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THE NEBRASKA LOADSTONE

IF there was one man in college whom the Rajah thoroughly and heartily detested, it was the captain of the Boat Club. He had many faults; he was very tall and powerful, and delighted contrasting the English physique with that of inferior races; by which he meant, among others, the Rajah's race. His manner was abrupt and overbearing, his laugh loud and unmusical. In fact, he grated horribly on the Rajah and it was merely the final straw when, in the exhilaration of a bump supper—full, as the Rajah remarked in disgust, of cow and strong drink—he called that prince, in playful chaff, a "nigger." The Rajah swore melodiously in Hindustani, and I saw that he meant to be revenged.

In those days the entertainment of the Nebraska Loadstone created a furore. Everybody went to see her, and everybody came away convinced that she possessed marvellous powers. Her peculiar—but everybody remembers the details of the performance, and how the tricks were finally, one by one, exposed, so that her adherents and believers were driven from one position to another, until at last they had to fall back on one single performance out of all those that the Loadstone gave, and maintain that on that occasion at least something unexplained and inexplicable did really happen. It is with the events of that particular evening that I am concerned. I think I can throw some light on them.

At first, however, there were many believers and few sceptics. The Dean carefully pointed out that Plato nowhere denied the existence of odic force; and the Bursar, who was generally supposed to be little better than an atheist, declared that Spencer in one passage impliedly asserted it; even the Warden, in his sermon, told us that it was better, according to Bacon, to believe two errors than refuse one truth—which was, to say the least of it, sitting on the fence. But none of these authorities shook the robust scepticism of the captain of the Boat Club. He knew a conjurer, and the conjurer had told him how it was done, and he was going to expose the Loadstone.

"But why have n't you?" I urged. "She's been here a week."

"He will not be too hard on her at first," said the Rajah, with a little sneer.

"I'll bust her up this very night," said Waterer. "I would have done it before, only I was gated."

The excuse was good, and Waterer departed, full of boastings and self confidence, to gather together a large number of the noisy men, and make a pleasant party to "guy the unhappy Loadstone." I stayed to smoke a pipe with the Rajah.

"Of course she's a fraud," said he; "and I believe that animal really has got hold of the right explanation."

"I shall go and see it," I announced.

After a moment's silent smoking, the Rajah

By ANTHONY HOPE

looked up with a twinkle in his eye. "So shall I—if niggers are admitted."

After Hall, he and I set out together for the Town Hall. We found the first two rows occupied by Waterer and his friends. They were all in evening dress, and had obviously dined—not in hall.

The Rajah and I seated ourselves just behind them. The room was full, and the feats were being most successful; each was followed by general applause, broken only by some gibe from our friends in front. These later grew so pronounced that the Loadstone's manager at last came forward and pointedly invited one of the scoffers to submit himself to experiment.

Now was Waterer's chance. He rose in the majesty of his bulk, walked onto the platform, and said in a loud voice as he settled himself on a chair: "If the lady can move me one foot from this chair, I'll give her a pony!"

The Loadstone advanced and began to paw him about in her usual fashion. Waterer, who was sober enough to have lost nothing but his shyness, was apparently too many for her. He was immovable; and cries of: "Now then! when are you going to begin?" and so on, became audible. Two or three minutes passed, and the Loadstone turned with a gesture of despair toward her manager.

"I can't—!" she began.

"I jumped to my feet, crying: "Wait a minute, look!"

For even as she spoke, there was what is scientifically called a solution of continuity between Waterer and his chair. Still in a sitting posture, but sitting on nothing, he was at least two inches from the wickerwork of the chair.

I glanced from him to the Rajah. That extraordinary man was in deep, placid, profound slumber.

I joggled his elbow and pinched his arm; he showed no consciousness whatever. I looked at the Loadstone. She was standing motionless on the stage, about a yard from Waterer, with one hand outstretched toward him, and her eyes fixed on his ascending figure; for Waterer was gradually, slowly, steadily mounting in his strange journey. He was now a foot from his chair, still in a sitting position—and up, up, up he was going. The wretch was white as a sheet, and gasping with fright and bewilderment. Thunders of applause burst from the audience. It was again and again renewed; but the Loadstone did not, as her custom was, bow and smile in response. She still stood motionless, and Waterer still ascended.

At last, at a height of fully twenty feet from the stage, he stopped. Simultaneously the Loadstone gave a loud shriek as she fell back into the arms of the manager—and the Rajah awoke.

"I beg your pardon," he said politely; "I was drowsy. Anything going on?"

"No; he's stopped now," I answered, my eyes eagerly fixed on Waterer.

The Rajah rose from his seat with a yawn.

"There'll be nothing more tonight," he said.

"Let's go home."

"Go home, man!—with that before our eyes!"

The Rajah shrugged his shoulders. "She won't do anything more," he repeated. "Look at her; she's quite done up."

And, indeed, the Loadstone looked half-dead as she gazed fearfully up at Waterer. Her demeanor was not that of a triumphant performer.

"Do sit down," I urged; "We must see the end of it."

With a weary sigh, the Rajah sat down, saying, "I'm not sure you will, you know."

While we talked, the audience grew impatient. However wonderful a feat may be, the public likes to have things kept moving. They thought Waterer had been in the air long enough, and there were cries of: "That'll do! Let him down!" "Give us another."

The manager held a hasty conference with the Loadstone; he seemed to urge her; but she shook her head again and again, and would do nothing but lie back in a chair, and pass her hand to and fro over her head. The Rajah looked at her with a slight smile. The clamor increased. I think a sort of panic—an angry panic—seized the audience.

"Bring him down! Bring him down!" they cried, pointing to the pallid Waterer, who sat as rigid as a trussed fowl!

After another despairing appeal to the Loadstone, the manager came forward and made a lame speech. The Loadstone was exhausted with her unparalleled exertions. She must rest; presently she would bring him down. Then Waterer's friends arose and ascended the platform. They walked about, they stood on one another's shoulders; they made it clear that no cords held Waterer. A pair of steps was called for and brought. Placed on a sturdy table, they just enabled a man to reach Waterer's feet. One mounted amid intense excitement. Turning to the Rajah I exclaimed, "Look!"

He was asleep again; and the Loadstone stood stiffly upright beckoning toward Waterer. Slowly and gradually he descended, leaving the man on the ladder grasping at empty air, till he sat again on his seat. The applause burst out, and the Loadstone sank back in a faint on the floor. The Rajah awoke, and the manager dropped the curtain, hiding the Loadstone, Waterer, and his friends from our view.

"Give me your arm," said the Rajah; "I am tired." I escorted him to a cab, and we drove home.

The Loadstone gave no performance the next evening; she was too fatigued; and Waterer was