

II

THE NUMISMATIST

POSSESSION IS NINE POINTS OF THE LAW,
SELF-POSSESSION THE TENTH

ELECTION day, '96, was big medicine in Terrapin. Miners all down from the upper camps, shoutin' Free Silver, and morose about John Sherman. 'All the cow-boys from the immediate vicinity were in. The immediate vicinity of any point in the Northwest is a good big scope of country—say as far as two men can ride fast in as many days as it takes to get there.

In Brown's Bank there was a sound of deviltry by night. Them back from the bar couldn't get back. A damsel with a dulcimer was dispensin' sweet strains, and a minority of the convention thought they was singing to keep her from feeling conspicuous, each dele-

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gate voting for a different tune. The toot on-gom was calculated to make an escaped lunatic homesick.

In the middle of this dispensation I comes in, late. I endeavored to attract the attention of the bar creature by shouting and sign talk, for I wanted to do my duty. I know I yelled, for I could feel my jaw waggle, and my breath give out—but I couldn't hear nothin'. No one would take my money. Some one or two drinks were handed to me, however, a handful of cigars and six dollars change. Them Free Silver fellows shore believed what they said.

So I looked around in search of distraction. Five deep they stood around the faro and roulette layouts. Dealers looked like a Turkish bath from raking in money and shovin' over chips. One fellow at the faro table had more'n six bushel of checks and was betting with a shovel.

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I made for the poker-rooms. Both locked. I hammers. "Shove your money under the door," yells some one inside, "and go away."

Here was a fine how-de-do. Six months' wages in my pocket and no action in sight. I went out in front to hear myself think. On the porch sat a man, unostentatious, hugging his knee, observing of the moon.

I shoved a cigar at him. He nods, sticks it in his face, and hands me up matches over his shoulder. I likes his looks.

And his sayin' nothing sounded good, too, for my ear-drums were jarred clear to my ankles. I found out later that he wasn't always silent. He was a sort of human layer-cake that way—big slabs of talk and thin streaks of keeping still.

He didn't look quite like a cow-boy. Cow-boys' eyes is all puckered up by sun and wind. Nor quite like a miner. His hands was white but they wasn't tin-horn's hands, not by no

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means. He wasn't drunk, and I couldn't understand him at all, so I felt around.

"Stranger?" says I. He nods.

"Miner?"

"Once."

"Cow-boy?"

"Once. Everything else—once. Just now I am a numismatist."

I set down by him to show that didn't make no difference to me.

"Is it—very bad?" I says, kinder solemn and hushed-like.

"A collector of rare coins," he explains, laughing. His laugh was good, too.

"Oh—I see. Got any of them with you?"

"Just one. Be careful of it," he says, and hands it to me. I holds it up to the light. 'Twas a common old iron dollar.

"Broke?"

He straightened up indignantly. "Not on your life—that's no counterfeit!" he says.

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I liked him. I felt friendly. My experience is that the difference between the friend that can help you but won't and the enemy that would hurt you but can't isn't worth notice. So I dug. When I gave his dollar back I slid five yellow twenties with it.

He looks 'em over carefully, feeling of them, edges and both sides, with his fingertips. "Very interesting," he says. "Very beautiful. How clear the lettering is!" And he hands 'em back.

"They're yours, Stranger," says I. "For your collection."

He swells up. "Not much. I'd beg before I'd accept charity."

"You don't understand me," I says, sparring for time. "I meant as a sporting venture. I'm superstitious. Men with a wad always lose it. So why shouldn't a broke man win? Take it and win us a home."

"Oh, that's different," says Stranger.

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"I accept with pleasure—the more so as I have an infallible system of winning at roulette, founded on long observation."

"Yes?" says I, beginning to feel sorry for my hundred.

"Yes. I have observed that, if you play enough, you always lose. You just mathematically must. The percentage is a scientific certain-t-y-ty. My system is to bet high, win, and quit before you begin to lose."

"How did you ever study it out?" says I, beginning to be glad about my investment again. "I never tried that way, but it sounds promising."

"Such being the case, I got a hunch," says Stranger. "Here goes for a gold chain or a wooden leg. Take my hand and watch me peer into the future."

We wiggled through to the table after a while. The dealer was a voluptuous swell, accentuated with solid gold log chains and

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ruby rings where convenient. I knew him. He wore a copyrighted smile losing, and a nasty sneer when he won. An overbearing man and opportune, Frenchy, addicted to killing his fellow-man in sheer self-defense, during the absence of his assailant's friends. Such was his unrefuted statement, the dead gentlemen having never given their testimony. He had been so fortunate in his protections that lots of folks rarely ever went out of their way to annoy him.

Stranger began hostilities by depositing a twenty on the black. Red ensued. Another twenty on black. Black comes. Frenchy shoved over a ten, and Stranger looked pained.

"I bet twenty dollars," he said, lifting of his brows.

"Ten dollars is the limit for any one bet," snaps Frenchy, rolling the ball again.

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"Don't delay the game. Bet or give up your place."

"But you took my twenty." He stopped the wheel. "No bets this whirl," says Stranger.

The crowd stopped talking and side-stepped for an alibi in case the gentleman should engage in self-defense.

Frenchy bares his teeth and snarls. "You lost. I got the mon. Why didn't you inquire? You orter understand a game before you buck it. This is my game and my rules goes. See?"

"I see," says Stranger quiet. "Give me tens for these twenties, please."

Snickers from the crowd. Frenchy had them Buffaloed to a standstill. All the same, they had no use for a fellow that let his rights be trampled on this way. And yet Stranger didn't look noways like a man of patient pro-

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clivities, given to turning the other cheek. Some wise ones cashed their chips when they remarked his easy smile.

When Frenchy began to roll again we had the table mostly to ourselves. I moves over by the wheel to watch the lookout, him having a game eye and a propensity to be sole witness for Frenchy when his life was attempted.

"I will now declare myself as for W. J. Bryan," says Stranger, dropping ten each on the squares marked 16, 2, 1.

"Twenty-seven, red, odd and McKinley," drones Frenchy, and scoops our thirty.

Stranger strings thirty more on 16, 2, 1.

"Nine, black, odd! Great Republican gains!"

Frenchy's singsong was plumb exasperating.

Stranger adorns his three numbers again with his last thirty, and, as an afterthought, put his rare old iron dollar on single o.

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"Single green," chants Frenchy. "Populist, by jingo!" I says, as Frenchy rakes the three tens and pays 'em, with five more to the green.

Ten each on 16, 2, 1. Then he planks the six on double green. "I hate a piker!" he states. And oo came.

"Alfalfa," I yells. "Grangers for ever!"

Things was looking up now, but Stranger was noways concerned. "Six thirty-fives is two hundred and ten—six I had makes two sixteen. Hold on till I make a purty." He bets ten straight on 16, ten on each corner, ten on each side. Same play for 2, and a lone ten on the unit. I never seen a board look so plumb ridiculous.

"Hope springs infernal in the human breast. Let 'er go, Hannal!" he says. "A short life and a merry one!"

The ball spun nearly two weeks. "Sixteen, black and even," remarks Frenchy.

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I takes a swift glance at the wheel then, to corroborate my ears. "And Bryan," suggests Stranger.

"Bryan! Bryan!" yells the crowd. Miners and cow-boys is Democrats *ex officio*, and Frenchy's surreptitious habit of defending himself was endearin' Stranger to 'em. Besides, he was winning. That helps with crowds.

Paying them bets was complex. We was over eleven hundred to the good on the turn. Other business was suspended, and the crowd lined up, leaving the gladiators the center of the stage, and a twenty-foot lane so they could have plenty of air.

"I will now avenge the crime of '73," remarks Stranger. "I'm getting it trained." He made the same layout. Strike me dead, if the ball didn't jump in a pocket—out—and back—and out again and deliberated between 2 and 35 while the wheel went around four-

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teen times. You could have heard the split-second hand on a stop watch in the next county while it balanced—and at last rope-walked down in two.

"Two, red, even," says Frenchy in a shocked voice, like he was seein' things at night.

No one could yell—they was a-catching of their breath. And we lays by twelve hundred and fifty more.

"Before proceeding further with my witchcraft," says Stranger, "I would ask you to set your valuation of layout, lookout, license and good-will. Because," he says, "any fool can see that the ball stops on the one this time. Science, poetry, logic, romance, sentiment and justice point to it, like spokes to a hub. And if you're going to bank with that chicken feed"—jerking his chin toward the shattered fragments of the bank roll—"you'll have to lower your limit . . . before I play. Oh, I'm learning fast."

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Frenchy looks unhappy, but there wasn't nothing to say. His pile wasn't big enough to pay if Stranger's predictions was accurate. "Bring me my sack, Brown," he calls out. Brown opens his safe and lugs over the sack. Frenchy pours it out on the table—ten thousand dollars, bills of all sizes from five to a thousand, and a coffee-pot full of gold. "Shoot," he says. "You're faded."

Stranger eclipses the one spot with ten dollar bills: ten each on corners, the four sides and the middle. "It's a sure thing—we'd just as well have some side money," he says, betting ten each on black, odd, first column, first dozen and 1 to 18. "Mr. Brown," he says, "the gentleman who runs the game will hand you seventy dollars when the ball stops. Drinks for the crowd while it lasts," and drops ten each on 16 and 2, for luck.

Buz-z-z. The ball hums a cheerful ditty,

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like hot coffee on a cold day. Buz-z-z—Click.

Frenchy goes into a trance, chewing his mouth. He moistens his lips and makes an effort. "One, black, and odd!" His voice was cracked and horrified.

"What a pleasant dream!" I thinks. "It's a shame to wake up and wrangle horses, but it must be near day." I tries to open my eyes, but couldn't. 'Twas no dream of avarice. Stranger was just visible above a pyramid of deferred dividends.

"Great Democratic gains," he announces. "Gentlemen—in fact, all of you—what'll you have?"

"I guess that includes me, all right," states a big miner. "Strictly speaking, I don't want no drink now, but, if you'd just as soon tell me what color my old pack-mare's next colt'll be, I sh'd be obliged."

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No one wanted a drink—nobody moved. More miracles was what they wanted. "What? No drinks?" says Stranger. "Prohibition landslide in Terrapin? Can I believe my ears—or my nose? Well, then, I will pursue my hellish purpose. I appeal to the calm judgment of this crowd, if they ever heard of an election without repeaters?" But he doesn't let his gaze wander to the crowd none whatever. He never taken both eyes off Frenchy to oncet, since the limit had been pulled on him.

He decorated the board just as it was the last time, and looks on with pleased expectancy while the ball spins. I hope I may be saved if it didn't come a repeater!

Stranger yawns as he pulls in thirteen hundred and twenty dollars. "Thanking you for your kind attention," he states, "the entertainment is now concluded. Will some one trust me for a sack?"

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"Feet cold?" sneers Frenchy.

"Oh no, I'm quite comfortable. But I *might* lose if I kept on," Stranger explains. "Those numbers may not come again for ever so long. This is a piking game, anyhow. I like to bet my money in large chunks."

"You seem to be a sort of a Democrat," suggests Frenchy. "Why not back up your views? Here's seven thousand says McKinley's elected."

"Why, *that's* my game," says Stranger, beaming. "That's just what I wanted. Bryan's going to sweep the country from Dan to Milwaukee."

I gives him the nudge, for I sees our pile a-glimmering. I don't mind betting on cards or horses and such, but politics is tricky. But he prattles on, plumb carried away by the courage of his convictions.

Frenchy's nose dented. Why, I learned later, but I'll tell you now. Terrapin was

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sixty miles from a telegraph office and all right-minded citizens was here present. But this sure-thing sport, knowing we was all for Bryan, had posted a relay on the North trail to bring him news. It was now way past midnight. He had known McKinley was in since about the time I was staking Stranger, and poor, innocent, confiding Stranger walks right into his trap.

"Even money?" asks Frenchy.

"I would shorely scorn to take such an advantage of you," says Stranger. "I'll give you a chance for your white alley. I will now proceed to divide my capital into five parts. The first part contains fifteen hundred dollars, which I bet you against five hundred dollars that Bryan is our next President. I will then bet you fifteen hundred even that Bryan carries thirty-six states, a list of which I will make out and seal. Third pile, two thousand dollars, gives you a chance to break

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even if you're lucky. Give me odds of five to one and I bet this two thousand that Bryan carries four other states, names of which will also be deposited under seal with stake-holder. Pile number four, five hundred dollars, goes even that I made a good bet. Number five, one hundred and sixty-six dollars, goes in my pocket for tobacco and postage stamps and other luxuries."

"You're delirious. Your money's a gift," says Frenchy. "Make out your agreements. It'll take more'n I got to cover that five to one bet, but I can borrow the Northern Pacific on that proposition." He takes Brown off for a confidential and comes back with the money by the time Stranger had the bet in writing and signed.

Frenchy reads it aloud. "You are all witnesses," he says, and slaps his fist to it. "Name your stake-holder."

"Put it in Mr. Brown's safe—money, agree-

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ment and my two lists of states. Decide to-morrow at five P. M. when the stage comes in."

They makes a bundle of it and locks it up. "And now," says Stranger to me, "my presentiments points for bed."

"Why couldn't you quit when I wanted you to, you ijit?" I says. "You made the worst break I ever see."

"You certainly surprise me. Haven't I raised you to a position of opulence by my acumen and foresight? Your ingratitude grieves me to my heart's core—and just when we stand to more than double our money, too."

"Acumen! Foresight!" I jeers. "'Twas blind, bulldog, damn-fool luck. I furnished all the judgment used when I tried to stop you. I put up the money, and you had a right to harken to me."

"You're my partner," says he calmly. "Half this money is yours, and all, if you need it. But I lost *your* money. This here is the

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proceeds of my iron dollar. By to-morrow night we'll have eleven thousand, anyway, and here you're complaining. I do hate a quitter."

"And I hate a fool. You have a chance to win one bet, and that's all."

"You'll regret this hasty speech to-morrow night. Follow me, and you'll wear diamonds!"

"Yes—on the seat of my pants," I rejoins bitterly. And all them somewhat diverse prophecies came to pass.

When we woke, after noon, 'twas pretty well known how the election went, and we was guyed unmerciful.

But Stranger wasn't noways dejected. "Rumor—mere rumor. 'Out of the nettle danger we may pluck the flower safety,'" he spouts, waving his hands like a windmill. "I've been in worse emergencies, and always emerged."

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I was considerable sore and was for not showing up to turn over the money, but he persuaded me.

"At the worst Frenchy owes me ten that I won fair on the second bet last night," he says. "If I have to collect that, I aim to charge him something for collectin'. I had that in mind last night if the green hadn't come when my dollar was on it."

I sees reason in this, and oils my guns.

Frenchy was waitin' with his lookout, gay and cheerful. "Did you bring your sack?" was his greeting.

"Why, no, I forgot. Hi! Bud!" Stranger gives a boy five dollars. "Bring an ore sack to the barkeep for me, and keep the change."

We gets Brown with the package of stake money and prognostications on our way through the crowd to a back room. Brown busts the package and begins the hollow mockery.

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"Bet number one." He reads the specifications. "Bryan loses. Any objections?"

Stranger shakes his head sorrowful, and pushes over the two-thousand-dollar packet.

"Bet number two." Brown breaks the list of thirty-six states. "For Bryan," he reads: "Connecticut, New York, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota—" His feelings overcome him and he laughs till the tears roll down his face. Frenchy leers, and the lookout rocks himself back and forward. And to cap it off comes a knock, and barkeep comes in with the sack Stranger ordered.

They howled. "I'll give you ten for your sack," gasps Frenchy.

"You needn't rub it in," says Stranger, injured. "I certain was mistook in them estimates. Pass on to the next."

"Third bet," wheezes Brown. He wipes his cheeks and tears open the list of four states. "Bryan will carry—" he begins. He

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turns pale, his tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth, and his eyes bugged out so you could hang your hat on 'em.

"TEXAS!" he screeches. "*Arkansas, Georgia, SOUTH CAROLINA!*"

"Then I made a good bet!" observes Stranger, popping the rest of the money into the sack.

"What!" yells Frenchy. "You were to name four additional states—forty in all!"

"Oh, no. Four *others*. These four were not in my list of thirty-six. You lost and I've got the mon. Why didn't you inquire? You orter understand a game before you play it. This is my game, and my rules go. See?"

Stranger's gun was dangling on his right hip, but, as Frenchy drew, Stranger's right hand caught his'n, gun and all, and Stranger's left produced a .45 from nowhere at all and proceeds to bend it over Frenchy's head. The tin-horn couldn't get his right hand loose, so

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he reaches around with his left, jerks Stranger's gun from his hip. But he only wastes time snapping it, for that one wasn't loaded.

I thought maybe Brown and the lookout would double up on my pardner, but they didn't. They just shoved the two pits of their two stomachs up against the muzzles of my two guns, and looked foolish.

"Nuff!" screams Frenchy, letting go his gun. He looks like ration day at Rosebud. Me and Stranger walks out, sticking closer'n brothers, lockstepping, back to back.

"What'd I tell you?" says Stranger, turning in at a butcher shop. 'And there he asks may we use the scales, and pours our ill-gotten gains into both scoops till they balance. "Take your choice, pardner," he says. "You're short on faith, but you're hell on works!"

Next to a restaurant. Before our order comes, in steps Billy Edwards. He was a

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deputy sheriff, but white. "Would you mind my asking your name? 'Cause Frenchy doesn't know. He's swearing out a warrant for you, alleging assault with intent to kill," says Billy politely. "They haven't give me the warrant yet. Course if they had I wouldn't tell you this, for you might get away before I found you."

I'd never thought to ask his name!

"Artemus G. Jones," says he, and he stuck his thumb in his vest. "Set down and take supper with us."

"Ar—ahem. Er—what does the G. stand for?"

Artie looks embarrassed. "Galatians," he sighs.

"What? Was you named after—"

"I was named," says Artie, "after a family scrap. Can't you suppress it? Artemus G. ought to identify me."

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"I—I thought it might spell easier," says Billy.

After supper we walks over and gets the warrant. Billy arrests Artie and disarms him. "You know *your* business—I'll make any kind of bet on that," says Billy; "but in your place I should have been far away on a bounding bronco."

We went to be tried before Judge Eliot. Frenchy kept a jack-leg lawyer named Satterlee, and he was helping persecute.

"Have you legal advice, prisoner?" says his Honor.

"A little," says Artie softly.

"Proceed. Call the plaintiff."

Frenchy took the stand and told a terrible tale of wanton robbery and brutal, unprovoked violence. He had won an election bet from prisoner, and prisoner had taken the money by force. He showed his wounds.

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He shore looked like he'd been playing goat with a buzz-saw.

Brown and the lookout was good witnesses, but they let out, when the Judge questioned them, that Artie had the money in his sack before the trouble began and that Frenchy had a gun. And not a word about my presence of mind.

Artie allowed he wouldn't cross-examine them. His Honor was riled. "Will you take the stand, sir?" he says.

Artie stretches. "Oh, no—I guess it's not worth while to take up your time. Ugh—o—oah," he says, yawning.

Judge was furious. "Prisoner, if you've got any witnesses in your defense, call 'em. As the evidence stands—up you go!"

Artie placed himself on top of his feet. "Your Honor," he says "call Billy Edwards."

Billy gives his name, sex, color, and other essentials. Then says Artie:

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"You arrested me to-night?"

"Yes."

"Was my gun loaded?"

"One of them was empty. The other one had five cartridges in it," Edwards promptly asserts.

"Was the loaded one bloody?"

"Awful."

"That's all," says Artie with a gracious wave of his hand, dismissing the witness. "Your Honor, our friend the Gaul, alias Frenchy, is before you. I am refined by nature. One gentle pull on the trigger would have removed all doubt. He isn't. I move that my client, Artemus G. Jones, me, I, myself, be discharged, and plaintiff reprimanded for frivolity in taking up the time of the court. Had I wished to kill this jigger I certainly would have shot him. The gun that was bloody was the gun of Artemus," and Artie

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paid the whole blamed court a compliment by the way he retired.

Frenchy's lawyer began to holler, but the judge cut him quick. "Sit down, Mr. Satterlee," says he. "Unless you can prove your client is dead, the court will pursue the course indicated by the learned counsel for defense."

"Selah!" says Satterlee. "I'm down. Set 'em up in the other alley."

III

THE MASCOT OF THE GRAYS

A BASE-BALL GAME AND THE SUBSEQUENT PROCEEDINGS

"WHY, yes!" said Mr. Perkins, "I'll tell you all about it, if you've got the time to spare. I was managing the Grays—that was the club from the west side of the river, you know—and we thought ourselves the prettiest things that ever played base-ball in Dakota; for a while. And then we had hard luck. Our fancy pitcher was an ex-soldier named Fitzeben; a well-built, pale, handsome fellow, with lots of style, and no heart. As long as things were coming his way, he could put up a game of base-ball that would make a man forget his religion; but if they began to find him on the other side, Fitz would go to slops on the run. First-base was this man