss to us, but then, our fines for lying were all settled at one fell swoop.

AN ADVENTURE WITH PIRATES.

I KNEW I had wounded the deer; for I could see its blood upon the bushes through which it had rushed after receiving the shot. I thought of going back for my horse before pursuing it. I had left him tied to a tree some two or three hundred yards back, the better to approach the game. While hesitating, I noticed clear sky through the timber on three sides—right, left and in front. This could be caused only by the river, as the whole bottom-land was covered with a thick cottonwood forest. It must be a bend in the stream, forming a sort of peninsula, with an isthmus of not more than a hundred yards in width, my position being about midway between the recurvings of the river. In this case the buck would be in a trap, and could not get back into the bottom-land without passing me within shot. His only alternative would be to take to the water, which he might do, or might not. As it was the broad Mississippi, he likely would not; but, in any case, the horse would be of no use there; and hastily reloading, I walked on.

I had no difficulty in taking up the trail of the stricken animal. Under the shadow of the moss-trellised trees, the soil was damp, and the "slot" was conspicuous—the more so, that the antlered monarch of the forest evidently had been laboring in his flight. Once again I saw goutts of blood upon the palmettos, brushed off from his bleeding flanks, as he ran through them.

I soon reached the edge of the river, and there saw his hoofmarks in the mud that selvedged the sloping bank. There were no return tracks; therefore he had taken to the river. It was the Mississippi as I have said, but not the main stream. At a glance, I saw it was a "cut-off"—a small, wooded island interposing itself between me and the great "Father of Waters." Beyond doubt, the deer had swam off to the island, there, equally beyond doubt, as I supposed, to lie down and die.

He was a splendid buck, with not less than a dozen "tines" upon his antlers—I had noticed this while drawing a bead upon him. I wanted him for a trophy, and was determined to have him. But how? the branch stream, though not over a hundred yards in width, was of rapid turbulent current. Stripped, I could swim it, though not comfortably, or carry a dry gun—certainly not to bring back with me the carcass of a large deer. The horns, perhaps I might. Better the trophy than nothing.

I had half made up my mind to strip and swim to the island, when I bethought me of a boat, though of a little hope of there being any near.

Along the river for miles there was no habitation. I had hunted there before and knew it. For all this by a sort of involuntary inspiration, I glanced interrogatively around, with my eyes sweeping whatever of water-surface was in sight.

There was a boat in sight, but it was a "flat,"—a regular "broad-horn," and, of course, unavailable for my purpose. It was far out in the main-stream, beyond the wooded islet, which it had already passed. As I set my eyes upon it, it was just running a jutting point below; and as its great steering oar disappeared from my sight, I could make out on the stern beneath, painted in rudely-shaped letters the name,

"NANCY."

The Nancy could be of no use to me; and at once dismissing her from my mind, I was about to commence stripping, when a canoe, shooting round the upper end of the islet, came right down the cut-off. There were two men in it. They were in their shirt-sleeves—red shirts, at that, a good deal soiled and faded. Their features were shaded by broad-brimmed wool hats, also the worse for wear. I did not stop to scrutinize either their dress or features, but at once hailed them.

"I want to cross over to the island; will you take me?"

"What d'ye want to cross thar for?"

"I've wounded a deer—a fine buck. He has swum there. He is dying or dead before this. I want to get him."

The man who handled the paddies, caused the stroke to be suspended.

"What will ye give?" was the interrogation, promptly put.

"A dollar, I replied."

"D—n yer dollar! say two and we'll do it. You expect us to take ye back to the bank after ye've pot yu'r don't ye?"

"Certainly."

"That will take some time, an' we hain't any to lose. Say two shiners, an' we'll gi'e ye half an hour."

"Agreed; two dollars."

As I said this, I plunged my hand into the pocket of my hunting-coat, and drew forth a fistfull of gold and silver coin' so as to secure them to the bargain, by showing I was able to keep my part of the stipulation.

I saw that they were impatient, and I was determined to get possession of my stag and his splendid antlers.

The canoe—a tolerably well-shaped "dug-out"—was paddled, stern foremost towards the bank; and as it approached I noticed, in small lettering under the name "Nancy." By this I knew it was the "tender" of the flat-boat I had seen sweep down stream, which accounted for its occupants being pressed as to time.

I made no remark about this, but stepped in taking a seat in the stern, which was surrendered to me by him who had hitherto occupied it; he scrambling up closer to the paddler at the bow.

"Half an hour, stranger," he said, reminding me of the stipulated time.

"We've agreed to gi'e ye that. If we are longer, we must charge more. A dollar for every ten minutes."

"All right!" I said, taking out my watch to make note of the time.

It was a gold case repeater, worth, with the chain, at least two hundred dollars.

After returning it to its fob, and looking into the faces of the two men, I felt a little regretful at having shown it; as also of having made display of my lose coin—some three hundred dollars I carried in gold and silver pieces. Two more rascally sets of features I never saw in juxtaposition, and it was difficult to say which set was the more expressive of true penitentiary type. After all, thought I, they are but boatman—whom it may not be fair to judge either by their looks or general exterior.

I had no time to reflect. In less than five minutes the canoe struck the shore of the islet, and I jumped out to look after my deer, on the tracks of which I came, at the spot where we made landing.

Under the excitement of soon bringing my hunt to a successful conclusion I paid little heed to aught else, though on parting from the canoe, I could not help noticing that the two boatman held a hurried consultation in whispers, while one of them stepped ashore after me, saying he would go along, and if need be, give me assistance.

I made no objection, but kept on, my whole thoughts occupied in tracing the stag. The islet was not over three acres in extent, covered with an undergrowth of palmettos. I knew the deer must be among them; and I was not long discovering the coveted antler, rising above the fan-shaped fronds, their owner lying concealed beneath, on what would no doubt have been his deathbed, had no one ever come near him. To hasten it I raised my rifle, and taking aim at his heart which was still feebly beating, I fired.

There seemed to be two cracks simultaneously; but that might have been caused by the recoil of my gun, which appeared to bust in my hands; I could not tell then, for, after pulling the trigger, I became insensible.

When consciousness returned, I found myself alone, lying along the ground—with a terrible aching in the head. Raising my hand to the spot, I felt an abrasure at the back part of my skull, with a piece of the scalp missing. On returning my hand before my eyes, I saw my fingers were reddened with blood.

My senses gradually growing clearer, I gazed around, and soon perceived that I was alone, lying among the palmettos.

Staggering to my feet, I looked still further, and saw, at some distance, the dead body of the deer. I remember having fired the shot that must have killed it. But my gun that I supposed to have burst in my hands—where was that? It was not there—either lock, stock or barrel. And my watch, worth two hundred dollars; and the odd three hundred in coin, I had carried in my pocket? All gone, and along with them, the two canoe-men who had ferried me across to the island.

For a time I felt perplexed; but not for long. With my fast-clearing consciousness came the claircissement of all that had transpired. I had heard two cracks—one I knew to be my own gun—the other, I now conceived must have been a pistol, whose bullet, intended to pass through my brain, had only glanced off from the thickest part of my posterior skull, rendering me for the time insensible, and to all appearance dead. This was fortunate, else a second shot might have