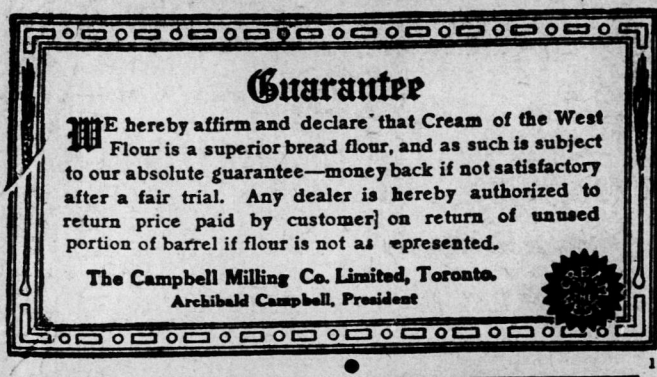


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CHAPTER XV.

(Concluded.)
"I met with a young woman; she was a good-looking piece o' goods, an' I made up to her. She had a kid, a boy, an' she told me that she'd met with a misfortune. But it didn't choke me off, for I was sweet on her; and though she stood out agen me for a time, I married her."

"For a time we hit it off fairly well; then we got to smacking an' jawin'. Perhaps it was my fault, perhaps it was hers. I think I was a bit jealous o' the kid. Never knewed a woman so set on a child as she was on 'im! I was dirt beside 'im, that's what I was. Well, I was a tidy-lookin' cove in those days—it's a long time ago—"

Talbot moved impatiently. He was still as incredulous, but it was impossible to avoid being impressed by the man's grave and earnest manner.
"An' I had plenty of admirers, an'—after a time, when I saw that we couldn't hit it off any longer, an' that I'd better cut my lucky, I took an' hooked it from her. I thought as we both would be 'appier apart. When I was goin' I got together the bits o' things that belonged to me—natural enough that, weren't it, gov'nor? So I got up in the night and packed 'em up. By mistake—by mistake, mind you—I took a few odd things o' hers. Amongst 'em was some papers she used to keep in a box—keep awfully close and secret; and when I'd settled down an' got an opportunity I went over 'em like. An' what do you think they was?"

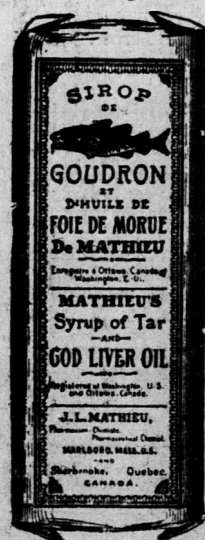
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He leered at Talbot cunningly. Talbot displayed no interest, but sat and smoked with apparent indifference.

Oatway leant forward a little and struck his knee.

"They was a marriage and birth certificate. She hadn't had no misfortune, but was a properly wedded wife an' the kid was—what d'ye call it?—a 'gitimate one!"

"Extremely interesting to you, no doubt, my man," said Talbot; "but I fail to see—"

"Oh, you'll see sharp enough presently," retorted Oatway, significantly. "It was a certificate of the marriage of Janet Burchett an' Algernon Edward—oh, I can't remember the names—Denby—"

Talbot smiled.
"There is only one Algernon Edward Denby," he said, "and that is the Earl of Lynborough."

"Curse it all, ain't I saying so?" retorted Oatway. "There it was in black an' white. They was married at a church in Paris, a Protestant church an' before the—what d'ye call it?—consul. An' there was the certificate of the boy's birth in Melbourne, Australia, all set out reg'lar an' proper. It didn't interest me much at the time, as you say; only it seemed kind of curious that she should 'a' hidden it from me, most women bein' rather nice and particular on these points; but I didn't give myself much trouble over it. I was doin' well at the time an' had other things to think of. I was doin' so well that I clean forgot all about her and the kid; and after awhile the luck went agen me, an' I come over to Europe. A pal o' mine had got a little plan for doin' some book-makin'. He was a Frenchy, an' I went to Paris with him. We struck the 'oof there an' had a good time—he wet his thick lips—'an' one day it 'curred to me that I'd look up that little matter o' the marriage. I went to one of them notary coves, an' he and there it was, right enough. She'd took me to the church an' a office,

been married quite square an' on the proper. See? I got copies o' that certificate an'—well, then the luck went agen me an' I got stranded. Fact is, Mr. Talbot Denby, I'm bitten by the same dog as you. I can't keep off the cards and the rollin' ball; understand? I 'ad to leave Paris through the interference o' some coves that ain't worth speakin' about, an' I just drifted about, now in luck, an' now out o' it. And at last I come over to London. Bad luck agen! I was down on my beam ends the night you and I spent a pleasant evenin' at Isaac's, an' it was becos' I was driven to despair that I tried to sneak your note. What 'appened that night kind o' sickened me o' London, an' I kind o' pined for the country. So I set off on the tramp. Wonderful the ways o' Providence, isn't it? S'elp me if I didn't bend my steps in this here direction. I'd got a little coin as I'd beg—made on the road, an' I put up at the Dog and Owl. An' one night I was sauntering around just lookin' about me, when I was collared by the young man as I pointed out. Now, the moment I see him there was something familiar-like in his face, and it fair puzzled me. Then I heard his name was Farrington, an' I remembered that one o' the names on the certificate was similar—"

Talbot raised his head and knitted his brows. Now that the man mentioned it, he remembered that Farrington was one of the family names. He had not heard it for years, but—Ah, yes, it was a mere coincidence, of course.

"Is that all?" he asked, contemptuously. "I have listened very patiently, my man—"

"I ain't done yet," said Oatway, stolidly. "The other night as I was saunterin', just for exercise, through the woods, I came upon the head-keeper's hut. There was two o' 'em talkin', this Ralph Farrington an' the head-keeper; an' just for passing the time I came up an' listened. Burchett was tellin' about the way his sister Janet was lured away by one o' he swells at the Court, how she disappeared an' left no trace—usual kind o' thing, you know; but it set me thinkin', an' I was goin' away to hink it out, when the young man—"

"e'd nearly spotted me afore through one o' these cursed dawgs o' his—collared me in the last spinney. He treated me rough, he did! Reg'lar nauded me!"

His hand went to his throat and he loosened his collar, as if he were choking.

"He treated me vile, he did!" he went on, with an oath and an ugly cowl. "An' it's well for you he did!" e added, with a sudden snarl; "for if he'd been civil an' gentle with me I should have up an' told him what 'm tellin' you; an' where would you have been then, Mister Denby?"

Talbot smiled.

"Very much where I am now, my man!" he said; "for, of course I needn't tell you that I don't believe a word of your oath. 'That your wife had already been married, was a wid'ow, before you married her, I have no doubt; but that she married the Earl of Lynborough—that was your assertion, was it not?—is too ridiculous—"

"I went to the chapel—in the grounds," broke in Oatway. "I seen the registry of his birth; the names are the same as them on the certificate of marriage! Eh, what?"

Talbot sneered.

"Very fairly put together for an illiterate person like yourself," he said. "But if I asked you for the certificates—which I have no intention of doing, believe me—I should be told that you had lost them, that they had been accidentally destroyed—"

Oatway leered at him triumphantly. "Not so fast, gov'nor!" he said. "I'm not so green. Not me! I've stuck to them papers, an' I've got them now!"

He took out the greasy pocket book and, laying it on his knee, struck it with his big, dirty hand.

"There they are, tight an' snug!" he said, gloatingly.

"But you refuse to let me see them!" remarked Talbot, with a shrug.

"Not a bit of it!" retorted Oatway. "There they are!"

He opened the pocket-book and, taking out some papers, actually thrust them into Talbot's hand. "Oh, I'm not afraid! I've got the copies in another pocket! You can tear them up, if you like. But you just try it!" he added, savagely. "Try it, an' I'll choke you where you sit!"

Talbot took the papers and, slowly unfolding them, examined them closely. His heart seemed to him to cease to beat as he read them. If they were not skillful forgeries—too skillful to be the work of such a man as this—they were genuine certificates of the marriage of the earl to Janet Burchett, and the birth of his child; the son and heir of the Earl of Lynborough. It was amazing, too incredible! Why, the man had just passed was, if he were the child whose certificate of birth Talbot held in his hand, Viscount Denby, the next Earl Denby, the next Earl of Lynborough! And he Talbot Denby!

Not a muscle of his face moved, but he could feel the blood in his veins turn cold.

He could have borne the shock better if it had been any other man; but that this fellow who had set him at defiance and had broken his stick almost across his back should be the heir to Lynborough, should oust him out of the title and estates—Oh, it was to monstrous, too improbable and far-fetched!

"Well, gov'nor," demanded Oatway, who had been watching him closely, "what are you going to do? For instance, what offer are you going to make? What are you goin' to give me for those papers, an' to 'old my tongue, eh?"

Talbot awoke from his hideous reverie and tossed the certificates to him.

"Nothing," he said, with an air of indifference.

"Nothin'?" echoed Oatway.

"Certainly not! If this story were true, if these certificates were genuine, which I doubt, the story is probably known to half a dozen, to twenty other persons—"

"No, no; I'll swear it isn't!" Oatway broke in. "It was her secret, an' she kep' it, why, I don't know; I admit I don't! There's not a livin' soul as knows she was married, as knows who the boy is but me. I'll swear it! What! d'ye think she would not have told me, the man she was going to marry! Why, when we fell out I used to jeer about her 'misfortune'; an' she never let on, never spoke up an' said she was married. And d'ye think if she could keep her tongue quiet under them there circumstances that she'd let on to other people! No, gov'nor, you may take your Bible oath that only me—only you an' me now—knows anything about it."

To be continued.

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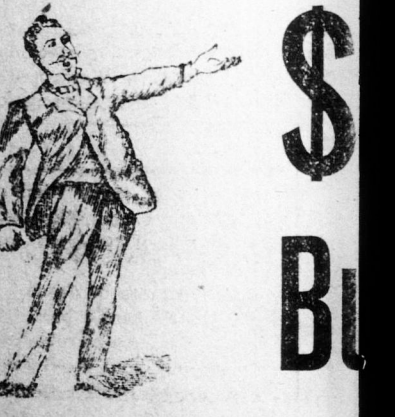
The train with the Shamrock Excursion Party arrived here at 11:40 this morning. A few of the party de-trained here, but Carbonear is headquarters to-day. The attraction being Father McCarthy's Garden Party. The day is most suitable for the event and all who fail to have a good time, will have themselves to blame.

Miss Bride Dicks after a very enjoyable visit to friends in St. John's, returned home by the excursion train this forenoon.

The entertainment in the Academy Hall last night given by a St. John's company for the benefit of the Marine Disaster Fund was well patronized and a decided success. It will be repeated in Carbonear to-night.

The Veedee Demonstrators are holding forth to-night in the Academy

BANAN



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