

GENERAL MILES AND THE DOG

It is hard work to make a speech when you have listened to compliments from the powers in authority. A compliment is a hard text to preach to. When the chairman introduces me as a person of merit, and when he says pleasant things about me, I always feel like answering simply that what he says is true; that it is all right; that, as far as I am concerned, the things he said can stand as they are. But you always have to say something, and that is what frightens me.

I remember out in Sydney once having to respond to some complimentary toast, and my one desire was to turn in my tracks like any other worm—and run, for it. I was remembering that occasion at a later date when I had to introduce a speaker. Hoping, then, to spur his speech by putting him, in joke, on the defensive, I accused him in my introduction of everything I thought it impossible for him to have committed. When I finished there was an awful calm. I had been telling his life history by mistake.

One must keep up one's character. Earn a character first if you can, and if you can't, then assume one. From the code of morals I have been following and revising and revising for seventy-two years I remember one detail. All my life I have been honest—comparatively honest. I could never use money I had not made honestly—I could only lend it.

Last spring I met General Miles again, and he commented on the fact that we had known each other thirty years. He said it was strange that we had not met years before, when we had both been in Washington. At that point I changed the subject, and I changed it with art. But the facts are these:

I was then under contract for my *Innocents Abroad*, but did not have a cent to live on while I wrote it. So I went to Washington to do a little journalism. There I met an equally poor friend, William Davidson, who had not a single vice, unless you call it a vice in a Scot to love Scotch. Together we devised the first and original newspaper syndicate, selling two letters a week to twelve newspapers and getting \$1 a letter. That \$24 a week would have been enough for us—if we had not had to support the jug.

But there was a day when we felt that we must have \$3 right away—\$3 at once. That was how I met the General. It doesn't matter now what we wanted so much money at one time for, but that Scot and I did occasionally want it. The Scot sent me out one day to get it. He had a great belief in Providence, that Scottish friend of mine. He said: "The Lord will provide."

I had given up trying to find the money lying about, and was in a hotel lobby in despair, when I saw a beautiful unfriended dog. The dog saw me, too, and at once we became acquainted. Then General Miles came in, admired the dog, and asked me to price it. I priced it at \$3. He offered me an opportunity to reconsider the value of the beautiful animal, but I refused to take more than Providence knew I needed. The General carried the dog to his room.

Then came in a sweet little middle-aged man, who at once began looking around the lobby.

"Did you lose a dog?" I asked. He said he had.

"I think I could find it," I volunteered, "for a small sum."

"How much?" he asked. And I told him \$3.

He urged me to accept more, but I did not wish to outdo Providence. Then I went to the General's room and asked for the dog back. He was very angry, and wanted to know why I had sold him a dog that did not belong to me.

"That's a singular question to ask me, sir," I replied. "Didn't you ask me to sell him? You started it." And he let me have him. I gave him back his \$3 and returned the dog, collect, to its owner. That second \$3 I carried home to the Scot, and we enjoyed it, but the first \$3, the money I got from the General, I would have had to lend.

The General seemed not to remember my part in that adventure, and I never had the heart to tell him about it.