

Sleeping or Waking?

THE REMARKABLE EXPERIENCES OF JOHN COATES.

BY W. S. HUMPHREYS.

I.

I had got a holiday!

Well, and what of that? you will say. Most men get holidays at certain times and seasons.

But then I am not like most men, for I had not had a holiday—a real fortnight's holiday—for some eight years. Therefore, I think there is some excuse for my elation over the matter.

For a number of years I had been a clerk in the firm of Furze, Hatt & Co. I had endeavoured to fulfil my duties to the best of my ability, and not without success; for, on this particular day, old Mr. Furze, the head of the firm, came to me, just as I was preparing to leave the warehouse, and said:

"Mr. Coates, I should like to have a little conversation with you before you leave."

I intimated my readiness, and followed my employer into his private office, wondering what he had to say.

Mr. Furze closed the door, seated himself at his desk, pointed to a chair and bade me also be seated. Then he said:

"Mr. Coates, you have been in our employ some years now. You have given us every satisfaction, and I think the firm should do something more for you than it is doing at present."

I don't know whether I blushed or not as my employer ceased speaking for a moment, but I bowed politely, and the old gentleman proceeded:

"As you know, I am getting up in years, and do not feel equal to having the sole management of this large concern on my shoulders. The branch at Quebec requires all Mr. Hatt's attention; therefore, we think of taking a junior partner into the business—a young man, who will put all his energies into the affair, introduce new ideas and keep the business up with the times. Can you mention such a person?"

I stammered something about not being able to name such a man at a moment's notice. For this private conference was quite a novelty to me. The business was conducted in a very conservative manner, and I had never before been invited to private counsel with my employer. The latter did not remain silent for any length of time, but went on:

"Well, Mr. Coates, I have found the man that I want, and have only to get his consent to accept the position."

"I am glad to hear it, sir," I replied, as he again paused, as though expecting me to say something. "Do I know the gentleman?"

"Ahem, well I rather expect you do. Why, sir, the future junior partner in the old house of Furze, Hatt & Co. is yourself, that is, if you accept the position."

To say that I was astounded at this announcement does not by any means express my feelings. I was thunderstruck! John Coates, a partner in one of the oldest and wealthiest firms in Montreal? I could not credit my senses. I could not believe that I had heard aright.

I bounded from my chair in my astonishment and tried to say something but failed, then made a step towards my employer.

He sat quietly chuckling to himself, evidently enjoying my surprise, then bidding me be seated, he continued:

"My announcement appears to cause you some surprise; nevertheless, I have been contemplating this step for some time. As I said before, you have given us every satisfaction. You understand the business better than anybody else in the establishment; and I do not think either of us will regret the new state of affairs, that is, of course, if you accept my proposition."

I had recovered my composure somewhat by this time, and again starting from my chair, I went forward and grasped the old merchant's hand, shaking it heartily, while I murmured somewhat incoherently:

"Mr. Furze, if you think I am worthy of the trust you are willing to repose in me, I accept it with all my heart, and I assure you I will do all in

my power to further the interests of the firm."

"If you do as well in the future as you have done heretofore, I shall never regret this step," Mr. Furze answered kindly. "And now," he continued, "you have been working extra hard on account of my recent illness. I propose that you take a fortnight's holiday now, leave the warehouse behind you for a few days—leave as a clerk and return as a partner in the firm of Furze, Hatt & Coates."

I was overwhelmed at this further expression of my employer's kindness, and endeavoured to express my gratitude, but he put me off with the remark that the arrangement was as much for his benefit as my own, as it would give him more leisure to pursue those antiquarian researches that were his hobby. After a little more conversation we left the warehouse together, Mr. Furze got into his waiting carriage, and I bade him good night, his parting words to me being:

"I shall expect you to dine with us to-morrow. Quite a family affair—only my wife, my niece and myself. After to-morrow, your time is your own for a fortnight."

And he was driven away.

I stood for a few moments watching the retreating vehicle. My mind was still somewhat bewildered. I could not grasp the situation all at once. I, John Coates, a partner in the firm of Furze, Hatt & Co., and invited to dine with my employer *en famille*! Nevertheless it was true. The old merchant's words were still ringing in my ears as I wended my way to the particular restaurant where I took my evening meal.

And now I am at home in my own cosy little room at my University-street boarding-house. A bright fire is burning in a Franklin grate, for the evening is somewhat chilly. I have thrown off my office garments, put on a comfortable dressing-gown, encased my feet in a somewhat faded pair of slippers, and drawn my chair up to the grate, revelling in the luxury of doing nothing.

When I say doing nothing I make a slight mistake, for if my hands are idle my brain is busy going over the events of the past few hours.

I wonder how the employees in the warehouse will receive the announcement of my entrance into the firm. Will there be any jealousy manifested at my preferment? But no, I do not think any of my fellow-workers can be jealous of me, the oldest clerk in the employ of Furze, Hatt & Co. Then I wonder why my employer had invited me to dine with him on the morrow. I had never been to his private house, had only seen his wife two or three times, and as for his niece, I really did not know that he had one living with him.

Then my thoughts led me to wonder what this niece could be like. Was she old or young? Dark or fair? Short or tall? Witty or dull?

I could answer none of these questions, and banished them from my mind, feeling that I should see the young—or old—lady on the morrow, when all my questions would be answered.

II.

The warmth from the fire must have made me drowsy. I was in a part waking and part sleeping mood—my eyes at times being open, gazing on the glowing coals, and at times being closed.

All at once—whether I was awake or asleep I know not—I saw gradually shape itself before my vision a sort of misty panorama, at times perfectly distinct and then only dimly visible.

The first thing that appeared to me was the face of a young girl—a very pretty face, with cheeks like blush roses, eyes of tender grey, a pretty dimpled chin, teeth of whitest ivory, encased in a pair of the most kissable lips ever found to tempt a lonely bachelor. The whole was crowned with a wealth of clustering hair of the palest golden tint, hanging loosely over a pair of shapely shoulders.

The face was a very pretty one, and I fastened my gaze on it, being loth to lose one feature. But it vanished all too soon, and for a moment all was blank.

Next I saw the interior of a railway car. It was a Pullman, but seemed to be somewhat crowded. I glanced from one passenger to another in search of some familiar face. There were several ladies and gentlemen, but all were strangers to me. But,

stop; no, not all, for there, in a corner, apparently by herself, with no companion, is the young girl whom I saw a few moments ago.

Before she was habited as for an evening party; now she is robed as for a journey—a dainty little turban hat archly perched on that golden head, and a flowing sacque of sealskin, loosely fastened, covering her body. But that it was the same face I was positive, although I had but little time to verify my assertion, for while I was still gazing at her, the whole scene vanished, quickly as a scene from a magic lantern when the slide is drawn out.

But soon another vision appears. This time it is far from pleasing. I see a man—repulsive looking and hideous, with "villain" stamped upon his countenance. Though dressed in fashionable apparel, vice of the lowest type and cunning of the deepest dye are depicted on that retreating brow and underneath those butting eyebrows.

The scene changes once more, and I see a road, crossed by a railway track, dimly outlined at first, then gradually becoming clearer, until even the pebbles on the road are plainly to be seen. I recognize the spot. It is on the Upper Lachine Road, at the point where the railroad track crosses it.

I had barely time to note this fact when my attention is directed to the sound of a fastly-driven team of horses, and I see a covered carriage approach. The horses are drawn up just before the carriage reaches the track, the door of the vehicle is opened and a man alights. He gives some instructions to the driver of the carriage, who mounts the box, turns the horses' heads and drives some twenty paces down the road. Then the man turns and advances towards the crossing, and I see with astonishment the same repulsive features I had gazed on with repugnance a moment before.

The man has evidently some purpose in view. He carries a lantern in his hand, which he proceeds deliberately to light. Then I see that it is what is called by railway men a "danger signal," the glass being red. What is he going to do with it, I wonder; but, while wondering, I hear a distant rumble—faint at first, but growing louder and louder, and presently I see the bright light of the advancing locomotive. Meanwhile the man with the lantern has run down the track some few paces and is vigorously swaying the lantern backwards and forwards. There is a shriek, a whistle "down brakes," and the train is suddenly brought to a standstill. The man with the lantern quickly extinguishes the light, hurries to the door of the Pullman car, glances in, sees the young lady encased in furs whom I had previously noticed, makes a rush for the door of the car, enters, whispers a word in the girl's ear, causing her to start, and then urges her to rise and follow him.

Meanwhile all is confusion. The railway official appears at a loss to know why the train was stopped. An examination has been made of the track, but nothing wrong discovered; and, as the man with the danger signal could not be found, orders are given for the train to proceed.

In the car the young girl had risen from her seat and was preparing to follow the man who accosted her from the car. Then a most unaccountable thing happened.

As this man with the repulsive visage was on the point of leaving the car—as he was in fact holding open the door for the young lady to pass out with him—a form confronted him—a form that I recognized as myself. This last person that appeared on the scene—myself—took hold of the man, caught him by the throat, dragged him on the platform of the car, closed the door with a bang, and then threw his captive violently on the ground, where he lay stunned while the train moved slowly away.

For awhile all was blank. Then another scene appeared to me. This time I was taken to Bonaventure Station. I knew I was in Bonaventure Station, although I could discern but one thing. I heard the trains moving backwards and forwards, the bells ringing and the whistles shrieking; but I could see nothing but the clock, the hands of which pointed to ten minutes past ten. For a few moments the clock was plainly visible to me, then it suddenly vanished, and all was darkness.

(To be Continued.)