

## The Attorney General's Pants

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*Of the District of Columbia Bar*

On a warm August afternoon in 1905, I was standing in front of the New Willard Hotel at the F Street end when Morgan H. Beach came walking along the south side of F Street and joined me. We had a brief conversation, the result of which was that when he resigned as United States Attorney for the District of Columbia, I joined him in the practice of law. That meant that Mr. Beach did the practicing, and I opened the windows and answered the telephone. Now and then he would allow me to help him in a small way in something interesting.

While he was still United States Attorney for the District of Columbia, an amusing incident occurred:

A gentleman whose arrest, in connection with a certain case, was under consideration, suddenly left town. It was vital that a detective be sent after him at once. The Department of Justice in those days was not the highly efficient organization that it is now, and when Mr. Beach applied for a detective, he was told there was no one to assign to the case and no appropriation from which an outside man could be paid. It got to be about 11:00 p.m., and no solution of the problem could be had. Mr. Beach, who was not only an excellent lawyer, but whose sense of humor never failed him, decided to go with two of his



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assistants to the residence of the Attorney General and lay the matter before him.

Philander C. Knox was Attorney General at the time, and resided in a large house on the north side of K Street between 15th and 16th Streets. Mr. Beach rang the door bell and the butler responded and said no one could see Mr. Knox as he had retired for the night. Mr. Beach told the butler to go up to the Attorney General's bedroom and say that he must see him as the matter could not wait until morning. The butler returned saying Mr. Knox was in bed, but to come up. Mr. Beach and his assistants went up, and there lay Mr. Knox in the middle of a large bed, only his bald head visible.

Mr. Beach stated his business, and that no funds were available at the Department to employ a detective and explained how vital it was that it be done that night. Mr. Knox never changed his expression, nor made any comment while Mr. Beach was talking. When Mr. Beach stopped talking, Mr. Knox said, "Hand me my pants." Mr. Beach went over to a chair on which the Attorney General had piled his clothes and took the pants to Mr. Knox. Mr. Knox reached in the pocket and brought out a roll of bills that looked like it would pay the National Debt. He looked at Mr. Beach and said, "How much will it cost?" Mr. Beach replied about \$500.00. Mr. Knox peeled off five \$100.00 bills, handed them to Mr. Beach, threw the pants on the floor, settled back in bed, and said, "Good night, gentlemen."

On the way out, Mr. Beach picked up Mr. Knox's hat instead of his own and had to return from the front steps to make the necessary exchange. As he moved up K Street in the dark, Mr. Beach said to his assistants, "Damn it, I always did want a Knox hat."