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P'LASKI'S TUNAMENT.

By Thomas Nelson Page

1891

I had the good fortune to come from "the old county of Hanover," as that particular division of the State of Virginia is affectionately called by nearly all who are so lucky as to have first seen the light amid its broom-straw fields and heavy forests; and to this happy circumstance I owed the honor of a special visit from one of its most loyal citizens. Indeed, the glories of his native county were so embalmed in his memory and were so generously and continuously imparted to all his acquaintances, that he was in the county of his adoption universally known after an absence of forty years as "Old Hanover." I had not been long in F—— when I was informed that I might, in right of the good fortune respecting my birthplace, to which I have referred, expect a visit from my distinguished fellow-countyman, and thus I was not surprised, when one afternoon a message was brought in that "Ole Hanover was in the yard, and had called to pay his bes' bespecks to de gent'raan what hed de honor to come f'om de ole county."

I immediately went out, followed by my host, to find that the visit was attended with a formality which raised it almost to the dignity of a ceremonial. "Old Hanover" was accompanied by his wife, and was attended by quite a number of other negroes, who had followed him either out of curiosity excited by the importance he had attached to the visit, or else in the desire to shine in reflected glory as his friends. "Old Hanover" himself stood well out in front of the rest, like an old African chief in state with his followers behind him about to receive an embassy. He was arrayed with great care, in a style which I thought at first glance was indicative of the clerical calling, but which I soon discovered was intended to be merely symbolical of approximation to the dignity which was supposed to pertain to that profession. He wore a very long and baggy coat which had once been black, but was now tanned by exposure to a reddish brown, a vest which looked as if it had been velvet before the years had eaten the nap from it, and changed it into a fabric not unlike leather. His shirt was obviously newly washed for the occasion, and his high clean collar fell over an ample and somewhat bulging white cloth, which partook of the qualities of both stock and necktie. His skin was of that lustrous black which shines as if freshly oiled, and his face was closely shaved except for two tufts of short, white hair, one on each side, which shone like snow against his black cheeks. He wore an old and very quaint beaver, and a pair of large, old-fashioned, silver-rimmed spectacles, which gave him an air of portentous dignity.

When I first caught sight of him, he was leaning on a long hickory stick, which might have been his staff of state, and his face was set in an expression of superlative importance. As I appeared, however, he at once removed his hat, and taking a long step forward, made me a profound bow. I was so much impressed by him, that I failed to catch the whole of the grandiloquent speech with which he greeted me. I had evidently

secured his approval; for he boldly declared that he "would 'a' recognized me for one of de rail quality ef he had foun' me in a cuppen." I was immediately conscious of the effect which his endorsement produced on his companions. They regarded me with new interest, if any expression so bovine deserved to be thus characterized.

"I tell dese folks up heah dee don't know nuthin' 'bout rail quality," he asserted with a contemptuous wave of his arm, which was manifestly intended to embrace the entire section in its comprehensive sweep. "Dee 'ain' niver had no 'quaintance wid it," he explained, condescendingly. His friends accepted this criticism with proper submissive-ness.

"De Maconses, de Berkeleyses, de Carterses, de Bassettses, de Wickhamses, de Nelsonses, an' dem!"—(the final ending "es" was plainly supposed to give additional dignity)—"now *dee* is sho 'nough quality. I know all 'bout 'em." He paused long enough to permit this to sink in.

"I b'longst to Doc' Macon. *You* know what *he* wuz?"

His emphasis compelled me to acknowledge his exalted position or abandon forever all hope of retaining my own; so I immediately assented, and inquired how long he had been in "this country," as he designated his adopted region. He turned with some severity to one of his companions, a stout and slatternly woman, very black, and many years his junior.

"How long is I been heah, Lucindy?"

The woman addressed, by way of answer, turned half away, and gave a little nervous laugh. "I don't know how long you been heah, you been heah so long; mos' forty years, I reckon." This sally called from her companions a little ripple of amusement.

"Dat's my wife, suh," the old gentleman explained, apologetically. "She's de one I got now; she come f'om up heah in dis ken-try." His voice expressed all that the words were intended to convey. Lucindy, who appeared accustomed to such contemptuous reference, merely gave another little explosion which shook her fat shoulders.

As, however, I was expected to endorse all his views, I changed the embarrassing subject by inquiring how he had happened to leave the old county.

"Ole marster gi' me to Miss Fanny when she ma'yed Marse William Fitzhugh," he explained. "I wuz ma'yed den to Marth' Ann; she wuz Miss Fanny's maid, an' when she come up heah wid Miss Fanny, I recompany her." He would not admit that his removal was a permanent one. "I al'ays layin' out to go back home, but I 'ain' been yit. Dee's mos' all daid b'fo' dis, suh?"

He spoke as if this were a fact, but there was a faint inquiry in his eyes if not in his tone. I was sorry not to be able to inform him differently, and, to change the subject, I started to ask him a question. "Martha Ann—" I began, and then paused irresolute.

"She's daid too," he said simply.

"How many children have you?" I asked.

"I 'ain' got but beah one now, suh, ef I got dat one," he replied; "dat's P'laski."

"How many have you had?"

"Well, suh, dat's a partic'lar thing to tell," he said, with a whimsical look on his face. "De Scripturs says you is to multiply an' replanish de uth; but I s'pecks I's had some several mo'n my relowance; dar's Jeems, an' Peter, an' Jeremiah, an' Hezekiah, an' Zekyel, Ananias an' Malachi, Matthew an' Saint Luke, besides de gals. Dee's all gone; an' now I 'ain' got but jes dat P'laski. He's de wuthlisses one o' de whole gang. He tecks after his mammy."

The reference to Pulaski appeared to occasion some amusement among his friends, and I innocently inquired if he was Martha Ann's son.

"Nor, *suh*, *dat* he warn'!" was the vehement and indignant answer. "Ef he had 'a' been, he niver would 'a' got me into all dat trouble. Dat wuz de mortification o' my life, suh. He got all dat meanness fom his mammy. Dat ooman dyah is his mammy." He indicated the plump Lucindy with his long stick, which he poked at her contemptuously. "Dat's what I git for mar'yin' one o' dese heah up-kentry niggers!" The "up-kentry" spouse was apparently quite accustomed to this characterization, for she simply looked away, rather in embarrassment at my gaze being directed to her than under any stronger emotion. Her liege continued: "Lucindy warn' quality like me an' Marth' Ann, an' her son tooken after her. What's in de myah will come out in de colt; an' he is de meanes' chile I uver had. I name de urrs fom de Scriptur', but he come o' a diff'ent stock, an' I name him arter Mr. P'laski Greener, whar Lucindy use' to b'longst to, an' I reckon maybe dat's de reason he so natchally evil. I had mo' trouble by recount o' dat boy 'n I hed when I los' Marth' Ann."

The old fellow threw back his head and gave a loud "Whew!" actually removing his large spectacles in his desperation at Pulaski's wickedness. Again there was a suppressed chuckle from his friends; so, seeing that some mystery attached to the matter, I put a question which started him.

"Well, I'll tell you, suh," he began. "Hit all growed out of a tunament, suh. You an' I knows all discerning tunaments, 'cuz we come f'om de ole county o' Hanover, whar de *raise* tunaments"—(he referred to them as if they had been a species of vegetables)—"but we 'ain' niver hearn de modification of a *nigger* ridin' in a tunament?"

I admitted this, and, after first laying his hat carefully on the ground, he proceeded:

"Well, you know, suh, dat P'laski got de notionment in he haid dat he wuz to ride in a tunament. He got dat f'om dat ooman." He turned and pointed a trembling finger at his uncomplaining spouse; and then slowly declared, "Lord! I wuz outdone dat day."

I suggested that possibly he had not followed Solomon's injunction as rigidly as Pulaski's peculiar traits of character had demanded; but he said promptly:

"Yes, suh, I did. I whupped him faithful; but he took whuppin' like a ole steer. Hickory didn' 'pear to have no 'feck on him. He didn' had no memory; he like a ole steer: got a thick skin an' a short memory; he wuz what I call one o' dese disorde'ly boys."

He paused long enough to permit this term, taken from the police court reports, to make a lodgement, and then proceeded:

"He wuz so wuthless at home, I hired him out to ole Mis' Twine for fo' dollars an' a half a mont'—an' more'n he wuth, too!—to see ef po' white ooman kin git any wuck out'n him. A po' white ooman kin git wuck out a nigger ef anybody kin, an' 'twuz down dyah that he got had foolishness lodgicated in he haid. You see, ole Mis' Twine warn' so fur f'om Wash'n'n. Nigger think ef he kin git to Wash'n'n, he done got in heaven. Well, I hire him to ole Mis' Twine, 'cuz I think she'll keep P'laski straight, an' ef I don' git but one fo' dollars an' a half f'om him, hit's dat much; but 'pear like he got to runnin' an' consortin' wid some o' dem urr free-issue niggers roun' dyah, an' dee larne him mo' foolishness'n I think dee able; 'cuz a full hawg cyarn drink no mo'."

The old fellow launched out into diatribes against the "free issues," who, he declared, expected to be "better than white folks, like white folks ain' been free sense de wull begin." He, however, shortly returned to his theme.

"Well, fust thing I knowed, one Sunday I wuz settin' down in my house, an' heah come P'laski all done fixed up wid a high collar on, mos' high as ole master's, an' wid a better breeches on 'n I uver wear in my *life*, an' wid a creevat! an' a cane! an' wid a seegar! He comes in de do' an' hol' he seegar in he han', sort o' so" (illustrating), "an' he teck off he hat kine o' flourishy 'whurr,' an' say, 'Good mornin', pa an' ma.' He mammy—*dat* she—monsus pledged wid dem manners; she ain' know no better; but I ain' nuver like nobody to gobble roun' *me*, an' I say, 'Look heah, boy, don' fool wid me; I ain' feelin' well to-day, an' ef you fool wid me, when I git done wid you, you oon feel well you'self.' Den he kine o' let he feathers down; an' presney he say he warn me to len' him three dollars an' a half. I ax him what he warn do wid it, 'cuz I know I ain' gwine len' to him—jes well len' money to a mus'-rat hole;—an' he say he warn it for a tunament.

"Hi!' I say, 'P'laski, what air a tunament?' I mecked out, you see, like I ain' recognizated what he meck correspondence to; an' he start to say, 'A tunament, pa—' but I retch for a barrel hoop whar layin' by kine o' amiable like, an' he stop, like young mule whar see mud-puddle in de road, an' say, 'A tunament—a tunament is whar you gits 'pon a hoss wid a pole, an' rides hard as you kin, an' pokes de pole at a ring, an'—' When he gets right dyah, I interrup's him, an' I say, 'P'laski,' says I, 'I's raised wid de fust o' folks, 'cuz I's raised wid de Ma-conses at Doc' Macon's in Hanover, an' I's spectated fish fries, an' festibals, an' bobby-cues; but I ain' nuver witness nuttin' like dat—a nigger ridin' 'pon a hoss hard as he kin stave, an' nominatin' of it a tunament,' I says. 'You's talkin' 'bout a hoss-race,' I says, 'cuz dat's de on'yes' thing,' I says, 'a nigger rides in.' You know, suh," he broke in suddenly, "you and I's seen many a hoss-race, 'cuz we come f'om hoss kentry, right down dyah f'om whar Marse Torm Doswell live, an' we done see hoss-races whar wuz hoss-races sho 'nough, at the ole Fyarfiel' race-co'se, whar hosses used to run could beat buds flyin' an' so I tole him. I tole him I nuver heah nobody but a po' white folks' nigger call a hoss-race a tunament; an' I tole him I reckon de pole he talkin' 'bout wuz de hick'ry dee used to tune de boys' backs wid recasionally when dee didn' ride right. Dat cut him down might'ly, 'cuz dat ermine him o' de hick'ries I done wyah out 'pon him; but he say, 'Nor, 'tis a long pole whar you punch th'oo a ring, an' de one whar punch de moes, he crown de queen.' I tole him dat de on'yes' queen I uver heah 'bout wuz a cow ole master had, whar teck de fust prize at de State fyah in Richmond one year; but he presist dat this wuz a tunament queen, and he warn three dollars an' a half to get him a new shut an' to pay he part ov de supper. Den I tole him ef he think I gwine give him three dollars an' a half for dat foolishness he mus' think I big a fool as he wuz. Wid dat he begin to act kine o' aggervated, which I teck for incidence, 'cuz I nuver could abeah chillern ner women to be sullen roun' me; an' I gi' him de notification dat ef I cotch him foolin' wid any tunament I gwine ride him tell he oon know when he ain't a mule hisself; an' I gwine have hick'ry pole dyah too. Den I tolt him he better go 'long back to ole Mis' Twine, whar I done hire him to; an' when he see me pick up de barrel hoop an' start to roll up my sleeve, he went; an' I heah he jine dat Jim Sinkfiel', an' dat's what git me into all dat tribilation."

"What got you in?" I inquired, in some doubt as to his meaning.

"Dat tunament, suh. P'laski rid it! An' what's mo,' suh, he won de queen,—one o' ole man Bob Sibley's impident gals,—an' when he come to crown her, he crown her wid ole Mis' Twine's weddin'-ring!"

There was a subdued murmur of amusement in the group behind him, and I could not but inquire how he came to perform so extraordinary a ceremony.

"Dat I don' know, suh; but so 'twair. Fust information I had on it wuz when I went down to ole Mis' Twine's to get he mont's wegges. I received de ontelligence on de way dat he had done lef dyah, an' dat ole Mis' Twine gol' ring had lef by de same road at de same time. Dat correspondence mortify me might'ly 'cuz I hadn' raised P'laski no sich a ways as dat. He was dat ooman's son to be sho' an' I knowed he wuz wuthless, but still I hadn' respect him to steal ole Mis' Twine wed-din'-ring, whar she wyah on her finger ev'y day, an' whar wuz gol' too. I want de intimation 'bout de fo' dollars an' a half, so I went 'long; but soon as ole Mis' Twine see me she began to quoil. I tell her I just come to git de reasonment o' de matter, an' I 'ain' got nuthin' 'tall to say 'bout P'laski. Dat jes like bresh on fire; she wuss'n befo'. She so savigrous I tolt her I 'ain' nuver had nobody to prevaricate nuttin' 'bout me; dat I b'longst to Doc' Macon, o' Hanover, an' I ax her ef she knowed de Maconses. She say, nor, she 'ain' know 'em, nor she ain' nuver hearn on 'em, an' she wished she hadn' nuver hearn on me an' my thievin' boy—dat's P'laski. Well, tell then, I mighty consarned 'bout P'laski; but when she said she 'ain' nuver hearn on the Maconses, I ain' altogether b'lieve P'laski done teck her ring, cause I ain' know whether she got any ring; though I know sence the tunament he mean enough for anything; an' I tolt her so, an' I tolt her I wuz raised wid quality—sence she ain' know the Maconses, I ain' tole her no mo' 'bout dem, 'cuz de Bible say you is not to cast pearls befo' hawgs—an' dat I had tote de corn-house keys many a time, an' Marth' Ann used to go in ole Mistis' trunks same as ole Mistis herself. Right dyah she mought 'a' cotch me ef she had knowed that P'laski warn' Marth' Ann's son; but she ain' know de Maconses, an' in cose she ain' 'quainted wid de servants, so she don' know it. Well, suh, she rar an' she pitch. Yo' nuver heah a ooman talk so befo' in yo' life; an' fust thing I knew she gone in de house, she say she gwine git a gun an' run me off dat lan'. But I ain' wait for dat: don nobody have to git gun to run me off dee lan'. I jes teck my foot in my han' an' come 'long way by myself, 'cuz I think maybe a ooman 'at could cuss like a man mout shoot like a man too."

"Where did you go and what did you do next?" I asked the old fellow as he paused with a whimsical little

nod of satisfaction at his wisdom.

"I went home, suh," he said. "I heah on de way dat P'laski had sho 'nough done crownt Bob Sibly's gal, Lizzy Susan, wid de ring, an' dat he wuz gwine to Wash'n'n, but wuz done come home to git some things b'f o' he went; so I come straight 'long behinst him jes swif' as my foot could teck me. I didn' was'e much time," he said, with some pride, "'cuz he had done mighty nigh come gittin' me shot. I jes stop long 'nough to cut me a bunch o' right keen hick'ries, an' I jes come 'long shakin' my foot. When I got to my house I ain' fine nobody dyah but Lucindy—dat ve'y ooman dyah"—pointing his long stick at her—"an' I lay my hick'ries on de bed, an' ax her is she see P'laski. Fust she meek out dat she ain' heah me, she so induschus; I nuver see her so induschus; but when I meck 'quiration agin she bleegeed to answer me, an' she 'spon' dat she 'ain' see him; 'cuz she see dat my blood wuz up, an' she know dee wuz trouble 'pendin' for P'laski. Dat worry me might'ly, an' I say, 'Lucindy, ef you is done meck dat boy resent hissself f'om heah, you is done act like a po' white folks' nigger,' I say, 'an' you's got to beah de depravity o' his transgression.' When I tolt her dat she nuver got mad, 'cuz she know she air not quality like me an' Marth' Ann; but she 'pear right smartly disturbed, an' she 'clar' she ain' lay her eyes on P'laski. She done 'clar' so partic'lar I mos' inclin' to b'lieve her; but all on a suddent I heah some 'n' sneeze, 'Quechew!' De soun' come f om onder de bed, an' I jes retch over an' gether in my bunch o' hick'ries, an' I say, 'Come out!' Lucindy say, 'Dat's a cat'; an' I say, 'Yes,' I say, 'hit's a cat I gwine skin, too.'

"I jes stoop down, an' peep onder de bed, an', sho 'nough, dyah wuz P'laski squinch up onder dyah, cane an' seegar an' all, jes like a ole hyah in a trap. I ketch him by de leg, an' juck him out, an'—don' you know, suh, dat ooman had done put *my* shut on dat boy, an' wuz gettin' ready to precipitate him in flight! I tolt her it wuz p'intedly oudacious for her an' her son, after he had done stolt ole Mis' Taine weddin'-ring, to come to my own house an' rob me jes like I wuz a hen-roos'!"

"What reply did she make to that?" I asked, to facilitate his narrative.

"She 'ain' possessed no reply to dat indictment," he said, pompously. "She glad by dat time to remit me to terminate my excitement on P'laski, an' so I did. He hollered tell dee say you could heah him two miles; he fyahly lumbered." The old fellow gave a chuckle of satisfaction at the reminiscence, and began to draw figures in the sand with his long stick. Suddenly, however, he looked up.

"Ef I had a-intimated how much tribilation dat lumberin' wuz gwine to get me in, he nuver would 'a' hollered. Dat come o' dat chicken-stealin' nigger Jem Sinkfiel'; he cyahed him off."

He again became reflective, so I asked, "Haven't you seen him since?"

"Oh, yes, suh, I seen him since," he answered. "I seen him after I come out o' jail; but 'twuz a right close thing. I thought I wuz gone."

"Gone! for whipping him?" "Nor, suh; 'bout de murder."

"Murder?"

"Yes, suh; murder o' him—o' P'laski." "But you did not murder him?" "Nor, suh; an' dat wuz whar de trouble presisted. Ef I had a-murdered him I'd 'a' knowed whar he wuz when dee wanted him; but, as 'twair, when de time arrove, I wair unable to perduce him: and I come mighty nigh forfeitin' my life."

My exclamation of astonishment manifestly pleased him, and he proceeded with increased gravity and carefulness of dictation:

"You see, suh, 'twair dis way." He laid his stick carefully down, and spreading open the yellowish palm of one hand, laid the index finger of the other on it, as if it had been a map. "When I waked up nex' mornin' an' called P'laski, he did not rappear. He had departed; an' so had my shut! Ef 't hadn' been for de garment, I wouldn' 'a' keered so much, for I knowed I'd git my han's on him some time: hawgs mos'ly comes up when de acorns all gone! an' I know hick'ries ain't gwino stop growin': but I wuz cawnsiderably tossified decernin' my garment, an' I gin Lucindy a little direction 'bout dat. But I jos wont on gittin' my sumac, an' whenever I como 'cross a right straight hick'ry, I geth-orod dat too, an' laid it by, 'cus hick'ries grow mighty fine in ole fiel's whar growin' up like. An' one day I wuz down in de bushes, an' Mr. 'Lias Lumpkins, de constable, come rid-in' down dyah whar I wuz, an' ax me whar P'laski is. Hit come in my mind torectly dat he warn' P'laski 'bout de ring, an' I tell him I air not aware whar P'laski is: and den he tell me he got warrant for me, and I mus' come on wid him. I still reposed, in co'se, 'twuz 'bout de ring, an' I say I ain' had nuttin' to do wid it. An' he say, 'Wid what?' An' I say, 'Wid de ring.' Den he say, 'Oh!' an' he say, "'Tain' nuttin' 'bout de ring; 'tis for murder.' Well, I know I ain' murder nobody, an' I ax him who dee say I done murder; an' he ax me agin, 'Whar air P'laski?' I tell him I don' know whar P'laski air: I know I ain' murder him! Well, suh, hit subsequently repeared dat dis wuz de wuss thing I could 'a' said, 'cus when de trial come on, Major Torm Woods made mo' o' dat 'n anything else at all; an' hit 'pears like ef you's skused o' murder er steal-in', you mus'n' say you ain' do it, 'cuz dat's dangersomer 'n allowing you *is* do it.

"Well, I went 'long wid him. I ax him to le' me go by my house; but he say, nor, he 'ain' got time, dat he done been dyah. An' he teck me 'long to de cote-house, an' *lock me up in de jail!* an' lef' me dyah in de dark on de rock flo'! An' dyah I rejourned all night long. An' I might 'a' been dyah now, ef 't hadn' been dat de co'te come on. Nex' mornin' Mr. Landy Wilde come in dyah an' ax me how I gettin' on, an' ef I warn' anything. I tell him I gettin' on toler'ble, an' I ain' warn' nuttin' but a little tobacco. I warn' git out, but I knew I cyarn do dat, 'cuz 'twuz de ambitiouses smellin' place I ever smelt in my life. I tell you, suh, I is done smell all de smells o' mink an' mus' an' puffume, but I ain' nuver smell nuttin' like dat jail. Mr. Landy Wilde had to hole he nose while he in dyah; an' he say he'll git de ole jedge to come an' ac' as my council. I tell him, 'Nor; Gord put me in dyah, an' I reckon He'll git me out when He ready.' I tell you, suh, I wair p'intedly ashamed for de ole jedge, whar wuz a gent'man, to come in sich a scand'lous smellin' place as dat. But de ole jedge come; an' he say it wuz a ——— shame to put a humin in sich place, an' he'd git me bail; which I mus' say—even ef he is a church member—might be ixused ef you jes consider dat smell. But when de cote meet, dee wouldn' gi' me no bail, 'cuz dee say I done commit murder; an' I heah Jim Sinkfiel' an' Mr. Lumpkins an' ole Mis' Twine went in an' tole de gran' jury I sutney had murder P'laski, an' bury him down in de sumac bushes; an' dee had de gre't bundle o' switches dee fine in my house, an' dee redite me, an' say ef I 'ain' murder him, why'n't I go 'long an' pre-duce him. Dat's a curisome thing, suh; dee tell you to go 'long and fine anybody, an' den lock you up in jail

a insec' couldn' get out."

I agreed with him as to the apparent inconsistency of this, and he proceeded:

"Well, suh, at las' de trial come on; 'twuz April-cote, an' dee had me in the cote-house, an' set me down in de cheer, wid de jury right in front o' me, an' de jedger settin' up in he pulpit, lookin' mighty aggravated. Dat wuz de fus' time I 'gin to feel maybe I wuz sort o' forgittin' things, I had done been thinkin' so much lately in jail 'bout de ole doctor—dat's ole master—an' Marth' Ann, an' all de ole times in Hanover, I wuz sort o' misty as I wuz settin' dyah in de cheer, an' I jes heah sort o' buzzin' roun' me, an' I warn' altogether certified dat I warn' back in ole Hanover. Den I heah 'em say dat de ole jedger wuz tooken down an' wuz ixpected to die, an' dee ax me don' I want a continuance. I don' know what dat mean, 'sep dee say I have to go back to jail, an' sense I smell de fresh air I don' warn' do dat no mo'; so I tell 'em, 'Nor; I ready to die.' An' den dee made me stan' up; an' dee read dat long paper to me 'bout how I done murder P'laski; dee say I had done whup him to death, an' had done shoot him, an' knock him in de haid, an' kill him mo' ways 'n 'twould 'a' teck to kill him ef he had been a cat. Lucindy wuz dyah. I had done had her gwine 'bout right smart meckin' quiration for P'laski. At least she say she had," he said, with a sudden reservation, and a glance of some suspicion toward his spouse. "An' dee wuz a whole parcel o' niggers stan'-in' roun' dyah, black as buzzards roun' a ole hoss whar dyin'. An' don' you know, dat Jim Sinkfiel' say he sutney hope dee would hang me, an' all jes 'cuz he owe' me two dollars an' seventy-three cents, whar he ain' warn' pay me!"

"Did you not have counsel?" I inquired.

"Council?"

"Yes—a lawyer."

"Oh, nor, suh; dat is, I had council, but not a la'yar, edzactly," he replied, with careful discrimination. "I had a some sort of a la'yer, but not much of a one. I had ixpected ole Judge Thomas to git me off; 'cuz he knowed me; he wuz a gent'man, like we is; but when he wuz tooken sick so providential I wouldn' had no urrs; I lef' it to Gord. De jedger ax me at de trial didn' I had no la'yar, and I tell him nor, not dyah; an' he ax me didn' I had no money to get one; an' I er-spon' 'Nor, I didn' had none,' although I had at dat time forty-three dollars an' sixty-eight cents in a ole rag in my waistcoat linin', whar I had wid me down in de sumac bushes, an' whar I thought I better hole on to, an' 'ain' made no mention on. So den de jedger ax me wouldn' I had a young man dyah—a right tall young man; an' I inform him: 'Yes, suh. I didn' reckon 'twould hu't none.' So den he come an' set by me an' say he wuz my counsel."

There was such a suggestion of contempt in his tone that I inquired if he had not done very well.

"Oh, yes, suh," he drawled, slowly, "he done toler'ble well—considerin'. He do de bes' he kin, I reckon. He holler an' mix me up some right smart; but dee wuz too strong for him; he warn' no mo' to 'em 'n wurrm is to woodpecker. Major Torm Woods' de com-monwealsh's attorney, is a powerful la'yer; he holler so you kin heah him *three* mile. An' ole Mis' Twine wuz dyah, whar tell all 'bout de ring, an' how impident I wuz to her dat day, an' skeer her to death. An' dat Jim Sinkfiel', he wuz dyah, an' tolt 'bout how I beat P'laski, an' how he heah him 'way out in main road, hollerin' 'murder.' An' dee had de gre't bundle o' hick'ries dyah, whar dee done fine in my house, an' dee had so much *evidence* dat presney I 'mos' begin to think maybe I had done kilt P'laski sho 'nough, an' had disermembered it. An' I thought 'bout Marth' Ann an' all de urr chil'ern, an' I wondered ef dee wuz to hang me ef I wouldn' fine her; an' I got so I mos' hoped dee would sen' me. An den de jury went out, an' stay some time, an' come back an' say I wuz guilty, an' sen' me to de Pen'tentiary for six years."

I had followed him so closely, and been so satisfied of his innocence, that I was surprised into an exclamation of astonishment, at which he was evidently much pleased.

"What did your counsel do?" I asked.

He put his head on one side. "He? He jes lean over an' ax did I warn' to repeal. I tell him I didn't know. Den he ax me is I got any money at all. I tell him, nor; ef I had I would 'a' got me a la'yer."

"What happened then?" I inquired, laughing at his discomfiting reply.

"Well, den de jedger tole me to stan' up, an' ax me has I got anything to say. Well, I know dat my las' chance, an' I tell him, 'Yes, suh.' An' he inform me to precede wid de relation, an' so I did. I preceded, an' I tolt 'em dyah in de cote-house ev'y wud jes like I have explanified it heah. I tolt 'em all 'bout Marth' Ann an' de chillern I hed had; I reformed 'em all decernin' de Maconses; an' I notified 'em how P'laski wuz dat urr ooman's son, not Marth' Ann's, an' 'bout de tunament an' how I had demonstrated wid him not to ride dyah, an' how he had repudiated my admonition, an' had crown de queen wid ole Mis' Twine weddin'-ring, whar he come nigh git-tin' me shot fur; an' how I had presented him de hick'ry, an' 'bout how he had departed de premises while I wuz 'sleep, an' had purloined my garment, an' how I wuz waitin' for him, an' getherin' de hick'ry crap an' all. An' dee wuz all laughin', 'cuz dee know I wuz relatin' de gospel truth, an' jes den I heah some o' de niggers back behine call out, 'Hi! heah he now!' an' I look roun', an', ef you b'lieve me, suh, dyah wuz P'laski, jes repeared, all fixed up, wid he cane an' seegar an' all, jes like I had drawed he resemblance. He had done been to Wash'n'n, an' had done come back to see de hangin'."

The old fellow broke into such a laugh at the reminiscence that I asked him, "Well, what was the result?"

"De result, suh, wuz, de jury teck back all dee had say, an' ax me to go down to de tavern an' have much whiskey as I could stan' up to, an' dee'd pay for it; an' de jedger distracted 'em to tu'n me loose. P'laski, he wuz sort o' bothered; he ain' know wherr to be disapp'inted 'bout de hangin' or pleased wid bein' set up so as de centre of distraction, tell ole Mis' Twine begin to talk 'bout 'restin' of him. Dat set him back; but I ax 'em, b'fo' dee 'rest him, couldn' I have jurisdictionment on him for a leetle while. Dee grant my be-ques', 'cuz dee know I gwine to erward him accordin' to his becessities, an' I jes nod my head to him an' went out. When we got roun' hine de jail, I invite him to perject his coat. He nex' garment wuz my own shut, an' I tolt him to remove dat too; dat I had to get nigh to he backbone, an' I couldn't 'ford to weah out dat shut no mor'n he had done already weah it. Somebody had done fetch de bunch o' hick'ries whar dee had done fine in my house, an' hit jes like Providence. I lay 'em by me while I put him on de altar, I jes made him wrop he arms roun' a little locus'-tree, an' I fasten he wris'es wid he own gallowses, 'cuz I didn' warn' was'e dem hick'ries; an' all de time

I bindin' him I tellin' him 'bout he sins. Den, when I had him ready, I begin, an' I rehearse de motter wid him f'om de time he had ax me 'bout de tunament spang tell he come to see me hang, an' wid ev'y wud I gin him de admonishment, tell when I got thoo wid him he wouldn' 'a' tetch a ring ef he had been in 'em up to he neck; an' as to shuts, he would' a' gone naked in frost b'fo' he'd 'a' put one on. He back gin out b'fo' my hick'ries did; but I didn' wholly lors 'em. I receive de valyationo' dem too, 'cuz when I let up on P'laski, fust man I see wuz dat Jim Sinkfiel', whar had warn' me hanged 'cuz he didn't warn' pay me two dollars an' seventy-three cents. He wuz standin' dyah lookin' on, 'joyin' hiself. I jes walk up to him an' I tolt him dat he could pay it right den, or recommodate me to teck de res' o' de hick'ries. He try to blunder out o' it, but all de folks know 'bout it an' dee wuz wid me, an' b'fo' he knowed it some on 'em had he coat off, an' had stretch him roun' de tree, an' tolt me to perceed. An' I perceeded.

"I hadn't quite wo' out one hick'ry when he holler dat he'd borry de money an' pay it; but I tolt him, nor; hick'ries had riz; dat I had three mo', an' I warn' show him a man can meek a boy holler 'murder' an' yit not kill him. An' dat I did, too: b'f o' I wuz done he hollered 'murder' jes natchel as P'laski."

The old fellow's countenance beamed with satisfaction at the recollection of his revenge. I rewarded his narrative with a donation which he evidently considered liberal; for he not only was profuse in his thanks, but he assured me that the county of Hanover had produced four people of whom he was duly proud—Henry Clay, Doctor Macon, myself, and himself.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK P'LASKI'S TUNAMENT ***

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