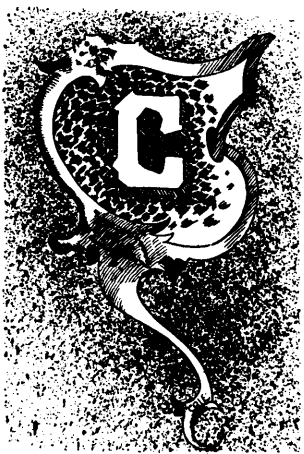


THE WOLF AND THE LAMB.

BY WALTON S. SMITH.



YRUS LAMB was a man of mysterious antecedents, who came to settle in Canada. He did not bring over much coin when he first appeared, but he brought a Yankee twang and an overwhelming assurance. Neither did he put up at a first-class hotel, as do most of his nation whose past is obscure. A genius he who could afford to wait, and in consequence a favourite

One was desperately dense, being a youth entirely without self-assertion; the other was simply desperate. She was a lover of freedom and folly, with the prospect of a three months' incarceration before her. A desperately dense youth is not necessarily very different from the rest of his kind in one particular; he is quite as susceptible as they to the charms of female beauty.

When the lover of freedom and folly smiled, Martin, of course, cast down his eyes and blushed. He would not have been true to his character otherwise. But he knew that the maid was fair, withal; and it was not long before his eyes had rallied and gazed upon her again—and yet again! She was very pretty, and she seemed favourably impressed with our hero. But what would you? The latter was desperately dense! He experienced the most delicious agony during the course of that trip. He longed to speak to the attractive stranger, but he durst not. He was very much impressed with her, and his heart beat responsively whenever he mustered courage to meet her glance. Yet, as has been said, she was but a lover of folly; and she was amusing herself. Suddenly our hero was smitten by a brilliant idea that dazed him by the shock of its advent; it was simple, and it did not require overmuch courage.

He took out his pocket memoranda book, and wrote upon a blank page:—

"I would like to know you better; I am getting off at the next station, and fear I may never see you again. Will you let me have your address that I may write to you? My name is as under, and my address is "Sheercliff," Quebec, P. Q.

MARTIN LAMB

P.S.—Please do not think me impudent or anything—I am in earnest."

This composition took up much time, and no less than three pages of his book. When he had pencilled it out carefully, he folded the paper into a compact little square. Then, as the engine's whistle announced the fact that the train was approaching a station, he gathered his traps together and rose from his seat. As he passed the young lady, he lurched slightly, and dropped the missive into her lap.

The deed was done! Martin shambled into the passenger coach and fell upon the first seat that was handy. He felt very nervous, and very conscious of the fact that he had done a brave action.

He remained several days in Montreal, but when at length he reached his home he found an envelope addressed to him in a large characterless school-girl hand. On tearing it open, three pages of gush were disclosed, written in the same style of calligraphy, and signed Blanche Hebert.

The letter informed the delighted Martin that Mademoiselle Blanche had been favourably impressed by his appearance. She wished he had spoken to her, but he was evidently bashful. Then a sage admonition anent the folly of bashfulness, and, in conclusion,—

"If you are too backward you will never be lucky in love!"

"By gum!" said Martin, who never actually swore, "I will take her advice." And so he did, according to his lights; he consulted Henri Tremblay. The latter was a young French Canadian, who had been educated at the Seminary in Quebec, and graduated at Laval University in the same city. He was a lawyer, without much practice, and he was very ambitious. He had a talent for writing scathing editorials, and the columns of a small French newspaper, which was published in the interest of a certain clique of Provincial politicians, were open to his pen. As he was useful to this clique, he might be a great man some day, for we manage these things after an original fashion in Canada.

His eyes were dark and piercing; his black hair curled in picturesque style over his brow, and he had a hooked nose which a remote ancestral connection with the Huron tribe of Indians had bequeathed. He was thirty years of age and unmarried.

Martin loved to bask in the reflected light of a stronger intellect, and he admired physical beauty; in consequence Tremblay was his model. The latter was a handsome fellow, his frowning crest and eagle's beak notwithstanding. He had all the lithe strength, and much of the terrible beauty of a tiger. Ordinarily his manner was soft and very fascinating, but, if roused, his anger was fierce and quick.

Henri took the letter which Martin handed him, and read it over twice before committing himself to an opinion. As he did so, he conjured up an image of a fair frail little matron whom he had known too well some ten years before. Then he had been a wild young student at Laval, and she a small dame with blue eyes and a plump figure, who minced her words and was profoundly silly. He remembered her well, and dimly he recalled a miniature reflection of herself, who was called "*La Petite Baby*," and whose real name was Blanche.

But aloud he only said "Sacre!" and appeared to ponder deeply.

"Do you know her?" asked Lamb, curiously.

The other showed his strong white teeth.

"Know her? No! But I know the family!" he added, after a pause.

"She is of good family, then?" asked Martin, who, being of a rather plebeian stock himself, was inclined to set an undue value on such trifles.

Again the white teeth gleamed. "She is connected with the best French names in Canada!" said Henri.

"By gum!" said Martin, "I'll—!"

"*Tranquil!*" commanded the other, laughingly. "What you say may be used as evidence, *mon ami*. I shall wash my hands of the matter. Those convent girls,—bah! They are like fire,—they burn. She will make you love her!"

"By Gum!" said Martin, in a tone of conscious power.

"You think she fancies me, eh?"

Henri flashed a keen look at his interrogator, and his brain reviewed the position with characteristic rapidity meanwhile. The summing up was much as follows:

I. Martin Lamb,—fool—rich—unmarried—well!

II. Blanche Hebert,—foolish and weak like her mother,—well!

III. Mr. and Mrs. Martin Lamb,—young, foolish and wealthy,—well!

IV. Henri Tremblay,—clever and experienced—friend of the family—fascinating with men, irresistible with women,—ambitious, but poor,—well!

He pondered over the matter a little, and said at length, "I dare say she would. You are a sly dog, Lamb,—and very insinuating with women!" Then he waved his hands. "I refuse to take any responsibility in the case!" he said, laughing, "but I can give you the address of a friend of mine in Montreal, who will help you to the death, if needs be."

As Tremblay gave Martin the address of his Montreal friend there was a peculiar expression in his fierce magnetic eyes.

On a high cliff, overhanging the St. Lawrence river, commanding a very picturesque view of that grand old stream, stands a large, white, clap-boarded mansion; it has wide verandahs and expansive French windows, shaded by green blinds. It is a very comfortable country house, and the grounds about it are also very comfortable. There are many tall trees—elms that stand majestically against the sky, and poplars with an ever moving foliage; maples, whose broad leaves change to a glorious red when the summers wane; and hardy fir trees that remain green throughout the length of the Canadian winter. In the hot summer months it is a restful place, where the birds sing blithely and the trim lawns please the eye. When the snow comes, drifts pile about the homestead, even invading the wide verandahs and barricading the expansive French windows, and the winds moan dolefully through the leafless tress that dot the storm swept lawn. But, withal, there is a grandeur in its wintry perspective, and a bracing tonic in the moaning blasts; whilst within the walls of the house, warmth and comfort reign.

This was "Sheercliff," the home of Martin Lamb, which Cyrus, his father, had built; and this the refuge wherein that shrewd old accumulator of dollars had spent the last idle years of a very busy life. Here it was, moreover, that Martin, his son, brought his fair young bride, with whom he had eloped. He had kept up the correspondence and had made arrangements for the marriage while the girl was visiting some Montreal friends during the short Christmas vacation.

She was very fair to look at, this convent girl,—very much given to shrugging her plump shoulders and to rolling her large blue eyes. She had beautiful golden hair, and her teeth were like pearls; they showed to perfection when she smiled. She smiled whenever the occasion offered, did this bride of Martin's, and she contrived to find that occasion very often.

Martin was exceedingly proud of his pretty wife, and much given to chuckle when he thought of how he had won her; he described the whole affair to Henri Tremblay shortly after

of fortune. He was a cool, hard-headed Yankee, whose deliberate drawl concealed an indomitable energy, whose sole object in life was the accumulation of dollars. He went into the lumber business, beginning at first with insignificant ventures. But as the years passed, and the never ending supply of square timber continued to float down the great rivers to be converted into gold at Quebec, he began to thrive,—slowly at first, but steadily withal, until at last he became one of the wealthy lumbermen of the country. Ultimately he made himself friends in Parliament, and obtained Government contracts, which, as all Canadians know, open the door to untold riches. He prospered exceedingly, did Cyrus, and built him a house near Quebec; he took to himself a wife, moreover, who, in due time, gave birth to a son. Then she died, leaving her husband to garner wealth as of yore, with a youthful heir to succeed to his hard earned shekels. Again the years passed, and time again saw the affairs of our shrewd merchant continue to prosper. But, in its course, there came a small doubt that gradually resolved itself into the force of a shocking conviction, in the mind of Cyrus Lamb. This was relative to Martin, his son and heir, and the mental trouble was put thus to the father, as the outcome of his own trained observation.

"That critter, Martin, is a damned fool!" said the trained observation blankly; and, of all crimes, that of being a damned fool was the most unpardonable in the eyes of Cyrus Lamb. But, withal, he loved the lad who was his own son—loved him even though his ruddy face expressed a vapid intellect, and his receding chin bespoke a want of self-assertion. Martin was not troubled with ambition of any sort; he had no energy,—"no sand!" to quote the mental summing up of Cyrus Lamb.

The latter had seen many wealthy firms go to the wall through mismanagement. Possibly he had often egged them on to their own undoing that he himself might profit thereby. He could not look forward to the time when Martin's would be the directing hand without misgivings; and so it was he sold out and retired from business. He settled in his comfortable country house, near Quebec, to spend his old age, with a goodly fortune safely invested.

So it was, moreover, that on his demise, a few years later, Martin Lamb, the damned fool, found himself the possessor of a large income, derived from the interest of a safely invested principal. Found himself free to roam the wide world, to get beyond the small boundary of his surroundings and to improve his mind. But, like other fools, he was a contented wight; he settled down in the house his father had built and thence he stirred not, beyond an occasional journey to Montreal or another neighbouring city.

Those who take the trouble to study the habits of the fool, who has both wealth and leisure, will have noticed that sooner or later the inevitable impulse offers, and the inevitable piece of unpardonable folly is committed.

Martin Lamb experienced the impulse when he was on his way from Ottawa to Montreal. He had been up at the first named city to see the opening of parliament, and was returning home. It so happened that Blanche Hebert likewise chanced to be returning from a bondage, which her soul detested, in a certain convent on the outskirts of Montreal city. Moreover, they were the only passengers in the drawing-room car.