

THE STRANGE EXPERIENCE OF VICTOR LAFONTAINE.

For many years the very worst farm in all St. Polycarpe was that belonging to Victor Lafontaine.

less; eight hundred dollars or the charity of the parish; eight hundred dollars or exile."

The view, indeed, along his entire horizon, was one calculated to discourage the stoutest heart, and it was small wonder that after a few moments' study of the prospect Victor's shoulders were accustomed to take on an added droop, and his countenance an increased hopelessness of expression.

What was to become of him? Clearly there was nothing left for him but to put the children upon the parish and go away himself to the States, where perhaps he could get work and in time make another little home. And yet how could he leave St. Polycarpe — he who had never spent a night away from it in his life?

At this point, however, that ill-fortune, which despite his name it was destined should follow Victor so persistently in his life, came to him in the form of a modestly successful farmer.

Tears rushed to Victor's eyes — tears of bitter yearning and despair. Was there no hope for him? Was there no one who would hold out a helping hand in the hour of his necessity? With the frenzy of the lost his mind went wildly about for some stupendous plan which even at this eleventh hour might avert his impending doom.

In the wake of these crushing pecuniary losses, had come also a corresponding series of domestic trials. Angelina, his wife, had done the best she could, but a family of eight children, including a deformed boy incapable of self-assistance, left her but little time for the manufacture of those helpful accessories to his Friday market-load common to his neighbors.

His inner vision seemed to find the most satisfactory settlement of his doubts, for immediately with an air of greater decision, he unbuttoned his overcoat, and after fumbling in a number of inner pockets, brought forth a scrap of paper and a fragment of lead pencil.

It is needless to say, however, that this comparatively simple manner of procuring funds could not go on forever, even with as lenient money lenders as followed that business in St. Polycarpe, and before long Victor awoke to the fact that not only could he obtain no more money on house or lands, but that if he did not at once produce the sum of eight hundred dollars these possessions would pass irrevocably out of his keeping.

It is strange to note how frequently Nature accommodates her moods to ours; weeping when we weep, and smiling again when some ray of happiness has dispelled our gloom.

The day on which he was made acquainted with this crisis in his affairs would have been a dismal one even if associated with more enlivening circumstances than the tidings of impending bankruptcy and disgrace.

Yet to something more tangible than his happy belief was evidently due his air of undisguised jubilation. A gleam of uncontrollable animation showed in his usually mournful countenance, a sparkle of wondering delight in his sombre eyes.

Over and over in his aching brain hummed the brief words of his dreadful sentence, resolving themselves at last into a sort of doleful refrain to which the tread of his lagging feet made a fitting accompaniment.

Victor accepted the invitation with the alacrity which had marked his movements during the morning, and stepping into the hall he preceded the notaire briskly to the little office where he seated himself with obvious cheerfulness, placing his burden on the floor at his feet.

receptacle, Victor, however, smilingly but firmly waved them aside, and with commands for their good behavior during his absence set forth for the third time on the way to town. His pace was rapid, buoyant, like that of a man bound upon some pleasing errand, but as soon as he was well out of view of his house he stopped, untied the bag with great caution, and after glancing once or twice half fearfully over his shoulder, opened its capacious mouth and peered long and eagerly into the depths within.

It was not the church, however, which formed the objective point of his journey to-day. He passed that edifice with only his customary respectful salutation, and with hurried steps made his way to the comfortable red brick cottage beyond, where in Monsieur Trudeau, the notaire, had so recently unravelled the tangled skein of his affairs for him.

"Well, well, Victor," he said as he took his usual place at the table and began toying with his pen. "You seem to be bearing your trouble better than I thought you would. To tell the truth, I felt sorry enough for you yesterday, and if I had been a rich man I would have given you that eight hundred dollars myself. But you look as happy to-day as if you had never heard of mortgages or any of the bad things that go with them."

Victor laughed. "Ah, M'sieu," he said cheerily, "I have not forgotten about the mortgage. How could I? That was a bad fix I was in yesterday sure enough; I never want to see Victor Lafontaine in a worse one. But a great many things may happen in twenty-four hours, and today, strange as it may seem, I am able to laugh, and I fear no more that great debt which threatened to ruin me."

Monsieur Trudeau opened his eyes in astonishment. "You no longer fear the mortgage?" he cried. "What do you mean by that, my friend? Surely you are not going to tell me that you have found someone generous enough, or I might say foolish enough, to lend you the sum you require without security? I know St. Polycarpe pretty well, and I cannot name a man who is able to do such a thing."

Victor gazed placidly at his companion's perturbed countenance for a little space; then his own smile faded slowly and an expression of deep seriousness and perplexity overspread his honest features. He drew his chair nearer to that of the notaire and lowered his voice mysteriously. "You are right, M'sieu, right again. There is not a man in all St. Polycarpe, or in the wide world for that matter, who would lend me one cent this instant. And yet, M'sieu, notwithstanding this fact, there are in this cotton bag at my feet no less than eight hundred good dollars, with which I propose this very day to wipe out all claims upon my house and lands."

"Either you are trying to play a joke on me, Monsieur Lafontaine, or you do not know what you are saying. Which ever the case may be I must tell you that I have no time to-day for anything except business."

For answer Victor arose, and picking up the sack, dropped it heavily upon the table where it fell with a sharp, unmistakable jangle. "Judge for yourself, M'sieu," he said simply, beginning to fumble at the knot, "if these are not good dollars then I do not know what money is."

He loosened the fastening as he spoke, and with a turn of his hand sent a stream of silver coins rattling upon the table. Bright, shining, palpably real, they continued to mass themselves in luxuriant mounds and hillocks until hardly an inch of its dull surface remained exposed to the distended eyes of the astounded notaire.

When the supply was finally exhausted, Victor returned to his chair and waited for his companion to speak. It was some time before the notaire was able to do so. At last he found voice to say sternly: "Victor Lafontaine, where did you get this sum of money that seems to fit so well your needs. Tell me instantly, or as well as I know you, I shall think there is no good dollar you have been driven to some dishonest deed. He fixed a piercing eye on his client, but Victor neither winced nor hesitated.

"Ah, M'sieu," he said humbly, "I do not wonder that you are surprised — suspicious. How, indeed, could I procure so much money in one short night — I who am so stupid, so ignorant? No, I could not do it; I have not done it. This money that you see before you was sent to me from Heaven, or at least if it was not, then I do not know where it came from."

Monsieur Trudeau frowned. Picking up a handful of the coins, he examined them closely. "This money that you say came from Heaven," he said with sat-

isasm, "bears the impress of the mint of the United States. How do you account for that, my friend?" "I cannot account for it, M'sieu. I can account for nothing. But wait — I will tell you the strange thing that has happened to me, and you shall judge for yourself."

"Yesterday, as you know, I hear from your lips that the mortgage can run no longer, and that if I cannot redeem my place with eight hundred dollars I must lose it. I tell you that it will be impossible for me to do this, and that I am, therefore, a ruined man. So much you know to be true, M'sieu. Well, now, what happens after that? Something most strange as you shall hear."

"I go out from your office heartbroken, seeing only shame and misery in store for myself and my children. I dread to go home, so I walk slowly, trying all the time to think of some means to escape from my difficulty. But I am not clever and I think of nothing. I tell myself I would better be dead — that God has forsaken me — that I have no friend on earth or in Heaven; and then, suddenly, as I say that I think of someone — not on earth, to be sure — but someone who I have heard loves much the poor, and helps them out of their distress, I tell myself a little gift of bread in his name. I mean that beautiful saint, M'sieu, in the brown robe and with the little Infant in his arms who stands near the big altar in the church."

"Well, it is he — St. Antoine, that I remember like a flash, and I resolve to ask him to solve me for the sake of my children. How shall I do this? I know very well for I have often seen those little letters lying at his feet in the church. It is in this way that I too shall make my petition. I do not wait until I have reached my home to do this; no, there is no need, for I am in a hurry, and I have moreover in my pocket a bit of pencil and enough paper to answer my purpose. I kneel, then on the sidewalk, and write. It is not easy for I do not like that work, and it is long since I have been to school. But anyhow I make my request like this, M'sieu: "

Victor drew a sheet of paper toward him, and with Monsieur Trudeau's own pen proceeded once more to inscribe his brief appeal: "Grand Saint Antoine, Veuille m'accorder la grace que je vous demande, et je vous promet des pains pour les pauvres."

"There M'sieu," said he, putting the paper into his companion's hand. "There is the letter, just as I wrote it. As for the bad spelling I do not care. I know the good St. Antoine is not going to mind the mistakes as long as I have promised him bread for his poor."

"As it is late, and I have been long away, I decide to take a short break, and go home to the fields by the winter roadway that leads straight to my house. And now listen well, M'sieu, for if what I have to tell you is not a miracle, then I do not know what such things are."

"I cross the first field quickly and without adventure. I enter the second and presently come to the brook, which cuts it about midway. The ice is beginning to thaw so that I hunt out a narrow point and leap to the other side as lightly as I can, considering my big boots and coat. I slip, however, on the opposite bank, and my foot strikes something very hard buried in the snow and mud. I examine the place and find the hard object to be a cotton bag or pillow-case filled with something heavy. I am much surprised because few people use this path except myself and my children, so I pick up the bag and open it, and I find what I have been seeking for so long — home before you see before you. And now, if it was not sent to me by that great saint, in answer to my petition, tell me where it did come from."

Victor ceased speaking, and the RED IN THE BLOOD is the sign of life, of vital force, of the force that life has, of the force that life is.

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notaire sat very still buried in deep thought. "I hardly know what to say to you, Victor," he said at last. "Here is something which I can explain no better than yourself. The spot you speak of is a lonely one, remote from travel, and yet I feel sure, notwithstanding my faith in the power of prayer, that human hands have placed this treasure where you found it. Do not despair, St. Antoine may yet help you out of your difficulty, but for the present at least, you have no claim upon this money and I could not use it for the purpose you wish. These dollars are American, and we know that the United States sends us many fugitives from justice. Let me write, then, to the police authorities at Montreal, and if the money is as I suspect, the plunder of some criminal, the information will no doubt lead to his capture."

"There will perhaps be also a reward given for the recovery of the funds or the arrest of the thieves, and if so it will of course belong to you. At any rate I will arrange that no further proceedings in regard to the mortgage be taken until search has been made for the owner of the funds and that is something gained for you already. Come and see me within a week's time and I shall surely have news for you."

Victor's face had fallen dolefully during this speech. It was a dull ending to his bright dream, but he never thought of objecting. "Very well, M'sieu," he said meekly, "you know best. Keep the money and do what you please with it. I shall come again in a week to hear what you may have to tell me."

But Victor did not have to wait a week to hear the history of his wonderful discovery. In three days' time not he alone, but all St. Polycarpe was thrilling with a rush of events that brought it to a pitch of excitement never before experienced in its century or so of existence.

The first thrill was caused by the appearance of a trio of impressive-looking guardians of the peace, who stepped one morning from the Montreal train, and made their way with expedition to the house of Monsieur Trudeau.

Hardly had this fact become known to such citizens as were within easy reach of the news, when the same gentlemen reappeared, and under the captaincy of the notaire, proceeded in solemn procession across the fields to the brook that made itself faintly visible amid the drifted snow. Arrived here, the entire party began what seemed to the on-lookers as a most incomprehensible examination of the muddy edges of the stream and the adjacent soggy ground. The meaning of their search became clear, however, when after about half an hour's labor a leather case was discovered much stained and water-soaked, but which upon opening disclosed a yet undamaged mass of papers, bank notes, and gold of value only to be guessed at by the uninitiated.

It was then St. Polycarpe heard with a shudder a dreadful tale of murder and robbery committed in the banking establishment of a far-away New England town. It was then it learned that the malefactor, fleeing from his crime, had in terror for safe-keeping deposited his spoils in this isolated spot before continuing his way to the city. And it was then it discovered, most wonderful of all that a reward of one thousand dollars had been offered by the directors of the bank for the recovery of the stolen property and the tracing of the murderer, and that as both these ends had been accomplished through the agency of their own humble townsman, Victor Lafontaine, it was to him and to no other that the munificent bounty belonged.

It was not easy for St. Polycarpe to grasp at once all the confusing details of the case, but one point at least remained distinct and tangible in the mind of every individual — Victor Lafontaine now possessed a goodly sum of money, and was able to start him once more well equipped on the road to prosperity.

As for Victor himself — well he had his own explanation of recent events which he was not ashamed to voice to all who cared to listen. "Who was it, Monsieur," he would say solemnly as he reached the conclusion of his marvellous tale, "who was it that bade me go home across the fields and directed my steps without mistake to that particular part of the brook for a crossing? Ah, my friends, it was not chance that made me do those things, it was that good St. Antoine, who guided me because he had heard my prayer."

"I confess that I was disappointed, that I lost my faith for a while when, having found this great gift, I was obliged to yield it up and remain as poor as ever. But you see it is not for everybody to understand the methods of those great saints. St. Antoine took his own way to help me, and now instead of eight hundred dollars I have a thousand. Yes, it is most strange that good fortune that has come to me; but it shows, my friends, that one does not get to that good saint for nothing. At any rate he saved me, and that you may all see for yourselves."

And there is not a cynic in St. Polycarpe who has been able to produce an argument with which to confute his belief. — J. Gertrude Menard, in Donahoe's Magazine.

WASHING BLANKETS — Blankets need to be washed more frequently than many housekeepers suppose — in fact, they should never be put away for the summer without it, no matter how careful we have been with them. The soft and finer a blanket is, the more likely it is to retain disease germs within its fleecy folds; a soiled blanket is an inviting place for moths, and both these dangers are obviated by giving it a thorough washing. It is a good plan to do this work at home, and with the aid of a good washing ma-

chine and wringer it is not a difficult task. You will need plenty of soft water, heated until it is almost boiling hot. Dissolve a tablespoonful of borax in every bucketful and add enough soap to make a strong suds. The soap should be melted before it is put in. Put the blanket in the machine and pour the water over it. Use two or three waters, or enough to clean it thoroughly, having each water the same temperature, and prepare it in the same way. You will be surprised to see how much dirt will come out of an apparently clean blanket. Rinse in two or three waters until every trace of soap is removed, then run it through a wringer. Hang it on a line in the sunshine, where a gentle breeze is blowing, shaking it well to remove the wrinkles. Leave it until perfectly dry, then fold neatly and pack in a box or chest, putting in a generous piece of camphor gum as a moth preventive. Borax softens the wool, cleansing the blankets quickly and leaving them soft and fleecy. Never boil a blanket and never rub soap directly upon it.

- THE INVENTOR'S WORK. List of patents recently granted in Canada: — 71,049 — Thos. Bell, Toronto, Ont., moth proof bags. 71,056 — John Booker, Hamilton, Ont., cooking stoves connected to heating furnaces. 71,085 — J. H. Hislop, Et. Easthrop, Ont., harvesting sugar beets and turnips. 71,218 — F. Philbert, Buckingham, Que., metallic shingles or roofing plates. 71,201 — Alb. Drouillard, Windsor, Ont., device for ventilating urinals. 71,223 — Wm. H. Fox, Toronto, Ont., invalid bed. 71,265 — J. W. Carswell, Chatham, Ont., machine for drying peat. 71,279 — B. L. Tanner, Mt. Forest, Ont., churn.

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